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# Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices

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by
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National Collegiate Honors Council
YOUR LINK TO UNDERGRADUATE HONORS EDUCATION

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# PREFACE

I began my research into honors composition in 1991. As a graduate student beginning a program in composition pedagogy, I had many of the usual concerns about teaching for the first time: how to balance the theory that I was learning with classroom practice, how to emphasize the importance of effective written communication to students who had built up a lifetime's worth of writing phobias, how to establish the authority to evaluate undergraduate papers when I had so recently been an undergraduate student myself, and so forth. Another of my concerns, however, stemmed from my past educational experience as an honors student. Throughout my elementary and secondary education, I had been tracked into gifted and honors courses, and I had always excelled in English courses and in writing projects in other courses. Then, as an undergraduate student at a local state university, I was chosen to participate in my school's most select honors program, and although our program did not offer specific honors courses, I continued to develop my writing skills in my regular coursework and in independent study. Now that I was preparing to teach at this same university, I was worried that my honors background might lead me to set my evaluation standards too high for the average student. I especially feared how I would relate to students who, as I perceived at the time, did not have the same drive, the same intellectual curiosity, or the same ability to learn and to perform to their highest ability as I did but who merely wanted to pass the course with the minimum amount of effort and to move on through their programs in the same fashion. While these concerns sounded elitist even to me, they were quite real at the time.

To address some of these concerns, I enrolled in a summer 1991 seminar on teaching basic writing. While the majority of students enrolled at my university would not be categorized as basic writers, I thought that this would be a good way to expand my horizons beyond the honors student mentality. Reading about students who cared a great deal about their academic performance but who were truly struggling to build their writing skills not only made me more appreciative of my own facility with writing but also caused me to think about composition pedagogy in different ways. How had the educational system failed these students? How had common pedagogical practice failed these students? How early in their academic careers had these students been written off by faculty, by administrators, and eventually by themselves? The actual grouping and labeling of basic writers and basic writing particularly interested me. For example, concepts such as *diagnosing* writing problems, offering *remedial* course work, and *curing* writers' difficulties revolve around medical terminology. At one level, these

terms suggest that writing problems are a symbolic type of illness for which students come to the composition course and/or to the writing lab to be "cured," but at a deeper level, these terms imply that something is fundamentally wrong with the student herself if she cannot write in the manner that the institution (another medical reference) deems acceptable.

While focusing on the grouping and labeling of basic writers, I began to make connections between basic writing and honors education. Students at the upper end of the academic spectrum are also grouped and labeled, and these labels change over the course of a student's education: elementary school children are *gifted, talented*, or *exceptional*, and as they progress through high school and college, they become *honors* students. These labels and the programs which they represent carry with them certain advantages (e.g., specialized curriculum, extracurricular opportunities, and increased funding), but these students are still removed from the educational norm, just as remedial students are — they go to different classrooms, they read different textbooks, and they complete different exercises. I am not arguing that this tracking is necessarily a bad thing; on the contrary, I have experienced the benefits of an accelerated curriculum firsthand. Honors students, however, still face inherent pitfalls of their special education: at times, peers resent them for what they consider special treatment, instructors exploit them by foisting teaching responsibilities upon them in the guise of "developing leadership skills," administrators trot them out for dog-and-pony shows during accreditation cycles, and family members pressure them to maintain higher standards not only in academic performance but in personal matters. Although these consequences are preferable to those which students labeled remedial must endure, they still affect students negatively, and the negative effect of labeling is an important similarity between basic writers and honors students.

To explore this similarity further, I researched the labeling and grouping of composition students at both ends of the educational spectrum at the university level. I found much information on basic writers in books and articles and a journal dedicated entirely to basic writing. I also found information about university-level honors education in general, but I was surprised and disappointed by the dearth of material about honors composition at the university level. Library database and ERIC searches led to a variety of books, articles, and papers on the writing of gifted and honors students at the elementary and secondary levels, but few aided in analyzing university-level honors composition. For example, an article in a 1991 issue of *Written Communication* focused on freshman composition students' perceptions of what *honors* means, but the

authors did not focus on honors students nor on any facet of honors composition.

This dearth of information on university-level honors composition became even more apparent when, in a later pedagogy seminar, I decided to extend my research on honors composition by designing a syllabus and rationale for an honors freshman composition course. Again, I found a great deal of information about textbooks, assignments, and sample student documents for elementary and secondary honors writing instruction, but I found no discussions of curriculum or instruction for university-level honors composition. Without the resources of model syllabi or assignments, I constructed my own syllabus by combining the essay cycle of the department's traditional freshman composition course with readings selected from those I had found during my research. I titled my course "The Gifted Experience" and grouped the readings and essays into units on educational issues, family issues, research on gifted education, and psychological differences and problems of the gifted. I taught this course for a group of incoming honors students, and I believe that they benefited from thoughtful self-critique and from exposure to scholarly research writing. I felt that I could have provided them with a much more challenging course, however, if I had been able to access established models for honors freshman composition.

As I completed my first attempt at teaching honors freshman composition, I also completed my master's degree, and in 1993, I began doctoral study in rhetoric and professional communication. My professional interests in composition pedagogy expanded to include computer-assisted instruction, the rhetoric of scientific and technical communication, and gender studies, but I always maintained my research interest in university-level honors composition. I learned how professional disciplines control what they wish to consider valid knowledge in that field through scholarly journals, so in this respect, the continued dearth of scholarly research and publication on honors composition frustrated and puzzled me. Postsecondary honors education has a representative organization, the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), which publishes both a refereed journal, *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* (formerly *Forum for Honors*), and a nonrefereed newsletter, *The National Honors Report*. The only scholarly discussion I could find here on university-level honors composition was one article from 1994, Kenneth Bruffee's "Making the Senior Thesis Work." I monitored research in composition journals, on-line resources, *Dissertation Abstracts*, and so forth, but these did not yield new information on honors composition.

Perhaps, having experience as an honors student and as an instructor of both traditional and honors composition courses, I can

speculate about reasons why honors composition has not been widely discussed. First, composition scholars may not perceive honors education as controversial enough to provide interesting research questions and topics to debate in written forums. For example, as noted earlier, concerns over teaching basic writing at the university level have generated a significant amount of quality research and award-winning publications, much of which has resulted from instructors' desires to aid and encourage such students in the face of lack of training and support for such programs. Conversely, composition instructors may see honors students as not a problem and thus not worth writing about: these students tend to learn at a faster pace, to provide leadership in class discussion and critique groups, and to conduct themselves well as students, such as following instructions the first time through and turning in assignments on time. As Frank Aydelotte, widely regarded as the founder of the modern honors program, states in *Breaking the Academic Lockstep*, "The same professors who are glad to see special help provided for weaker students will take the line that the best students can look after themselves" (129).

Second, scholarly research is time-consuming, and thorough qualitative or quantitative research into honors education may not be a high priority when balanced against a teacher-researcher's other scheduling demands. On the one hand, program directors are the most familiar with the content of their programs, but the demands of administering a program limit the amount of time directors have to conduct and present scholarly research on honors education, especially research focused on specific courses such as honors composition. On the other hand, faculty who teach honors composition courses in addition to their regular courses are more familiar with issues and problems specific to honors composition, but they might be more interested in research in their own specializations, such as nineteenth-century American literature, rather than on honors composition.

Third, other types of professional concern may discourage potential scholars from researching honors education. Compared to research in firmly entrenched disciplines such as literature, history, or mathematics, research in honors education is relatively uncharted territory; some argue that this provides an exciting opportunity for research, but others argue that the dearth of research demonstrates a lack of interest in the whole subject. Why should they support fruitless research? Perhaps some departments look at an activity report or tenure materials and are reluctant to assign due credit to an honors article in that field because they are unsure of what exactly it contributes to their own field. In many ways, then, potential scholars

of honors composition may be feeling pressure not to pursue this research.

For whatever reason, research on university-level honors composition is quite limited; however, interesting research, both qualitative and quantitative, is being conducted at the elementary and secondary levels. Areas of research on gifted and honors writing include gender differences, multiple abilities, curricular and instructional innovation, and testing and assessment. Researchers at that level also face larger issues threatening gifted and honors education, such as full inclusion in traditional classes and backlash against the practice of tracking. Similarly, scholars can find controversial issues, and thus opportunities for research and publication, in university-level honors composition, such as in the following questions:

1. In the face of budget cutbacks and dropping enrollment, can we afford to offer separate honors composition courses?
2. With movements in higher education toward full inclusion and multiculturalism, should we not favor heterogeneity over the homogeneity of honors composition courses?
3. Some people, educators included, believe that the brightest students will attend private universities or Ivy League schools. Why, then, should state or public universities provide specialized offerings such as honors composition courses when the students whom these courses would serve are going elsewhere?

Considering issues such as these, I believe that studying university-level honors composition provides a rich, currently untapped arena for scholarly research. This project begins to address this dearth in research by answering basic questions about composition courses and other types of written communication projects commonly found within our contemporary honors programs.

# CHAPTER ONE

## WHY SHOULD WE RESEARCH HONORS COMPOSITION?

Composition instruction at the college level is an important tool in aiding students to develop and demonstrate necessary academic and professional skills through written communication, including creative self-expression, critical thinking and debate, original research, and burgeoning professional expertise. If students can develop these skills through general composition courses and through writing projects in their field-specific coursework, what should an honors composition program provide beyond basic university requirements? A powerful argument for honors education in general comes from Frank Aydelotte in *Breaking the Academic Lockstep*:

> [W]hen one faces the problem of providing a more severe course of instruction for our abler students, one sees immediately that it is not sufficient merely to provide more of the same kind of work. The work must be different; it must not only be harder but must also offer more freedom and responsibility, more scope for the development of intellectual independence and initiative. (14-15)

Rather than making honors composition merely "more and better" than traditional composition, honors educators can expand instruction to benefit students in several ways, including increased attention to critical thinking, the development of professional communication skills, close faculty mentorship, and challenging work with peers.

### Critical Thinking

As I will argue in Chapter Two, formal writing instruction is a crucial element in the development of students' critical thinking skills, and because honors programs traditionally focus on critical thinking, they can build these skills through honors composition instruction. Further, an honors composition course allows instructors to incorporate more opportunities for critical thinking and argumentation than are typically included in a general composition course because they need not spend as much time building students' basic composition skills. Therefore, less time spent on review and re-review of basic skills and documents opens up time to discuss complex issues and theories and to develop critical thinking and argumentation skills. With thoughtful instruction, students can be

encouraged not only to analyze more difficult reading selections but also to debate them with their peers and even to disagree with the authors, an intimidating task even for some graduate students. For example, students in an honors science writing course can debate the merits of Thomas Kuhn's concept of the paradigm shift or analyze the power of and resistance to scientific communication in the ongoing controversy of evolution versus creationism in public schools. Learning to question authorities can be difficult and uncomfortable for some students, but such skills can benefit students both in their short-term projects, such as crafting an original, well-argued senior research thesis, and their long-term professional development goals. These skills may be developed to a further degree in an honors curriculum than in a general writing program, where students need additional time to develop basic writing skills and are more likely to resist discussing theoretical concerns.

**Professional Communication Skills**

An expanded focus on both written and oral communication helps to prepare students for professional development and networking opportunities, including research projects, conference presentations, and publication. For example, if a university sponsors an undergraduate research contest with opportunities for publication, oral presentation and/or monetary awards, students who have progressed through an expanded honors composition program with strong research and oral presentation components may excel in such a contest more readily than students who have submitted papers completed for general coursework but have not previously presented them in additional workshop or presentation formats. Writing for and presenting in such forums can build skills for future professional conference opportunities, for oral and written workplace proposals, and even for everyday meetings, presentations, and reports.

**Faculty Mentorship**

Students completing portfolios, senior theses, or other types of capstone projects often work closely with a faculty mentor from their specialization. While all students in upper-level major coursework may (or may not) receive a certain amount of specific writing instruction, students working on honors writing projects gain additional exposure to and guidance in field-specific communication from one-on-one mentoring. The mentor's main responsibilities often include guiding the student through research and analysis of important issues and problems in that field and assisting the student in generating oral and written communication appropriate in content and style for that particular field. A faculty mentor is also more keenly aware of field-specific communication opportunities, such as

conferences, publications, and research projects, in which the student can participate and build marketable communication skills. The student also benefits from exposure to and participation in the mentor's own work, such as earning acknowledgment and even publication credit from helping to conduct research for and/or write a published article or chapter.

As the student nears the end of undergraduate studies, the mentor can then help the student prepare for entrance into the workplace or admission to a graduate program, not merely through letters of recommendation and connections in other professional and academic settings but also through mock interviews, development of a writing portfolio, suggestions for and reviews of application letters and essays, and so forth. In these ways, a faculty mentor provides additional, field-specific guidance which is beyond the scope of experience of the honors writing instructor as well as the instruction received by students in the general academic major program.

**Work with Peers**

Honors composition courses give students the opportunity to work with other skilled, motivated students in taking their own writing, critiquing, and critical thinking skills to the next level. For example, one honors student in my traditional technical communication course was demonstrably more skilled than his classmates in the content, organization, and style of his technical documents, but during his participation in the honors thesis seminar the following semester, he felt that his writing was inferior to that of his classmates and that he was learning a great deal from reviewing their research drafts. Some instructors argue, however, that honors students can still develop writing and leadership skills in traditional composition classes while giving average students additional guidance during drafting and critiquing sessions. What sometimes happens in such classes, though, is that honors students become less focused on improving their own writing skills and more focused on teaching other students. Working in a homogenous group with other honors students would allow the student to work in a more challenging drafting and critiquing environment while alleviating some of the frustration of having to assume a more pedagogical role in collaborative work.

Honors composition courses also bring together students from diverse majors who would not ordinarily interact on either an academic or a social basis; thus, they not only develop skills in writing in various genres for different audiences, but they also develop relationships resulting in increased participation in honors programs' extracurricular activities. For example, although freshman Presidential Scholars at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville were enrolled together in my honors composition sequence for only

two quarters during their first year (1992-93), three-quarters of them chose to attend the spring Honors Retreat, which had been sparsely attended the previous two years. In June 1995, all of the current officers in the Dean's College Honors Club had been in that class, as had been many of the Undergraduate Research Program participants and award recipients. Therefore, between in-class collaboration and extracurricular interaction, composition courses within an honors program can foster an increased spirit of collegiality and create a challenging yet comfortable environment where students test ideas and push the development of each other's skills.

While this list of benefits is not all-inclusive, it suggests the positive contribution that honors composition courses and writing projects can make to student development and to the honors program itself. Honors students may be in wildly divergent academic majors, but honors composition courses can benefit students from all majors; such courses provide students with an element of unity within the honors program, and the overall program itself benefits by creating a strong academic, professional, and extracurricular identity.

Although development of writing skills is an important element for students and faculty within any program, honors program directors and instructors have few resources to use for developing specific honors writing courses and projects. They can use general honors program guidelines and scholarly research in composition studies, but no source provides comprehensive information specifically about honors composition. Therefore, the purpose of this project is twofold: (1) to ascertain the current state of honors composition and (2) to propose guidelines for developing quality honors composition courses and projects for every type of honors program. In Chapter Two: Twentieth-Century Developments in Honors Education and Composition Instruction, I will survey literature in composition instruction and in honors education, focusing on the history of and developments in each area from the late nineteenth century to the present in American colleges and universities. Within this review, I will argue that both honors programs and writing programs have worked to improve students' critical thinking skills and that in this way, composition instruction is essential to developing honors students' critical thinking and writing skills. This will establish a foundation for each area and will identify important points where these fields have historically crossed paths in higher education.

In Chapter Three: A Survey of Writing Courses and Projects in the Contemporary Honors Program, I will present and discuss my survey of National Collegiate Honors Council member institutions regarding composition elements in their programs. My initial instrument was a short questionnaire to assess the general availability and design of composition courses, elements, or projects

within these programs. I then used electronic mail to send follow-up interviews to self-selected respondents to discuss topics such as admission, curriculum, and assessment in more depth. Of the 640 member NCHC programs at the time, 303 program directors completed the initial survey, and 54 people participated in the follow-up interview.

In Chapter Four: A Guide to Honors Composition Courses and Projects, I will use information from the literature review, results from the questionnaire and follow-up interviews, and my own experience as a composition instructor to develop guidelines for designing and implementing composition courses and projects within the contemporary honors program. Material is arranged by types of course or writing component, beginning with program admission writing samples, progressing through composition courses and writing projects at various levels, and concluding with the senior thesis or capstone project. In addition, I will discuss assessment of writing components, faculty compensation for courses and independent study projects, resistance to honors work from other faculty and administrators, and perceptions of writing skill and academic performance of honors students.

Finally, in Chapter Five: Conclusion, I will reflect upon the results of this project. Information collected in the survey and follow-up interviews and presented in the guidelines and suggestions section identifies a variety of honors composition courses and projects, but each component, or type of writing activity, should be developed in much more detail with supporting sample materials. Also, this project is limited to honors program directors' knowledge of composition courses and projects, so future research should include input from composition instructors who teach honors courses, from honors faculty in all disciplines who incorporate writing assignments into their courses and who direct honors theses, and from the honors students who complete these courses and projects. I will also identify some problematic trends found throughout the responses that I feel need to be addressed in order to make composition more successful within the honors program.

Throughout the literature review, survey and interview, and guideline chapters, I will consider the following questions:

*Coursework:* How should courses and projects be structured at each level? Issues to be considered include how honors courses differ from non-honors courses, what types of exercises and assignments are challenging yet manageable at each grade level, how honors writing is evaluated, and how writing skill is incorporated into periodic and overall evaluations of the student's progress.

*Implementation:* How should composition components be implemented? Issues to be considered include how they fit within the

overall honors program, how qualifications for entering and completing honors composition components are determined, how faculty contribute to the components and how they guide students from their specialties, from what departments courses should be taught, and what resistance faculty and students might have to the components themselves. Careful consideration of such questions as those above and those raised during interviews will direct the construction of thoughtful, detailed activity guides and accompanying rationales.

Overall, honors programs vary greatly in their design from school to school: some programs offer a multitude of honors courses in many fields; some have strict, challenging requirements for honors certification at graduation; and some encourage students toward deeper professional development by eliminating most general education requirements, thus freeing more time for coursework in major and minor areas. Similarly, I have seen a wide variety of responses from NCHC members regarding composition elements in their programs: some have many, some have none, and many fall between these extremes.

As stated earlier, my main purpose is to ascertain the current state of honors composition and to propose guidelines for developing quality honors composition courses and projects for every type of honors program. I believe that this project will provide a starting point for honors program directors and instructors who wish to design or revise their own honors composition courses and projects, and it will contribute much-needed research to the bodies of literature in both composition instruction and honors education. I also acknowledge that proposed composition components will not fit perfectly within every type of honors program; however, components presented here can serve as templates for curriculum design, change, and rationale within a variety of honors programs and schools to the benefit of students and faculty alike.

# CHAPTER TWO

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS IN HONORS EDUCATION AND COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION

To establish the framework upon which this project is built, I want to identify important intersections between theoretical and pedagogical approaches in honors education and composition instruction. A brief review of the history of the honors movement in the United States shows interesting parallels with the development of composition studies, specifically developments in the United States during the twentieth century that parallel events in the honors movement. Additionally, we can draw parallels with gifted and honors composition instruction at the elementary and secondary levels to demonstrate that such instruction at the university level can be similarly studied.

### A Brief History of Honors Education

The first notion of modern honors education was instituted in 1830 at Oxford and Cambridge Universities with the creation of separate pass and honors degrees, the latter requiring a program of study that was both quantitatively and qualitatively more substantial than that pursued by the average student. Harvard then adopted a version of Oxford's pass-honors program; in *The Superior Student in American Higher Education*, Joseph Cohen colorfully describes this development in honors education:

> President Charles Eliot's expansion of the elective system at Harvard from 1872 to 1897 was the first revolutionary change from the then almost universally narrow and prescribed curriculum. It was conceived as a liberating reform in keeping with nineteenth-century democracy, and it spread throughout the country. It led to endless controversy with academic conservatives, who fought its consequences of dilution and indiscriminate incorporation of courses. It was the harbinger of both good and ill. Out of the later efforts to remedy the transformation of many large institutions, private and public, into shopping centers for a huge variety of packaged courses came some of the first efforts at creative reconstruction. (13-14)

Then, as Timm Richard Rinehart notes in "The Role of Curricular and Instructional Innovation in the Past, Present, and Future of Honors Programs in American Higher Education," Wesleyan College

(1873) and the University of Michigan (1883) also began "[h]onors recognition at graduation, based on a thesis, an approved arrangement of courses, and a more flexible, individualized academic program" (15). The catalyst, suggests Rinehart, for the spread of the honors movement in America, though, may have been the establishment of the Rhodes Scholarship, since Rhodes Scholars pursued academic careers through professorships and administrative positions and subsequently implemented the Oxford pass-honors system in their own institutions (15).

**Frank Aydelotte**

The Oxford pass-honors system and Rhodes Scholarship program shaped the thinking of one of the founders of the honors movement, Frank Aydelotte. Aydelotte graduated from Indiana University and spent some time teaching before returning to school to earn a master's degree at Harvard, where he then taught composition. This experience, however, turned him against the Harvard system of composition instruction; he returned to Indiana and reformed the composition program there. After this, he became a professor in the MIT writing program. In *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925: A Documentary History*, editor John C. Brereton counts Aydelotte during this time among "intellectual conservatives who knew the current composition scene firsthand and who published significant writing textbooks" (23) and among those who "made their mark in administration" (25). He had also spent time at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, an experience that influenced his later research into honors education and his advocacy therein of Oxford's pass-honors system. He became president of Swarthmore in 1921, and after leaving that position in 1939, he directed the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

Before he began to focus his professional pursuits more exclusively on honors education, Aydelotte was a voice calling for reform in composition pedagogy. In 1917, he published *The Oxford Stamp and Other Essays: Articles from the Educational Creed of an American Oxonian*, which included the essay "The History of English as a College Subject in the United States." In the first half of the essay, he discusses the well-known composition work of Blair, Campbell, Whateley, Bain, and others; in the second half, he addresses the displacement of the classics by English literature. Overall, his main argument is that "the root of our troubles in English is that we have inherited an attitude toward the subject which has led us, both in literature and composition, to emphasize technique rather than thought" (310). This argument sounds familiar to contemporary composition scholars: eighty years later, we continue to debate

issues of style versus substance, of organization and fluency, and of critical thinking. Additional arguments, such as the following statement regarding what we identify today as critical thinking skills, sound as if they could have been published in a contemporary essay:

> Since 1890 composition teaching has advanced rapidly from theory to practice. But the practice is really based on the old theory. Textbooks on writing have been less and less used or have become more and more useful manuals needed by writers (advice on hard points of grammar, punctuation, usage, and arrangement of material, more or less like the indispensable "style books" issued by publishing houses), but the themes have continued to be written for the sake of practice rather than for the sake of saying something. Students are advised to *write, write, write,* when the advice they need is *think, think, think.* (306)

In the contemporary college-level composition classroom, instructors continue to struggle to balance writing and thinking in course objectives. The opportunities for reflection, professional exploration, and development of mature reasoning and argumentation skills through carefully crafted writing assignments are noble goals for the composition course, but how can students communicate these ideas effectively when they have not yet mastered basic grammatical and mechanical skills? Therefore, students are still required to build their writing skills through frequent and varied exercises — Aydelotte's "write, write, write" — but composition scholars and instructors are working to make these assignments more meaningful to students by eliminating tired topics and exercises to be parroted and replacing them with current professional and social concerns, contemporary genres (for example, essays to be formatted as newsletters), and pedagogical approaches, such as building critical thinking skills through an evaluation of professional web sites to discern which is the most informative and truthful for a given topic. In this way, contemporary composition instructors work to develop both writing skills and critical thinking skills in their students, thus according with Aydelotte's concern that students need to "think, think, think" (306).

Aydelotte's interest in honors education came into full focus at Swarthmore College. In 1922, he established one of the first, relatively formalized honors programs, which emphasized upper-division course offerings to complement and build upon the pass-honors differentiation. He published a pioneering report in 1925, *Honors Courses in American Colleges and Universities*, which

catalogued honors programs and their offerings across the nation. His most important contribution, however, came in 1944 when he published the first book devoted entirely to honors programs, *Breaking the Academic Lockstep: The Development of Honors Work in American Colleges and Universities*. In the late 1930s, he undertook an ambitious survey of honors programs at 130 colleges and universities. With funding from the Carnegie Corporation, he and thirty-five volunteer faculty members traveled the country to interview faculty and to review honors programs in depth, and their findings constitute the bulk of the book.

Aydelotte begins *Breaking the Academic Lockstep* by discussing the foundational program at Oxford; next, he reviews his experiences with the honors plan at Swarthmore. He then moves his discussion to the program reviews, which he divides into three groups:

> (1) those in which honors work is an extra activity over and above the ordinary requirements for graduation,
> (2) those in which honors work is allowed to replace a certain number of courses, usually one or two courses in the Junior and Senior years, and
> (3) those in which honors work replaces entirely the regular curriculum during the two upper years. (45)

Within these reviews of academic offerings, he repeatedly identifies four types of academic work of which honors programs were chiefly composed: senior theses, comprehensive oral and written examinations (including evaluation by external examiners), dedication of the last two years of a student's academic program to in-depth independent study, and an increase in individualized instruction in the form of tutorial work and seminars. He also includes special discussion of honors work at state universities, of instruction and examinations, and of administrative and financial problems in honors programs. While much honors work at four-year institutions included in the survey focused primarily on the junior and senior years, Aydelotte also sees the first two years as common preparation for later specialized work, showing his roots in composition by stating, "It would doubtless be advisable to insist upon a certain number of common subjects — for example English and foreign languages" (145).

While these program reviews certainly established a foundation upon which many more universities built their own honors programs, another major benefit of this book is Aydelotte's justification of honors education at the university level. Although his 1944 publication date may incline objectors to perceive the material as dated, Aydelotte's arguments remain as relevant to contemporary

honors education as his earlier observations on the state of composition studies are in that field. For example, in referring to the book's title, he states:

> The most persistent objection to this breaking of the academic lock step, to giving abler students harder work, is our academic interpretation or misinterpretation of the idea of democracy. If all men are born free and equal why should some be given a better education than others? The word "better" begs the question. The best education for any individual is that which will develop his powers to the utmost and best fit him to realize his own ideal of the good life. (128)

While Aydelotte's work broke professional ground for honors education, it was by no means the last word on the subject, and it had its share of shortcomings. At this stage, none of these programs was fully developed, as the few available honors courses were usually mere substitutions for other upper-level courses available only to juniors and seniors, and the programs themselves had fairly small enrollment. Since these early programs were usually in small, private East Coast colleges, these institutions could more easily implement curricular change, logistically speaking, than larger schools and public schools; they might also have been more willing to do so considering the more "select" student bodies they served, students who, for professional or academic advancement, might be more willing to accept additional academic challenges. Taking honors education and program development into a broader realm called for another pioneering researcher.

**Joseph Cohen**

The other recognized pioneer of the honors movement, Joseph Cohen, successfully took the honors crusade into the realm of the large, public university by creating the Honors Council at the University of Colorado in 1928. He added freshman and sophomore courses to the honors program, budgeted provisions for an honors library and program newsletter, and created the permanent position of honors director. Cohen kept the Honors Council alive during World War II, which caused the demise of many honors programs and brought about an accompanying lull in publication about honors education. Aydelotte retired, and Cohen came to the forefront of the honors movement, "emerg[ing] as the postwar catalyst for the development of an organized, nationwide honors program movement" (Rinehart 18). The launch of Sputnik in 1956 (the same year in which Aydelotte died) fostered a resurgence of interest in honors education, as Cold War concerns caused Americans to

rethink their positions on "elitist" education in relation to preparation for competition with other countries.

Cohen's written contribution to university-level honors education is *The Superior Student in American Higher Education*, for which he served both as the editor and as a contributor. Published in 1966, this work builds upon Aydelotte's *Breaking the Academic Lockstep*, updating the history of honors education since Aydelotte's work; chapter topics include the history of the honors movement; characteristics of the superior student; types of programs at liberal arts colleges, universities, small private colleges, and secondary schools; a representative case study; and types of evaluation in honors programs. Cohen also identifies contemporary problems that had developed since Aydelotte's work. For example, Cold War-era competition between the United States and the Soviet Union spurred legislators and educators to increase academic standards, especially in the natural and applied sciences, and honors programs at all levels developed or expanded to address these needs. Such expansion, however, also sharpened the trade school versus liberal arts debate about whether honors programs should include work in professional specializations or focus on providing an enriched arts and humanities experience for students in all fields. Also, many schools were adopting open admissions policies, so in the wake of changing academic standards, honors programs may have been perceived as old-fashioned, undemocratic, elitist institutions.

With this updated study, Cohen, as did Aydelotte, contributes to the ongoing argument for the justification of honors work in higher education. Whereas Aydelotte identified the potential benefits for individual students, Cohen takes the argument a step further by making honors education an instrument of overall institutional change:

> Honors programs as they are predominantly conceived in this book fall into the category of forces that make for change in an institution — in this case perhaps the most important of all institutions, the one which links the present with the past and prepares for the future. How such a change is effected has been of particular interest to me. In the educational world sudden revolutions are impossible. But this does not mean that change of any kind is also impossible, that we must be content with the *status quo*. I have viewed honors as capable of affecting the entire institution by creating a nucleus of quality, the influence of which would spread within the institution's boundaries and beyond them. The problem is not how to give something to the best students alone in an isolated and small-scale way.

> Instead, it is how to set in motion a force for change that will spur the institution as a whole to work to make as many students as possible into first-rate products. (ix)

Similar to Aydelotte's arguments, Cohen's call to see honors programs as nuclei for institutional change and improvement is still relevant thirty years later. In the face of shrinking budgets, growing enrollments in the wake of the open admissions policies of the 1960s, and increasing demands for higher standards at all educational levels to compete with international performance, institutions can look to their honors programs not only as development centers for challenging, stimulating curriculum but also as recruitment tools for exceptional students and faculty alike.

Overall, one of the most beneficial components of this book for honors program directors and staff is an extensive list of major features that honors programs should have. This list proposes specifics far beyond those identified by Aydelotte, demonstrating the growth and focus which the honors movement had experienced in the intervening twenty years. Although this list is relatively lengthy, I have reproduced it in Appendix A in its entirety, not only because it is a benchmark in honors education, but also because it provides a foundation for later discussion of my methodology in researching honors composition and my application of results in advocating composition components throughout two- and four-year honors programs.

**Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS)**

Cohen's other major contribution to the honors movement began in 1957 when he helped to found the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), which, according to Cohen, "was to operate independently and act as a clearinghouse for information on honors activities across the nation" (qtd. in Rinehart 18). As the first organized professional forum for honors educators, ICSS supported the honors movement by (1) promoting the importance of developing more comprehensive, four-year programs that would encompass both general and departmental honors coursework, including admitting students to the program as freshmen (Ray Asbury, "A History of the Honors Movement Part Two: The History of ICSS," 8); (2) introducing a newsletter, *The Superior Student*, which served from 1958-1964 as the first printed forum for honors education; and (3) supporting Cohen's extensive travel to advance and maintain interest in honors education.

Generous funding also helped to support this honors boom, which lasted from 1955 to 1965. ICSS received substantial initial support from the Carnegie Corporation, which allocated $125,000 in

1957 for the two-and-a-half-year start-up project and an additional $140,000 in 1960. The Carnegie Corporation also gave funds to individual colleges and universities, including the 1958 contributions of $54,000 to the University of Michigan and $84,700 to Boston College for further development of their honors programs. Other funding sources included the National Science Foundation and the United States Office of Education (Rinehart 19).

Having fostered and financed the growth of honors programs and the professional connections for participating faculty and administrators, ICSS members believed that the honors movement had reached adulthood and considered their mission fulfilled, disbanding in 1965 and publishing their aforementioned *The Superior Student in American Higher Education* in 1966.

**National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC)**

Still feeling the need for an organized professional voice in higher education, honors educators met in 1966 to form the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), which is currently the major professional forum for honors education. Building upon the foundation established by Aydelotte, Cohen, and the ICSS, NCHC provides a network for honors administrators and educators to discuss their curricular and extracurricular developments and to voice their concerns about honors education with the strength of a national professional organization. Currently, NCHC has approximately 780 member programs at two-year, four-year, and graduate degree-granting institutions as of September 2002.

To support these member programs, NCHC provides several important opportunities for scholarly and professional development in honors education:

1. *Annual national conferences.* Centered upon a different theme every year, the annual convention provides opportunities for professional development and idea sharing as well as reinforces the institutional legitimacy of honors education. Students in member programs are also invited and encouraged to participate in special sessions.

2. *Publications.* The ICSS newsletter, *The Superior Student*, ceased publication in 1965. *The Forum for Honors*, a refereed journal, was published by NCHC from 1971 to 1995. *The NCHC Newsletter* first appeared in 1980. In 1986, the newsletter became *The National Honors Report* (*NHR*). This quarterly publication offers articles about creating, developing and fine-tuning honors courses, honors programs, and honors colleges. It also showcases the work of honors students, faculty, and directors while serving as the public record for NCHC as an organization. In 2000, NCHC began publishing a new refereed journal, the *Journal of the National*

*Collegiate Honors Council* (*JNCHC*), to replace the moribund *Forum for Honors*. Appearing twice a year, this periodical publishes scholarly articles on honors education and issues relevant to honors education and the national higher education agenda. NCHC also publishes a monograph series on honors topics that are important to its membership.

3. *Regional and state associations.* Like other professional organizations, NCHC convenes an annual conference each year. NCHC also maintains a close relationship with various regional organizations. In addition, many states have independent state honors councils. These regional and state conferences provide members increased opportunities to address professional concerns.

4. *Special projects.* NCHC members design interinstitutional, interdisciplinary honors semesters, centering on a different theme every year, which emphasize experiential learning for both students and faculty. Other projects include satellite seminars and evaluation workshops.

5. *Information clearinghouse.* NCHC continues the ICSS function of disseminating information about existing and new honors programs and generally representing and promoting honors education.

These services, especially the annual conferences and the refereed scholarly journal, are important tools for maintaining the professionalism of honors education. Not only do they keep honors administrators and educators around the country connected, a network begun by Aydelotte, but they also provide opportunities for professional development that are acknowledged by professional disciplines and accepted by university committees as valid venues for professional and scholarly development of individual participants and of honors education in general. Thus, such opportunities encourage administrator and faculty participation in honors education through availability of professional activity and acknowledgment.

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY COMPOSITION STUDIES

The history of rhetoric and composition studies in the western tradition stretches far back to the foundational works of the classical Greek period. For the purposes of this review, however, I will limit discussion of rhetoric and composition pedagogy to the twentieth century in the United States to construct parallels in educational developments between this field and honors education, using James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* to establish this timeline. While other exhaustive reviews of this era provide extensive references to many important scholarly works and several schools of thought, I will focus

upon those running concurrent to events in the development of the undergraduate honors program.

**Three Schools of Rhetorical Theory**

In his introductory chapter, Berlin identifies three main categories of rhetorical theories that have evolved throughout this century: objective theories, subjective theories, and transactional theories. As scholars have researched new areas and developed new theories, they have modified the concepts, terms, and practices, but they still tend to fall into one of the three schools. Although composition instructors often align themselves more strongly with one or another of these schools, most composition courses, including honors composition courses, have elements of two or three schools addressed through a variety of writing exercises and assignments.

1. *Objective theories.* Defining these theories, Berlin states, "From this perspective, only that which is empirically verifiable or which can be grounded in empirically verifiable phenomena is real. The business of the writer is to record this reality exactly as it has been experienced so that it can be reproduced in the reader" (7). The dominant theory in this category is current-traditional rhetoric, which hearkens back to traditional training in classical rhetoric focusing on modes of discourse. In classical times, novice orators studied a multitude of rhetorical terms and concepts and learned to imitate, and in many cases repeat verbatim, the works of master orators who came before them before they were allowed to compose their own speeches. Similarly, as students today learn to write, they study types of essays, such as comparison/contrast or cause and effect, and stylistic elements of writing, such as similes and metaphors. They learn to identify these through reading works instructors have deemed effective examples for each essay and element type; as the students progress through the readings, they are asked to make their writing and argumentation styles more like those of the authors they are reading.

An example of this theory in action is the contemporary freshman composition course that leads students through reading and writing of several forms of expository essays and research exercises. In some cases, the course is divided into a two-course sequence, with the coursework divided in two ways. One way is to devote the first course to expository essays and the second to the research paper; the second is to use the first course for expository and research writing and the second course for writing about literature, in which literary works the instructor deems important are used not only to develop the student's appreciation for literature but also to serve as the model writings.

2. *Subjective theories.* These theories "locate truth either within the individual or within a realm that is accessible only through the individual's internal apprehension, apart from the empirically verifiable sensory world" (11). Berlin's historical precedents for these theories range from the philosophical idealism of Plato to the works of Emerson and Thoreau to Freud's influence on American psychology. Rather than relying on external models and focusing on objective essays and research writing, writing in the subjective school allows for more reflection and self-involvement, and thus more self-control, in the writing process. For example, rather than merely reading a series of essays to generate writing topics, students can write a sequence of personal journal entries, directed by the instructor, to learn to generate their own topics of interest.

Another contemporary application of subjective theory in composition instruction is the use of peer critiquing. The class is divided into small groups, usually three or four students to a group, and students read and evaluate each other's essay drafts, often answering specific questions provided by the instructor to give direction to the critique of the essay. While students assist each other in building writing and argumentation skills through editing and revision, they also provide their own readings and sample essays for their group members, who might be inspired by a topic or a specific argument presented by a peer.

Elements of subjective theory do not seem to be as commonly used in honors composition courses, at least as reported initially by program directors in the survey and follow-up interview presented in Chapter Three. For example, some honors programs condense a regular two-course freshman composition sequence into one course, and this course usually focuses less on reflection or self-expression and more on argumentation and research. In fact, most advanced honors composition courses and projects focus on research and argumentation, such as professional and technical communication courses, senior theses, and professional presentations and publications, far more than an overall self-exploration. Some subjective elements, however, are employed throughout honors writing courses and seminars; for instance, a key component within many thesis seminars is peer critique of proposals, bibliographies, and drafts. Otherwise, honors writing is traditionally focused on research writing and professional development.

3. *Transactional theories.* These are "based on an epistemology that sees truth as arising out of the interaction of the elements of the rhetorical situation: an interaction of subject and object or of subject and audience or even of all the elements — subject, object, audience, and language — operating simultaneously" (Berlin 15). One important concept within the transactional school is the idea of

the discourse community, in which people earn membership in a group, such as a professional discipline, by learning to communicate about topics important to that group using language which other group members understand but which those outside the group might not. For example, as chemistry students learn formulae, laboratory procedures, and research protocols, they also learn how to use appropriate terminology and how to write up proposals, lab reports, and research reports using the appropriate organization and style for writing in chemistry.

Another aspect of transactional theories focuses on how groups control what they consider valid knowledge through oral and written communication. Returning to the chemistry example, we can note that the study of chemistry in the United States is overseen by the American Chemical Society, which publishes a prestigious, refereed professional journal. The main chemistry community is also divided into many subcommunities, such as biochemistry, physical chemistry, and organic chemistry, each with its own specialized field of knowledge and terminology and thus with its own professional journals. Studies submitted to these journals for publication are reviewed by an editorial board, and many of these journals are highly selective, publishing fewer than ten percent of all articles submitted. Reviewers look at articles for the content of the studies and the appropriateness of the research, but the articles must also be written, organized, and formatted correctly in order to be considered for publication. In this way, the chemist's proper use of language is crucial to publication and thus plays an important role in what determines knowledge in that field.

Common applications of transactional theories in composition instruction can be observed in scientific and technical communication courses. As reported by program directors in Chapter Three, relatively few honors programs offer these courses in honors sections, but many are in the planning stage. More programs, however, require their students to write an honors thesis, a lengthy exercise in field-specific communication, and many programs encourage student participation in conferences and publications. With a thesis, students learn to perform independent research and to present that research in the acceptable professional style; as they present the results to different audiences, such as a defense committee composed of field specialists and an undergraduate research symposium made up of students and professionals in many fields, they learn to adapt their language so that each audience will understand their results. In these ways, students learn the importance of language in the validation and dissemination of what is considered knowledge in a given discipline.

After outlining his three major schools of rhetorical theory, Berlin traces them throughout twentieth-century developments in composition instruction and discusses the social implications of these patterns within American higher education. He shapes his historical survey in this fashion:

> Changes in rhetorical theory and practice will be related to changes in the notion of literacy, as indicated by developments in the college curriculum. The curriculum, in turn, is always responsive to the changing economic, social, and political conditions in a society. Obviously, the kind of graduates colleges prepare have a great deal to do with the conditions in the society for which they are preparing them. This study will demonstrate that the college writing course, a requirement for graduation for most students throughout the century, responds quickly to changes in American society as a whole, with literacy (as variously defined by the college curriculum over the years) serving as the intermediary between the two — between the writing course and larger social developments. (5)

Honors programs are uniquely influenced by all three types of changes — literacy, the writing course, and larger social developments. As noted earlier in this chapter, honors programs have both flourished and floundered under alternating perceptions as preparation for global educational and technological domination or perpetuation of socioeconomic elitism and educational ideology. Also, just as the writing course is foundational to college education, so it often is at one level or another within the honors program; throughout various types of honors writing courses and projects, instructors employ methods from each of Berlin's three rhetorical schools. To begin drawing parallels between honors education and composition instruction, then, we need to consider the birth of the modern composition course.

### Professionalization and Foundational Work in Twentieth-Century Composition

The groundwork for contemporary composition studies was laid by professors and scholars in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century through the professionalization of English studies in modern American higher education. Much of the prototypical nineteenth-century work in composition came from Harvard, the school that also played a role in the early beginnings of the honors

movement and where Frank Aydelotte had studied and taught composition. Berlin notes:

> Charles William Eliot, Harvard's president from 1869 to 1909, had in fact considered writing so central to the new elective curriculum he was shaping that in 1874 the freshman English course at Harvard was established, by 1894 was the only requirement except for a modern language, and by 1897 was the only required course in the curriculum, consisting of a two-semester sequence. (20)

During this time, English studies became more defined professionally through the establishment of the Modern Language Association (MLA) in 1883. Throughout the next few decades, however, the MLA began to focus more specifically on scholarly research and pursuits in literature and languages, so those more concerned with pedagogical approaches to English studies, mainly at the high school level but later at the college level as well, formed the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 1911.

The main catalyst behind the creation of the NCTE was the development of the Uniform Reading Lists, lists of books which would be used for admissions testing for prospective college students. In 1874, Harvard became the first university to require an admissions essay based on the Uniform Reading Lists. As more universities adopted such essays, two things happened: (1) high school English teachers adapted their curricula to include these texts, in effect feeling pressure to teach to the test, and (2) colleges in various areas of the country disagreed on the types of works to be included on the lists to meet their specific entrance requirements. The NCTE was initially formed to protest this de facto university-level control of high school English curricula; eventually, the organization came to be concerned with issues in English instruction in all its forms across primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. The expanding college focus led to a special edition of *English Journal* in 1928, from which *College English* developed in 1939.

Positioning these developments within his three rhetorical schools, Berlin identifies Harvard as the early twentieth-century seat of the objective rhetoric movement known as current-traditionalism. At this time, although university enrollment throughout the country was still quite small compared to contemporary percentages, universities were shifting from elitist approaches to admissions and course offerings to more practical programs of study in order to prepare students for newly developing, middle-class technical and professional fields. To aid these budding professionals in learning to communicate properly in written form, the typical freshman writing

course became a workload-heavy exercise in frequent essays, translations, imitations, readings, and longer themes covering various discourse forms, all of which were held to high standards of organization, style, and correctness. Whether this great bulk of writing assignments and the ways in which they were corrected actually helped students to become better writers became a point of controversy, especially between "those who would teach writing through practice and those who would teach it through the reading of literature" (Berlin 39).

One of the Harvard program's opponents was Frank Aydelotte, working at Indiana at the time of his publications on this topic but supporting his arguments with his prior experience teaching within the Harvard system. Berlin groups him with other scholars in the rhetoric of liberal culture, that time period's entry in the school of subjective rhetoric. Berlin states that "[t]he aim of this education was preeminently self-realization, the self arriving at its fulfillment through the perception of the spiritual qualities inherent in experience [. . .]. The writing cultivated in this rhetoric thus valued the individual voice, the unique expression that indicated a gifted and original personality at work" (45). This approach to personal development and achievement can be seen in Aydelotte's continuing call for increased opportunities for independent study and individual tutorial work in early honors programs.

Interestingly, Aydelotte can also be grouped with the time period's representative in the school of transactional rhetoric, the progressive education movement:

> Progressive education was an extension of political progressivism, the optimistic faith in the possibility that all institutions could be reshaped to better serve society, making it healthier, more prosperous, and happier [. . .]. Progressive education wished to apply the findings of science to human behavior. This meant that the social and behavioral sciences were strongly endorsed and constantly consulted as guides to understanding students. (58-59)

Discussing the "shift from a subject-centered to a child-centered school" (59), Berlin identifies Fred Newton Scott as progressive education's major proponent within English studies and composition. Through his publications and his early leadership of NCTE, Scott advocated an alternative to current-traditional rhetoric by arguing for "reality as a social construction, a communal creation emerging from the dialectical interplay of individuals" (47). The founder of the movement itself was John Dewey, a significant figure in American pragmatism, who argued that students should be freed from the

fetters of rigid, time-constrained educational exercises and challenged to contemplate complex ideas and struggle to make connections between various aspects of nature and society on their own. In *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, Cornel West calls Dewey "the greatest of American pragmatists" (69) and notes that "[f]or Dewey, the aim of political and social life is the cultural enrichment and moral development of self-begetting individuals and self-regulating communities by means of the release of human powers provoked by novel circumstances and new challenges" (103). Again, this stance was readily adopted in the early honors movement's approaches to more open, individualized instruction and preparation of the student as a critically-thinking, responsible citizen. For example, in 1966, Joseph Cohen writes that before the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, "honors work in America was not a new phenomenon. Early in this century the intellectual purpose of higher education emerged as a crucial concern for the culture. We have to look back to Dewey as the thinker who showed us the importance of experiment in education" (xii).

Aydelotte, also a published advocate of the "ideas course," which Berlin categorizes as a subgroup of transactional rhetoric, opposed the Harvard system because the mechanistic churning out of essays prompted students to "write, write, write," as he noted in a passage quoted earlier in the chapter, but it did little to encourage them to "think, think, think." The ideas course, then, introduced the concept of using readings in various fields, which formed the beginnings of the modern freshman composition essay anthology, to stimulate critical thinking, discussion, and written communication about these issues for students. The goal here is not so much the student's own self-realization but the development of social awareness and the student's role within it.

During these first few decades of the twentieth century, writing instruction and honors education experienced the same types of growing pains, with each group claiming to provide the best type of education for a growing undergraduate population. In composition instruction, as noted by Berlin, conflicting schools of rhetoric were shaping pedagogical approaches in various ways; in honors education, as noted by Aydelotte, opponents debated whether the honors program should expand a student's intellectual development through more rigorous field-specific education or through independent study, moral and ethical development, and academic freedom. Reflections of the contemporary debate between the liberal arts approach versus the trade school approach to post-secondary education and the purposes of two-year and four-year programs can be seen clearly in these earlier works. For example, has the English

department been forced to reduce classical literature, poetry, and drama from requirements and major programs to electives in order to provide services such as freshman composition and professional communication courses for departments which produce higher numbers of employable majors? Similarly, should honors programs focus on providing students from these majors a liberal, creative foundation which they might not otherwise receive, or should they eliminate general education requirements so that students can pursue additional, marketable majors or minors and independent research? That these issues are still being debated demonstrates their complexity within writing programs and honors programs alike. As higher education moved toward the middle of the century, all sides in these debates pursued qualitative research to support their claims, and in this way the parallels between composition instruction and honors education continued.

**The Survey Era in Composition**

As noted above, Frank Aydelotte conducted two major surveys in honors education: (1) a general review of honors programs in 1925, *Honors Courses in American Colleges and Universities,* and (2) a more extensive survey conducted with a group of colleagues in 1939, which resulted in the 1944 *Breaking the Academic Lockstep.* For the field of honors education, these milestone surveys seem monumental in their scope; however, for English studies, particularly for the burgeoning composition specialization, surveys were hardly uncommon during this time period.

Berlin calls attention to several early surveys of composition courses, beginning with H. Robinson Shipherd's 1926 survey of required freshman composition courses at 75 schools. Statistics considered included geographic region, school and course enrollment, frequency and length of writing assignments, and types of required readings. Berlin also highlights Warner Taylor's more extensive 1927-28 survey of composition at 225 schools, which supported and expanded upon Shipherd's study. Findings in these studies bear a striking resemblance to contemporary freshman composition instruction: most courses were required for first-year students, were taught by graduate assistants and instructors rather than professional faculty, were composed of three hour-long sessions, and included a rhetoric textbook, a handbook, and a collection of essays (Berlin 61-63). Another survey published in *College English* in 1942 demonstrated just how entrenched the contemporary features of the freshman composition course had already become, such as forms of discourse, essay anthologies, ability sectioning, conferences, and writing labs (Berlin 64-65).

In light of drawing parallels to the honors movement, this tradition of ability grouping is worth a closer look. Taylor's survey indicated that ability grouping was one of freshman composition's newest features, in which departments used placement tests to group students into advanced, regular, and remedial or "sub-freshman" tracks, the last of which often carried no credit (64). Berlin then traces ability grouping through several additional reports, including Norman Whitney's "Ability Grouping at Syracuse" (*English Journal*, 1924) and "Ability Grouping Plus" (*EJ*, 1928), *English Journal*'s "English A-1 at Harvard" (1932), and various program descriptions from such universities as Illinois, Minnesota, and North Carolina (66-69). Berlin attributes the growth of ability grouping to the influence of Dewey's progressive education movement, encouraging different types of students to strive toward a college education but also enabling them to explore intellectual challenges and develop individual skills at different paces. Furthermore, and of importance to honors educators, researchers above often noted intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for those students who achieved advanced status or who progressed through regular sections more quickly, such as decreased class hours for the same amount of credit, decreased frequency of assignments, decreased requirements for instructor conferences, and increased choice and variety of assignment themes. Relating this research to honors education, the honors program could take direct advantage of ability grouping in freshman composition to accelerate their students' essential writing instruction and thus allow them to progress more quickly to advanced writing and research tasks in their electives and their major programs. As the following chapters will demonstrate, many contemporary honors programs still use ability grouping in honors composition courses to provide foundational instruction for later honors thesis and publication projects.

As traditional features of both composition programs and honors programs became increasingly entrenched, each field faced a serious developmental change after World War II, which naturally influenced higher education across the board, especially through the growing general education movement. This movement began after World War I to help the masses who wanted to pursue increased opportunities in professional education achieve a balanced education and sense of citizenship. While post-war honors education seemed to be in a holding pattern, with Aydelotte's 1944 publication its last major contribution, composition instruction saw the advent of two crucial elements toward increased professionalization: the communications course and the first official Conference on College Composition and Communication.

Berlin calls the communications course "[t]he most conspicuous feature of most general education programs [. . .]. This course, commonly interdepartmental, combined writing instruction with lessons in speaking, in reading, and sometimes even in listening" (93). As with the freshman composition course, this course would be required for all incoming students, not only to prepare them for academic and, later, professional communication tasks, but also, more immediately, to prepare their study skills and to help them adjust to college life. This return of the oral communication component to student preparation also seemed to hearken a return to classical approaches to rhetorical training, in which most communication in the public forum was spoken.

Along with the communications course, this period saw the formal establishment in 1949 of a separate professional forum for composition and communication instruction, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). The establishment of a professional organization in any field marks an important point in that field's development: conferences and publications, such as the quarterly *College Composition and Communication*, signify not only that a field's population has grown beyond informal meetings and hallway lore and so must provide an organized, formal forum for communication, but also that its research and communication have grown to a point where leaders feel the need to control what is considered valid research and knowledge in that field through the implementation of competitively selected conference papers and refereed journals. Thus, just as NCTE had branched away from MLA to focus less on scholarly research approaches to English studies and more on pedagogical concerns within the field, CCCC provided a means of professional communication and development for the growing population of scholars and teachers within this increasingly important specialization. The parallel here to the honors education movement is that within a decade, Joseph Cohen would found the honors movement's first professional organization, the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student. Thus, composition instruction and honors education had each taken an important step towards professional acknowledgment and identity through the establishment of specific professional organizations. The unifying force provided by each professional organization would then aid each field in facing the next major challenge to higher education: the Cold War.

**The Cold War and the Open Admissions Policy**

As post-war euphoria gave way to Cold War paranoia, the drive toward international competition and national excellence caused an explosion in development throughout all educational levels and in all

fields, but especially in science and technology. The launch of Sputnik in 1956 became a catalyst in this explosion, and 1958 saw the passage of the National Defense Education Act. These developments shook the honors movement out of its own post-war stupor: the ICSS was established in 1957, and its almost decade-long research project for update and expansion of Aydelotte's earlier work was published by Cohen in 1966 as *The Superior Student in American Higher Education*. The renewed public cry for educational excellence had created the perfect climate for a resurgence in honors education.

In composition studies, Berlin identifies this period with the resurgence of the professional study of rhetoric and the advent of cognitive and psychological research in composing processes. In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, Stephen North argues that although CCCC had been established in 1949, the early 1960s were the critical period of research and development for composition studies, when the field turned away from the dominance of progressive education's focus on the self-realization of the student and toward long-term academic and professional goals (9). He marks 1963 as the birth of composition with a capital "C" because of the publication of Albert Kitzhaber's *Themes, Theories, and Therapy: The Teaching of Writing in College*, which was the first book-length study of college writing, and his CCCC address of that year, entitled "4C and Freshman English." North identifies these as the beginning of true composition research because Kitzhaber calls for

> the exertion of authority over knowledge about composition: what it is, how it is made, who gets to say so and why. What made that so difficult a challenge to meet — the reason the "4C" had failed to exert such leadership — was that it never really had the means to do so: it had no such control over knowledge, no mode of inquiry by which such order might have been imposed, nor whose findings would have been acknowledged by the wider profession. (15)

At this important turning point, the foundations having been laid, composition scholars answered Kitzhaber's challenge and moved beyond simple surveys and published "hallway discussions" of pedagogical issues into thoughtful, probing qualitative and quantitative studies of instructional practice and student writing performance.

So, as scholarly research in composition made great strides in the field's development during the 1960s, the honors movement also began to take its contemporary shape in 1966 with Cohen's collection and the formation of the National Collegiate Honors

Council. Each field experienced new maturity just in time to face another major academic challenge: the open admissions policy. Introduced at the City University of New York in 1970, this policy dramatically changed the characteristics of incoming freshman populations at many schools, not only in socioeconomic demographics but also in basic preparedness for post-secondary academic pursuits. This movement naturally influenced departments campus-wide, but writing programs faced a particularly important challenge: while ability tracking had existed in various forms for decades, this influx introduced a mass of students who were not even able to perform to standard in the lower freshman composition tiers. Composition instructors struggled to incorporate different types of readings and assignments and different approaches to instruction and evaluation into these classes in hopes of reaching these students, and as they came together to address these issues, composition's specialization of basic writing was born.

Basic writing as a field not only entailed such classroom-specific problems as those mentioned above, but it also raised uncomfortable questions about inequities in elementary, secondary, and higher education related to race, gender, and/or socioeconomic status. In addition to struggling to catch up to minimal college-level writing standards, basic writers also contended with the stigma of testing and labeling; for example, in light of the influence of behavioral and cognitive psychology in composition theory around that period, the term "remedial" writing implied, however subtly, that the basic writer's problem was a psychological one that could be "diagnosed" and "remedied" in a writing "lab." Whether the label is "basic" or "remedial" or "marginal" or "nontraditional" or "developmental," students and instructors alike must deal with the emotional, academic, and even financial problems associated with such instruction. Thus, basic writing has become professionalized, with its own journal and many scholarly works, including two that are considered key texts in composition studies in general, Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors & Expectations* and Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*.

Basic writing is still an integral part of contemporary composition studies, as instructors continue to develop more effective curricular materials and instructional approaches, to explore the effects of labeling and ability grouping on these students, and to present their information in publications and conference publications. One might argue, however, that honors students are also "nontraditional," that they are performing in the other margin, as it were. For example, while basic writers face certain challenges in a regular composition course, so do many honors students. They can become frustrated by and resentful about completing exercises and writing essays they

have already mastered in high school, and they can feel burdened by a heavy leadership role in class discussion and peer critiquing, becoming less a student and more an instructor and editor for their peers and encountering subsequent resentment from them. On the other hand, some honors composition sections are only slightly more challenging than regular sections, requiring merely more readings and longer papers on the same generic topics, while others are testing grounds for materials to be adapted for use in regular sections, in which case students are treated like guinea pigs for the writing program's experimentation. These examples only begin to address important issues in writing difference and ability grouping in honors composition; however, unlike basic writing, discussion of honors composition is nonexistent in composition journals and conferences, probably for reasons noted in Chapter One.

Perhaps the more appropriate venue for discussing honors composition is in professional honors education forums; even here, though, scholarly, research-based discussion of composition courses and projects is not readily available. While the NCHC acts as a clearinghouse for information and distributes guidelines for establishing, maintaining, and assessing honors programs in general, more detailed information about specific, varied curricular and instructional approaches to honors composition has not yet been addressed in published form, with the exception of Bruffee's article on senior theses. What honors composition needs, and what this project begins to develop, is scholarly research which connects composition instruction to honors education and which, like research in basic writing, addresses not only curricular and instructional approaches but also the politics of labeling, ability grouping, and differentiated identification and evaluation criteria.

## HONORS COMPOSITION: THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AND CRITICAL THINKING

Reviewing these brief twentieth-century histories of honors education and composition instruction at the college level, we can identify simultaneous developments in each field resulting from more universal influences in American education. For example, honors education and composition instruction were both affected by shifts in educational priorities due to the launch of Sputnik, but so were many other departments across college campuses, especially engineering and the sciences, as was education at the elementary and secondary levels. A more specific way for connecting significant work in these two areas is to discuss each field's common focus on developing students' critical thinking skills and the roles language and language instruction play in this development.

Language and thinking are inextricably linked. Language is not merely a tool with which we express our ideas; language is an integral part of shaping our ideas before we even speak them or put them to paper. We think using language, and then as we speak or write, the act of choosing words by which we will share our thoughts with others shapes our ideas even further. In *Invention as a Social Act*, Karen Burke LeFevre reviews studies by linguists and psychologists and argues that

> rhetorical invention is better understood as a social act, in which an individual who is at the same time a social being interacts in a distinctive way with society and culture to create something [. . .]. [O]ne invents largely by means of language and other symbol systems, which are socially created and shared. (1-2)

We must use a shared language, then, to communicate with others, and in communicating our ideas, the very language we use shapes the world around us.

One example of how we construct our world using language is the use of metaphor. In *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson analyze not the poetic sense of creative metaphorical expression but those metaphors we use every day. For example, they begin by analyzing the language we use to discuss the concept of argumentation under the rubric ARGUMENT IS WAR, stating that this rubric includes not merely the words we use to describe argument but also all of our beliefs and feelings about argument:

> It is important to see that we don't just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own [. . .]. Many of the things we *do* in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. Though there is no physical battle, there is a verbal battle, and the structure of an argument — attack, defense, counterattack, etc. — reflects this. It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing. (4)

Throughout the book, Lakoff and Johnson discuss how we construct and come to understand various abstract concepts through metaphors. For example, what is the difference between being *on time* and being *in time* for something? What is the difference between a car's being *in* the street and *on* the street? While the

grammatical differences seem small, the semantic differences demonstrate how we can use similar words to express very different abstract concepts. When we lead our students in discussing such langauge use, we naturally build their facility with grammatical and semantic choices, but we also encourage them to contemplate the role language plays in shaping what and how we think about important concepts. For example, when discussing how to build an argument in an essay, we can call our students' attention to the phrases above to propose reasons why students may feel uncomfortable if they cannot separate the logical positions in an academic argument from the emotional underpinnings in everyday verbal arguments with friends or family. In this way, they can think more critically about the general concept of academic argumentation and the specific points within their individual essay topics.

For another example of the power of language, consider the writing style used by scientists in professional field-specific journals. Most researchers write in the passive voice — "The plant was watered" — rather than in the active voice — "I watered the plant" or "We watered the plant" or "The research assistant watered the plant." Scholars of the rhetoric of scientific communication attribute this to the scientific community's desire to maintain objectivity in research: the researcher is not specifically identified in the sentence, so removing her from the description of the experiment thus effectively removes her from the experiment itself. In reality, we know that she or one of her assistants watered the plant, but the passive construction creates a sense of objective observation of the process by removing the person who performs the action. The passive voice also subtly eliminates direct responsibility or credit for the action and the results. For example, graduate and undergraduate research assistants may perform the procedures on the plants and calculate the results while the lead professor monitors their progress and writes the article; by writing "The plant was watered," she does not have to attribute work to any specific student.

Students learning to write in the scientific research style often receive conflicting advice regarding the use of passive voice, and this is problematic. On the one hand, many composition instructors advise their students to use active voice because sentence structures are generally less awkward when the subject of the sentence is acting rather than being acted upon. On the other hand, many professors in the disciplines want students to use passive voice because active voice is not readily accepted in scholarly publications for reasons noted above. What practice should students follow? The power of language here is demonstrated in the choice which student writers have to make: active voice earns a better grade in the composition class, but passive voice allows the student

to participate more fully in discipline-specific conversations in publications and at conferences. Thus, students must think critically as they write such reports, not only about the arguments which they are making but also the ways in which active or passive voice will shape those arguments and the reactions that they wish to elicit from their prospective readers.

Instruction in language use, therefore, specifically in writing skill, is one of the most important tools we can give to honors students. When we ask honors students to write, they are not merely discussing *what* they researched at the library or retained for the exam but *how* they understand these concepts through the words they use, the order in which they organize their thoughts, and the examples they use to support their points. Unlike fill-in-the-blank, multiple-choice, and true-or-false exams, writing assignments make students think more critically about a topic because to summarize and paraphrase ideas successfully in their own words, they must understand a topic more fully rather than merely remember certain bits of information. Challenging writing tasks promote rigorous thinking and class discussion, very desirable elements of honors curricula which strengthen the learning of honors students.

These discussions of critical thinking and language skills connect for composition instruction and honors education in the writing-across-the-curriculum movement. Proponents of writing across the curriculum argue that students learn to become better writers and better thinkers when their writing instruction is not isolated in the composition classroom but continues throughout their major courses and electives. This means that faculty throughout the disciplines should incorporate more writing assignments and different types of writing tasks into their courses. In this way, students apply what they have learned in their composition courses to writing about field-specific issues and problems; in doing so, they are made to think about such problems in greater depth and detail than if they are merely required to complete multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank exams. The implication for honors programs is that composition instruction should continue beyond honors sections of freshman composition to include advanced composition courses, writing-intensive field-specific seminars and colloquia, and written capstone projects in which students can demonstrate how their writing and critical thinking skills have developed.

This concern with intercurricular writing instruction has been labeled in several ways, with *writing across the curriculum* being one of the most widely used terms. Some scholars have also used *writing in the content areas* or *write to learn*, with each term implying something slightly different. For example, in *Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: College Level*, Stephen N. Tchudi maintains the

distinction that "'writing in the content areas' generally refers to what individual instructors do with writing in their own classes, while 'writing across the curriculum' describes attempts to organize writing in entire academic units" (7). He then defines *writing in the content areas*:

> *Writing in the content areas* refers to the pedagogical possibility that writing can be taught through subject-matter courses as well as in English classes and that students can deepen their knowledge and understanding of a discipline by writing about it. The philosophy of *writing in the content areas* holds that every faculty member should consider him/herself a teacher of writing. While this notion has obvious appeal for English faculty, it has received wide support from instructors in areas as diverse as science, fine arts, applied arts, social science, humanities, and mathematics. (7)

This relates to the concept of writing to learn, in which students will retain more information and will question and debate more readily when they are asked to perform their own in-depth research and writing about topics rather than merely taking notes and regurgitating facts on an exam. Students who write more frequently and in greater depth, then, take increased responsibility for their own learning.

Faculty responsibility, however, regarding increased writing assignments is an additional concern. In the passage above, Tchudi alludes to the support that interdisciplinary writing instruction has received not only from English faculty but from faculty in other disciplines. Naturally, English faculty are happy to see this development: the burden, as it were, of composition instruction is thus shared beyond freshman composition and the English department, and other faculty will come to appreciate the time and dedication needed for thorough writing instruction and evaluation. The burden, however, is not always readily accepted by faculty in other disciplines. They have prepared to teach engineering, psychology, or management, they argue, not writing, so they fear that they will not be able to evaluate their students' writing properly. In "Writing Across the Curriculum: Past, Present, and Future," Elaine P. Maimon attributes these fears to the instructors' own past experiences with composition instruction:

> The good intentions of composition instructors had often been lost on future scientists, sociologists, and art historians, and they developed unfortunate attitudes about writing and about themselves as writers. Those who had taken

> composition courses that focused on grammar and usage were often wont to confuse correct writing with good writing. Science professors who had been force-fed James Joyce in an undergraduate course in which they had expected to learn how to write revealed that they had never experienced the appropriate epiphanies. Worst of all for the collegial enterprise at hand, many professors of other disciplines had learned at an impressionable age that the teaching of writing was mainly a matter of grammar and literary analysis, two areas that most of them felt unqualified to teach. (68-69)

In this way, even though faculty have become successful writers in their fields — successful enough to earn doctoral degrees, to publish in their fields, and to supervise graduate theses and dissertations — they reflexively fall back upon their own freshman composition experiences when faced with the task of grading undergraduate student writing.

Another faculty concern is that writing assignments will take too much time away from necessary coursework. For example, a mathematics professor might argue that a course on differential equations is difficult enough for students to complete as it is and that students must concentrate on formulae and calculations rather than on writing papers. Assigning and discussing papers would consume valuable class time that should be spent discussing the problems themselves, and then the professor would have to take more time to read and evaluate the papers. Proponents of writing across the curriculum argue, however, that the writing does not need to come solely in the form of lengthy research papers. In "Writing: An Act of Cognition," Toby Fulwiler provides several examples of brief, informal writing tasks in which students can discuss what they have learned and how they have learned it; for example, students can keep a weekly journal or log in which they discuss successes and problems they have had with that week's assignments, and the instructor reviews these relatively quickly without having to "grade" them. In this way, both students and faculty can reflect upon what is actually being learned in the class.

In their concern about grading standards, proponents of writing across the curriculum call for increased communication between composition experts and faculty in other disciplines to discuss methods for authentic assessment of writing. Faculty can thus learn, as Maimon suggests above, to distinguish "correct" writing from "good" writing; because students should research and write to learn, faculty should focus on evaluating this writing for content and argumentation rather than merely for grammar and punctuation.

Maimon argues that faculty themselves must become students again, open to new ways of thinking about writing:

> Comprehensive writing programs must begin in conversation — the kind of conversation too rarely stimulated within our usual administrative structures. The first schools to establish cross-disciplinary writing programs began by inviting faculty members from all disciplines to become students again, to join in seminars during summer and winter vacations, and to remember that all scholars are rhetoricians in the best, classical sense of that word. (67)

When faculty from across the campus discuss their concerns about writing in the classroom, they can develop consistent goals for the development of writing and critical thinking skills among majors and throughout a student's entire academic career. Writing across the curriculum then becomes a unifying factor for departments throughout an institution.

Similarly, writing across the curriculum should serve as a unifying force for an honors program. In fact, although many instructors, composition and otherwise, assume that honors students must be excellent writers, the truth is that not all honors students are good writers and that all honors students can benefit from some type of directed composition study. In "Honors and Non-Honors Students: How Different Are They?" Thomas B. Harte states this point well:

> Although as a group, honors students are generally effective at written expression, even honors students can have serious writing problems. After all, competent writing is a learned behavior and, for a variety of reasons, even bright people may not have learned how to do it. Indeed, our English department tells me that last semester out of fifty honors students in freshman English, not a single one tested out into the advanced course. (13)

To respond to this need, more honors programs are taking the writing-across-the-curriculum approach and increasing the amount of writing honors students do throughout their programs. In fact, several survey respondents and follow-up interviewees could not provide much information on specific courses, thesis requirements, or other projects because these components were planned but not yet implemented, a state of affairs that demonstrates the current growth of honors composition. From Frank Aydelotte's work with the "ideas" course onward, honors programs have always emphasized developing students' critical thinking skills, and writing to learn has

been a large part of this. In *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, John C. Bean further emphasizes the connection between writing and critical thinking:

> [I]n presenting students with significant problems to write about — and in creating an environment that demands their best writing — we can promote their general cognitive and intellectual growth. When we make students struggle with their writing, we are making them struggle with thought itself. Emphasizing writing and critical thinking, therefore, generally increases the academic rigor of a course. Often the struggle of writing, linked as it is to the struggle of thinking and to the growth of a person's intellectual powers, awakens students to the real nature of learning. (xiii)

Therefore, honors composition courses and projects can avoid the trap of being merely more readings and more writing assignments by promoting increased interdisciplinary opportunities for critical thinking through writing across the curriculum.

Currently, as will be shown in more detail in the following chapter, honors programs address their students' needs for cross-curricular writing instruction and development of critical thinking skills in the following ways:

1. Few honors programs exempt their students from freshman composition, and many offer honors sections or special combined courses that focus on research and argumentation skills. Honors students thus start their careers of academic writing upon a common foundation.

2. Many honors students are required to take an advanced or field-specific composition course, such as technical or business communication, if such a course is required by the student's major or by the school's general education requirements. Many programs also currently offer these courses in honors sections. While the bulk of an honors student's writing will be academic writing, these courses develop skills that students will use in nonacademic workplaces.

3. Many programs offer honors seminars and colloquia that are designated "writing-intensive." These courses are field-specific and sometimes interdisciplinary, and writing to learn plays an important role in developing students' critical thinking skills. At some schools, these courses follow freshman composition, but at others that allow exemption from freshman composition, these courses provide the students' formal writing instruction.

4. More programs at both four-year and two-year schools require students to write a senior thesis or written capstone project to

complete the honors program and/or earn honors certification. For these projects, students learn to research topics in their fields and to adopt appropriate writing styles and formats. Students are also encouraged to present their materials at conferences and to publish them in undergraduate and professional journals. Such projects are examples of Tchudi's concept of writing in the content areas.

5. Honors programs often use interdisciplinary faculty participation for evaluation of writing in a variety of ways. For example, an interdisciplinary honors committee may be asked to read and evaluate writing samples during the annual admissions process. Interdisciplinary honors colloquia and seminars are sometimes team-taught by faculty from different departments. Thesis committees convened for evaluation of the written document and the student's oral defense could be interdisciplinary as well, especially if the honors program director participates in all thesis committees.

With these types of courses and projects in place or in development within most honors programs, writing across the curriculum seems to be effectively addressing many concerns about writing and critical thinking at the intersection of honors education and composition instruction. A major problem, however, remains in that honors composition currently has no central set of criteria to determine what honors composition is, how it should be evaluated, how courses and projects should be structured, and who should be involved in designing courses and projects and evaluating the writing done therein. Scholars in composition research have produced a number of sourcebooks and guidebooks for composition instruction at freshman and advanced levels; scholars in writing across the curriculum have created guides for administrators and interdisciplinary faculty who want to incorporate writing into their programs; and the National Collegiate Honors Council provides general guidelines for honors education at two-year and four-year programs. None of these, however, specifically addresses honors composition. The following chapters of this monograph address this need by answering some of the basic questions honors program directors and faculty have about honors composition courses, writing-intensive major courses, and extracurricular writing projects such as senior thesis and outside publication.

## FIVE SIGNIFICANT ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY HONORS EDUCATION

With NCHC providing a forum for discussion, contemporary honors educators have focused their goals and objectives in five areas: program rationale, curriculum, instruction, evaluation, and experimentation/innovation. These are significant for honors composition because honors program directors, writing instructors,

and program faculty must address these issues when developing and implementing honors writing courses and projects.

**Rationale for Honors**

Honors educators are constantly defending their efforts against charges that honors education is elitist and perpetuates some hidden political agenda by providing special opportunities only for those students whom they believe will be "just like them." Also, as competition for limited funding increases, how can schools justify allocation of resources to programs that serve only a small, elite group of students? Honors students are already advantaged in their capacity to comprehend and apply complex concepts more quickly than other students; why should we work to push them even farther ahead of their peers when their peers are the students who truly need our attention and our resources? Rinehart, however, argues,

> Honors programs are not elitist when they perceive of their role in a broad social context, when they help their institutions to attract a diversity of excellent students and faculty, and when they are able to move some of the best features of honors education into a wider institutional context. (32)

Some of these "best features" include smaller class sizes and student-teacher ratios, more class discussion rather than lecture sessions, and more specialized course topics within the arts and sciences rather than those found in regular survey and laboratory courses. Honors composition courses generally engage these features by maintaining smaller class sizes than regular composition courses, by encouraging class participation through more substantive peer critique and editing of essays, and by allowing students to research and/or write about specialized or unique topics. For example, one survey respondent for this study indicated that one honors freshman composition instructor focused the class on the epic form and required students to write a ninety-nine-page personal epic as the semester's work. While this may seem excessive for a freshman assignment, it demonstrates the possible diversity of honors composition.

Opponents of honors composition argue that honors students should remain in regular composition sections because they provide leadership in class discussion and peer critiques of essays. Proponents, however, should argue that rather than developing their own writing and leadership skills, honors students with advanced writing skills enrolled in regular composition end up focusing more on editing their peers' papers and, in effect, become teaching assistants

for the class. But, in a separate section, honors students writing at similarly advanced levels can challenge each other's writing and critical thinking skills through more in-depth, challenging writing assignments and thus focus on being students rather than semi-instructors.

**Honors Curriculum**

Honors educators have worked to increase both the breadth and depth of honors coursework and programs to create well-rounded yet professionally prepared graduates. For example, honors students at New Mexico State University enrolled in Chemistry: Experiments, Laws, and Theories studied the history of chemistry and the development of important theories. Rather than perform contemporary experiments, students replicated historical experiments that enabled them to see how chemists developed theories and why these were accepted during various historical periods (*Honors Program* 5). Students still built skills in chemical experimentation procedures but did so from a unique perspective.

The variety of honors composition courses and projects traditionally offered should expand to meet these needs as well. Honors composition benefits programs in the following ways:

1. As colleges and universities struggle to balance demands for professional preparation and demands for retention of more traditional general education requirements, honors educators have been outspoken advocates of the liberal arts, particularly humanities, in their desire to expose students to a variety of subjects. Program directors and honors instructors should take advantage of this attention to the humanities by promoting the benefits of honors composition courses and projects to students and faculty in all disciplines and generating institutional and financial support for a wider range of honors writing opportunities.

2. Honors programs were in the forefront of the postwar/Sputnik push for improvement in science education and the need for university-based coursework in professional areas, such as engineering and medicine, in addition to a liberal arts background. Honors composition should expand to serve these students as well; in addition to traditional honors freshman composition courses that focus on the research paper or writing about literature, advanced courses such as honors technical communication and business communication should be offered to prepare students for writing in nonacademic professional and technical settings.

**Honors Instruction**

The opportunity to teach in an honors program can attract quality faculty to an institution: not only do faculty have the chance to work

with high-quality students, but they can also try different instructional approaches that might not be readily accepted by students in a regular course section. For example, the professor for the honors chemistry course discussed in the previous section is "recognized as a specialist in chemical education" (*Honors Program* 5); in a regular lower-division survey and laboratory course, he may present some history in addition to contemporary theories and lab assignments, but in this honors course, he can stretch himself as an educator by combining history and experiments so that students gain a more complete perspective about chemical theories and their development. Such honors courses allow faculty to pursue their own special interests in greater depth than they would with regular undergraduate courses.

Honors composition courses and projects can also allow faculty to use different instructional approaches. For example, one option is a team-taught seminar on a subject of professional interest with another faculty member from that discipline, such as writing in education or the rhetoric of scientific communication. Other honors faculty might ask upper-level honors students to serve as teaching assistants in lower-division courses. Another instructional cornerstone of honors programs is independent study, providing opportunities for students to explore their own interests in depth with a limited amount of supervision; faculty who supervise such projects should use the opportunity to introduce students to conventions of research and professional writing in that specific field.

**Honors Evaluation**

In this time of increased calls for accountability of all college and university programs regarding adequate preparation of employable students, honors educators are also developing more thorough assessment measures for honors programs. Thorough, valid assessment will either show the benefits of honors programs, helping to improve their legitimacy at the university, or cause program administrators to reevaluate their efforts and work to improve their programs (see M. Sean O'Brien, "Part Three: The NCHC Era"). For honors composition, program directors and composition faculty should decide how the honors courses will be evaluated: as a part of the honors program evaluation, as a part of the writing program or English department evaluation, and/or as a part of an institutional evaluation.

Honors composition courses and projects are actually helpful in providing course self-evaluation and overall program evaluation. For example, at the completion of a composition course, a seminar, or a senior thesis, students can write a self-evaluation essay which reflects upon what they have learned and upon the course or project

itself. In addition to student reports, portfolios of student work can also inform faculty, program directors, and honors committees about the success of individual courses and assignments, as I will discuss in Chapter Four. Students can also compile cumulative portfolios of work throughout their academic programs, and these can be used in overall program evaluation.

**Experimentation and Innovation in Honors**

Honors courses can serve as a testing ground for exciting new programs for general use so that all students may benefit from them. For example, several math courses at New Mexico State University either began as honors courses and were integrated into the regular departmental curriculum, such as Honors 275G: Spirit and Evolution of Mathematics, or were developed by honors and taught as a split honors/departmental course. Does such experimentation, however, make honors students guinea pigs, and will the programs be transferred intact to the general student population or be diluted for non-honors students? For example, many honors programs are incorporating writing into their programs by requiring their students to write a senior thesis or capstone project of fifty pages or more; if other departments would like to adopt this project for their own graduation requirements, will they shorten the length requirements or otherwise make the project easier so that regular students can complete it?

In this area, honors education is simultaneously innovative and conservative — how can honors administrators and faculty be innovative and still retain notions of what excellence and academic challenge are? As Rinehart states, "A few honors educators have even viewed educational innovation as being mostly anti-intellectual, permissive, and erosive of academic quality and standards" (47). For instance, opponents might question allowing honors students to replace required general education courses with independent study credits for reading, researching, and writing about topics of personal interest. Why should these students not be made to take the same foundational courses as the rest of the students, and why should they be allowed to take an entire term to complete a project when (1) it could easily be done over the summer and (2) most students will put it off until the last few weeks of the term? Rather than being "permissive" and failing to maintain academic standards, however, honors instructors argue that their standards for evaluating student performance in independent study projects — and in honors composition coursework overall — are more stringent than those they use in traditional courses. Also, honors students tend to study more complex topics in greater depth, and their argumentation tends to include more critical analysis of the chosen topic. In general,

program directors and faculty ensure that honors writing courses and projects are innovative academic experiences for their students while maintaining challenging standards.

In considering these five important issues, we can see how honors composition makes an important connection between work in honors education and composition instruction. The next step establishing this connection as a valid area for scholarly research and discussion is to move discussions out of the realm of hallway lore into professional publications and conferences. Although we have no previous articles or books about college-level honors composition on which to model our discussion, we can find models in the volume of work on gifted and honors English at the elementary and secondary levels. These teacher-researchers have taken their observations and successful exercises out of the hallway and into published research venues, and they have maintained a professional dialogue about new developments in their field. College-level honors faculty should not disregard work being done at the grade school and high school levels merely because the research and exercises focus on young children rather than young adults or because the authors may not always write at as high a theoretical level as college instructors are accustomed to reading. Rather, we should look to these studies as models that we can use for combining our own theories about honors education and composition instruction into productive exercises and publishable research.

## GIFTED AND HONORS COMPOSITION AT THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY LEVELS

Although not much research combines honors education and composition instruction at the university level, research is abundant for gifted and honors English education at the elementary and secondary levels. Unlike college-level honors composition instructors, teachers at these levels have many resources with which to begin research and curricular development in honors English, including two major national journals, *Gifted Child Quarterly* and *Roeper Review*, and an abundance of essays found in the ERIC database. Article styles range from informal discussions of writing units and projects to complex quantitative analyses of assessment of student, instructor, and program performance.

A wide range of guidebooks and textbooks is also available: some cover honors education overall and include information on composition, and some focus specifically on composition. For example, Jane Piirto's *Talented Children and Adults: Their Development and Education* is a thorough textbook used for a university-level special education class on gifted education in the

public schools. Topics include identification of the gifted, program development, personal and academic development from birth through adulthood, curriculum, and counseling concerns. One section on talented elementary and middle-school children focuses on writing and literary scholarship, in which Piirto identifies sixteen qualities shown in the writing of young children who display extraordinary talent, such as use of paradox, unusual melodic combinations, and sophisticated syntax. Piirto's list would be useful during a testing and evaluation period to assess whether a child should be tracked into gifted or advanced English work. At the college level, unfortunately, no similar list is currently available for identifying traits of excellence in writing for potential honors students.

Many books on English education for gifted elementary and high school students include not only identification and assessment procedures but also classroom exercises and assignments and accompanying curricular and instructional rationales. Again, although these are designed for teaching younger children, college-level honors composition instructors should refer to these texts as models for building course guides and exercise guides of their own. For example, *English Programs for Gifted Students*, edited by Charles R. Chew, is an entry in the New York State English Council Monographs series. This collection of essays "highlight[s] the characteristics of the gifted student, instructional models to meet their needs, and curricular implications for the teachers and the school" (Introduction). *Writing Instruction for Verbally Talented Youth: The Johns Hopkins Model*, by Ben Reynolds, Kendra Kopelke, and William G. Durden, is a sourcebook for writing teachers, consisting of 13 chapters covering different stages within the writing process: Preparing to Write, Writing, and Rewriting. Each chapter is designed to cover a class period and is thus divided into four major sections: classroom objectives, an overview for the teacher, an actual classroom exercise, and possible assignments. The authors also make an important contribution to the honors composition argument when they state, "[W]hether teaching gifted or regular classes, in high school or in college, concern for writing is essential. Also essential is a class or class time designed explicitly to teach writing" (vii). Nancy Polette's *3 R's for the Gifted: Reading, Writing, and Research* provides sample exercises as well, but Polette also establishes foundations for the importance of gifted education by beginning with background theory in child development and education, such as works by Bloom and Piaget. These three texts and others like them should serve as models for researchers of college-level honors composition: first, their mere existence demonstrates that honors English is worth discussing in a professional, published venue, and second, they provide

organizational structure and format templates such as student identification, course planning, and curricular and instructional rationale that can be readily applied to college-level courses and programs.

Some texts in gifted education do not have to be adapted for college use but can be used as they are. For example, an important text in the argument for the justification of gifted education is *Handbook for Differential Education of the Gifted: A Taxonomy of 32 Key Concepts*, by Hans G. Jellen and John R. Verduin, Jr. This text operates at a much higher theoretical level and incorporates much more complex field-related terminology than the texts mentioned in the earlier paragraphs, so proponents of college-level honors education should easily be able to use concepts and examples presented by Jellen and Verduin in program and course rationales. For example, in their introduction, the authors discuss the psychological, pedagogical, epistemological, and sociological justifications for differential education of the gifted in a procedural democracy, using terms such as "synnoetics" and "polytechnical approach." Such heavy theoretical approaches and vocabulary should provide readers from any educational level with ammunition for dealing with resistant administrators and legislators. Each chapter addresses key concepts in four aspects of gifted education — The Nature of the Gifted Learner, The Role of the DEG [Differential Education of the Gifted] Educationist, The Demands of Knowledge, and The Needs of Society — and contains the following sections: descriptive treatment, prescriptive treatment, discussion, "see also," related concepts, and suggested readings. Such sections, concepts, and terms should be readily adapted to developing and justifying college-level honors composition courses and projects.

As this brief review demonstrates, teachers at the elementary and secondary levels are concerned and productive, with both scholarly research and useful pedagogical tools regarding gifted and honors students and writing instruction. They have taken their exercises out of the classroom and their discussions out of the hallway into the venues of professional conferences and publications, sharing their ideas with a national audience and building a network of teachers and administrators who support honors English education. This example should inspire honors program directors and instructors who are interested in college-level honors composition courses and projects but who cannot find similar types of resources for conducting their own research, for establishing their own criteria to identify and evaluate honors writing, and for designing their own course and program guides and rationales. With a common foundation in contemporary composition instruction and under the organizational umbrella of the National Collegiate Honors

Council, researchers in honors composition should take their own discussions out of the hallway and into these professional forums.

## CONCLUSION

While elementary and secondary educators have produced much research and many classroom guides about gifted and honors English education, honors educators at the college level have no comparable resources that focus specifically on honors composition. As noted in Chapter One, reasons for this dearth of research include the following:

1. Unlike primary and secondary teachers who can earn degrees and certification in special education, college faculty do not identify themselves as honors faculty primarily — instead, they are biologists, for example, who occasionally teach a section of honors biology.

2. Their principal research and publication interests are in their disciplines, not honors instruction. They will not be tenured for honors research nearly as readily as they will in their specialties.

3. They are more interested in theory and field research in their disciplines than in honors program development or pedagogy. As noted by Harte above, however, composition instruction is a vital part of honors education, and the writing-across-the-curriculum movement demonstrates that while composition faculty may spearhead change and improvement in composition instruction, faculty from all disciplines should provide instruction in writing and critical thinking throughout a student's program.

To continue the discussion of critical thinking and interdisciplinarity in honors composition, we need to assess current course and project offerings in college-level honors programs. The next chapter will present a survey of over 300 National Collegiate Honors Council member programs at two-year, four-year, and graduate degree-granting institutions regarding their current writing courses and projects. Responses from program directors indicate that rather than exempting their honors students from composition courses, they require their students to take at least one writing class, and many require two or more, including advanced composition courses and other types of writing-intensive colloquia and/or thesis preparation seminars. A reflection of this importance of composition instruction in an honors student's academic development, the survey information presented in the next chapter will address how honors programs are developing students' writing skills at various levels.

# CHAPTER THREE

## A SURVEY OF WRITING COURSES AND PROJECTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY HONORS PROGRAM

The empirical research for this project involved a survey of National Collegiate Honors Council member program directors that included two parts: a one-page questionnaire mailed to the directors and a follow-up interview consisting of questions determined by questionnaire responses. The second part was sent via electronic mail to respondents who indicated on the questionnaire that they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. This chapter will focus on a quantitative analysis of the results of the questionnaire and follow-up interview; application of the findings and incorporation of specific examples and quotations will be included in the following chapter, which offers a set of guidelines and suggestions for honors program directors and writing faculty.

### METHODOLOGY

**Questionnaire**

The first step of my study was a survey of National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) member institutions regarding the role of composition courses and projects in their programs. While this group necessarily excluded schools and programs that are not members, I posited that by having joined NCHC, directors of member programs had invested heavily in honors education and thus would be more likely to respond. At the time of my survey, NCHC included 640 institutional members.

The survey mailing consisted of a cover letter briefly outlining my questions (see Appendix B) and a one-page, two-sided survey with questions designed for speed and ease of completion; most were yes or no questions, with space provided to discuss types of courses and percentages of student participation (see Appendix C). Overall, the response rate was much higher than I had expected: practitioner's lore suggests that 20 percent is a high return rate for a questionnaire, so while I had originally hoped that approximately 130 surveys would be returned, I actually received 320 responses, or 50.0 percent. Of these, 17 either had not been fully completed (the back side was blank) or had been returned blank, which still left a significant total of 303 valid responses, representing 47.3 percent of NCHC's member programs. With assistance from an undergraduate computer science student, I tabulated the questionnaire results using a Microsoft Access 2.0 database.

**Follow-up Interview**

Approximately fifty percent of the survey respondents indicated that they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Several respondents included address information but did not circle yes, so I kept them in a back-up group for possible future use; I was reluctant to use them because several other respondents included address information but circled no.

Having briefly reviewed the responses, I generated a bank of follow-up questions requesting additional detail about the following response areas: admission, writing courses, other projects, and student performance. Questionnaire responses also shaped questions. For example, I did not include a survey section on contract work, but because several respondents indicated this option, I included this in their follow-up questions.

In the address information section of the questionnaire, I requested electronic mail addresses; since approximately ninety percent of respondents who were willing to participate in a follow-up interview provided an e-mail address, I decided to use e-mail to distribute my follow-up questions. While telephone interviews allow for more spontaneity and potential to delve more deeply into responses, they also raise issues of additional cost, time zone adjustments, and "phone tag" problems with arranging interviews. Also, conducting 150-plus telephone interviews would have been prohibitive because of the time required, especially nearing the end of the semester and the academic year when administrators, professors, and students alike are quite busy.

Working from the master question bank, I e-mailed a common salutation and closing while selecting relevant question sections to create individualized follow-up interviews for each respondent (see Appendix D). For example, if a survey respondent indicated an application essay, no honors courses, an honors thesis, and presentations but not publication opportunities, I included only those questions which pertained to those areas which that program includes. Also, as I reviewed survey responses, I adjusted questions accordingly. For example, some respondents indicated no courses but a thesis, so these questions were edited accordingly.

Overall, 150 follow-up interviews were e-mailed successfully, and 54 were completed and returned.

## RESULTS

**Questionnaire**

Question 1: Is your school a two-year, four-year, or graduate degree-granting institution?

I began with this question because NCHC includes members from various types of two-year colleges, and I wanted to be able to attribute possible differences in responses to program length, e.g., to the number of required courses or to the amount of time given to complete capstone projects. I also wanted to acknowledge possible differences between smaller four-year schools and larger schools that offer graduate programs. Here is the breakdown by type:

Table 3.1: Institution Type

| Institution | # | % |
|---|---|---|
| Two-year | 66 | 22 |
| Four-year | 100 | 33 |
| Grad degree | 137 | 45 |
| Total | 303 | 100 |

While I expected and received the most responses from graduate-degree granting schools, as demonstrated in Table 3.1, I was surprised at the number of responses from two-year schools; as one-fifth of the total responses, this group constitutes a significant percentage. Also, some respondents marked both "Four-year" and "Graduate degree," so I placed these responses in the latter category to distinguish them from pure four-year schools. As I continue through the questionnaire responses, I will provide not only overall totals for each question but also subtotals for each type of institution so that readers interested in a particular type of school will find this information easily.

Question 2: How many students currently participate in your program?

With this next question, I wanted to ascertain the average size of programs at various schools. Many respondents gave a range of numbers for program participation, so in these instances, I placed the response in the category for the higher number in the range. Table 3.2 below indicates size of program participation in demarcations of hundreds to condense the responses into manageable ranges.

Table 3.2: Numbers of Students in Honors Programs

| Students enrolled | 2-year | 4-year | Grad deg | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **blank** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| **0-100** | 48 | 53 | 26 | 127 |
| **101-200** | 13 | 19 | 34 | 66 |
| **201-300** | 1 | 9 | 17 | 27 |
| **301-400** | 1 | 8 | 13 | 22 |
| **401-500** | 2 | 2 | 12 | 16 |
| **501-600** | 1 | 2 | 5 | 8 |
| **601-1000** | 0 | 0 | 14 | 14 |
| **over 1000** | 0 | 6 | 14 | 20 |
| **Total** | 66 | 100 | 137 | 303 |

Question 3: Does your program admissions process include a writing sample? Of what type(s)?

a = student's previous paper or essay
b = application essay on a specific topic
c = timed essay on a specific topic

Although previous grades and quantitative test scores provide some prediction of students' potential for successful college study, many programs also request writing samples during the admissions process not only for placement reasons but also for a demonstration of students' critical thinking and argumentation skills. Hence this question. I also requested that respondents identify which they used among three types of writing samples that I believed programs would request most often: a paper or essay written for a previous class, an essay written for the application on a topic of the director's or selection committee's choosing, or a timed essay session administered either by the school or the program itself. In Tables 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5, I will divide the results for this question into three categories: whether or not programs request a writing sample during the admissions process, how many total marks each of the three sample types received, and how many programs used one or more types of writing samples and in what combinations.

Table 3.3: Admissions Processes That Include a Writing Sample

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 34 | 32 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 68 | 32 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 81 | 56 | 137 |
| **Total** | 183 | 120 | 303 |

Overall, 60 percent of respondents indicated that their admissions processes included some type of writing sample. Over two-thirds of the four-year institutions required a writing sample (68 percent), followed by 59 percent of graduate degree-granting institutions and only approximately half of the two-year institutions. Breaking down the results between each sample type becomes more complicated, however, because respondents could mark more than one sample or, in some instances, wrote in their own specialized sample type. Therefore, I will consider separately how many marks each type received and then in what combinations these types were marked.

Table 3.4: Total Marks for Each Type of Sample

| | a | b | c | other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 5 | 30 | 5 | 2 | 42 |
| **4-year** | 13 | 54 | 6 | 2 | 75 |
| **Grad deg** | 11 | 73 | 4 | 2 | 90 |
| **Total** | 29 | 157 | 15 | 6 | 207 |

Of the 207 total marks, the topic-specific application essay by far received the most marks (75.8 percent), with the previous paper or essay (14.0 percent) and the timed essay (7.2 percent) ranking a distant second and third. A small percentage (2.9 percent) of respondents wrote in a specialized type of writing sample, such as an open application letter. The prevalence of the application essay is also demonstrated in the analysis of combinations of marks in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Combinations of Writing Samples

| | 2-year | 4-year | Grad deg | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a + b + c | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| a + b | 3 | 4 | 7 | 14 |
| a only | 1 | 8 | 4 | 13 |
| b + c | 3 | 1 | 2 | 6 |
| b only | 23 | 48 | 64 | 135 |
| c only | 1 | 4 | 2 | 7 |
| other | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Total | 34 | 68 | 81 | 183 |

As I have highlighted here, the topic-specific application essay is the sole writing sample used in most programs' admissions processes (73.8 percent). The previous paper or essay is just as likely to be used in conjunction with the application essay as not, and the timed essay is rarely used in any instance, whether alone or in combination with another type. No responses gave an "a + c" combination, and those I have grouped under "other" give a variety of writing projects not included in the categories listed, such as a letter addressed to the program director. To me, the widespread use of the application essay suggests two things: it lifts the constraints of the timed essay to allow students to work at their own pace, but it provides uniformity in length and topic to aid in the evaluation process (which will be discussed in further detail in the Follow-up Interview section).

Question 4: Are students in your program exempt from freshman composition?

After asking about writing components in the admissions processes, I focused on freshman composition. In this part of the questionnaire, I was concerned with the ways in which honors students could "get out of" freshman composition, specifically through special exemptions and placement testing. Hallway lore suggests that honors students might avoid freshman composition through these ways or that they are advanced enough in their writing skills not to need such courses in the first place; however, I wanted to test this for myself. First, I asked whether honors students in the respondent's program were exempt from freshman composition.

Table 3.6: Honors Exemptions from Freshman Composition

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 0 | 66 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 15 | 85 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 20 | 117 | 137 |
| **Total** | 35 | 268 | 303 |

To my surprise, the vast majority of programs (88.4 percent) at every type of institution do not automatically exempt their students from freshman composition. This suggests directors' acknowledgment of the need to develop students' writing skills to the appropriate college level.

Question 5: Can students in your program test out of freshman composition?

Demonstration of previously developed writing skill appropriate to university-level work, therefore exempting the student from taking freshman composition, was more likely to be assessed through various measurements of such skill, as shown in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7: "Testing Out" of Freshman Composition

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 26 | 40 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 53 | 47 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 90 | 47 | 137 |
| **Total** | 169 | 134 | 303 |

Over half of the respondents (55.9 percent) indicated that their students could use this method to meet their freshman composition requirement, many noting whether this was through AP credit, the CLEP test, or other university placement testing.

I limited my questions about freshman composition to these exemptions at this point, allowing for more attention to discussion of special honors sections of freshman composition during later questions and during the follow-up interviews.

Next, I moved to questions about composition courses beyond freshman composition, asking whether the institution in general and the honors program in particular required such classes and whether

students were exempt from these as well or if they could take special honors sections of such courses.

Question 6: Do general education requirements at your institution include coursework beyond freshman composition, such as business or technical writing?

First, I wanted to assess whether the institutions in which these honors programs resided had general education requirements in writing for all students beyond freshman composition. For example, New Mexico State University requires an additional writing course after freshman composition for all students. Here are the results:

Table 3.8: General Education Requirements
Beyond Freshman Composition

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 33 | 33 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 37 | 63 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 77 | 60 | 137 |
| **Total** | 147 | 156 | 303 |

Overall, almost half of the respondents (48.7 percent) indicated that their institutions required coursework beyond freshman composition. Interestingly, half of the two-year schools and more than half of the graduate degree-granting schools required such work, but less than 40 percent of the four-year schools did so; this difference could be worth further investigation by composition scholars, who might discover why so many four-year schools do not require advanced composition work when two-year schools and graduate degree-granting schools do.

Question 7: Are students in your program exempt from this requirement?

As with freshman composition, I wanted to know whether honors students were exempt from general education requirements for advanced composition courses. Upon receiving the questionnaire results, I realized that I should have attached this question more directly to Question 6, such as Questions 6A and 6B, because in some instances, respondents who marked "No" in Question 6 to

indicate that they did not have any general education advanced composition requirements also marked "Yes" in Question 7 to indicate that students were exempt from these nonexistent requirements. Therefore, I have divided results in Table 3.9 to indicate whether the respondent had marked "Yes" or "No" in the previous question, with "NA" signifying that the respondent marked nothing for this question.

Table 3.9: Honors Exemptions from
Advanced Composition Requirement

| | If #6 = "Yes" | | | If #6 = "No" | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Yes** | **No** | **Total** | **Yes** | **NA** | **Total** |
| **2-year** | 1 | 32 | 33 | 0 | 33 | 33 |
| **4-year** | 5 | 32 | 37 | 3 | 60 | 63 |
| **Grad deg** | 5 | 72 | 77 | 4 | 56 | 60 |
| **Total** | 11 | 136 | 147 | 7 | 149 | 156 |

As the table shows, when institutions require students to take writing courses beyond freshman composition to fulfill general education requirements, the overwhelming majority of honors programs (92.5 percent) do not exempt their students from such requirements, again acknowledging the need for honors students to develop their writing skills at the college level.

Question 8: Does your program require additional composition courses beyond general education requirements?

With this question, I was curious to see how many honors programs required special composition courses to help develop their students' writing skills beyond their institution's general education requirements. I was not entirely sure what such requirements might include — for example, if a school did not require business or technical communication courses, might an honors program require one? — but I would give respondents the opportunity to discuss this point in later questions and in the follow-up interviews. Here are the results for question 8:

Table 3.10: Honors Composition Requirements Beyond General Education

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 6 | 60 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 16 | 84 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 22 | 115 | 137 |
| **Total** | 44 | 259 | 303 |

Overall, 85.4 percent of the respondents indicated that their honors programs did not require their students to take special composition courses beyond general education requirements. Most respondents who indicated "Yes" here attribute this requirement later to special thesis preparation workshops.

Question 9: Does your program offer honors sections of regular composition courses?

With this question, I began shifting my focus from general education requirements and possible honors student exemptions to special honors composition course offerings. In such courses, students would be able not only to fulfill both general education and honors program requirements but also possibly to develop their skills at an accelerated rate with differentiated curricula and to interact with other honors students on a more frequent basis. Here are the results:

Table 3.11: Honors Sections of Regular Composition Course

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 54 | 12 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 52 | 48 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 95 | 42 | 137 |
| **Total** | 201 | 102 | 303 |

Overall, two-thirds of the respondents indicated that their programs offered honors sections of regular composition courses, a result suggesting a certain level of commitment of budget and resources to honors composition education. As with Question 6, however, responses from the four-year schools (52.0 percent) seem to differ significantly from those of the two-year (81.8 percent) and graduate degree-granting (69.3 percent) schools; this difference again could be worth further investigation by composition scholars and honors educators.

Question 10: Does your program offer composition courses unique to the honors program?

In addition to honors sections of regular composition courses, I also wanted to know how many institutions offered unique honors composition courses, another indication of financial and instructional commitment to improving honors students' writing skills.

Table 3.12: Unique Honors Composition Courses

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 31 | 35 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 46 | 54 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 64 | 73 | 137 |
| **Total** | 141 | 162 | 303 |

Across all three types of institutions, almost half (46.7 percent) of the respondents indicated that their programs offered unique honors composition courses. The content and structure of honors sections of regular courses and of unique honors composition courses will be addressed in later questions and in the follow-up interview section.

Question 11: Through what department are honors composition courses offered?

Check all which apply.
a = Honors
b = English
c = Other (Please specify): _____

With this question, I wanted to ascertain which departments accepted financial and instructional responsibility for offering honors composition courses. With schools at all levels facing cutbacks not only in finances but also in staffing, space, and other instructional resources, special services such as honors offerings often suffer first unless financially and institutionally supported. As with Question 3, I have divided response analysis for this question into separate groups: Table 3.13 will display the total marks for each category (a = Honors, b = English, c = Other, and na = not marked or "none"), and Table 3.14 will display combinations of marks in each response.

Table 3.13: Departments Offering Honors Composition

| | a | b | c | na | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 15 | 55 | 7 | 5 | 82 |
| **4-year** | 30 | 58 | 11 | 21 | 120 |
| **Grad deg** | 38 | 101 | 17 | 15 | 171 |
| **Total** | 83 | 214 | 35 | 41 | 373 |

Overall, as I have highlighted, English departments received the most marks (57.4 percent), with Honors departments coming in second (22.3 percent). For Other (9.4 percent), respondents usually indicated other departments from which composition courses are often taught, such as Communications, Rhetoric, and Literacy departments, or indicated specialized courses in other major departments in the sciences, social sciences, and so forth. Respondents who marked no choices or wrote in "N/A" or "None" (11.0 percent) had also previously responded as such in earlier questions. The combination results are found in Table 3:14.

Again, analysis of combinations of marks in each response, such as a respondent's marking both Honors and English, shows that the English department often takes sole responsibility (50.8 percent) for offering honors composition courses, as I have highlighted here. Next most likely was a combination of the English and Honors departments (13.2 percent), followed by the Honors department alone (10.9 percent); again, however, the four-year institutions differ from the two-year and graduate degree-granting schools in this respect, as they are slightly more likely to indicate the Honors department alone rather than the combination of English and Honors.

Table 3.14: Combinations of Departments Offering Honors Composition

| | 2-year | 4-year | Grad deg | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **a + b + c** | 2 | 3 | 5 | 10 |
| **a + b** | 9 | 12 | 19 | 40 |
| **a only** | 4 | 15 | 14 | 33 |
| **b + c** | 3 | 2 | 5 | 10 |
| **b only** | 41 | 41 | 72 | 154 |
| **c only** | 2 | 6 | 7 | 15 |
| **na** | 5 | 21 | 15 | 41 |
| **Total** | 66 | 100 | 137 | 303 |

This predominance of English department responsibility for offering honors composition courses is natural given the subject matter of the course itself, but it also suggests that, unless honors programs pay part of the cost, English departments are also carrying the financial and instructional burdens for offering such courses and may or may not be operating with the same instructional agenda as their Honors departments regarding the courses.

Question 12: How many composition courses does your program require? 0 1 2 3 or more

Question 13: How many of these are honors courses? 0 1 2 3 or more

Following questions about whether or not programs offer and require regular and/or honors composition courses, I wanted to know how many such courses honors students were required to take and how many of these courses were honors offerings. For Questions 12 and 13, I provided choices of "0," "1," "2," and "3 or more" to allow respondents to account for not only multiple-course sequences of freshman composition but also advanced composition courses.

The following table is by necessity complex to account for the various combinations of responses. In the "Pairs" column, the first number represents the response to Question 12, and the second number represents the response to Question 13, with "b" indicating that the respondent left the question blank. For example, "2/1" would indicate that two composition courses are required and that one is offered as an honors course. Several patterns emerge from this pair of questions. First, as I have highlighted, the most frequent pairings are "1/1" (40 of 303, 13.2 percent) and "2/2" (97 of 303, 32.0 percent), indicating, respectively, one required course that is also offered as an honors course and two required courses that are also offered as honors courses. Second, the most frequent answer to Question 12 is "2," usually indicating either a two-course freshman composition sequence or a freshman composition course and an advanced composition course. Third, approximately 10 percent of the respondents indicated that their programs require three or more composition courses, which may indicate a quarter system, an extended freshman composition sequence, or the inclusion of advanced coursework. Fourth, 22.4 percent of respondents fall into the first category of combinations of "0" and blank responses; such responses usually correlated with earlier answers regarding overall general education requirements and specific honors program requirements regarding composition courses.

Table 3.15: Number of Courses Required
and Courses Offered as Honors

| Pairs | 2-year | 4-year | Grad deg | Subtotals | Groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| b/b | 5 | 5 | 4 | 14 | |
| b/1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| 0/b | 4 | 11 | 9 | 24 | |
| 0/0 | 1 | 16 | 12 | 29 | 68 |
| 1/b | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | |
| 1/0 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 11 | |
| 1/1 | 5 | 14 | 21 | 40 | |
| 1/2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 55 |
| 2/b | 4 | 3 | 4 | 11 | |
| 2/0 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 22 | |
| 2/1 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 17 | |
| 2/2 | 26 | 26 | 45 | 97 | 147 |
| 3+/b | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| 3+/1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | |
| 3+/2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 7 | |
| 3+/3+ | 4 | 5 | 11 | 20 | 33 |
| Totals | 66 | 100 | 137 | | 303 |

Question 14: What types of honors composition courses does your program offer? Please specify at what levels and under what titles.

For this question, I provided several lines in which respondents could list and discuss in somewhat more detail the types of honors composition courses their programs offer. I have categorized responses to this question in the following manner:

1. *Freshman:* This includes courses that are designated freshman, first-year, or 100-level; the bulk of this category is freshman composition.

2. *Advanced:* These are courses beyond freshman composition, including sophomore or 200-level and above.

3. *Writing-intensive:* This phrase is used several times throughout the responses, as in "we have no courses per se but all honors courses are writing intensive." WI will then designate responses along these lines ("writing-intensive," "writing components" within other courses). Here are the results:

Table 3.16: Types of Honors Composition Courses Offered

| | 2-year | 4-year | Grad deg | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Freshman** | 50 | 51 | 86 | 187 |
| **Advanced** | 15 | 18 | 30 | 63 |
| **Writing-intensive** | 3 | 9 | 13 | 25 |
| **Total** | 68 | 78 | 129 | 275 |

As expected from results in previous questions, the majority of honors composition offerings come at the freshman level (68 percent), followed by advanced composition courses (23 percent). Mentions of writing-intensive work, whether mentioned alone or in combination with other courses, accounted for 9 percent of the total individual marks, suggesting further research into what "writing-intensive" means within individual honors programs and within the honors community in general.

Next, reviewing combinations of course offerings within programs, Table 3.17 refines the types into specific categories:

1. *Freshman (1):* One freshman course, usually freshman composition.
2. *Fresh (2 or 3):* Two- or three-course composition or composition/literature sequence.
3. *Fresh + Adv:* Both freshman and advanced composition courses.
4. *Advanced:* Advanced composition courses only.
5. *WI:* Response only covers "writing-intensive."

Table 3.17: Combinations of Honors Composition Offerings

| | 2-year | 4-year | Grad deg | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Freshman (1)** | 11 | 17 | 20 | 48 |
| **Fresh (2 or 3)** | 26 | 21 | 42 | 89 |
| **Fresh + Adv** | 13 | 13 | 24 | 50 |
| **Advanced** | 2 | 5 | 6 | 13 |
| **WI** | 2 | 6 | 12 | 20 |
| **Total** | 54 | 62 | 104 | 220 |

As I have highlighted in the table above, more respondents (40.5 percent) indicated that their honors composition offerings were composed of a two- or three-course freshman sequence. After this category, almost the same numbers of respondents indicated that they offered both freshman and advanced honors courses (22.7 percent) or only one freshman honors course (21.8 percent). Advanced honors courses alone (5.9 percent) accounted for fewer mentions than the "writing-intensive" but not specifically composition-based course (9.1 percent), such as the writing-intensive honors seminar in sciences or social sciences.

Question 15: Does your program offer a senior thesis or other written capstone project?

With this question, I began my group of questions regarding the senior thesis, which was the subject of Bruffee's NCHC *Forum for Honors* article and therefore led me to question the progress of and contemporary approaches to this assignment since the article's publication. In designing these four questions, I wanted to acknowledge the facts that (1) some programs might not offer a formal thesis but rather another type of written individual project or seminar project, and (2) two-year schools might not offer a "senior" project per se but might still require some type of capstone project. Here are the results:

Table 3.18: Senior Thesis or Capstone Project Offered

| | Yes | No | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 7 | 59 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 85 | 15 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 115 | 22 | 137 |
| **Totals** | 207 | 96 | 303 |

Overall, more than two-thirds (68.2 percent) of all honors programs that responded offer a senior thesis or another type of capstone project. As expected, when I factor out two-year schools, of which only 10.6 percent offer such a project, the percentage for both types of four-year programs rises to 84.4 percent.

Question 16: Is the senior project required to complete the honors program?

Next, I wanted to know if the senior thesis or capstone project was required to complete the honors program, my hypothesis being that a significantly higher percentage would naturally complete this project if it were required than if it were optional, however prestigious or beneficial it may be. Here are the results:

Table 3.19: Senior Thesis or Capstone Project Required

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| **4-year** | 69 | 16 | 85 |
| **Grad deg** | 85 | 30 | 115 |
| **Totals** | 160 | 47 | 207 |

Of the 207 respondents who indicated that they offered a senior thesis or capstone project, over three-fourths (77.2 percent) said that this project was required to complete the honors program.

Question 17: What percentage of students in the program complete this project?

As mentioned above, I wanted to discover what percentage of students completed a written senior project when it was required to complete the honors program and when it was not required to complete the honors program. My first thought here was that a much smaller number of students would choose to complete such a project if it were not required; thus, I have divided the results for Question 16 into two tables, one indicating completion percentage of required senior projects and one indicating completion percentage of optional senior projects. Also, since completing such a project can be an intimidating, time- and effort-consuming activity during perhaps the student's most rigorous year(s) of study, I wondered how many students actually completed a required thesis and thus completed the honors program itself. Groupings are broken into fifths, including one category of "dk" for types of "don't know" responses and one category representing a 100 percent completion rate.

Table 3.20: Completion Percentage of Required Senior Projects

| % | 2-year | 4-year | Grad deg | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| dk | 2 | 10 | 13 | 25 |
| 1-20 | 0 | 13 | 23 | 36 |
| 21-40 | 1 | 6 | 9 | 16 |
| 41-60 | 1 | 10 | 8 | 19 |
| 61-70 | 1 | 7 | 8 | 16 |
| 81-99 | 0 | 11 | 9 | 20 |
| 100 | 1 | 12 | 15 | 28 |
| Totals | 6 | 69 | 85 | 160 |

Of the 160 respondents who indicated that their honors program requires a senior thesis or capstone project for program completion, the largest group (22.5 percent) indicated that 20 percent of their students or less complete the project, followed by 100 percent completion (17.5 percent). Several respondents, however, noted that this 100 percent was the percentage of students who remained in the program until the end of their courses of study, while others explained smaller completion percentages as representing the percentage of students who began the program, e.g., "25 percent of freshmen who enter the program go on to complete the thesis."

Overall, the range of percentages is fairly even throughout the groupings, and the fact that less than 20 percent of the respondents indicated a 100 percent completion rate of required projects suggests that students are not finishing the project itself, are choosing not to attempt it in the first place, or progress through the honors program to that point. In any case, further investigation may indicate that apprehension about such a large required writing project affects students' progress through and completion of an honors program.

As anticipated, completion percentages drop sharply when the senior project is optional rather than required to complete the honors program.

Table 3.21: Completion Percentage of Optional Senior Projects

| % | 2-year | 4-year | Grad deg | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| dk | 1 | 3 | 6 | 10 |
| 1-20 | 0 | 9 | 16 | 25 |
| 21-40 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| 41-60 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| 61-70 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 81-99 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 100 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Totals | 1 | 16 | 30 | 47 |

As noted in this table, only three of 47 respondents (6.4 percent) indicated completion percentages over 60 percent. Granted, 21.3 percent of the respondents indicated that they did not know their completion rate, but the majority of respondents (53.2 percent) in this optional thesis category indicated that their completion rates are at 20 percent or below.

Question 18: Do your students work with faculty mentors on their senior projects?

In the introductory chapter, I argued that honors composition courses and projects give faculty the opportunity to work with academically talented students both in class and on independent projects; therefore, I intended responses to this question to indicate the potential for such collaboration and mentoring through the senior project. Here are the results:

Table 3.22: Faculty Mentoring in Senior Projects

| | Yes | No | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2-year | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| 4-year | 82 | 3 | 85 |
| Grad deg | 112 | 3 | 115 |
| Totals | 199 | 8 | 207 |

A significant majority (96.1 percent) of respondents indicated that their students work with faculty mentors on their senior projects, thus confirming my argument for increased opportunity for faculty/student interaction with written projects in honors programs.

Question 19: Does your program offer publication opportunities for your students?

With this question, I began to move away from required and optional composition coursework and projects toward honors students' opportunities for professional development in written and oral communication, another aspect of honors students' academic and professional growth which honors programs can facilitate. I purposefully left these questions vague and open on the questionnaire and in the follow-up interviews to discover what specific types of opportunities each honors program provided; however, I did have in mind not only program-based and university-based publications and forums but also undergraduate and professional journals and conferences in which programs encouraged students to participate. First, I asked if programs offered publication opportunities.

Table 3.23: Publication Opportunities

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 38 | 28 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 46 | 54 | 10 |
| **Grad deg** | 65 | 72 | 137 |
| **Total** | 149 | 154 | 303 |

Overall, almost half (49.0 percent) of the respondents indicated that their programs offered publication opportunities for students. Interestingly here, the two-year programs vary from the other two groups, with over half (57.6 percent) of the respondents in this group indicating publication opportunities. Again, specific types of both on-campus and off-campus opportunities will be discussed in the follow-up interview section of this chapter and in the guidelines chapter (Chapter Four).

Question 20: Does your program offer oral presentation opportunities for your students?

Next, I asked about opportunities for oral presentation because this is an important part of professional development and an important way of learning to disseminate information from written projects.

Table 3.24: Oral Presentation Opportunities

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 60 | 6 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 84 | 16 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 109 | 28 | 137 |
| **Total** | 253 | 50 | 303 |

While the affirmative response here is not as large as with publication opportunities, still over four-fifths (83.4 percent) of the respondents indicated that their honors programs provide opportunities for oral presentation to their students. These often include seminars and off-campus conferences, and various types will be discussed later as well.

Question 21: Do your students compile a writing portfolio as they progress through your program?

I asked this question because writing portfolios are growing in popularity throughout all educational levels, elementary through postsecondary schools, as a demonstration of long-term progress and more holistic assessment and evaluation of student performance and growth. To this end, I wanted to know if honors programs at the college and university level had begun to incorporate cumulative writing portfolios so that program administrators, faculty mentors, and the students themselves could observe progress in writing skill while building a collection of written documents and research for employment and graduate school applications.

Table 3.25: Use of Writing Portfolios

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 15 | 51 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 21 | 79 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 20 | 117 | 137 |
| **Total** | 56 | 247 | 303 |

At this point, only 18.5 percent of the respondents indicated that they ask students to keep a portfolio of written projects throughout their undergraduate studies in the program. Granted, construction and evaluation of portfolios can consume much time and effort on the part of both faculty and students, but I believe that as the popularity of portfolios for reflection and for qualitative evaluation of a student's progress increases, the number of honors programs that encourage and even require students to maintain a writing portfolio will increase as well.

Question 22: Is writing skill included in a final evaluation of the students' honors program work?

Reflecting on Aydelotte's discussion and advocacy of written projects and exams at the end of an honors student's academic program, I wondered if an overall final evaluation that included a review of writing skill was still used in some fashion in contemporary honors programs. Although many academic programs have their own types of exit exams, I wanted to focus specifically on a formal evaluation of writing skill. The results are found in Table 3.26.

Overall, less than two-fifths (37.6 percent) of the respondents indicated that writing skill was included in a final evaluation of student progress. In some instances, respondents said that they had no final evaluation of any type, and others said that this final evaluation usually revolved around the senior project and not any separate documents. Apparently, this exercise has fallen by the academic wayside since Aydelotte's time, probably to be replaced by a more carefully written and thoughtfully evaluated senior project.

Table 3.26: Inclusion of Writing Skill in Final Evaluation

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 22 | 44 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 44 | 56 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 48 | 89 | 137 |
| **Total** | 114 | 189 | 303 |

Question 23: Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview to discuss your responses in more detail?

I included this last item on my questionnaire to develop a bank of respondents who agreed to participate in a follow-up interview.

Table 3.27: Respondents Willing to Participate in Follow-up Interview

| | Yes | No | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2-year** | 39 | 27 | 66 |
| **4-year** | 47 | 54 | 100 |
| **Grad deg** | 79 | 58 | 137 |
| **Total** | 165 | 138 | 303 |

Of 303 respondents, over half (54.6 percent) indicated their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. Reviewing respondent information for e-mail addresses, I then e-mailed 150 of these respondents with more detailed questions concerning their questionnaire responses.

**Follow-up Interview**

Of the 150 program directors who indicated they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, 54 people actually completed the interview, giving a completion rate of 36 percent. Numerical tallies will vary from question to question, however, according to how many respondents answered yes or no to specific items in the original questionnaire. For example, some of the 54 respondents indicated on the questionnaire that their programs did not require a writing sample in the admissions process, so these respondents did not receive a follow-up question group concerning admissions essays.

Although the original question bank did not have numbered questions, I have grouped and numbered them here for identification and discussion purposes:

Group I: Admission
Group II: Writing Courses
Group III: Thesis or Capstone Project
Group IV: Other Projects

I will focus on these tallies in this results section of this chapter; additional details, examples, and quotations will be included in the following guidelines chapter (Chapter Four).

Group I: Admission

This first group of questions focuses on responses from survey question #3 regarding whether the admissions process of the respondent's honors program included a writing sample submitted by the student. The majority of respondents who marked "Yes" for this question indicated that they required an application essay written at home on a specific topic chosen by the program director and/or honors committee, so I will address these follow-up responses first.

Group I.A Application essay on a specific topic

Question I.A.1: What topics have you used recently?

Because the distinguishing feature of this type of writing sample is the preselected topic upon which all of the applicants will be writing, I began by asking what topics each program has used recently. While each respondent gave a relatively unique answer, I saw patterns in their responses that led me to group them into the following categories:

1. *Reflective:* This type required students to focus on some aspect of their personal or academic development; for example, students might have been asked to reflect upon the most important class they have taken.
2. *Honors Program:* This type asked students about their projected participation in and/or expectations of the honors program.
3. *Current Issues:* This type focused students on contemporary issues in areas such as politics and socioeconomics.
4. *Arts:* This type allowed students to write about topics in the arts, such as books they have recently read either for class or outside of school.
5. *Multiple:* This type required a combination of the above topics.

Although most programs require applicants to write on only one topic, a few request two or more shorter essays on different topics. The table below summarizes the results:

Table 3.28: Topic Types in Admissions Essays

| | |
|---|---|
| Reflective | 10 |
| Honors Program | 6 |
| Current Issues | 3 |
| Arts | 3 |
| Multiple | 1 |

As indicated, the topic type with the most responses is the reflective essay, followed by essays about the honors program. An equal number of programs assigned topics in current issues and in the arts, and one respondent indicated a combination of four essays representing each of the four categories.

Question I.A.2: How long is the essay on average?

I asked this next question partially because length becomes a factor as more students apply and more essays have to be read by evaluators; more practically, however, students in writing classes at all levels quite frequently ask, "How long does this have to be?" and will thus naturally shape the content of an essay to fit the page requirement. I have grouped the responses according to number of pages; responses given in numbers of words have been converted to the approximate equivalent in pages. When respondents gave a range of words or pages, I grouped responses by the higher number.

More respondents indicated that their essays averaged two pages, three pages, or five pages. Fewer respondents indicated that they requested a one-page essay or a four-page essay; the respondent who indicated in the previous question that students wrote four separate essays indicated here that each essay was a typed, single-spaced page, so I counted this as a total of four pages.

Table 3.29: Length of Application Essays

| | |
|---|---|
| One page | 3 |
| Two pages | 8 |
| Three pages | 5 |
| Four pages | 2 |
| Five pages | 5 |

Question I.A.3: By whom is the essay evaluated?

I asked this question because any type of writing evaluation can be by nature a time-consuming process, and professionals from different fields may have varying standards by which they judge "good" writing; therefore, I wanted to see who accepted the responsibility for reading and evaluating these application essays.

Table 3.30: Evaluators for Application Essays

| | |
|---|---|
| Honors Committee or Council | 13 |
| Honors Director | 7 |
| Admissions Officers | 4 |

Over half of the respondents indicated that their honors committee or council shared the responsibility for evaluating students' application essays, and a smaller percentage of program directors indicated that they alone were responsible for evaluating the essays. Four respondents indicated that their institution's admissions office controlled general applications essays for all levels of students, including prospective honors students.

Question I.A.4: With what criteria is the writing evaluated?

As noted above, I wondered whether professionals from different fields had different criteria for writing evaluation. Although each respondent gave varying combinations of evaluation criteria, all used terms familiar to composition pedagogy. (Whether or not each honors committee or program director understands each concept in the same way, however, will be an interesting topic for future research.) In grouping these responses, I pulled common composition terms from the respondent's text; e.g., I would tally "I look for a demonstration of critical thinking ability and mastery of grammar and mechanics" as one mention of "critical thinking," one "grammar," and one "mechanics."

Also, although the application essay is merely one of the five eventual groupings under the admissions writing sample category, each of the other four groupings consisted of only one respondent each. Therefore, although I will discuss the other four groupings in more detail in Chapter Four, I have decided to include the evaluation criteria listed for the other groupings here as well because of the similarity of the responses.

I have divided the responses into three groups: undetermined criteria, in which quotations given were the extent of the response; multiple mentions of terms, in which a term was mentioned by more than one respondent; and single mentions of terms. I will include lists of responses and terms for each group in the following tables.

Table 3.31: Undetermined Evaluation Criteria

No formal or specified criteria (6 mentions)
"The usual"
"Varies"
"Wide open"

Table 3.32: Multiple Mentions of Evaluation Criteria Terms

| | |
|---|---|
| Content (10) | Critical thinking (2) |
| Gammar (7) | Development (2) |
| Creativity (5) | Expression (2) |
| Style (5) | Interest (2) |
| Organization (4) | Originality (2) |
| Mechanics (4) | Sophistication (2) |
| Clarity (2) | Spelling (2) |
| Coherence (2) | |

Table 3.33: Single Mentions of Evaluation Criteria Terms

Analytical depth quality of prose
Basic writing skills quality of writing
Depth of insight references
Grace relevance
Imagination structure
Intelligence support for an argument
Language use writing competence

While the responses grouped in Table 3.31 are quite vague, the specific criteria listed in Tables 3.32 and 3.33 reflect concepts commonly discussed in composition pedagogy and used in instructors' comments on students' papers for many types of documents. Within the context of the application essay, readers look first at the content of the essay, the student's mastery of grammar, creative approaches to the essay topic, a strong writing style, well-organized sentences and paragraphs, and a command of mechanics. Comments can also be grouped together as similar concepts; for example, the terms "creativity," "originality," and "imagination" all designate a level of inventiveness of thought and writing skill demonstrated by the applicant that distinguishes him or her as a potential honors student. Granted, instructors and other readers use the criteria in the tables above to evaluate the writing skill of any student, not just potential honors students, but program directors and honors committee members expect mastery of these skills before a student is admitted to the program: strong organization and development, depth of argument, fluid style, and an absence of grammatical and mechanical error are essential. In closing, two additional and rather inspiring comments about evaluation criteria include "signs of a lively, curious mind" (Brian Murphy, Oakland University) and "awareness that scoring the winning run in the championship game does not rank up there with

finding a cure for cancer or with the Second Coming" (Tony Whall, Salisbury State University).

Overall, despite the potential for great variance among programs, responses regarding application essays on a specific topic indicate that each type of program falls within certain ranges of topics, lengths, evaluators, and evaluation criteria, suggesting consistency from institution to institution.

Groups I.B - I.D: Other Types of Admissions Writing Samples

As noted, the majority of questionnaire responses, and thus the majority of follow-up responses, indicated and discussed application essays on a specific topic; only four follow-up interviews discussed other types of admissions writing samples. In fact, each of these four responses addressed a different type of writing sample, two of which covered the other two options given on the questionnaire and two of which covered items which the respondents wrote in on the questionnaire. I have divided these responses into the following groups:

Group I.B: *Timed essay on a specific topic:* This respondent explained that a 20-30 minute essay session in which the student writes on an assigned topic constitutes one half of the student's admission interview. The essay is then reviewed for competence in three specific categories — language use, logical development, and support for an argument — and then filed to be used in evaluating the student's progress in these three areas at program completion.

Group I.C: *Student's previous paper or essay:* This respondent merely indicated that he requested a document the student had previously written, reviewed the writing samples himself, and read them for content.

Group I.D: *Letter of Application:* This respondent wrote on the questionnaire that a prospective honors program student submits a letter of application, which is also evaluated as a writing sample. The letter is evaluated by faculty participating in the selection process; the respondent also gives an eloquent description of evaluation criteria, which will be quoted in full in Chapter Four.

Overall, the writing sample is an important part of the honors program admissions process, and the application essay written at home on a specific topic chosen by the program director and/or honors committee is the most popular way to collect a writing sample that represents an applicant's writing skill. While academic transcripts and scores on entrance exams can predict a student's potential to a certain extent, a writing sample demonstrates a student's command of language, depth of critical thinking skill, and

intellectual and creative potential to a degree not readily apparent through quantitative measurements.

Group II: Writing Courses

In this section, I progress from the admissions stage in an honors program to actual instruction occurring in various programs, focusing on differences between regular composition courses and honors composition courses. Most respondents were asked three questions regarding differences in course content and criteria for writing evaluation; a few respondents indicated that rather than taking special honors courses, students in their programs could contract for honors work in various classes, so these respondents were asked questions concerning such contracted work.

Question II.A How does the content of each course differ from that of a similar non-honors course?

If a course is going to be designated "honors," we should be able to identify features that distinguish it from a regular course. Several of the thirty-nine respondents in this question group, however, indicated that they had no unique requirement (one respondent), did not know if regular courses and honors courses differed in content (two respondents), or could not compare the content of their honors courses with regular courses (four respondents). The majority of respondents (thirty-two) indicated various differences, which I have grouped in the categories represented in the following table.

Table 3.34: Differences in Content Between Honors and Regular Courses

| | |
|---|---|
| More Reading | 15 |
| Different Teaching Approaches | 14 |
| More Writing | 11 |
| Higher Level of Writing | 8 |
| More Research | 6 |
| More Oral Elements | 5 |
| More Choice/Freedom | 5 |
| Combined Course | 4 |
| More Stringent Evaluation | 4 |
| Smaller Class Size | 3 |

Many responses included multiple differences, so each mention of an individual category was tallied, bringing total mentions to well over thirty-two.

With these categories, the most common response was that students in honors composition courses did more reading than those in regular courses, reinforcing the connection between increased reading and increased writing skills. Honors courses were also more likely to include different teaching approaches, such as team-teaching of an interdisciplinary seminar by faculty from different departments or the use of undergraduate honors students as teaching interns. In the next two categories, I have distinguished more writing, which indicates more assignments or lengthier assignments, from a higher level of writing, which indicates increased sophistication and critical thinking in students' writing. That honors courses provide more opportunities for research, discussion, and oral presentation also reinforces the idea that programs are preparing honors students for future graduate work. Some respondents also pointed toward honors students' having more choice and freedom with topics, assignments, and the overall direction of the course, but honors students may also encounter more rigorous evaluation standards as well. Finally, combining a required sequence of two or more courses into one intensive course and keeping enrollment smaller in honors courses than in regular courses can have an impact on students' overall course performance in positive ways by freeing their schedules for course exploration and allowing them more intimate interaction with the instructor and with other students.

Question II.B Who determines course content?

In regular composition courses, the content of the course is determined by the course instructor and/or the department housing the writing program, usually but not necessarily the English department. Instructors may have independent control over their course content, or they may need to adhere to the department's standards for course content to maintain consistency among a large number of sections of the same composition course. In honors composition courses, the instructional goals of the honors program have to be taken into consideration as well, so with this question, I wanted to ascertain who had the most input in course content: the individual instructor, the department, or the honors program.

Table 3.35: Determiners of Course Content

| | |
|---|---|
| Instructor | 19 |
| Instructor + Honors Program | 14 |
| Instructor + Honors Program + Department | 2 |
| Department | 2 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Instructor + Department | 1 |
| Honors Program + Department | 1 |

As this table shows, the most respondents indicated that the course instructor alone determined the content of an honors composition course, with the next greatest number of responses indicating a collaboration between the instructor and the honors program. Far fewer respondents indicated that the department participated in determining course content, either alone or with the instructor and/or the honors program.

Question II.C: Do criteria for writing evaluation differ between honors and non-honors courses? If yes, in what ways?

For this question, I wanted to know if honors composition courses encouraged higher standards of writing evaluation. If the honors course was distinguished in title and course number from a regular course, and the average student population differed, and the course content differed, might not the instructor's evaluation criteria differ as well? The tables below show whether there are differences and what the differences are.

Table 3.36: Differentiated Writing Evaluation Criteria

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 21 |
| Don't Know | 10 |
| No | 7 |

For the first part of this question, three times more respondents indicated that criteria for writing evaluation differed between honors and regular composition courses than those who indicated that criteria did not differ. A significant number, however, also acknowledged that they did not know whether individual instructors' own criteria differed between such classes.

For the second part of this question, then, I wanted those who answered "Yes" above to describe how criteria differed. As with several questions above, I identified specific criteria and grouped them into the categories listed in the following table. Also, as with previous questions, each response may have included more than one differentiated criterion, so I tallied each type separately.

Table 3.37: Differences in Writing Evaluation Criteria

| | |
|---|---|
| Development | 10 |
| General (proficiency) | 9 |
| Style | 7 |
| Instructor criteria | 6 |
| Organization | 2 |
| Mechanics | 1 |

In these categories, the most frequent differentiation mentioned was in evaluation of the development of students' writing, such as in analysis, critical thinking, and argumentation. Next, respondents indicated differentiation in general writing proficiency. More rigorous evaluation of students' specific writing style was then followed by differences in the instructor's own criteria, such as implementation of different rubrics. Last came increased expectations for organization and mechanics in students' writing.

Question II.D: Contracting for Honors Work

In a few cases, respondents indicated on the questionnaire that they did not have separate honors courses but that students could contract for honors work in various courses. In these cases, I replaced the questions above with a request to describe the contract system in more detail, indicating whether it entails extra and/or substantively different work from that required of non-honors students enrolled in the same course and whether instructors use different criteria when evaluating honors contract work. Since only two of the follow-up respondents provided information for this question, I will acknowledge here that each indicated natural types of differentiation for contracted honors work, and I will provide their detailed responses in Chapter Four.

Group III: Thesis or Capstone Project

With this group of questions, I requested additional detail from those respondents who indicated on the questionnaire that their programs included a senior thesis or some other type of written capstone project, either as a requirement for program completion or as an optional project. In this section, I asked five basic questions concerning how long the papers are, how the students prepare for the projects, how long they take to complete, and by whom and with what criteria the projects are evaluated.

Question III.A: What is the average page length of the thesis or capstone project?

This question elicited a variety of responses regarding overall page length of the student's final document, most of which included the program's average range of page lengths from student to student and major to major. I have divided page length averages into groups of ten, into which varying averages are placed; if the respondent listed a range, I tallied the response using the higher number in the range.

Table 3.38: Average Length of Thesis or Capstone Project

| | |
|---|---|
| 10-20 pp. | 5 |
| 21-30 pp. | 5 |
| 31-40 pp. | 4 |
| 41-50 pp. | 7 |
| 51-60 pp. | 1 |
| 61-70 pp. | 1 |

While the responses cover several categories fairly equally, the average length with the most responses is forty-one to fifty pages, with two responses indicating averages longer than this. At this length, the amount of research and argumentation sustained over a relatively long undergraduate paper begins to resemble graduate-level work, such as that required for a master's thesis; many programs have indicated that they do use this project to prepare their honors students for graduate school. More respondents, however, indicated average lengths of forty pages or less; while this is somewhat shorter than the average thesis length, it is still above average for undergraduate work in many fields and well within the range of papers presented at professional conferences and published in journals.

Other respondents, eleven in all, provided a numerical range within a more detailed discussion of how greatly length varies from field to field. Almost all of these ranges note a progression from shorter papers with more addenda in the natural and applied sciences to longer papers in the social sciences and humanities. Four other respondents discussed these variations without giving page numbers.

Question III.B: In what ways do students prepare for this project?

Because students in many cases are approaching a lengthier, more demanding writing project than they have previously attempted, they may be required, or may at least have the option, to prepare for the project in special ways. Responses to this question are grouped into the five categories in the following table.

Table 3.39: Preparation for Thesis or Capstone Project

| | |
|---|---|
| Course(s) | 14 |
| Independent study | 7 |
| Proposal | 5 |
| Previous coursework | 4 |
| Mentor | 4 |

In preparing to write the final project, many students take a course or a sequence of courses that includes writing and research seminars and colloquia. Some students are required to register for and complete a certain number of independent study hours for individual research and writing; other students are required to submit a proposal at the beginning of their projects, and some projects are designed to utilize students' previous coursework in their majors. While four responses indicate only work with a mentor in the student's field of interest, I suspect that students often work with faculty mentors in the other types of project preparation as well. In any case, programs that offer or require a thesis or capstone project are providing students with a variety of means for preparing for such a large written undertaking.

Question III.C: How much time does the average thesis or project take to complete?

As we reflect on the average thesis/project lengths, the amount of time that such a project takes to complete becomes an important chunk of the student's final year of study at that institution. While many projects average one semester to complete, as shown in the following table, more on average take two semesters or more, representing a significant commitment by the student, not only in the amount of research and writing involved in each project but in the practical matters of credit hours or extracurricular work and the resulting sacrifice of potential electives and outside activities. Here are the results:

Table 3.40: Average Thesis/Project Completion Time

| | |
|---|---|
| One semester | 12 |
| Two semesters | 17 |
| Two semesters + | 7 |
| Don't know (new) | 1 |

As noted above, several respondents indicated that their theses or capstone projects took one semester to complete; however, twice that number indicated that their students took two semesters or more to complete their projects, indicating a significant commitment of time and resources. One respondent could not provide an average completion time because the final project was new to the program.

Question III.D By whom is the project evaluated?

Just as the final project is a significant commitment on the student's part, it is also an important responsibility to those who evaluate such substantial projects, especially if the papers are not the final product of a specific course for which the evaluator is being professionally compensated. As shown in the following table, a variety of faculty members can be responsible for evaluating these projects.

Table 3.41: Evaluators of the Final Project

| | |
|---|---|
| Thesis Advisor | 10 |
| Advisor + Committee | 10 |
| Advisor + Outside Readers | 9 |
| Advisor + Honors Director | 6 |
| Course instructor(s) | 3 |

Of the thirty-eight responses to this question, only three indicated that the instructor of the specific project seminar or colloquium was solely responsible for evaluating the final project; one respondent here indicated that the course was team taught, meaning that evaluation did not fall upon one person alone. At the higher end of the total responses, an equal number of respondents indicated that responsibility for project evaluation fell either to the faculty thesis advisor/director alone or to the thesis advisor along with the student's thesis committee, just as a graduate student would submit a thesis or dissertation to a committee of faculty members. Following closely upon these tallies was the category of the thesis advisor and a selected number of outside readers, for example, other members of the student's major department but not formally committee members. Some evaluation was also done by a pairing of the thesis advisor and the honors program director. Overall, however, the majority of these responses demonstrate that evaluation of senior theses and capstone projects is shared between faculty members,

which not only spreads the responsibility but also, again, prepares students for graduate work with faculty committees.

Question III.E: With what criteria is the project evaluated?

With this sharing of responsibility for evaluating the final project comes potential for either positive agreement, or at least constructive consensus, or distracting disagreement regarding evaluation criteria. Students are also better able to follow a project to completion if they know in some detail with what criteria their projects will be evaluated. For this question, respondents provided varying amounts of detail: some discussed specific criteria for quality in both the written document and the oral thesis defense, while others briefly categorized responses such as "advisor criteria" or "publishable quality," as noted in the following table.

Table 3.42: General Evaluation Criteria for the Final Project

| | |
|---|---|
| Specific criteria | 15 |
| Advisor criteria | 6 |
| Field-appropriate | 4 |
| Varies | 4 |
| Publishable quality | 3 |
| DK/NA | 2 |

While a few respondents indicated merely that criteria varied or that they did not have formal criteria, the largest category of respondents listed specific criteria in greater or lesser detail, focusing on research, writing, and presentation skills. A more detailed discussion of these criteria will follow in Chapter Four. More generalized categories of responses include the project's meeting the advisor's individual criteria, constituting an appropriate contribution in the student's specific field (including creative works such as plays or musical compositions), or being a paper of publishable quality in that field.

Overall, while the senior thesis or capstone project is yet not present in every honors program, this type of project is growing in popularity, as indicated by several responses on the questionnaire and in the follow-up interviews, which indicated that data were not yet available because the project was either in its first year or was slated to begin in the next academic year. By reviewing practices from various types of honors programs, thesis proponents can improve their existing programs or lay strong foundations for proposed programs.

Group IV: Other Projects

In addition to enriched coursework and intensive second-year or fourth-year research and/or writing projects, honors programs can offer students opportunities to develop their oral and written communication skills in ways sometimes not as readily available to other students. Some opportunities, such as publication and presentation opportunities, continue along the lines of the thesis to prepare students for graduate and professional work. While some methods of assessing writing skill, such as the formal written exit exam popular during Frank Aydelotte's time, are used less in composition instruction, other, more holistic assessment techniques are being adopted, such as the burgeoning portfolio movement. This group of questions focuses on such opportunities.

Question IV.A You indicated that your program offers publication opportunities for your students. Of what types?

With this question, I was anticipating mainly responses indicating on-campus or intradepartmental publications, so I was pleasantly surprised at the indications of extrainstitutional publication as well, as noted in the following table.

Table 3.43: Types of Publication Opportunities

| | |
|---|---|
| On-campus Journals + Newsletters | 5 |
| Professional Journals | 2 |
| Conferences | 2 |
| Multiples (2 or more of above) | 7 |

Again, as I expected, several respondents indicated that their students' work appeared in on-campus journals and newsletters. Several more, however, indicated that they also encouraged their students to submit their work to professional journals and conferences, and not only ones specializing in undergraduate research but also more advanced field-specific journals and conferences as well. Since publication is not particularly required in the corporate sphere but is often crucial in academic professions, this provides honors students with another link to graduate and professional work in the academy.

Question IV.B You indicated that your program offers oral presentation opportunities for your students. Of what types?

In addition to building written communication skills, honors programs have the opportunity to build their students' oral communication skills in a variety of on-campus and off-campus venues, as outlined in the following table.

Table 3.44: Types of Presentation Opportunities

| | |
|---|---|
| In-class presentation | 24 |
| Symposium | 16 |
| Thesis defense | 12 |
| Conference | 11 |

Overall, forty interviewees responded to this question, but twenty of them listed more than one of the above types, which accounts for the higher total of presentation comments. Frequently, respondents indicated that their honors courses, seminars, and colloquia included not only greater amounts of student participation in class discussion but also increased opportunities for in-class presentations. Several also noted development of presentation skills through an undergraduate research symposium sponsored by the honors program or the student's home department or through a defense of the senior thesis. Honors students are also frequently encouraged to present at state, regional, and national conferences. In addition to discipline-specific conferences, respondents often mention the NCHC's annual conference, where undergraduates are welcome and encouraged to participate, the regional honors conferences, and the National Conference on Undergraduate Research.

As with the honors thesis and publication opportunities, presentation opportunities help prepare honors students for future graduate work. Granted, oral communication and presentation skills are valued in corporate settings as well, but thesis defenses, symposia, and conference presentations prepare students more for university work or research-based positions in private, corporate, or government sectors.

Questions IV.C.1-4: Portfolios

With the growing use of portfolios to holistically evaluate students' writing progress at all levels, from kindergarten to graduate study, I wanted in this section to assess portfolio use in honors programs. In addition to allowing advisors and honors program directors to monitor a student's academic development, portfolios help the students themselves can look back to see how much their writing skills have improved throughout their programs of study.

Portfolios can also serve as repositories for writing samples to be submitted in employment searches or graduate school applications.

Thirteen of the completed follow-up interviews included responses regarding these four questions:

1. What is included in this portfolio?
2. How is the portfolio generally formatted?
3. By whom is the portfolio evaluated?
4. With what criteria is the portfolio evaluated?

Within this relatively small number of respondents, these responses varied greatly and so defied ready categorization; for example, when asked about portfolio format, some respondents discussed internal organization of material, while others described physical formatting in binders or file folders. While I will discuss these descriptions and differences in more detail in Chapter Four, I will note here some overall patterns in portfolio use and evaluation.

1. Portfolios are used in honors programs in two major ways: as a compilation of work for one composition course or as a progressive and reflective project throughout a student's entire academic program.

2. Not only do students participate in evaluating their own work, but they also evaluate their courses and the honors program overall as they compile their portfolios; thus, the student portfolio can become a useful tool in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of individual honors offerings and the program itself over time.

3. Whether or not the portfolios are evaluated formally or as a required part of a student's completion of an honors program, the evaluation process is coming to resemble that for the thesis, as more than one faculty member participates in the evaluation process: the instructor(s) for the course, the honors program director, the faculty advisor, the thesis committee, a committee of honors readers, and so forth.

In these ways, cumulative portfolios can benefit students, faculty, and the honors program director in monitoring and evaluating not only each student's progress but the overall development of the honors program.

Question IV.D: You indicated that writing skill is included in a final evaluation of the students' honors program work. In what ways and by whom is writing skill evaluated?

As in the responses to the portfolio question, responses regarding writing skill in a final evaluation of a student's honors

program work were limited in number and varied in content. Responses did, however, fall into general categories:

1. This final evaluation is in essence the evaluation of the honors thesis or completion of the capstone seminar or colloquium project.

2. Honors programs focus on writing across the curriculum, so writing is constantly evaluated throughout a student's program of study.

3. Evaluation of writing skill may be included in an exit document or packet that the student submits to the program director.

What I was looking for, however, was any sign of the written exit examination, which was popular during Frank Aydelotte's time; happily, I can report that none of the respondents in this category indicated that they use this outdated method of evaluating writing skill.

Regarding this group of other outside oral and written communication projects in honors programs, I feel comfortable concluding that these opportunities, when designed and structured well, give honors students an advantage when preparing materials to transfer to another school or to apply to a graduate program. For students, however, who plan to go straight to work in the corporate or government sectors, some projects such as research and publication may not seem as beneficial. This Althusserian tendency toward reproducing the honors program's means of reproduction bears further investigation in future research.

## CONCLUSION

In drawing this chapter to a close, I would like to address three important themes running throughout the results of the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews. These issues are vital to the success of honors composition instruction, and they affect not only honors program directors and their students but also faculty and administrators across the campus.

### Writing Requirements

Many postsecondary institutions are giving increased attention to writing instruction, whether through additional composition course requirements, submission and evaluation by committee of a paper from every junior or senior campus-wide, required written capstone projects for every student, or implementation of writing-intensive requirements across the curriculum. Honors students are not exempted from these requirements; on the contrary, honors students write more often, especially in honors seminars and colloquia, and their papers tend to be longer, more complex, and more closely researched than those of their non-honors colleagues. Therefore,

honors faculty and composition instructors need to discuss the best ways to prepare students for these writing tasks, including acknowledgment of differentiated course instruction, and to prepare faculty to evaluate them.

**Preparation for Graduate Work**

Most freshman-level composition courses, honors or not, are designed to prepare students for the college-level academic writing tasks they will be facing in their future coursework. A major purpose, however, of advanced honors composition or writing-intensive honors courses, especially at four-year and graduate degree-granting institutions, is preparation for graduate school through stress on seminar papers, theses, conference presentations, and so forth. Part of the reasoning behind this may be that these are the types of writing that college faculty value and generate on a regular basis for professional advancement, so we want to pass these skills to our protégés. Perhaps honors students, good at being students and valuing education as they do, are more likely to enter graduate programs, where these skills are essential to success.

Those who do not plan to pursue a graduate degree, however, need to be made aware of this rationale. For instance, a more focused study of thesis completion rates might indicate that some students who do not complete their theses do not consider it an overwhelming writing task but rather feel that it will be useless in gaining corporate employment. These students may need to be offered alternative writing experiences, such as special seminars in professional communication or writing-intensive co-ops and internships. Honors programs should also contemplate contemporary writing tasks as a reflection of their own missions: should honors programs really be designed to steer students toward graduate school?

**Faculty Commitment**

Faculty members from all specializations accept and share the responsibility for developing the honors student's written communication skills. Students may begin their college writing careers in the honors freshman composition course with a specialized composition instructor, but they also often complete advanced professional communication courses, writing-intensive seminars and colloquia, and a field-specific thesis or written capstone project, all of which involve faculty members from a wide range of professional specializations with corresponding writing styles. Faculty are not always compensated for this work, however, especially independent study and thesis work. If institutions of higher education continue to profess a desire for excellence in education

and excellence in instruction, institutions and individual departments need to work in concert with their honors programs to remedy this situation. Otherwise, they will miss opportunities not only to offer challenging programs to exceptional students but also to attract exceptional faculty with both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of honors instruction.

Writing plays a vital role in contemporary honors education, from the point at which students apply to an honors program to the time nearing graduation when they write and orally defend their senior theses and capstone projects. Therefore, honors program directors must be involved in developing and guiding the writing courses and projects that are preparing their honors students for successful program completion, and writing program administrators, since they are often in charge of the programs housing honors composition and thesis preparation courses, and composition instructors need to acknowledge and participate in this process as well.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HONORS COMPOSITION COURSES AND PROJECTS

### INTRODUCTION

Designing one generic template for honors composition is almost impossible because honors program requirements can vary greatly from school to school. For example, some programs offer a wide variety of honors courses in many professional disciplines, while others do not offer any honors courses but exempt students from certain general education course requirements. Honors programs also naturally vary among two-year and four-year schools, with the latter by nature allowing students more time to develop writing skills through third- and fourth-year colloquia and senior theses. Therefore, I have designed individual honors composition component units that can be implemented in any type of two-year or four-year program. Many components will include specific quotations from the follow-up interviews discussed in Chapter Three.

I will separate these components into categories from which program directors and writing instructors may choose according to their program needs and development interests. Some components will cover specific honors composition courses, such as freshman composition, business and technical communication, and advanced writing seminars and colloquia; many honors programs also require writing projects outside the classroom, so other components will address the program admission essay, the senior thesis or capstone project, course-based and cumulative program portfolios, and presentation and publication opportunities. These sections will be organized chronologically to correspond to a student's admission to, progress through, and completion of an honors program and the types of writing courses and projects typically required at various program stages. Components will cover content, special topics, and evaluation criteria based on the questionnaire and follow-up interview responses and on my own experience in composition instruction. Thus, this chapter will serve as a resource guide for such aspects of honors composition as writing topics, course designs, thesis requirements, and conference opportunities to assist honors educators in creating or revising their programs' writing components.

## ADMISSION

The admissions process for many honors programs includes not only an initial interview and a review of the prospective student's transcripts and test scores but also an evaluation of a sample of the student's written work. Although a review of academic transcripts and quantitative measurements can determine a student's potential to a certain degree, program directors should also request a writing sample during the admissions process because such samples can demonstrate a student's critical thinking, argumentation, and language skills in more detail than allowed in a multiple choice test.

When requesting a writing sample during the admissions process, the program director should consider the following questions:

1. What types of writing should you request?
2. What topics should you use?
3. How long should application writing samples be?
4. Who should evaluate application writing samples?
5. With what criteria should you evaluate application writing samples?

1. What types of writing should you request?

Writing samples requested during the admissions process consist of the following four groups. Most programs request only one type of sample, but a few require a combination of two or more.

a. *Essay on an assigned topic.* The most frequently used type of admissions writing sample, this exercise requires the student to write at home about a specific topic assigned by the program to all applicants. By controlling the subject matter and length of the writing sample, the director ensures a higher degree of consistency throughout a large batch of samples, allowing evaluators to focus on and compare individual argumentation and writing skills more readily because each student is writing on the same topic. Students can also take as little or as much time before the deadline to compose the essay, using whatever prewriting and revising strategies they choose.

While using the same topic for several application cycles in a row maintains additional consistency from one year's group to the next, directors should be aware of potential evaluator burnout, which may negatively affect the evaluation process. Directors should also be aware of the potential for cheating and/or plagiarism in take-home essays; those who are especially concerned with this problem can keep previous essays on file, rotate topics on a regular basis, or

have students write the essay in a monitored, timed essay session (see number 4 below).

b. *Sample of the student's previous written work.* This consists of research papers and other types of essays that students have written for previous classes. Depending upon the amount of time and instructor-guided revision the student has invested in each document, this may be the most accurate representation of a student's writing skill and ability to develop and sustain a lengthy argument. Lack of consistency, however, in assignments, topics, and lengths among samples makes equitable evaluation more difficult.

c. *Application letter.* Various programs use the letter format not only for program admission but also for admission to honors seminars and colloquia. Some letters are assigned a specific topic, while some are left open. In either case, letters are generally shorter than essays and may thus be easier for students to prepare and faster for evaluators to read; however, brevity curtails development of sustained argumentation if this is a desired element for consideration.

d. *Timed essay.* While the topic essay listed above controls topic and length, the timed essay also controls the amount of time students have for writing the essay and the environment in which the students write it. In cases where the school's admissions department requires a timed essay for general school admission, the honors program director should request a copy of this essay for program admission; otherwise, the director should provide a topic, a room, a monitor, and necessary materials to ensure consistency between applicants or applicant groups.

Although control of time and environment can further increase consistency of experience between students, directors should acknowledge certain faults with the timed writing situation. One major concern about timed essay sessions is the stress accompanying an exam-like situation, which can affect even the best writers' concentration and argumentation skills and prevent them from providing a true sample of their writing and critical thinking skills. Another major concern is the proliferation of computer-assisted writing; most contemporary high school and college students use word-processing programs to write their essays, either at home or in a school lab. Therefore, in designing a timed essay session, directors should be aware of potential problems. Those directors who want a handwritten essay should acknowledge the differences between word-processing an essay and writing it by hand. Many contemporary students are physically more comfortable typing their essays on the computer than writing them out by hand. Drafting and revising essays on the computer are also easier for many students because they can perform prewriting exercises, draft their essays,

revise them, and edit them with spelling and grammar checks much more quickly than if they had to write everything out by hand, revise and recopy it, and look things up in a dictionary and/or thesaurus. Directors who provide a computer lab setting for timed essay sessions, however, should be prepared for potential unfamiliarity with the lab's hardware or software.

2. What topics should you use?

Because the most commonly used admissions writing sample is the take-home essay on an assigned topic, the program director or review committee is responsible for choosing the appropriate topic to assign. Topics currently being used throughout various honors programs fall into four categories: current issues, reflection, the honors program, and the arts. Each type of topic utilizes students' writing and argumentation strengths in different critical and creative ways, and some programs request separate essays that address two or more types of topics and thus demonstrate different types of writing and critical thinking skills.

Following is a list of topics currently or recently used in various programs:

a. *Current Issues*

Creationism vs. evolution; the arts as a reflection of our time; crisis in the inner city; single parent families; welfare reform; AIDS and society (Sandra L. Landuyt, Penn Valley Community College)

Current issues related to role of US in the world (economically, politically, concerning human rights, the environment or other issues) (Thomas Broadhead, University of Tennessee, Knoxville)

Last year's application gave choice of three:
1) Support or reject the following: Advancements in science and technology offer the best hope for improving and stabilizing society in the future.
2) If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one ability or quality, what would it be?
3) If you could change any one event in history, what would it be and how would you change it? (Peter Sederberg, South Carolina Honors College)

b. *Reflection*

We ask two questions — student chooses one — What is the most significant experience of your life? What is a question you have always wanted answered? Answer may be cast in the form of a letter to a real or imagined person. (Brian Murphy, Oakland University)

If you were to write your autobiography 20 years from now, what text would appear on pages 210 and 211? (Gavin Townsend, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga)

Imaginary letter of recommendation, written as though from the perspective of a supportive but searchingly candid external observer. (Daniel Rigney, St. Mary's University)

Changes in your past five years. Campus has a First Year Book: what should it be, and why? (Maynard Mack, University of Maryland)

The thing I like learning about most (apart from my major); the most significant challenge I have faced. (Mark Greenberg, Drexel University)

Discuss some life experience (a person, an event, a book, or some other influence) which helps explain who you are today and why you are pursuing a college education. (James Knauer, Lock Haven University)

Those selected by the admissions office — tell about a challenge, a humiliation, a success, a life-altering encounter, etc. (Tony Whall, Salisbury State University)

Tell us about yourself and why education, especially higher education, is important to you. (Jean Shankweiler, El Camino College)

Describe a significant learning experience and how it affected you. (Liz Beck, Iowa State University)

c. *Honors Program*

The topic has always been the same: Explain your idea of an Honors Program and indicate why you should be accepted in such a program. (Ellen Miller Casey, University of Scranton)

No topic is specified other than to indicate why the student seeks to be a member of the Honors program, what interests they would pursue, and how they would contribute. (Andrew Lau, Penn State University)

General question on how they would benefit from an honors program and how they would contribute to it (Diane Levy, University of North Carolina-Wilmington)

Scholarship Application: (this is a paraphrase, don't remember the exact phrasing) [*sic*] In what way can you contribute to the goal of Texas A&M University to achieve a student population that reflects the ethnic, geographic, economic diversity of the state of Texas and beyond.
Second question: Address any special consideration you wish us to give your application, i.e., special accomplishment, difficult circumstances, etc. (Susanna Finnell, Texas A&M University)

Why do you want to be in the Honors Program? What do you hope to contribute to the Honors Program? (Jerryn Carson, Geneva College)

For incoming freshmen:
1. What personal and academic strengths do you have which would allow you
to perform successfully in our Honors program?
2. What do you consider to be your personal and academic weaknesses? How do you plan to address them during your college career?
3. In what ways do you perceive that the Honors Program at Manchester College will improve the quality of your undergraduate education?
(Al Williams, Manchester College)

d. *The Arts*

Students are asked to write on a work from art, literature, science, social science, etc. that has had a big influence on them. (Dan Patterson, University of Memphis)

Why should music and art be included in the curriculum? (Jim Lacey, East Connecticut State University)

> List the books that you've read this year that weren't assigned in school, or write a brief paragraph on a favorite book that you read this year, explaining why you liked it. (Alison Trinkle, Texas Christian University)

One ambitious program requests individual, one-page essays on a topic in each of the four groups:

> Write on all four:
> Essay #1: describe a reading experience that you've had in the past two years that has influenced your understanding of or view of the world.
> Essay #2: describe a current issue (local or global) that you deem urgent andrealistically addressable. (Including something about how it should be addressed.)
> Essay #3: describe your hero, being clear and specific about why you find that person to be heroic.
> Essay #4: describe a time that stands out in your memory as an example of powerful learning or excellent teaching. (Thomas W. Albritton, High Point University)

These topics provide a wide range of both traditional and uniquely creative writing and reading opportunities for students and evaluators. Directors looking to implement or to update an admissions essay would do well to choose one of these topics.

3. How long should application writing samples be?

As instructors, we are all familiar with the constant student refrain, "How long does this have to be?" (We still encounter this ourselves with submission guidelines and calls for papers.) Required length depends upon the requested format, the desired level and depth of sustained argumentation, and considerations for evaluation time. A good length, however, for the essay on a specific topic is two to three typed, double-spaced pages (some 500-750 words). An average essay length for many traditional freshman composition essays, it is long enough for a well-organized and developed argument from a high school senior or a college freshman, but neither so long that students would have to stretch their material nor too long for evaluators to read and assess it easily and move on to the next essay.

The letter of application to the program should be one full single-spaced page. In no case should such a letter be longer than two pages.

4. Who should evaluate application writing samples?

Since the main purpose behind requesting writing samples is to help determine who should be accepted into the honors program, the program director should always be involved in the evaluation process; however, more often than not, the director is assisted in this process by the honors committee. In fact, the admissions process can compose a significant portion of the committee's responsibilities, especially if a program does not have highly delineated curriculum needs, such as course design and rotation, which need to be discussed on a regular basis.

Depending upon the size of the evaluating group and the type and number of writing samples to be evaluated, the committee should convene a brief discussion to ensure that professionals from different fields can read with standards as close to each other's as possible for consistent evaluation. If the essay topic remains the same from year to year, the director or committee chair should keep copies of essays from previous years to demonstrate clearly what type of writing led students to be accepted into the program and what type did not. If the topic changes from year to year, however, the director or committee chair should briefly review the essays and then select strong examples of "Admit" and "Do Not Admit" to use in norming sessions. Committee members should read the samples and discuss how each member would evaluate each paper; with input from individual members, the committee can then reach a consensus about standards for a successful essay.

Another point to consider is whether each evaluator will read all of the essays. If the evaluating committee is larger than five members and/or the number of essays to evaluate exceeds 100, then the essays should be divided into batches and evaluated by only two or three of the readers, thus distributing evaluation responsibility and reducing overall reading time. Here, a preliminary norming session should be required to keep each reader evaluating with the same standards.

5. With what criteria should you evaluate application writing samples?

Composition instructors generally use four categories in writing evaluation:

a. *Organization.* Does the writer move logically from point to point, incorporating an engaging introduction, transitions between points, and a strong conclusion?

b. *Development.* Does the writer support the essay's argument with appropriate details and examples? Does the writer demonstrate strong critical thinking skills? Does the writer use source material appropriately?

c. *Style.* Does the writer use language, syntax, and vocabulary in fluid or graceful ways, allowing the reader to focus on the writer's point rather than on the writing itself? Does the writer establish an individual voice, whether in a more personal or a more professional tone? Are items in these areas appropriate to the assignment and to the specific audience?

d. *Grammar and Mechanics.* Does the writer demonstrate command of correct grammar and punctuation usage, especially in complex constructions?

When evaluating writing of potential program participants, evaluators should read for above-average to exceptional performance in each of these four areas. As noted above, if essays are to be evaluated by more than one reader, all readers should discuss what their standards should be for admission to that individual honors program. For example, some programs may be more concerned with a student's potential for academic growth and thus may be more open regarding the four evaluation areas, while other programs may be more exclusive and thus may desire highly advanced, mature writing performance in all four at the beginning of postsecondary study. Evaluators should also remember that traditional applicants may be intellectually and emotionally more mature than their peers, but that they are still operating from a young person's perspective with a young person's academic preparation and thus should be evaluated accordingly. Also, the growing population of nontraditional, or returning, students should be evaluated by considering that while they may not have written academic papers for a long while, they may well have professional writing experience and that should also be evaluated accordingly. Overall, evaluators who are used to working with graduate students and highly talented undergraduate honors students should adjust their expectations when reading admissions essays; instructors who teach freshman-level composition courses will thus be helpful in guiding norming sessions and discussing evaluation standards.

In addition to excellence in general writing skill, evaluators should also look for creativity and originality evidenced in students' writing as possible predictors for students' intellectual development. This suggestion holds true especially when we consider the importance of original research in advanced professional work: creative, original approaches to traditional questions indicate the ability and willingness to view common problems in novel ways, which is important to furthering research in all fields. In short, does a

student stimulate enough interest so that evaluators, as the student's future professors, will be eager to work with and to help guide him or her?

Overall, the writing sample should be an important part of the honors program admissions process. Although reading and evaluating a large number of essays is naturally much more time consuming than merely reviewing grades and test scores, the effort produces a group of incoming scholars who have demonstrated at some length that they can not only think at a mature, critical level, but they can also express those thoughts in an organized, developed, and fluid manner.

## COMPOSITION COURSES

Once students are admitted to the honors program, they should continue to develop their written communication skills. In some cases, honors students are advanced writers eager to take their writing skills to a higher, more professional level; in other cases, honors students are still average writers but able to learn how to improve their writing at a faster pace than nonhonors students. In either case, these students need a differentiated curriculum to meet their own intellectual and academic needs. Rather than exempt students from general education writing requirements, honors programs should provide specialized instruction which will challenge both students and faculty.

Honors composition instruction can take many forms: freshman composition, advanced composition, business and technical communication, "writing-intensive" honors courses, honors seminars and colloquia, and course-based preparation of theses or capstone projects. This component section will focus first on specific types of composition courses and second on ways in which composition instruction is incorporated into other types of honors courses.

### Freshman Composition

1. Why should honors students take freshman composition?

While test scores, grades, or even a writing sample may demonstrate a student's advanced writing skill, most honors program directors indicate that honors students are still required to take freshman composition, whether in a nonhonors course or sequence, in an honors course or sequence, or in the form of honors contract work in a nonhonors course. Although a writing course may not be specifically designated "freshman composition," honors students still need a first-year writing course for the following reasons:

a. Although most traditional honors students have written relatively lengthy essays and research papers, they can still use a period of adjustment to writing in actual college-level courses. Here, they can develop their critical thinking skills, polish their citation skills, and advance their writing skills. Nontraditional students may also want to use this course to get back into the flow of writing academic papers, depending upon the amount of writing they have been doing in their workplace duties.

b. One of the benefits of any first-year writing course is that this class is usually the smallest the student takes. Even small science laboratory sections are merely corollaries to much larger lecture courses in which students can feel fairly anonymous. On the other hand, enrollment in typical freshman composition sections ranges from fifteen to thirty students because of the requirements of class discussion, student-teacher conferences, and time-consuming grading and revision cycles essential to good composition instruction. Students in these courses can thus develop a more personal rapport with their instructors; in fact, the freshman comp instructor may be the only professor who knows the student by name rather than by ID number. This rapport can be important in the student's transition from high school or from the workplace to college study, and honors students should not miss this opportunity.

c. The smaller enrollment of specialized freshman composition courses can also allow honors students to get to know one another as peers, as colleagues, and as friends. For instance, students who become accustomed to peer critiquing each other's freshman composition essays may feel more comfortable workshopping each other's junior- and senior-level seminar papers and final theses, whether in class or on their own. Also, as noted in the point above, smaller enrollment encourages the students to build personal rapport with each other, which in turn increases enrollment in future seminars and participation in extracurricular honors activities because students are assured that they will have friends there.

Even if honors students do not take a designated freshman composition course, some type of first-year writing course should be in place to provide students the opportunity, first and foremost, to adapt their writing skills to college-level study. For honors students, this course may serve as a transition to college study, where they can participate with frequency in class discussion rather than sit passively listening to lectures; here, they can form bonds with other honors students that will last throughout their academic programs and beyond.

2. When might honors students be exempt from freshman composition?

In most honors programs, students must take some form of freshman composition; however, a few programs exempt students under certain conditions. The first way in which students are exempted is through scores on the SAT or ACT, using either the comprehensive exam score or the specific unit score (SAT-V or ACT ENGL). These requirements, though, are usually exceedingly demanding, such as scoring a 35 or 36 of a possible 36 on the English section of the ACT. Other credit toward freshman composition exemption comes through Advanced Placement credit and very high AP, IB, and CLEP scores.

3. How should honors freshman composition differ from the nonhonors course?

Once honors programs and/or writing programs have decided to offer special honors sections of first-year composition courses, what should they do to distinguish these courses from the regular composition sections? Honors students still need to be prepared for writing tasks in upper-division courses, just as other students are prepared, but what makes the honors section "honors"? To maintain some degree of consistency in experience for all students at a given institution, instructors should begin with the syllabus for the regular freshman composition section, but rather than merely requiring *more* work from honors students, honors sections should require *different* types of assignments, readings, and instructional approaches.

The following list includes common characteristics distinguishing honors composition courses from regular courses. Each item will also provide sample course approaches and applications in the form of reports from honors program directors regarding their own composition courses.

a. *More writing.* Because honors students do not need as much preparatory college-level writing instruction and develop their writing skills at a faster pace than regular students, instructors should take advantage of the additional class time available to them to incorporate additional, different writing assignments into honors sections. The papers themselves should also be longer as well because the students have already demonstrated in their admissions essays that they have mastered the traditional essay length; therefore, they should be able to construct and sustain lengthier arguments than their peers.

Example:
"Honors Humanities I — Classical Epic" (taught by me) has a large writing component, culminating in a ten-to-twenty-page

research paper; "Honors Humanities II — Modern Epic," as taught by one professor, requires a ninety-eight-page "personal epic" (pretty free as to content and treatment). (William T. Cotton, Loyola University New Orleans)

b. *Higher level of writing.* Another characteristic that distinguishes writing in an honors composition course from that in a regular course is a higher level of writing skill. For example, honors students should demonstrate mastery of grammar and mechanics from the outset so that the instructor does not have to spend class time discussing these elements. Students should also have command of stylistic conventions in standard written English and demonstrate more advanced argumentation skills than their peers. In this way, the honors composition course can focus on further development of students' critical thinking and research skills rather than merely introducing or reviewing skills needed for basic college-level writing tasks.

Example:
The level's more sophisticated, beginning with full argumentative essays and moving into interpretive writing in the second semester. Content in [HON] 103 focuses on Supreme Court cases pending during the current year. "Regular" freshman English courses focus on close reading of expository prose, critiques, analyses, etc., heading students toward argumentative syntheses by the end of the year. Honors English also assumes that students are competent at grammar and other conventions from the outset. (Jay Paul, Christopher Newport University)

c. *More reading.* The reading load in honors sections should not merely be increased in the number of texts and in the length of each text but also in the complexity of texts, such as classical or theoretical works traditionally reserved for upper-division or graduate-level courses. While regular undergraduates are generally resistant to such reading loads, honors students have the advanced critical thinking skills needed to read, understand, and question such texts to a greater extent, and they are usually more willing to participate in class discussion about the texts.

Examples:
ENG 198 is the first in the sequence of discussion-based Honors Program Seminars. For Honors Program students it substitutes for ENG 114. Unlike ENG 114, it is entirely literature-based. In addition to the two novels — the Humanities Base novel and the Scholars Author novel — ENG 198 typically studies three other

substantial novels, usually one American, one British, and one European; usually one 18th-century, one 19th-century, and one 20th-century. Thus, for Honors Program students who would otherwise have had the Basic Skills composition requirement waived or who have already fulfilled it by AP or transfer credits, the Honors English Seminar can fulfill a different University-wide General Education requirement, the "Arts Study" requirement. (R. Alan Kimbrough, University of Dayton)

English 105H is the Honors section of first year composition. It is a humanities based course, and the topic of each section is selected by the instructor of that section (ancient/ Renaissance/ contemporary theater; hard-boiled detective novel; great books/novels of the 90's; literature of the oppressed/the millennium — looking backward to look forward). The regular course is more argumentative/persuasive in its approach. (Liz Beck, Iowa State University)

d. *More oral elements.* In addition to specific writing tasks, more extensive in-class discussion and more frequent oral presentations should develop students' critical thinking, debating, and leadership skills; this is especially important if students will be required later in their programs to present at conferences and/or to defend a thesis.

Example:
Students learn research paper techniques and teaching methods. Everyone in my section teaches part of the course and presents research in an oral report. (Joan Digby, LIU/CW Post)

e. *More research.* Honors sections should require more extensive research for written projects and oral presentations, including not only introduction to special college-level and professional resources but also instruction in conducting and writing up primary research. Again, this work prepares students for later conference presentation, publication, and thesis requirements.

Example:
The content does not differ so much as the depth with which it can be explored differs. In W140 and W150 students do more extensive and independent research than in W131/W132/W231 and generally speaking students are able to study rhetorical issues in some more depth. There is research done in W140 that is not taught in W131. (Sally Cone, Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis)

f. *More choice.* Honors faculty report that they allow honors students more freedom and more responsibility in determining the shape of a course. First, instructors should give students more opportunity for independent study to research topics of special interest in depth. Second, instructors should request student input regarding the types of readings and writing assignments to be included in a course. In these ways, the instructor and the students should work together to construct a meaningful academic experience for all involved, and the students should learn how to take responsibility for pursuing their intellectual interests.

Examples:
The students are given more freedom in the subjects that they write about. The class is very informal even though it still teaches the traditional writing concepts. (Carrie Williams, Mankato State University)

I use the department syllabus to get the requirements out of the way and then I try to make the class more user-determined and creative. Sometimes I allow the class to decide on content. (Nancy Adams, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley)

g. *Combined course.* Some honors sections will combine a regular two-course or three-course sequence into one course. Writing instructors often report that even if honors students have average writing skills, they tend to advance their skills more quickly; thus, an intensive, more quickly paced course that includes the same essential readings and assignments can be manageable for both students and instructors. A combined course can also open a slot later in the student's schedule for an upper-division seminar or for thesis preparation.

Examples:
ENG 114 is a one-semester substitute for the usual two-semester sequence required of all students under the University-wide Basic Skills requirement. ENG 114 covers all three of the principal compositional concerns of ENG 101-102 — exposition, argumentation, and research writing. Like ENG 102, it includes some attention to a "Humanities Base" novel, with which the other Humanities Base instructors (Western Civilization, Intro. to Philosophy, and Intro. to Religious Studies) are supposed to be familiar. It adds another work of fiction — a novel or collection of short stories by a contemporary author whom the Scholars Program invites to the University to spend an evening with the

ENG 114 students and other first-year Honors and Scholars Program students. (R. Alan Kimbrough, University of Dayton)
English Composition and Speech Fundamentals together; English Composition and Literature (Phyllis R. Hamilton, Frederick Community College)

h. *Smaller class size.* Honors composition sections should have a smaller class size than regular sections. In some cases, limited honors program participation can lead to smaller classes; in other cases, class size should be limited by the instructor or the program to allow more individual instructor attention for each student and more discussion and interaction among students.

Examples:
The Honors sections stress more extensive discussion and are likely to include a good deal of rewriting of what is written. That is possible because the enrollment in the sections is 7-8 less students than in the regular sections. (Judith Zivanovic, Kansas State University)

Honors courses differ in that they are smaller — at most 20 students. Secondly, more active learning takes place — more conversation, debate and dialogue. (Robert Barone, University of Montevallo)

i. *More stringent evaluation standards.* In some programs, standards for writing evaluation are more rigorous and demanding in honors sections. This topic will be addressed in more detail in Question 5 of this section.

j. *Different teaching approaches.* Rather than merely requiring more reading and writing, honors composition courses should also allow innovative teaching approaches, such as team-teaching and using undergraduate honors students as teaching assistants.

Example:
HON 200 uses advanced honors student interns in this writing course for freshmen. Students write one essay dealing with assigned reading in class each week which I evaluate and one out-of-class essay assigned and evaluated by an intern. Each of the four interns has a specific area, such as campus as text, friends and family, social questions, and the like, from which they assign four papers to each group. (Jim Lacey, East Connecticut State University)

Bringing all of these characteristics of honors composition courses together into one class is a challenging task; a course sequence description from Jim Dutcher of Holyoke Community College demonstrates how honors instructors can address these differences:

> Honors Eng 101 differs in that it is theme-centered, it includes fiction as most 101s do not, it is team-taught with a reference librarian and includes a major research-instruction component, the reading and writing loads are increased, and — as in all honors courses, we sometimes serve pizza. Honors Eng 102 is also theme-centered while most 102s (all?) are not. The work load is again increased. Our Honors Eng 102 is also much more inter-disciplinary than others because it is part of a learning community and is team-taught with a scientist. The readings reflect the theme, the philosophy and practice of science, broader philosophical issues, as well as literature.

4. Who should determine course content?

Responsibility for determining the course content for honors freshman composition should be negotiated among three parties: the individual instructor, who should have the most input into how the course will be taught; the faculty and/or administrators of the English department (or other writing program home department), who should maintain standards of instruction across the composition curriculum; and the honors program, which should similarly monitor instruction throughout the honors program.

In most cases, course content is determined solely by the course instructor, as noted by Thomas W. Albritton of High Point University:

> Each professor determines the specific content. Our Honors guidelines simply provide "permission" to be creative, challenging, to leave the text behind and provide readings and independence that are not a part of the regular section of 102.

In other cases, the instructor submits syllabi and rationale to the honors program director or committee and/or the English department or writing program home department for approval, as reported by Sally Cone at Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis:

> The course was originally developed through honors course development $ and was approved by the honors council. Since then, content is determined by the instructor. A radical deviation

from the original would be overseen by the English dept.'s writing program director.

As noted above, students can also participate to some degree in shaping course content.

> Sometimes I will give the class choices; for example, they can choose whether they want a unit on poetry or short stories. I give choices in the individual poems and stories. I try to make the assignments more creative, requiring different kinds of thinking. They are certainly more challenging than those I use in regular classes. (Nancy Adams, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley)

In the end, the main responsibility for honors composition course design should fall to the course instructor, who will be working with the students and with the material on a daily basis; writing program administrators and honors program administrators can then monitor the quality and success of the course through student evaluations and professional activities reports.

5. Should criteria for writing evaluation differ between honors and nonhonors courses?

In evaluating any type of honors work, instructors tend to fall into one of two camps: those who believe that all students, honors and nonhonors, should be evaluated fairly with the same criteria, and those who believe that honors students should be graded more rigorously because they can perform at a higher level and thus should be challenged to their highest abilities.

In the first group, program directors argue that while reading and writing tasks differ between honors and regular composition sections, criteria for evaluation should remain consistent throughout all sections. Typical arguments include the following:

> The tasks are more demanding, and so are evaluated differently, but the criteria (as in "coherence," "development," "standard English," etc.) are consistent across all sections of 102. (Thomas W. Albritton, High Point University)

> I tell all Honors Program instructors to teach as if the students were brighter than normal but to grade as if they were in their regular sections. (Karl Oelke, Union County College)

> The Honors classes generally have only A's and B's for grades, because that is what they would get in a regular class. But if the student does not perform up to expectations — then they could get a lower grade. (Liz Beck, Iowa State University)

More program directors acknowledge, however, that criteria for writing evaluation do differ between honors and regular sections of composition courses. Because of the amount of work instructors put into differentiating honors courses from regular courses through more demanding reading and writing tasks, higher evaluation standards seem a natural conclusion to the honors student's writing process; in fact, several program directors identified differing evaluation standards as an important distinguishing feature of honors composition courses. Typical statements for this group include the following:

> As a rule a higher level of understanding and/or difficulty is expected from the honors student. Honors students are also expected to take greater responsibility for their own learning and leadership roles in assisting peers. (Sandra L. Landuyt, Penn Valley Community College)

> A higher degree of sophistication in the argument, graceful writing, and an appropriate style should complement flawless mechanics in Honors writing courses. (Mark Greenberg, Drexel University)

> The general rhetorical issues are the same so evaluation proceeds with the same methods and assumptions. But because the honors students are dealing with issues of greater complexity, we expect to see more complex work at varying grade levels. The context of a class determines evaluation criteria, so the different student body and the longer work produced leads to fuller bodies of work. (Sally Cone, Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis)

> Honors students are expected to produce more extensive and sophisticated work. An A grade in a regular class is probably just a B grade in an honors class. (Lillian Mayberry, University of Texas at El Paso)

> The criteria differ because in non-honors classes correct grammar and any sort of analysis suffices to distinguish the paper from the worst papers. In honors classes all papers are grammatically correct and analyze. The superior papers show

signs of sophistication. Excellent papers are analytical and persuasive. They are thorough and convincing. (Jean Shankweiler, El Camino College)

Some program directors, while acknowledging differences, take a more philosophical approach to the evaluation criteria issue, raising interesting questions about honors education and composition instruction:

> I'm sure that in the back of everyone's mind, honors students are held to higher standards, but we all try to give an "A" paper an A, a "C" paper a C, and so on. This is a dilemma for all teachers in all courses: do we grade students against the other students in the same class or do we grade all papers against the standards of some Platonic papers in the sky? (Jim Dutcher, Holyoke Community College)

> [G]rade distributions for the various sections of ENG 114 have occasionally indicated that one or more instructors have been using criteria either markedly more relaxed or markedly more stringent than the majority of the faculty staffing the course. My own sense — as an English professor! — is that the criteria for writing evaluation differ far more from instructor to instructor than they do from course to course. (R. Alan Kimbrough, University of Dayton)

Overall, the current climate in honors composition instruction suggests that just as reading and writing tasks that instructors assign in honors composition differ from those assigned in regular composition courses, the criteria these instructors use for evaluating honors students' writing should differ from criteria used in regular composition sections in the ways noted above. In the end, however, the instructor, honors program director, and writing program director need to discuss which approach to evaluation will best fit the school's students, faculty, program, and institutional needs regarding honors composition evaluation. If honors coursework and program requirements are generally highly differentiated from regular academic requirements, then criteria for evaluating student writing, and student work overall, should be differentiated as well.

**Advanced Writing Courses**

In addition to the freshman writing course, some schools require students to take an advanced writing course that introduces them to document genres specific to their professional disciplines, such as business writing, technical writing, and specialized writing in the

humanities and social sciences. Honors students should fulfill such requirements; in fact, honors program requirements may otherwise be so focused on extensive research writing and academic seminar papers that honors students would especially benefit from instruction in brief, concisely written correspondence and reports. To become more fully rounded and prepared as writers, honors students need experience with professional genres — correspondence, manuals, business plans, grants and proposals, and so forth — which will help them not only as burgeoning professionals but also in preparing to begin a full-fledged thesis project.

What can also help differentiate honors sections and regular sections of advanced composition courses is the incorporation of higher levels of discipline-appropriate communication theory. Undergraduate students can become understandably resistant and frustrated with articles and chapters filled with obscure concepts and polysyllabic terminology, especially if the instructor is not effectively "translating" difficult passages and making sure that students understand how the theory relates to their classroom exercises and their future workplace writing tasks. This is not to say that honors students are not resistant themselves to some degree; rather, they tend to be more able and more willing to engage complex concepts, wanting not merely to know *how* to write and format things in certain ways but also to know *why*. Some advanced honors writing course options include the following:

a. *Advanced composition.* This course should combine more in-depth development of writing, research, and critical thinking skills with study of a particular topic; topics could vary by semester or by section to include current sociopolitical, cultural, or environmental issues. Another suggestion would be to incorporate more discussion of rhetorical and composition theory, from classical to contemporary. Students may have a certain familiarity with elements of these theories from freshman rhetoric and composition, but an advanced course would allow them to focus upon a certain period or school in greater depth. In either case, students in this course should make the transition from shorter freshman-level essays to longer papers, either research-based or creatively-oriented, in which they must sustain solid organization, development, and stylistic consistency.

b. *Business writing.* As in a regular course, honors sections of business writing should cover basic genre formats — e.g., correspondence, electronic communication, document design, business plans, and proposals — but they should also apply higher-level readings and discussions of organizational and management theory, communication theory, and publications management to their assignments. The course could also provide students the opportunity to perform service learning through work with local non-profit

agencies. While work with academic and corporate organizations can be valuable to the student's education, academically privileged students can truly give back to the community by, for example, helping a non-profit agency to design a brochure or write a grant proposal. Liz Beck of Iowa State University reports on such a course:

> English 302H is Business Communication — This course covers the stands, theory and principles of business and professional communication. Students in the Honors course work in teams to take on an in-depth project of their choice and then present at the end of the semester. Projects have included: a new marketing plan for the Honors Program; a study of women faculty and promotion issues; a marketing plan for the community animal shelter; a study of accessibility within university buildings for students with disabilities; a historical study and color brochure of the university cemetery.

c. *Technical writing.* Again, an honors section of technical writing should include not only genre formats — e.g., correspondence, technical reports, proposals, and manuals — but also discussions of the rhetoric of scientific and technical communication. For example, students could discuss the evolution of the modern scientific article and the reasons why publication in a refereed professional journal helps to control what a discipline considers valid knowledge in that field. Students might also review images of science and technology in the popular media. Also, as with business writing, this course can be a good opportunity for service learning with local not-for-profit agencies, such as helping to design a manual or write a proposal.

While these are a few types of advanced composition courses, instructors and program directors should discuss what types of courses are needed to serve their students. For example, at a school with a large education program, the honors program may want to offer a special advanced composition section for education majors to help them to examine the quantitative and qualitative research being done in this field. While general principles of organization, development, and style can be applied in any field, discipline-specific advanced courses can help students make the transition from freshman writing to the higher-level critical thinking and writing skills needed for upper-division courses and in the workplace.

**Seminars, Colloquia, and "Writing-intensive" Courses**

Outside the venue of officially designated honors composition courses, students gain writing instruction and experience through a variety of honors courses, including seminars, colloquia, and "writing-intensive" courses. At some schools, these courses complement

required honors composition courses; at others, they provide the students' main writing and critical thinking instruction. While further research is needed to determine what constitutes "writing-intensive" coursework at various institutions, sample comments from the preliminary survey indicate that extensive writing is done in honors courses and seminars throughout the disciplines (names and institutional affiliations are not included here because several respondents remained anonymous on the surveys):

> Although we require no formal comp classes, our honors courses are, by definition, writing intensive. In addition, students complete 2 independent studies, usually culminating in a written project. Our school also has a writing portfolio graduation requirement.
>
> Honors courses in any and all disciplines have writing requirements, substantial ones. We have writing requirements across the curriculum and most departments demand Senior Theses.
>
> All Honors courses are seminars with variable topics. Some may substitute for various composition courses. Writing across the curriculum truly functions in our special topic seminars.
>
> An individual student may arrange with instructor to take a course, including composition, as "Honors." Composition is a major component of all honors coursework — not taught as separate courses but incorporated with subject-focused courses.
>
> Honors does not offer composition courses, but faculty do require a great deal of writing in Honors seminars and teach composition & rhetoric dependent on student needs.
>
> We assign lots of writing in all honors classes. "Composition" classes are for regular non-honors classes only.

**Contract Work**

Contract work provides an alternative to students in programs that might not be able to afford or otherwise support separate honors sections or special honors courses. In these cases, students who are enrolled in a traditional section of a course can "contract" with the instructor to perform different and/or additional assignments for honors credit. Faculty, students, and the program director should be

aware of what constitutes the honors contract: adjusted syllabi, additional readings, additional writing assignments, higher evaluation standards, and so forth. This section includes two sample sets of honors contract guidelines, the first of which comes from Matt Campbell at Johnson County Community College:

> Each academic division at JCCC offers Honors Contracts developed by individual faculty members for selected courses. The contracts, offered for one hour of additional credit, are designed as extensions to the regularly scheduled courses. In order to complete the contract, students are required to meet on a regularly scheduled basis with the instructor offering the contract for mentor-student tutorial sessions. The work in the contract may include doing additional reading and writing assignments, completing expanded field or laboratory work, and writing term papers or other suitable assignments.

A more detailed sample set of guidelines for honors contract work comes from Sister Thomas Corbett at Ohio Dominican College; the sheet format has been reproduced in Figure 4.1 on the following page as closely as possible. The student who chooses the Honors Option must participate fully in determining what work should be done to fulfill the option, emphasizing student responsibility, and the projects are designed to stress critical thinking and interdisciplinarity, important elements of writing across the curriculum and honors education.

Figure 4.1: Honors Option Work at Ohio Dominican College

Guidelines for the Honors Courses Option
in the English Division

Honors courses are designed to stimulate creativity, critical thinking, and analytical skills. This program allows students to work closely with a faculty mentor who will help them with their independent work. The work, however, is the responsibility of the student. Therefore, a student who chooses to enroll in courses within the English Division with the honors option must have successfully fulfilled the following requirements:

- English 110 and 111 (or the permission of the instructor and Sr. Thomas Corbett)
- Have a G.P.A. of 3.2 or better
- Should be at least in his/her sophomore year

**Format for the Honors Option in English Courses:**

- Full-time faculty must teach honors courses. These courses may be offered at any level and should have some of the following characteristics:
  - Require a high level of student involvement and responsibility;
  - Stress critical thinking;
  - Use interdisciplinary approach.
- Involve student in project design:
  - Each individual student should participate in the formulation of his/her project in any given course;
  - The faculty member must approve the project or suggest modification to the student if necessary;
  - Each student must sign his/her contractual agreement with the instructor.
- Allow an in-depth study of a related topic to the course of special interest to the student. Therefore, the student must:
  - Select his/her topic
  - Write a paragraph or two outlining his/her proposed project of the honors option due **three weeks** after classes begin;
  - Present the proposal to the faculty member who must approve or offer suggestions to the student on the proposal;
  - Present a timeline to the faculty member, who in turn, must review it with the student;
  - A copy of the approved project should be submitted to Sister T.A. Corbett;
  - Present an oral presentation of the project in class — at least twenty minutes long;
  - It is the student's obligation to fulfill these requirements if the course is to serve as an honors option.

**Standards**

Each student:

- Should project A standard.
- Must demonstrate exceptional standards.
- Should maintain a grade of at least B+ or better, if not, forfeit the Honors Option.

## SENIOR THESES AND CAPSTONE PROJECTS

When program requirements include a senior thesis or other capstone project, students can understandably be intimidated by such a lengthy, involved project. Many major programs tightly restrict a student's schedule from semester to semester, so some students may have neither the credit hours available nor the personal motivation to devote to what in many programs represents the equivalent of a master's thesis. In fact, honors program completion rates can be negatively affected when a thesis is required for honors designation at graduation. Thus, it is essential for the honors program to provide some form of preparation, to encourage faculty mentorship of the project, to help participants set research and drafting deadlines, and to help both faculty and students to establish clear criteria for evaluation of individual projects.

Theses and capstone projects can differ in important ways: while the traditional thesis project focuses on some form of substantial, individual research and writing, the capstone project can range widely from writing a play, composing a musical work, or collaborating on a bridge design project or invention to holding a show of artwork or designing and implementing a curricular change at a local school. This section will focus on the traditional thesis process; however, guidelines and suggestions may be used where applicable in the written portion of each of these types of senior projects.

Typical questions about thesis work include the following items covered in this section:

1. Why should honors students write a thesis?
2. Should the thesis be required or optional?
3. How should students prepare for the thesis?
4. How long should the thesis take to complete?
5. How long should the thesis be?
6. Who should evaluate the thesis?
7. With what criteria should the thesis be evaluated?

### 1. Why should honors students write a thesis?

If program directors and faculty mentors are going to ask undergraduate students to undertake what is essentially graduate-level research and writing, they should be prepared to explain to the students why this high-level task is being assigned and what the students will gain from the experience.

First, researching and writing a thesis are good preparation for graduate or professional school: students will become familiar with

graduate-level work, they will prepare a document that will demonstrate their potential for future individual research and writing, and they will have the opportunity to follow one research project through a cycle that includes proposal, research, write-up, oral defense and possibly conference presentation and publication. Students who do not plan to pursue further education, however, may be reluctant regarding these points, so program directors and faculty advisors can help these students to shape a thesis project toward preparing a portfolio capstone to be used during employment searches and interviews. In this way, the thesis can demonstrate a student's individual motivation, communication skill, and ability to commit to and finish a lengthy research and writing task.

The thesis project is also an opportunity for students to delve in greater depth into specific areas of their fields of professional interest. Dedicating a substantial amount of time and effort to one project can help students make the transition from in-class exercises and term papers taking only a few weeks (or days or hours) to write to those workplace projects taking months to produce. Intense work on one field-specific topic can also help students to determine whether this topic and even the field overall are really what they wish to pursue professionally. Although the last semester or two may seem like the wrong time to change one's mind about professional pursuits, the thesis project, as with internships and co-ops, affords a better, relatively safe time to decide this than during the student's first professional project or year. On the positive side, the thesis project can cement the student's choice of major, providing confidence and personal satisfaction about future professional decisions.

The thesis may also allow students and their faculty advisors to work more closely together. Advisors may involve honors students in their own research projects, allowing these students to participate more fully in research analysis and write-up, but the thesis enables the student to take control of these elements and to produce them with the advisor's guidance and experience. Advisors can help students identify important issues in the field that need to be researched and then guide the students in performing research within the appropriate scope, resources, and abilities of each student. Thus, advisors can help prepare students for research, writing, presentation, and publication appropriate to that field.

Considering these arguments, program directors and honors faculty should work together to make the thesis experience a positive one for their students, and they can shape each program's requirements and each student's project using the following sections.

2. Should the thesis be required or optional?

Of the survey respondents who indicated that their honors program includes a thesis or capstone project, approximately three-fourths indicated that this project is required to complete the program. Naturally, thesis completion rates drop when the project is optional, but so do overall program completion rates when the thesis is required (see Tables 3.20 and 3.21, pp. 111 and 112 respectively). Such tables confirm the argument that a large research and writing project may be too time-consuming and/or too intimidating for some honors students, who may avoid or abandon the project even at the cost of failing to complete the honors program.

Therefore, program directors who require the thesis as a final project but who also want to maintain as high a program completion rate as possible should work with honors faculty and students to ensure that the proper preparation, completion, and evaluation procedures are in place for each project. The remainder of the sections in this component unit address some of the basic concerns in these areas.

3. How should students prepare for the thesis?

Students can prepare to research and write a thesis in a variety of ways.

a. *Courses in the major field.* If students view the thesis as a "very big research paper," then they should realize that the research itself is an essential component in the process. To begin this project, students should review coursework and research projects they have already completed to aid in deciding what and how to research for the thesis. Ideally, students should be thinking about potential thesis topics as they progress through their major courses and honors colloquia, and program directors and faculty advisors should aid students as they go along. For example, Martha Woodward at Marshall University states that the thesis project "is meant to integrate and focus what they have learned in their major/s. We encourage them to integrate disciplines whenever possible. They get indoctrinated from their freshman year." Having considered various topics and research approaches throughout their undergraduate curricula, students in such a program will not reach their junior or senior years and approach the thesis process as if it were a surprise.

b. *Proposals.* After deciding upon a topic, students should write a proposal outlining the anticipated research, resources, and timeline for project and document completion. The average length of the thesis proposal is three pages, although this can vary among disciplines, as noted by Liz Beck of Iowa State University:

> It will vary with the college Honors requirements. There may be a very detailed proposal required, listing the objectives, the methodology and the project design. Other colleges require a paragraph description as a project proposal. Students may step far afield from their major to do an Honors project, so the intellectual preparation will vary.

Proposals are then reviewed and approved by the student's advisor and the program director. The overall timetable for proposal preparation, submission, and approval can vary as well, especially if students have not taken advantage of time and opportunities allotted for thorough preparation, as noted by Daniel Rigney of St. Mary's University:

> Honors Scholars are supposed to be incubating the project in the spring of their junior year and working on it over the summer, but most are notoriously behind schedule by Thanksgiving of their senior year [. . .]. They prepare for their projects mainly by reflecting on what their authentic interests are (usually in their major), defining their topics clearly (often in consultation with a faculty member whom they have requested as their first reader), and submitting their proposed topics on a response form provided to them in the spring of their junior year. In practice, however, half of our students haven't really decided what they want to write about until the beginning of the fall.

Some of this pressure can be alleviated by making students aware of requirements and timetables from the beginning of their programs, as suggested in the earlier section, and then providing firm guidance to adhere to deadlines.

c. *Work with advisor.* Students should work with a faculty advisor throughout thesis preparation and completion. First, advisors should monitor the validity of the research: Is the work interesting and valuable within that discipline? Is the student adhering to standards and procedures regarding quantitative and or qualitative research in that field, such as using required methods to calculate and confirm data or submitting university approval forms and collecting individual permission forms for human subjects research? Second, the advisor should monitor the student's writing style and thesis format, ensuring that the student uses field-appropriate language and terminology; correctly incorporates the necessary graphics, such as charts, graphs, maps, or drawings; cites relevant sources in the correct style (Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, Council of Biology Editors, American Chemical Society, and so forth); and formats front matter, chapter headings and

subheadings, and end matter according to standards in the discipline and/or the honors program. Third, advisors should be familiar with the procedures and forms for honors thesis completion and submission, from initial proposal to oral defense and binding, in order to help students to adhere to personal and program-driven timetables.

d. *Writing seminars.* Many programs offer special upper-division writing seminars to build the specific drafting, revising, citing, and formatting skills students will need to produce a lengthy, high-quality thesis. Within the seminar class, students also develop peer critiquing skills; in helping to flesh out the content and to polish the style in each other's drafts, students may also glean ideas they have found in others' drafts to aid revising their own papers. These seminars are usually taught by faculty from the school's English department, faculty from representative disciplines, and/or the program director.

e. *Research semesters.* Faculty-guided research semesters and independent study, taken for varying hours of academic credit, are also important to the completion of the thesis project. On one hand, honors students often take demanding course loads and may not be able to complete a lengthy thesis task while taking a full course load, so three or four credit hours of independent study inserted into — not in addition to — a full schedule might alleviate some of the pressure to complete a thesis project. On the other hand, because many students' course schedules are tightly sequenced and managed for required and elective courses from semester to semester, squeezing in extra credit hours for research and independent study may be difficult.

Program directors, advisors, and departmental faculty, then, should negotiate ways in which these credits can be substituted for general elective credits. For example, some honors programs already reduce the number of required general education electives in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences to give students more credit hours for exploring professional interests through double majors or multiple minors. In my own experience as a student and in informal discussions with colleagues and students, I have found that many college preparatory programs in high school have already covered much of the material from these introductory general education courses, so rather than cover this material again, honors students could better apply these hours elsewhere. Some of these hours, then, could be used for independent study to support the research and preparation necessary for the thesis.

Overall, these five types of thesis preparation function well when integrated with a thorough support network for the students, such as in the following examples:

Students take the required Honors courses. They are encouraged to begin undergraduate research early, so that they flow naturally into a project for their thesis. They must submit a proposal which describes how they decided on the thesis direction, their methodology and their time line and they must have a thesis advisor who signs this document. Some departments have a Thesis tutorial which can be taken for credit and students doing research in that department may do so; other departments have only the Thesis credit itself, so those students tend to register for only one semester; students with both tutorial and thesis can take credit for two semesters, that of research and that of writing. (Judith Zivanovic, Kansas State University)

Usually in steps as they proceed through honors: the two composition courses (one emphasizing research; writing); shorter honors papers; H399-Honors Independent Study (major project or 30 page paper); undergraduate research grant program-similar to H399, but for grant funds rather than credit; then the senior thesis. They submit a form and 2 page proposal to the Honors Council for approval. In the summer, the Honors director approves or requests revision, rewrite. (Sally Cone, Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis)

I conduct two evening seminars for first-semester juniors, distributing and explaining the thesis guidelines that we have prepared. I encourage them to consult — current Honors Program seniors working on theses, copies of recent theses in their academic field, faculty members who have served as thesis advisors, departmental chairpersons, etc. — and to start thinking and conversing about possible thesis topics for their own projects.

In some ways, the entire sequence of Honors Program seminars, one each semester their first two and a half years, prepares them for the project. The last of those seminars is itself a semester-long single collaborative research project, following an engineering systems design approach. The transition from collaborative research to independent research should be nearly automatic. Otherwise, preparation varies from student to student and even more from discipline to discipline. (R. Alan Kimbrough, University of Dayton)

Students who have already invested time and effort into meeting with their advisors and program directors, writing proposals, conducting independent research, and participating in writing

workshops are more likely to view the thesis as a task that is well within their abilities to accomplish. Therefore, the honors program should provide guidance through these supporting opportunities to ensure higher thesis completion rates and, subsequently, higher overall completion rates for programs requiring the thesis for graduation.

4. How long should the thesis take to complete?

According to interview respondents, the average thesis takes two semesters to complete; some may be completed in one semester, while others may take three semesters or more. The project timetable for each student's thesis depends upon two factors: the length of program and the target length of the document. For instance, students in honors programs at two-year schools may not have as much time for contemplation, preparation, and completion as students in four-year schools. On the other hand, some program directors at two-year schools may ensure that students are preparing to write the thesis or capstone project from their first term, while some students at four-year schools may simply write a proposal and then spend one semester researching and writing the thesis.

Sample timelines listed here are provided by program directors; these responses demonstrate typical ways in which thesis preparation and completion are approached. The first example is from Karl Oelke at Union County College:

> We begin by assigning subject matter experts around Thanksgiving time of the previous semester and ask the student and mentor to meet at least once before Christmas vacation to select a topic and get a reading list together. During the second week of the spring semester, I ask students to submit an annotated bibliography of at least six book-length works that will help them do their paper (to mentor with copy to me). During the third week, all students and all mentors meet with me to discuss where they are (topic limitation, bibliography, sources, etc.). Around 6th week of the semester, I meet with the students for a progress check. Around the 10th week of the semester I again meet with students, when they submit a first draft of their paper (at least 12 pages long) (draft to mentors with copy to me). Final drafts due to mentors (with copy to me) the 14th week of the semester. During final exam period, students present their research findings orally in "open" presentation (we "hire" a seminar room and advertise to all faculty, staff, and students — attendance averages around 10-20, with a reasonable mix of faculty, staff, and students).

In this timeline, we can see how the thesis process is effectively broken up into several short, manageable tasks that are due at regular intervals throughout the main thesis semester. Students are in frequent contact with their thesis advisors and program directors, and they work to build the thesis throughout the term rather than scrambling in the last few weeks to produce a lengthy document.

The second sample timeline, from R. Alan Kimbrough at the University of Dayton, demonstrates the thesis process extended over two semesters between the junior and senior years:

> We normally ask the students to register for their six thesis credits in two blocks of three credits — the second semester of their junior year and the first semester of their senior year. We urge them to complete the thesis half-way through their senior year or shortly thereafter. My experience in this job for the past seven years has been consistent: we rarely have any theses turned in before the last four weeks of the year. So, if you define the duration as beginning with the first thesis preparation seminar in October of the junior year, you could say the thesis project takes 19-20 months. The registration for the thesis credits equals two semesters but bears no necessary relation to the time students devote to the thesis project. Many have found it possible to do nearly all of the research work for their thesis in the summer between their junior and senior years.

Kimbrough acknowledges the fact that although preparation for the thesis begins in October of his students' junior year, and even though most complete the necessary research during the following summer, most students do not submit their final thesis drafts until the last month of their senior years. Therefore, programs requiring increasingly lengthy theses (fifty pages and up) should provide enough time for the students to propose, research, draft, and revise such documents, as demonstrated by the two-semester approach in the second example, but they should also incorporate set deadlines for specific "sub-tasks," as demonstrated by the one-semester, part-to-whole approach in the first example, to keep students on track while they balance the thesis with their required courseload.

5. How long should the thesis be?

As discussed above, length varies among programs and departments, but on average, undergraduate honors theses usually fall between thirty and fifty pages. Several program directors

indicated, however, that substantial differences in thesis length can be found among types of majors, as noted below.

> This varies by discipline: The sciences tend to have very long-term projects which are reported out in relatively short theses — from as few as 10 plus pictures from one who made a discovery which changed the way slides were handled beyond the campus, to 20, with the occasional 30 pp. with pictures. The Social Sciences and Humanities tend to be longer, from about 50-70 pp. The Arts/creative projects will tend to be 30-40 or so, sometimes with art. (Judith Zivanovic, Kansas State University)
>
> The honors thesis is 50 pages or longer, except in math and some of the creative arts in which it supplements an extensive project. (Joan Digby, LIU/CW Post)
>
> Theses typically run about 40-50 pages in the humanities and social sciences, but are often briefer in the sciences (as few as 18-20 pp. in biology, where the writing is tight and technical), and may go to 200 pages in computer science if they involve pages and pages of written code. We don't have any formal page length requirement, but we don't like to see anything less than 20 pages as a rule. (Daniel Rigney, St. Mary's University)
>
> Depends on the field — maybe 15 pages of text in the natural sciences up to 200 pages for History or English. (Diane Levy, University of North Carolina-Wilmington)
>
> Anything from 25 pages in the engineering or science up to 300 pages in literature and history. (Susanna Finnell, Texas A&M University)
>
> Length depends on subject and credit hours; students may do a 3 to 15 hour thesis, but most choose to do 3 or 6. I would say the average Liberal Arts thesis runs 50 pages; science papers tend to be shorter. We also allow "projects" which are more creative and include novels (often hundreds of pages); poems; art projects; original compositions, and computer software. (Peter Sederberg, South Carolina Honors College)
>
> Social sciences 50-60; Humanities 40-50; Sciences 20-30 (with lots of addenda, charts, graphs, etc.). These are gross estimates; I've had a 12-pager from a biologist studying nutria and a 230 page novel from a social work major attempting to do

a fictive study of philanthropy in Elizabethan England. (Tony Whall, Salisbury State University)

These directors consistently indicate that the body text of theses in the sciences is shorter while that of theses in the humanities and social sciences is longer, a tendency that program directors should consider when assigning or recommending general thesis length for all their honors students.

6. Who should evaluate the thesis?

After the student has worked hard to research, draft, revise, and submit the thesis, the thesis reviewer's task begins. Given the student penchant alluded to above to put thesis completion off for as long as possible, reviewers will then be evaluating these lengthy documents at the last minute as well. If students submit memos and drafts throughout the semester, as described in the first example in the previous section, then the reviewing task is slightly easier, for the reviewer has already seen the bulk of the students' material in one form or another. If no such measures are in place, however, the reviewer must devote extra time during thesis reading to provide a thorough evaluation of content, writing style, and format; this task is challenging in an ideal situation but becomes more difficult when faculty members are also reviewing end-of-semester exams and seminar papers from their regular undergraduate and graduate courses. Therefore, responsibility for thorough thesis evaluation should be shared by multiple faculty members in the ways listed below:

a. *Course instructor.* When the thesis is specifically written as part of a course or seminar, the course instructor should be the primary evaluator for content, style, and format; the project should have input from the student's advisor, but the instructor should still be the main reader.

b. *Advisor or thesis director.* When the thesis is written to satisfy requirements for honors program completion or special honors certification at graduation, a thesis advisor or director should guide and evaluate the project. In their responses to the question of who should evaluate the thesis, some program directors responded that the advisor is the sole evaluator:

The student's advisor for the project; the Honors Program has no role in evaluation. (Aliina Hirschoff, American University)

The mentor - the professor in the major field who is guiding both the thesis and the research semester. The honors program

director is fully aware of the status/topoi/depth of all projects through syllabi and direct contact with the students. (Linda Webster, University of Arkansas, Monticello)

Theoretically by the director and council; in actual practice, by the faculty adviser. (Brian Murphy, Oakland University)

To share the responsibility for thesis evaluation, however, as noted above, the advisor should work together with a specially designated thesis committee, a panel of selected outside readers, and/or the program director.

c. *Thesis committee.* If a program's thesis requirement is truly comparable to a graduate-level thesis, students should also be required to convene a committee to help direct and evaluate the thesis just as a graduate student would. Thesis committees can be constructed in a variety of ways, depending upon program and faculty resources. Examples include the following:

Each Project has, as part of its designated examination committee, a Project Director, two members of the faculty from the department in question, one faculty member from outside that department, and one faculty liaison from the Departmental Honors Committee. (The DHON committee consists of about 15 faculty members from a variety of departments on campus.) The project is evaluated by the exam committee, which reviews the paper itself and the student's oral defense of the project. The exam committee recommends honors or whatever to the Departmental Honors Committee, the body that officially makes the awards. (Gavin Townsend, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga)

Committee of 3 profs. selected by the student, 2 in major and 1 outside. (Alison Trinkle, Texas Christian University)

A thesis committee appointed by the Honors Program Committee. (Al Williams, Manchester College)

d. *Outside readers.* In lieu of a formal thesis committee, outside readers can assist in thesis evaluation. Such readers should include faculty from the student's major department or from other departments; in either case, these faculty should serve as "fresh" readers who have not been involved in the research and drafting processes and who will thus provide a more objective reading for the final thesis document. Examples include the following:

> The thesis is evaluated by the advisor and a reader, who may or may not be from the same department, depending on the subject. (Joan Digby, LIU/CW Post)
>
> By all members of the department. An oral exam on the thesis is conducted by the department. A "consensus" grade is given by the student's thesis adviser. (Joe Walser, Alma College)

e. *Program director.* Because students are completing the thesis as part of honors program requirements, the program director should also be involved in thesis evaluation. Some directors take an active role:

> The first reader (normally a faculty member in the major) works directly with the student on matters of substance. I, the Honors Director, serve as a second reader and copy editor on some 15-20 theses a year. It's labor-intensive. I defer to the judgment of the first reader in submitting a final grade for the student. (Daniel Rigney, St. Mary's University)

Other directors serve more as facilitators or mediators:

> Faculty mentor has sole authority to assign grade, but I as Honors Program Director get a copy and give feedback also. If there ever were a situation where I believed an injustice were being done, I would feel comfortable talking to the faculty member about it, but, in practice, most have been very solicitous of my input. (Karl Oelke, Union County College)

As Rigney notes above, thesis evaluation is labor-intensive, and while a thesis committee or group of outside readers can share the responsibility for such a task, they should also come to a consensus of what constitutes a good thesis. This will ensure a certain degree of consistency in thesis experience from student to student within the same major program and between programs. Although writing topics and writing styles naturally differ between professional fields, students who compare their research efforts and number of pages with other honors students should be assured that their projects are typical of those in that particular field.

7. To what standards should an honors thesis be held?

In evaluating the honors thesis, readers should insist upon excellence in all aspects of a student's performance: the topic should be significant and interesting; the qualitative or quantitative

research methodology and results should be valid and reliable; the writing should demonstrate superiority in all aspects of organization, development, and style; and the student's overall performance should merit consideration as honors work, graduate-level scholarship, or research of publishable quality in that field. This section reviews the use of various criteria for thesis evaluation.

a. *Specific criteria.* Although thesis projects differ in nature among professional disciplines, the honors program director should provide a set of general criteria with which readers in any discipline can begin to evaluate an undergraduate honors thesis. These criteria should address different student, faculty, department, and program needs in demonstrating writing skill, critical thinking ability, quality of research, format, and presentation.

A well-phrased example of specific criteria for thesis evaluation comes from Gavin Townsend at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga:

> Projects can be denied honors, awarded honors, or awarded "highest honors." To be worthy of highest honors, the papers should meet the following general criteria (as quoted from the UTC Departmental Honors Handbook):
> The paper should include a clear, compelling introduction to the subject of the project, presenting a developed context for the research question or thesis. The writer's thesis or hypothesis should be sophisticated, meaningful, and clearly stated early in the paper. The paper's organization should be rigorous, well-developed, and consistently apparent to the reader. The writer's presentation of researched materials should be managed with skill [. . .] gracefully synthesized into the argument of the paper, and orchestrated such that the author maintains control of the paper's purpose and direction. Sources should be precisely and consistently cited according to standards accepted in the discipline (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.). The paper's conclusion should be thorough, drawing together the threads of the argument or thesis and making plain the writer's conclusions about the subject. The bibliography should include a convincing array of relevant source materials, such that the reader is certain of the writer's authority on the subject. Editing and proofreading of the final draft must be exhaustive. The candidate must demonstrate an unusual ability to defend the project with confidence and intelligence in an oral examination. (page 11)

b. *Field-appropriate work.* Some programs require that their undergraduate students produce honors theses comparable to graduate-level work or other professional, discipline-specific projects:

The criteria are based on the criteria for a master's thesis in the discipline. (Dan Patterson, University of Memphis)

Some variation by discipline, but I would say first year graduate paper quality. (James Knauer, Lock Haven University)

c. *Advisor criteria.* With great potential for variation in thesis projects among disciplines, some programs assign the responsibility for establishing evaluation criteria to the student's advisor:

Mostly our top faculty are those who agree to advise the project and they decide up front if the project is worthy. If the student lives up to the proposal and the faculty member signs off, that is a big step. It is important that this be a worthy project and a significant effort of research and reporting. (Judith Zivanovic, Kansas State University)

Criteria are determined by the thesis advisor. I urge the students to have those spelled out in some detail at the very beginning of the project. (R. Alan Kimbrough, University of Dayton)

d. *Publishable quality.* Some programs use standards for field-specific undergraduate or professional publication to evaluate the thesis:

It should be publishable as undergraduate research. (Jim Lacey, East Connecticut State University)

The announced aim is "publishable quality." Faculty are free to define "Honors" as they will. (Ellen Miller Casey, University of Scranton)

The project is normally evaluated in the same way that a journal submission would be evaluated in the field in which the student is writing. Students use the standard citation format and professional style of their discipline. We impose no centralized criteria, since projects vary so markedly. (Some, for example, are novels; others are engineering inventions, etc.). (Daniel Rigney, St. Mary's University)

Whatever criteria each program director, faculty advisor, or thesis committee decide upon, as Kimbrough notes above, these criteria should be made clear to students, advisors, and other evaluating faculty members. In this way, all thesis participants can work together to ensure that students produce the best work for their

program needs, their disciplinary needs, and their own personal, intellectual needs.

### Additional Thesis Information

Included in Appendix E is a sample rationale statement submitted by Mel Shoemaker, director of the honors program at Azusa Pacific University. In this statement, readers can see how elements from each of the sections in this thesis component come together to build a manageable thesis experience for both students and faculty. Program directors and faculty advisors seeking additional information regarding the honors thesis should refer to Kenneth Bruffee's article "Making the Senior Thesis Work" in *Forum for Honors* (Spring/Summer 1993, 2-10).

## PRESENTATION AND PUBLICATION OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to traditional undergraduate academic activities, honors students often have opportunities to develop oral and written communication skills in more professional venues, such as research conferences and journals. This section identifies some of the options honors students and their advisors and program directors should pursue.

1. What types of presentation opportunities do honors students have?

Although these guidelines focus mainly on written communication, effective oral communication is also important in conveying a student's critical thinking abilities and field-specific knowledge. For example, participation in seminar discussions can demonstrate not only that students can think critically and creatively during a debate but also that they show confidence in the point they are arguing through strong eye contact, necessary volume, appropriate body language, and other conventions of oral communication expected in our society's contemporary academic and nonacademic workplaces. (International practices and differences can also be studied and discussed.) In addition to taking specific communication courses, students can develop their oral presentation skills in these common ways:

a. *In-class work.* Class participation and in-class presentations are important components not only in composition and communication courses but in honors seminars and colloquia and in a growing number of upper-division courses in all fields. Instructors should indicate whether and how quality and/or quantity of participation will be factored into the final grade. They should also

make clear their criteria for evaluating oral presentations and adhere to those criteria throughout the term; thus they should spend some amount of time in class discussing what constitutes effective professional oral communication. Criteria for excellence in oral presentations should include a strong introduction, well-structured organization of the material, the effective use of audiovisual aids, a spread of eye contact across the audience, appropriate volume and tone, a comprehensive conclusion, and the ability to answer questions afterward.

b. *Department- or institution-based symposia.* Undergraduate students can gain experience in giving conference-style presentations and posters through symposia sponsored by their departments, their honors programs, or their institutions. Some departments at various schools require that all seniors give one oral presentation during a weekly symposium session attended by faculty, graduate students, and other undergraduate students. Various colleges and universities also hold annual undergraduate research symposia, which are often sponsored in part by the school's honors program; symposium administrators can determine whether the presentations and posters will be competitively judged and awarded or not.

To help sponsor a full one-day or two-day undergraduate honors research symposium, the honors program can participate in several ways. First, the program director and staff should be responsible for budgeting resources and making arrangements for rooms, equipment, and refreshments. Thesis advisors and honors

committee members should serve as the organizational committee for scheduling participants, grouping presentations, and serving as judges if presentations and posters are to be judged. Undergraduates at earlier stages in the honors program should observe senior or capstone presentations and gain insight into the thesis process by staffing the symposium as panel chairs, audiovisual assistants, and general facilitators; they should also be involved in producing posters, flyers, programs, award certificates, and other supporting promotional materials. Afterward, all involved should be acknowledged at an awards reception or luncheon, at which time awards should be distributed for outstanding presentations and posters in various fields and categories.

c. *Thesis defenses.* Most honors programs requiring a senior thesis also require the corresponding thesis defense. This is excellent preparation for students who plan to continue their studies in a graduate program, but it can also help develop presentation, discussion, and argumentation skills for those students entering nonacademic workplaces. Students should meet with their advisors, committee members, and program directors to prepare for the

defense. The advisor and committee members should inform students about how a defense is conducted in that particular field: what introductory comments the committee will expect from the student, what types of questions the student can expect and how the student might respond appropriately, and how the defense will be evaluated as a part of the thesis process and the overall honors program completion process.

The program director should provide general guidelines for conducting defenses in any field to maintain consistency within the program. Suggestions include the following: the defense should be at least one full hour but no longer than two; the thesis advisor should conduct a brief "mock defense" session to prepare the student for sample questions; the advisor should also apprise the student of prospective audience members from outside the committee, expectations for audiovisual presentation, and other environmental considerations (even expected manner of dress); and the committee should inform the student about pass or fail status immediately following the defense and should provide detailed written comments about strengths and weaknesses in the student's performance within seven days of the defense.

d. *Conference presentations.* More undergraduate students are participating in local, regional, and national conferences, such as the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, and honors students are no exception. In fact, students are encouraged to participate in the annual national National Collegiate Honors Council conference as well as regional and state honors conferences. Undergraduate students are also participating in and giving presentations at professional conferences in their major fields, either individually or in conjunction with their advising professor. Again, presentations are excellent preparation for students planning to pursue graduate work or academic careers, but they can also help students become accustomed to presenting research and proposals in front of strangers, a situation they may encounter in any number of research, corporate, and government jobs. Students may choose to travel to these conferences individually, but many times they will travel with their advisors, program directors, and/or other students. In either case, advisors and program directors should assist students in making travel arrangements, acquiring funding, and rehearsing the presentation.

With any type of oral presentation, students should have the guidance and support of honors faculty, advisors, and program directors. What might begin as a ten-minute oral presentation in an honors technical writing course, in which the instructor has created a supportive environment where students are encouraged to experiment with presentation styles, may lead to further research

and additional presentations at gradually larger and more prestigious regional and national conferences. Program directors and faculty should make students aware of such opportunities and assist with preparation and monetary support for them.

2. What types of publication opportunities do honors students have?

To those of us in the academic workplace, the "publish or perish" philosophy has generated a considerable amount of anxiety concerning the importance of publications in one's professional development and advancement. Although most students will never publish an article, chapter, or book unless they plan to pursue graduate work and/or enter a field where publication is required, we should educate our students about the publication process because publications of various types are good résumé and *vita* lines, and students can take pride in watching their double-spaced academic papers turn into professionally typeset and bound documents.

Rather than feel pressured to direct students toward professional journals right away, program directors and faculty advisors have several options through which they can guide undergraduate students in building credentials toward more competitive publication.

a. *Student publications.* Various programs and campuses publish collections of student work that students edit and manage themselves under the supervision of a faculty advisor. Formats range from an informal, spiral-bound collection of essays and papers from one class or a variety of courses and majors to a professionally designed and bound annual journal. Undergraduate honors students should be responsible for various aspects of publishing the collection, such as review, selection, editing, desktop publishing, printing, binding, and distribution; thus, student staff members gain experience in publication design and management, and student contributors participate in the submission and review process. An honors faculty advisor should provide guidance in publication management and assist in securing production funding and materials.

b. *Undergraduate research and creative journals.* Since publication in the traditional professional journal is typically extremely competitive enough among credentialed faculty and professionals in a given field, program directors and advisors should encourage their honors students to submit their work to journals designed specifically for undergraduate research. With these journals, students can still experience competitive selection and blind review while having a higher chance of being published than in journals designed for graduate and professional work. Program directors and faculty advisors should make their students aware of these journals and

encourage submission, helping students understand and adhere to submission guidelines and deadlines.

c. *Scholarly and professional journals.* At this level, individual undergraduate students have little actual chance of being published individually; however, students who participate in their faculty advisors' own research projects can be included in article bylines, whether the student only assists in the research or actually participates in the write-up. While honors students may have advanced writing skills, the professor should still be the primary author, with possible assistance from participating graduate students. In this case, the undergraduate honors student should still observe and participate as much as possible in the drafting, editing, and submission processes to acquire a sense of the publication review process in that field.

d. *Electronic and on-line journals.* As designing and accessing web sites become easier and more professional journals publish on-line versions of their latest issues, students and faculty alike will have increased opportunity for publication through electronic media. While technorhetoricians debate issues of intellectual property, validity of research without the traditional review process in place, and credit (or lack thereof) toward professional development concerning electronic publication, students may find this a relatively easy way to be published in a professional venue. Program directors and faculty advisors should help their students research these on-line opportunities to investigate which journals and publications have achieved a desired level of credibility within a particular field.

Another opportunity for electronic publication is for honors programs to begin their own on-line journals, which could be incorporated into the program's homepage. Such journals might then be networked among programs under the auspices of the NCHC. As with the student publications discussed above, undergraduate honors students should serve as webmasters and editors of their journals, with an honors faculty advisor to supervise electronic account management and adherence to specific school regulations for institutionally based web sites. In this fashion, students may electronically publish various papers and senior theses or capstone projects, which will then be available as models and possible required seminar reading for students in earlier stages of the program.

Overall, presentation and publication opportunities are good ways for honors students to develop an idea beyond the initial research project and written paper. These processes help students to move away from thinking about oral and written presentation merely as tools to achieve a certain grade toward using these venues to disseminate important information and exchange original

ideas. Through these activities, students will also network with other students and professionals in their fields, building important relationships and investigating opportunities for future employment and graduate study.

## PORTFOLIOS

The portfolio movement is spreading not only throughout college-level composition courses but elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education in general. Writing portfolios are generally structured in two ways: in some classes, students collect every exercise, draft, revision, and instructor comment sheet throughout the term in a folder or binder for a final evaluation, while in other classes, students may choose the best representations of their work for the final evaluation, comparable to creating a professional portfolio for job applications. Each process involves a substantial amount of work on the part of the student and the instructor.

1. Why should honors students compile portfolios?

Traditionally, as students proceed throughout an academic term or year, their progress is assessed through homework, projects, tests, and reports; their performance is measured through letter grades and/or point totals; and their academic careers can thus be summarized neatly on a few pages of academic transcripts. The portfolio, however, provides a venue for a more holistic, tangible evaluation of the student's progress during the course. For instance, in a freshman composition course, rather than merely accumulating a series of letter grades, students who maintain a course portfolio can readily look back at the end of the semester and see the progress they have made throughout the course in in-class exercises, major essays and revisions, and research papers. This compilation assists instructors in the same way: although portfolio review can be time-consuming, these collections provide instructors with an accurate sense of whether a student has actually progressed as a writer and thinker during the course.

Portfolios can also be kept throughout the student's entire academic program and can benefit students, advisors, and program directors in several ways. First, students and their advisors can chart the student's progress through the degree program and major coursework through an annual review of portfolio materials. Report cards and transcripts merely report grades, while portfolio materials demonstrate firsthand how the student has developed argumentation skills, field-specific knowledge, and communication skills appropriate to that discipline; reviews of such materials can give the student a

more authentic sense of accomplishment than a list of courses and grades. Second, the student will have a readily available collection of research and writing upon which to build a prospective thesis and from which to select the best samples for employment searches and graduate school applications. Third, program directors and honors faculty can refer to portfolios in assessing the program and its courses, using documents from groups of students across several years for self-assessment or to show other faculty and administrators concrete examples of excellent work being done in the program.

2. What should students include in their portfolios?

Portfolio content can vary by instructor preference, program requirement, and student choice. Depending upon these factors, portfolios can include everything the students have produced, or they can consist of the students' best work. In this section, portfolios are divided into two types: course-based portfolios and cumulative program portfolios. Course-based portfolios may build to the cumulative program portfolio, in which case the course instructors and program director should discuss how the portfolios should progress to the final product. Course portfolios, however, can be compiled independently, and program portfolios can be compiled without the benefit of earlier portfolios.

Course-based portfolios vary according to the type of course. For example, portfolios in composition classes should include in-class exercises, writing journals, drafts, revisions, comments — all materials from the semester — so that both instructors and students can monitor growth in writing skills. In an honors seminar or colloquium, a portfolio could contain a log of responses to readings, drafts of seminar papers and their accompanying peer critiques and instructor comments, and other written materials generated during the course. Under the influence of the writing-across-the-curriculum movement, writing is incorporated into more types of courses in many different majors, and students could compile portfolios in these classes as well. For example, an honors chemistry course portfolio could include homework, quizzes, and exams in addition to printouts and drafts of lab reports. Portfolios are also a good place to keep syllabi, handouts, and notes for future reference and for assistance in evaluation of whether the student has met the course objectives. In any instance, students should also compose a reflective cover letter or essay at the conclusion of compiling the portfolio. Again, this helps both the student and the instructor to assess development of writing skills and mastery of the content of the course.

Cumulative program portfolios can include everything the student has done throughout the academic program — research papers,

essays, exams, notes — and should include at minimum the student's best written work from a variety of courses. Some students give conference presentations in essay or poster form, and students should remember to include these in the portfolio. The same holds true for the inclusion of publications, especially if the student's name is included in the byline of a faculty mentor's published article or chapter; even if the student did not participate in the actual write-up of the research, he or she still participated in research of publishable quality. If the student has completed a co-op or internship, written materials from these should be included as well. As with the course-based portfolio, the cumulative program portfolio should include a reflective letter or essay from the student, addressing the student's development of writing skills, mastery of content in major courses, and progress through the honors program.

Another option would be to design a professional portfolio to be used for applications to graduate programs or to professional employment opportunities. This portfolio should contain samples of the student's best written work in that field (e.g., essays, research reports, and scripts), focusing on documents in which content and format will relate the most to the type of position or program to which the student applies. The student should also include a résumé or *curriculum vita*, an abstract or general letter of transmittal at the beginning of the portfolio, and other professional-looking documents (e.g., correspondence, brochures, handouts, and proposals) that he or she has produced.

In addition to paper documents, some students may wish to include electronic materials on disk in their portfolios. For example, student-designed computer programs and applications should be run on disk rather than printed. Granted, this limits evaluation to those with the field-specific knowledge and the necessary hardware and software to run the program, but such programs are just as important as traditional papers within the scheme of a student's professional development, so they should be included in the portfolio. With various programs readily available on disk in the portfolio, students can easily select the appropriate disk to present during job interviews. Students should check ahead of time to ensure that the interviewer has the necessary hardware and software available to run the program, but actually demonstrating the program during the interview makes a much stronger impression than merely describing it orally or in writing. Further, students may design professionally-focused web pages and include disk copies of these to be run in the evaluator's or interviewer's browser. At the very least, the portfolio can include the site's URL and hard copy printouts of selected pages; on-campus evaluators may have time to look these up on their own time, but time is limited during job interviews, so having a

disk copy ready to run may be more convenient. If students do want to include such disks, they must remember to check disks frequently for viruses, especially if the disks contain material composed on a variety of machines or if the students use their disks frequently in job interviews on a number of machines.

3. How should students format their portfolios?

Portfolios may be formatted in a variety of ways, and instructors and program directors should consider not only the amount of effort but also the prospective cost to the student when establishing criteria for portfolio format. If the honors program can subsidize formatting for cumulative portfolios, either through monetary allowances or through use of resources (e.g., binders, printers, and copiers), more students will be able to create collections with spiral or offset binding, color printing, and high quality paper. The program should also compensate the student if a copy of the cumulative portfolio will be kept by the program for future reference by students and other faculty. Instructors requiring course-based portfolios may also request copies of the students' portfolios, but depending upon the length of the portfolio and the honors resources available to students and to the instructor, students may or may not be able to be compensated for individual course portfolios.

a. *Organization.* Students can organize their portfolios in various ways, depending upon what the student wishes to emphasize and what the program requires to be included in the portfolio. For example, students might arrange their selected documents in chronological order, beginning with their first-year work and then continuing through their two-year or four-year programs; in this way, students and evaluators can assess the progress made from term to term. Another organizational format would group work from courses in the student's major first, highlighting the student's professional interests and abilities, and then group work from minor courses and electives behind this. Front matter in either type should include a cover page, a letter to the program director and/or other readers in which the student reflects upon his or her body of work, a table of contents, and a list of appendices or other special enclosures. Documents may then be grouped by year, term, and course or by major, minor, and electives.

To assist in keeping the material organized, students should begin compiling their portfolios during their first term and add to them as they continue their studies rather than attempting to dig up old papers and arrange them right before graduation or the established portfolio due date(s). Program directors should provide guidelines at the beginning of a student's honors program work and request a

review of portfolio contents on a term-by-term or annual basis. In this way, the students may also evaluate their own progress from term to term.

b. *Materials.* As noted above, the materials that students choose to use or are required to use to create their portfolios can depend upon how much the students can afford to spend, what resources they have, and how much material they are expected to include in the portfolio. Below are some of the common materials used to construct a student writing portfolio.

(1) Three-ring binders. Binders make organizing, adding, deleting, and rearranging the documents in portfolios easy for students. They are relatively inexpensive, as are supporting supplies such as three-hole punchers, tabbed dividers, and plastic sheet protectors. The binders come in a wide variety of sizes, and while the largest ones can become a bit unwieldy, they do hold considerable material in one place. The three-ring binder works well for a course-based portfolio, with one binder made per course. For the cumulative program portfolio, however, unless students will be submitting multiple binders in order to encompass all types of papers, exams, notes, and handouts, this compilation is best limited to major papers and exams from the student's courses.

(2) File folders. A collection of file folders is a better way to collect all of the student's papers, exams, notes, and handouts in one place for the cumulative program portfolio, and it also works well for the course-based portfolio. This method does, though, necessitate the use of an expanding (accordion) file, hanging file folders within a file case, or even a regular box or milk crate to keep the documents organized. This format is more comprehensive and does allow for a thorough review of the student's development, but larger forms can be unwieldy to transport for both student and reader.

(3) Spiral binding. This and other types of permanent binding work best for written group projects in business and technical communication courses, for a more selective and thus less bulky final individual portfolio, or for a professional compilation of writing samples to be sent with graduate school applications or to be used in employment interviews. This binding lends a professional look to the portfolio, but it must be delayed until the compilation process is finished and all front and end matter has been prepared because students cannot add or remove items on a regular basis without tearing up the materials. The portfolio contents must also be selective rather than comprehensive because, although binders come in a range of sizes, documents with larger binders are still relatively limited in size, and the pages become more difficult to turn without damaging the punched holes.

Cost is also an issue with this type of portfolio format: three-ring binders and file folders are inexpensive and readily available, but specialized binding is not. If the program director likes this look and would like to require it or at least provide it as an option for portfolios as well as documents in other honors courses, purchasing a high-quality, heavy-duty binding machine would be a good investment. The honors program could then provide the machine and the plastic binders while the students could provide cover and paper stock and bind their portfolios themselves rather than having it done at an off-campus print shop.

(4) Electronic forms. As electronic publication, on-line journals, and computer-assisted instruction lead professional and academic written communication further into the twenty-first century, program directors and honors students may increasingly choose to compile portfolios electronically, either on disk or on a web page. For example, if the honors program has a web site, students can build portfolios within and link them to the home honors page. Other students and faculty can then easily access examples, and prospective students and faculty can review examples of excellent work being produced in the program (not to mention the fact that multiple readers do not have to keep passing or reminding each other to pass a portfolio back and forth). Having such materials on an honors program web site could also serve as a recruiting tool for prospective student and faculty participants.

Granted, hardware and software compatibility between student and reader can be a problem, and until all instructors request documents on disk or via electronic mail and return them with word-processed comments and program-specific macros and revision marks, the disk or on-line copy of a student's document will likely be the final draft with none of the teacher's written comments. Compilation and material production, however, are far easier: contemporary students keep all their papers backed up on hard drives and disks anyway, so with a few mouse clicks, they can copy selected documents into a portfolio file. Disks can also be stored easily in the honors program office for future use to bring up sample documents and portfolio compilation examples, and files can be updated to new program versions and new media relatively easily.

Electronic portfolio forms can also incorporate elements not available in traditional hard copy documents. For example, portfolio documents on the honors program web page can be enhanced with color, graphics, and dynamic, interactive multimedia components. An engineering student's electronic portfolio would allow a prospective employer to access a well-designed resume, an honors senior thesis with charts that can build data columns individually and in color with a few clicks, and a sample design program application that can be

run with a few more clicks. Similarly, an education major can post not only a resume and an honors senior thesis but also a series of interactive lessons and a RealTime video showing the student's teaching style and skills. This is not futuristic hopefulness; this is happening in our classrooms and on our students' web sites right now, and employers increasingly request students' URLs to review these materials. Although these types of items may transcend the traditional writing portfolio — assessment of writing skill — they can still provide demonstrations of writing skill while incorporating the honors student's skills in multimedia presentation and, in some instances, oral communication as well.

Overall, portfolio format should be determined by the program director and the student, taking into consideration the primary and possible secondary audiences for the portfolio. For example, if several people (student, program director, instructor, advisor) will be reviewing the portfolio, then a three-ring binder would be preferable to file folders because individual papers and folders are less likely to fall out or be misplaced. Due to the natural differences in document types between majors, students will be incorporating different types of things into their portfolios, so they should work with their faculty advisor to format a field-appropriate portfolio. The program director can still establish general content and format guidelines to maintain a certain level of consistency between majors; if so, then these guidelines should be made clear early in each student's program.

4. Who should evaluate the portfolios?

After all of this discussion about guidelines and suggestions for content and format of portfolios, a key question still remains: who will read the portfolio? Generally, the type of portfolio will determine the evaluator, as noted below.

a. *Instructors.* For course-based portfolios, the course instructor should be the primary evaluator. Instructors should also be asked to participate in committee reviews of cumulative program portfolios.

b. *Program directors.* For cumulative program portfolios, program directors are often the primary evaluators. If the program requires or recommends portfolio compilation, then the program director should take the responsibility for distributing guidelines, working with students as they complete their portfolios, and reviewing the final portfolio. If the portfolios will be reviewed by committee, then the program director should distribute the portfolios to the appropriate readers and guide discussion of evaluation criteria.

c. *Advisors.* The student's advisor should also participate in cumulative program portfolio design and evaluation, especially if the portfolio or selected materials therein will be used in employment or

graduate school applications. While the program director can evaluate portfolio material for general writing development and overall presentation, the advisor is better suited to evaluate progress within field-specific knowledge and research and to guide students in writing and selecting the best types of papers for professional portfolio use.

d. *Students.* The students themselves should participate in a reflective self-evaluation of their own materials in both course-based and cumulative program portfolios. Instructors and program directors must take care, however, to guide students toward cover letters or essays containing honest self-evaluation and away from those merely providing a plea or justification for a certain course grade or level of honors certification. Therefore, instructors and program directors should provide specific questions for the students to consider: How has your writing improved throughout the course/program? How has the course/program material helped you as a writer, as a student, and as a future professional in your field? What do you like about your writing, and what would you like to continue to work on? While a certain degree of discomfort can be expected from students who are reviewing papers written during previous semesters, students can benefit both academically and emotionally from seeing how far they have come and how much they have learned since they began a term or a program.

5. How should portfolios be evaluated?

Although portfolios do generate additional effort from both the students compiling them and faculty evaluating them, the reward is in the sense of accomplishment, both in the student and in the program, when students and evaluators reflect upon a body of excellent, interesting work. Criteria for portfolio evaluation may differ among instructors and directors and between course-based portfolios and cumulative program portfolios, so evaluators should discuss what represents standards of excellence and evidence of progress for the course and for the program. Generally, evaluators should review portfolios in these areas:

a. *Writing skill.* One main purpose behind using the portfolio in the composition course is so that both the instructor and the student can gauge the improvement in writing skill that a student has made throughout the term. For example, if the student began the term having problems with developing an argument by using specific details and examples, both student and instructor can review subsequent essays in the portfolio to assess whether the student has improved in this area. Similarly, portfolio documents should demonstrate a student's development in critical thinking and

argumentation skills, organization of ideas and supporting points, appropriate writing style and language use, and mastery of grammatical and mechanical conventions.

In the cumulative program portfolio, development of writing skill among courses throughout a two-year or four-year program becomes even more evident. For example, a freshman honors student who wants to major in chemical engineering may write a ten-page research paper in honors freshman composition on bioremediation; when that same student is a senior who has just finished a sixty-page thesis on an original bioremediation research project, she can review her freshman composition essay to see that although she is discussing the same topic, she has developed a mastery of terminology, professional style, and scientific argumentation that she naturally did not possess as a freshman.

b. *Field-specific knowledge.* Another reason behind the chemical engineer's progress is the development of field-specific knowledge throughout her major program. While her transcript merely shows course titles and grades earned, a cumulative portfolio readily demonstrates the specific concepts mastered in those courses and the development of research interests throughout those courses. This can be especially helpful for students who are required to complete a senior thesis or capstone project; rather than throwing their portfolios together shortly before graduation, they should maintain their portfolios from semester to semester in order to develop research interests and topic discussions for the thesis.

Portfolio evaluators should also review the development of field-specific knowledge the student demonstrates in the portfolio, which implies that the portfolio should be evaluated not only by the program director but also by the student's major advisor. For example, the chemical engineering major may have earned a B in her thermodynamics class, but her lab reports and seminar papers demonstrate that she is actually well-versed in this subject — perhaps she just did not perform well for some reason on the final exam. In this way, portfolios could provide a more complete picture than transcripts of what a student has learned in a course or a degree program.

c. *Format and appearance.* In theory, portfolio appearance should not distract an evaluator's focus from the student's written work, but in reality, we all are influenced by a document's appearance. For example, the freshman composition instructor who must read through twenty-seven portfolios during final exam week will remember the neatly organized, interestingly designed portfolio more positively than one in which folders are falling out and papers are crumpled. Format becomes even more important when the student is designing a portfolio for professional use or graduate

school applications, where judicious use of visual rhetoric can give students an edge in a highly competitive environment. Format criteria should be established according to areas discussed in the above section.

Overall, the portfolio can carry varying weight among courses and programs, but the portfolio should not be the sole tool for evaluating a student's performance. Rather, it should complement other forms of cumulative and final evaluation. For example, in the freshman composition course, the portfolio usually represents a significant portion of the student's final grade — at New Mexico State University, the portfolio currently represents sixty percent of a student's final grade — but the student's entire course grade is not based solely upon it. Similarly, when an honors committee reviews a graduating student's file for a certain level of honors certification, the committee should use multiple measurements, such as the portfolio, transcripts, thesis research and defense, self-evaluation, reports from the advisor and other faculty, and so forth.

## A FEW FINAL TIPS

In drawing Chapter Four to a close, I would like to offer a few suggestions for designing or revising honors composition courses and projects.

Be flexible. Rather than dictating concrete criteria for course and project design, this set of guidelines and suggestions provides a starting place for creative, innovative development or revision of writing components. Honors instructors and program directors should adapt sample topics, assignments, and guidelines to fit individual program and student needs. For example, a formal thesis may be appropriate in some disciplines, but other students should have room to write a play, an instructional plan and rationale, or another type of substantial, professional document.

*Enlist aid from other programs.* The amazing percentage of participation in this project from National Collegiate Honors Council member program directors demonstrates both the dedication these professionals have to honors education and their willingness to share information about their programs. If efforts to develop or revise a particular writing course or component have stalled, instructors and program directors should review what other programs have done to move the process along. The national, regional, and state honors conferences, along with the NCHC on-line discussion list, are good places to make contacts with other honors professionals; many programs also have web pages within their school's main web site, and some faculty may have syllabi and assignments for honors courses on-line as well.

*Acknowledge the direction toward graduate school preparation.* Program directors should remember that three of the advanced projects in these guidelines — the senior thesis, conference presentations, and publications — tend to prepare students more for graduate school than for nonacademic professional activity. Discuss these opportunities with honors faculty and students, and as noted above, be flexible when assigning these projects. For example, a professional internship or co-op, at the end of which the student submits a formal written review and self-evaluation, might be more useful for some students than a formal, research-oriented thesis.

*Manage the overall workload.* While all of these courses and projects are wonderful opportunities for student, faculty, and program development, program directors should monitor their levels of involvement in these projects. For instance, if a program includes all of these composition options, then in addition to the regular administrative duties in running an honors program, directors could be reading admissions essays and senior theses, helping students to prepare portfolios, evaluating those portfolios, setting up and participating in undergraduate research symposia, taking students to professional conferences, and guiding them toward publication. As any composition instructor will attest, thorough, attentive reading and evaluation of student writing can be quite time-intensive, so depending upon the number of honors program students involved in these projects at any given time, directors should distribute reading and evaluation responsibilities to specially designated committees. Directors should also feel confident in their ability to evaluate student writing in a variety of disciplines and discipline-specific genres. If necessary, composition instructors and instructors from these disciplines should assist the director in identifying what constitutes strong research and writing in each field; as directors gain experience in reading different types of papers, they should hone their own evaluation skills and, if necessary, revise the project parameters.

## CONCLUSION

This collection of guidelines and suggestions for honors composition courses and projects addresses an important aspect of college-level honors education: writing preparation and instruction do not have to be merely "more, more, more" tacked onto a student's regular academic load. Thoughtful course design, creative substitution of meaningful writing projects for general education electives, opportunities for intensive research and/or writing at an advanced level, and promotion of extracurricular activities that develop students' oral and written communication skills help honors

programs to provide students with challenging academic experiences. Within the writing classroom or seminar, students should come to know each other and themselves better through critique workshops and collaborative projects. Outside the classroom, students should develop their professional interests through independent study and research, and they should broaden their personal and professional horizons through the publication process and travel to professional conferences.

Honors program directors and faculty should also benefit from these courses and projects. Within the classroom, they have the opportunity for instructional experimentation and more meaningful intellectual exchange, which might not take place in the traditional classroom with prescribed texts and syllabi and standardized expectations. Extracurricular activity involved in advising independent study, evaluating portfolios, and supervising publication and presentation often goes beyond the work expected from assigned professional duties, and although these faculty are eager to work with honors students, their efforts should be acknowledged in better fashion than current standards dictate.

Although these guidelines provide a framework with which program directors and instructors can design or revise writing courses and projects, it is far from comprehensive. Suggestions for the necessary research and further development of honors composition are addressed in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## REFLECTIONS UPON THIS RESEARCH

As I stated in Chapter One, the purposes of this project are to ascertain the state of honors composition and to propose guidelines for developing quality honors composition courses and projects for any type of honors program. As to the first purpose, I agree with Harte's contention that honors students need college-level composition instruction as much as and sometimes more than average students. Honors students may have written research papers and taken advanced placement credit in high school, but they still need to adjust their writing skills to college-level writing demands. They may also feel that their writing is perfect as it is and may thus be the most resistant to changing their drafting tactics and working on revising and editing skills. As I note in Chapter Two, students should develop their college-level writing skills not merely to become better writers but to improve their critical thinking skills. Honors educators have long promoted this same goal of developing students' critical thinking skills; Frank Aydelotte, the founder of the college-level honors education movement and also a composition instructor, states this point well when he urges that students do not need merely to "write, write, write" but also to "think, think, think" ("History of English" 306).

The second purpose of this project, as presented in Chapters Three and Four, demonstrates the ways in which honors programs are currently addressing this need to develop students' critical thinking through comprehensive composition instruction. Honors students from all majors may or may not elect to take honors courses in literature, natural sciences, social sciences, and so forth, but almost all of the honors programs represented in this study required some type of writing instruction, whether through formal composition courses or through writing-intensive courses throughout the disciplines. Honors students also build their writing skills outside the composition classroom by completing research-based or creative senior theses and capstone projects, by shaping articles for publication, and by preparing and presenting papers at state, regional, and national conferences. Program directors and honors faculty throughout the nation approach formal and informal writing instruction and evaluation in various ways, but although no one set of guidelines can fit every type of honors program, I believe that the outlines and suggestions here provide a foundation from which honors educators can shape their own composition components. Overall, the information gathered through these surveys and follow-up interviews and presented in these guidelines proves that writing is

an essential honors program component — essential to admission into and completion of an honors program, essential to discipline-specific honors instruction, and essential to each student's academic and professional development.

The responsibility for this academic and professional development should be shared among honors faculty. While formal classroom writing instruction is generally the responsibility of the English department, the growth of the writing across the curriculum movement indicates that writing should be an important part of every course to develop students' critical thinking skills more thoroughly. Writing-intensive honors seminars and colloquia and field-specific senior theses and capstone projects should extend honors students' writing instruction not only to put into practice but also to build upon what students have learned in the composition classroom. This continuity means that all honors faculty should be involved in writing instruction and evaluation; therefore, all faculty within a given honors program should proceed from some common ground when assigning and evaluating writing assignments. How should papers in an honors class differ from those in non-honors classes? What does "writing-intensive" mean? How should learning journals or peer critiquing be used? Should faculty ensure relative equality of student performance among different majors on senior theses and capstone projects? To address questions such as these, program directors should bring composition faculty and honors faculty together regularly, perhaps at an annual conference or retreat, to discuss the best ways to approach writing instruction and critical thinking development throughout a student's academic career.

Overall, comprehensive composition instruction is an important way in which honors programs can provide differentiated, challenging educational experiences for their students. Honors composition courses and projects should not entail merely more and longer readings and writing assignments but different kinds of assignments and instructional approaches, as shown in Chapters Three and Four, that develop students' critical thinking skills. Honors students should be encouraged to question and debate concepts through guided oral and written communication rather than merely to copy them down and regurgitate them in an essay or exam. By using comprehensive writing components, honors programs can truly distinguish themselves from traditional college-level curricula and bring together the best students and the best faculty to create an enriched educational environment.

## DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK IN HONORS COMPOSITION

As related in the foreword, I decided to do this research project because of the need in college-level honors education for a set of honors composition guidelines so that program directors and instructors interested in designing or revising such courses would have ideas from which to proceed. The guidelines and suggestions presented here, however, only begin to address a variety of needs and concerns in honors composition. This work, then, should be continued in three general directions. First, each component unit should be explored and presented in much greater detail to include a wide variety of options in course structures and assignment topics; to present sample syllabi, assignments, and student documents; and to offer approaches to instruction and evaluation of student writing. Second, perspectives from outside the spectrum of this project should be addressed. All of the survey data in this study come from program directors who know what their programs are doing in general regarding writing instruction but who may not be involved with the day-to-day workings of these classes and projects. Therefore, future research in honors composition should relate the experiences of honors program faculty and students and should consider larger issues within honors education that affect composition instruction. Third, the results of this study raise some important questions about potentially problematic trends in the writing components of honors programs, specifically the issues of compensation for an increasing amount of time-consuming composition instruction and evaluation and of the cumulative effect of a program's later writing projects, outlined in Three and Four, on directing honors students toward graduate study.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

### Expansion of Component Guidelines

Honors educators and composition scholars should work together to expand the component guidelines and suggestions presented in Chapter Four. Each component should be developed to form a more complete picture of effective writing instruction and evaluation throughout two-year and four-year honors programs. Comprehensive component guides could be published in either traditional paper fashion or electronically via web sites and hypertext links to relevant materials.

1. *Admissions essay.* An in-depth guide to the admissions essay should include the rationale behind essay topic choices, suggestions for evaluator preparation, sample student essays with corresponding

evaluator comments, and ways in which essays can be used in annual and final evaluations of writing skill development and of overall student performance. What topics evoke the best student writing? How do readers from different disciplines agree upon common criteria for evaluation? How do admissions essays predict future success of honors students as writers?

2. *Freshman honors composition.* An in-depth guide to honors freshman composition should allow for variety in course approaches and materials by providing a collection of sample syllabi, reading lists, assignment sheets, and sample student papers with corresponding instructor comments. A web site would serve as a useful clearinghouse for such reference material: an editor could construct a comprehensive site for the materials, or even better, she could maintain a list of links to instructor-maintained sites so that materials could be updated frequently and easily. Students could also participate in constructing these sites, creating intra- and inter-institutional on-line publications for their work. Questions for study include whether honors students develop writing skills more quickly than regular freshman composition students and whether their essays and research papers are more complex analytically and syntactically.

3. *Advanced honors composition courses.* As in freshman composition, honors composition educators should create an on-line clearinghouse for syllabi, assignments, essays, and evaluations for honors business, professional, and technical communication courses, as well as other types of advanced composition courses in the social sciences and humanities. Instructors should also discuss approaches to presenting advanced rhetorical theory in these courses. Are honors students less resistant to reading complex theoretical articles? Are they able to apply these theories in subsequent writing exercises? Should writing focus more on academic essays and research or on workplace exercises and case studies?

4. *"Writing-intensive" coursework.* The term "writing-intensive" should be investigated further: What does it mean within the context of honors curricula? Do instructors within the same institution and among various institutions share a common perception of what "writing-intensive" coursework should entail and how it should be evaluated?

5. *Senior theses and capstone projects.* Again, this component would be served well by the creation of an electronic clearinghouse for instructions and guidelines, such as those from Ohio Dominican and Azusa Pacific included in the guidelines; for sample proposals and other preliminary paperwork; and for sample theses, including written responses from the program director, the thesis advisor,

and/or the thesis committee. Follow-up interviews with students who have completed theses could demonstrate in what specific ways the thesis process prepares students for graduate study and to what degree the process assists those students who do not wish to pursue graduate study.

6. *Portfolios.* Course-based portfolio work is more common in honors instruction, and more fully researched and documented overall, than cumulative program portfolios, but more programs are including cumulative portfolios as a part of their completion process. For both types, instructions, sample portfolio materials, and evaluation protocols should be collected. Follow-up interviews with honors students who have completed cumulative portfolios could demonstrate how such portfolios benefit honors students in applying for both graduate programs and professional employment opportunities.

7. *Publication opportunities.* The usefulness of publication opportunities should also be documented in follow-up interviews with students: Did publication help students who did not wish to pursue graduate study as much as those who did? Did students feel well prepared to enter the forum of refereed professional or semi-professional publication? Did they feel pressured to publish? Were they supported by the program director and/or faculty advisors?

8. *Presentation opportunities.* Instructors, advisors, and students should be surveyed to determine the usefulness of instruction and evaluation of oral presentations. While in-class discussion and oral presentations are quite common, and therefore formal preparation for them is documented in more detail in various writing and communication textbooks, preparation for conference presentations has not been documented as fully. Speaking in front of a classroom of peers is one thing, but speaking at a table or podium in front of a room full of strangers in a different town is another. How do program directors, instructors, and advisors prepare honors students for these presentations? How are students able to transfer these skills to nonacademic workplace situations?

**Needed Perspectives on Honors Composition**

In addition to expanding component guidelines, we need to study issues in honors composition from other, important perspectives that were not within the scope of this project. Responses discussed here come from NCHC member program directors because (1) the group is easily accessed through the NCHC mailing list and (2) program directors naturally know the most about what occurs in their programs overall. Research must be expanded beyond the program

director, however, to create a fuller and more balanced picture of contemporary honors composition courses and projects.

1. *Focus on students.* As demonstrated above, students' experiences with honors composition courses and projects are necessary to evaluate the success of various components. Students should be asked not merely to evaluate their own performance but to say what they think works in such components and what needs to be improved; case studies should follow selected students throughout their programs of study and beyond graduation to gauge the effectiveness of honors writing projects. Students should also be given the opportunity to voice their concerns, fears, and frustrations with certain projects, such as the thesis, rather than having these feelings casually dismissed by a director or an advisor with an "It'll help you later" or a "Trust me." Similarly, we should also study whether honors students are measurably more tolerant of reading higher-level rhetorical, visual, and communications theory in these courses and whether students can apply such readings in class discussions and assignments. In the end, these students are not guinea pigs to be experimented upon but people who deserve consistent, quality educational experiences, and their input while completing the program and after graduation will be valuable in providing the best instruction possible.

2. *Focus on instructors.* Although the program directors who participated in this study provided a certain amount of information regarding specific honors composition courses, the instructors who actually teach these courses would naturally provide much more detailed information regarding syllabi, assignments, and evaluation criteria. Because they are in the classroom every day, they can also provide more specific information about whether measurable writing differences exist between honors and nonhonors students. Future studies should include both proponents and opponents of honors education to contrast instructors' points of view about honors composition, such as whether special honors writing instruction makes a difference to students and to the program or whether honors students in discipline-specific courses actually write better than nonhonors students.

3. *Focus on writing.* Rather than relying solely upon reports from directors, instructors, and students, researchers of honors composition should perform their own detailed quantitative and qualitative studies of writing performance. Various types of writing should be collected so that overall honors student writing performance and the actual differences between the writing of honors and regular students may be analyzed. For example, program directors in this study discussed specific evaluation criteria, listed in Chapters Three and Four, with which they distinguish

honors-level writing from regular writing; composition researchers could study sample student essays to see whether they discern these differences using methodology in such core texts as Kirsch and Sullivan's *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research* and Lauer and Asher's *Composition Research: Empirical Designs.*

4. *Focus on difference.* Honors composition and honors programs in general should be studied regarding issues of difference in student population: gender, ethnicity, and age. For example, various sociolinguistic studies in gender and writing have argued that women are generally better at written and verbal communication skills overall; does this gender difference hold true in honors composition courses and projects? On the other hand, I have listened to fellow women honors students state that they pretend to be stupid so that potential dates will not be scared off, or they refuse to let instructors know that they are honors students because the instructors' expectations will be raised. What larger gender and intellect issues need to be explored within the realm of honors composition?

Ethnicity is also an important issue for honors composition, and it might reflect upon more serious questions about openness in honors programs overall. For example, the university where I taught an honors composition section for incoming Presidential Scholars was 20 miles from a relatively large urban area (St. Louis) with a large percentage of African-American residents, but none of the students, and thus none of the incoming program participants, was African-American. This section was not representative of enrollment percentages at the university, and my students openly questioned this disparity one day in class. I asked my former undergraduate honors mentor, who at one time had been the chairperson of the honors committee, my students' question: "Why are there no black students in our class?" He became somewhat defensive, referring vaguely to "admission criteria" and "program standards." Although this reaction reflects upon an underlying problem in some honors programs, specific questions relevant to honors composition and the connection between ethnicity and writing skill could be studied in analyses of students' skills in moving between "Standard American English" and "Black English Vernacular" or other minority dialects. Do minority honors students have different language skills, or have they become more adept at switching between dialects? Another growing concern involves the number of students whose native language is not English, so researchers could also study the representation of English as a Second Language speakers within honors programs. Those of us who teach composition recognize traits of various non-standard or non-native elements in students' writing and speaking, and we work with students on these elements;

however, more research needs to be conducted regarding how language difference affects students' admission to and performance in honors programs.

In addition, both two-year and four-year schools are seeing an increase in the number of returning students, people who have chosen, for whatever reasons, to begin or return to college study at a later stage of life. In what ways do these students participate in and contribute to honors programs? Are returning students prepared to write a competitive admissions essay? Are they asked to balance a thesis on top of not only required coursework but also full-time employment and obligations to their school-aged children, problematic areas that do not worry many traditional undergraduate honors students aged eighteen to twenty-one? True, these students have chosen to pursue college study while working and/or maintaining their families, and many perform not merely adequately but better than the younger students in their classes. What position, however, do honors programs take more frequently: returning students must complete the same requirements as traditional students, or returning students can choose from optional courses, thesis approaches, and extracurricular writing opportunities in order to complete the program?

These questions of gender, ethnicity, and age within honors composition courses and projects deserve further study because they reflect the changing nature of higher education overall. Our question should be, is the honors program changing along with it?

## PROBLEMATIC TRENDS IN HONORS COMPOSITION

Throughout my research, as I have suggested in Chapters Three and Four, I have noticed some trends in honors composition that need to be addressed. One of my concerns is that as honors composition courses and projects become more frequent and complex, faculty are not being compensated accordingly for this increasing workload. Another concern is that many of the extracurricular writing projects, such as the thesis, publications, and conference presentations, are really preparing students for graduate study rather than for post-baccalaureate employment. I would like to address these concerns and call for increased attention to them here.

1. *Workload and Compensation.* During my follow-up conversations with honors program directors, I asked them about compensation for the increasing amount of formal and informal writing instruction that honors faculty are asked to provide. Although the information I collected falls outside the scope of the guidelines provided in Chapter Four, I would like to mention the issue here

because it relates to honors composition and to honors education in general and needs to be addressed if honors programs are going to attract the best faculty.

In preliminary discussions with program directors, I found that honors composition courses, seminars, and colloquia are often considered part of an instructor's regular courseload. Some English departments "lend" faculty to the honors program through compensated release time, which means that the honors department is ultimately responsible for funding (or partially funding) this instruction. In some programs, faculty must take an overload to teach an honors course.

For extracurricular components, however, especially the senior thesis, honors faculty are often not compensated. This attitude is troublesome considering the amount of time and effort a faculty member must devote to directing research and reading and evaluating drafts. Considering that many of these theses are the equivalent of graduate-level theses, undergraduate honors thesis advisement should be considered equally to graduate-level advisement in professional activity reports. While a few program directors reported that they can provide stipends or honoraria to thesis advisors, most said that their honors advisors were compensated only by their personal satisfaction and by student and program gratitude. In fact, one program director stated that not only is the thesis advisor not compensated for this work, he or she is also responsible for the student's research expenses.

Comprehensive honors composition begins in the classroom but progresses through extracurricular components such as the senior thesis. If students are to develop their writing and critical thinking skills, they need faculty who will provide expert guidance and evaluation. If honors programs wish to offer these opportunities, they must attract the best faculty; therefore, program directors, English departments, and college administrators need to address the issue of compensation and professional credit to maintain interest and participation in these components.

2. *Trend toward Graduate School Preparation.* While many honors composition courses and writing-intensive field-specific courses parallel the progression of the average academic major, the extracurricular components of thesis work, publications, and conference presentations often guide honors students toward graduate work. This goal is not bad in itself: many honors students are probably already inclined to continue university study at the graduate or professional level. These projects also develop students' writing and critical thinking skills in challenging ways; in fact, academic departments at many schools require senior projects,

publications, and conference presentations from all of their majors, not just honors students.

As more honors programs adopt these graduate-style exercises, however, my concern is that honors students who want to earn their bachelor's degrees and find a job may not find these exercises as useful for their own professional goals. One of my friends from my undergraduate honors program earned her bachelor's degree in industrial engineering and began a well-paying corporate job two months later; she is not required to attend national engineering conferences, nor is she required to publish in professional journals to maintain her position. How useful would writing a senior thesis have been to her? Granted, she would have further honed her writing and thinking skills, and she might have been able to present her thesis as a part of her professional portfolio, but how much time and effort would she have had to dedicate to a project that may or may not have helped her get a job? In such cases, program directors should consider alternatives to the thesis project, such as offering an honors component within an internship or co-op that includes an extensive written journal, summary, and evaluation of the experience.

Are graduate-style honors exercises designed because these are what most honors faculty have done themselves and will continue to do, so we consider these practices a rigorous means to develop writing and critical thinking skills? Perhaps we are overemphasizing advanced academic writing to the students' disadvantage. Recently, composition instruction has expanded beyond the traditional academic essay course to include business, technical, and professional communication, and honors programs should follow suit by providing honors options and extracurricular activities focusing more on nonacademic workplace writing. For example, rather than writing individual research theses, students from business, engineering, computer science, and advertising could collaborate on a comprehensive business plan for starting and promoting a small engineering software firm. Students would still be conducting research in their respective majors, but they would be applying their writing and critical thinking skills to a workplace situation while creating a comprehensive professional document. In this way, we not only challenge students to think differently about their subjects of interest and about their approaches to writing, but we also challenge ourselves to think beyond our own academic writing tasks.

## CONCLUSION

We need to professionalize research into college-level honors composition, to take it out of the realm of hallway lore and into

professional publications and conferences. We need to perform more rigorous quantitative and qualitative research into honors composition, not only to improve what we deliver to students but also to provide empirical study with which to counter those who oppose honors education. In these ways, we will foster our own professional development, we will build a stronger honors community, and, most importantly, we will prepare our students for future workplace communication challenges in the best ways we know how.

# APPENDIX A*

## THE SIXTEEN MAJOR FEATURES OF A FULL HONORS PROGRAM

1. Identify and select students of higher ability as early as possible. This involves far closer cooperation than has hitherto been the case with high schools and preparatory schools. It also involves making full use of the new experience that has accumulated on the proper uses of predictive techniques, past records, entrance tests and interviews, as well as studies of aptitude, motivation, readiness, and achievement.

2. Start programs for these students immediately upon admission to the college or university, and admit other superior students into these programs whenever they are later identified by their teachers.

3. Make such programs continuous and cumulative through all four years, with honors counseling especially organized and equally continuous.

4. Formulate such programs so that they will relate effectively both to all the college work for the degree and to the area of concentration, departmental specialization, or preprofessional or professional training.

5. Make the programs varied and flexible by establishing special courses, ability sections, honors seminars, colloquia, and independent study, all with course credit. Advanced placement and acceleration will serve in a contributory role.

6. Make the honors program increasingly *visible* throughout the institution so that it will provide standards and models of excellence for all students and faculty, and contribute to the substitution of an "honors outlook" for the "grade outlook." For the latter purpose, gradelessness in some honors offerings — i.e., a "pass-fail" approach — is a frequent advantage.

7. Employ methods and materials appropriate to superior students. Experience has shown that this involves:

    a. Bringing the abler students together in small groups or classes of from five to twenty;
    b. Using primary sources and original documents rather than textbooks where possible;

c. Eliminating lecturing and predigesting by the faculty of content to be covered; approaching the subject matter to be covered selectively; discouraging passive note-taking; encouraging student adventure with ideas in open discussion — the colloquium method with appropriate modification of this method in science and professional schools;
d. Supplementing the above with increased independent study, research and summer projects, honors study abroad, and imaginatively conceived summer institutes;
e. Providing for continuous counseling in the light of the individual student's development by teaching personnel rather than by full-time nonteaching counselors; but the professional counseling staff should include specialists in honors;
f. Differentiating between the needs of men and women in counseling in the light of the steeper erosion of talents after graduation among the latter;
g. Embodying in the program the required differentia between the creative and the formally cognitive approach;
h. Giving terminal examinations to test the honors results.

8. Select faculty qualified to give the best intellectual leadership to able students and fully identified with the aims of the program.

9. Set aside, where possible, any requirements that restrict a good student's progress, thus increasing his freedom among the alternative facets of the honors and regular curriculum.

10. Build in devices of evaluation to test both the means used and the ends sought by an honors program.

11. Establish a committee of honors students to serve as liaison with the honors committee or council. Keep them fully informed on the program and elicit their cooperation in evaluation and development.

12. Use good students wherever feasible as apprentices in teaching and as assistants to the best people on the faculty. Even freshmen can sometimes serve in this capacity. There is increasing use both of available research institutes and laboratories in the area for a semester or a summer. Foundation funds in support of such undergraduate research and independent study projects are increasingly available.

13. Employ honors students for counseling, orientation, and other appropriate honors purposes within the general student body.

14. Establish, where possible, an honors center with honors library, lounge, reading rooms, and other appropriate decor.

15. Work toward closer liaison between the undergraduate program and the graduate school.

16. Ensure that such programs will be permanent features of the curriculum and not dependent on temporary or spasmodic dedication of particular faculty members or administrators — in other words, institutionalize such programs, budget for them, and build thereby a tradition of excellence. (Cohen 46-48)

**Ed note: This list is taken from Joseph Cohen's 1966 book, The Superior Student in American Higher Education. For the official, updated list of Basic Characteristics of a Fully-Developed Honors Program, please go to www.nchchonors.org, and click on "Basic Characteristics."*

# APPENDIX B

**Cover Letter to Questionnaire for NCHC Member Programs**

March 12, 1998

Dear Honors Program Director:

I am a doctoral student in the Rhetoric and Professional Communication Program at New Mexico State University, and for my dissertation, I am studying the role of composition in honors education at the university level. To begin assessing this role, I need your assistance. I am distributing the attached survey to all National Collegiate Honors Council member programs. This survey includes questions concerning writing components in admission, general education requirements, program requirements, and final evaluation within your honors program. Even if your program includes no honors composition courses or projects, your response will provide valuable information in my overall assessment.

Please complete the survey and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by **April 1, 1998**. If you have any questions about this survey, feel free to contact me at the address or phone number given on this letterhead or by e-mail at aguzy@nmsu.edu.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Annmarie Guzy
Department of English, Box 3E
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, NM 88003
(505) 646-3931

# APPENDIX C

**Questionnaire for NCHC Member Programs**

Spring 1998 Honors Composition Survey
Annmarie Guzy New Mexico State University

1. Is your school a _____ two-year, _____ four-year, or
   _____ graduate degree granting institution?

2. How many students currently participate in your program?
   _____

3. Does your program admissions process include a writing sample? Y N
   Of what type(s)? Check all which apply.
   _____ student's previous paper or essay
   _____ application essay on a specific topic
   _____ timed essay on a specific topic

4. Are students in your program exempt from freshman composition? Y N

5. Can students in your program test out of freshman composition? Y N

6. Do general education requirements at your institution include coursework beyond freshman composition, such as business or technical writing? Y N

7. Are students in your program exempt from this requirement? Y N

8. Does your program require additional composition courses beyond general education requirements? Y N

9. Does your program offer honors sections of regular composition courses? Y N

10. Does your program offer composition courses unique to the honors program?

11. Through what department are honors composition courses offered? Check all which apply.
    ____ Honors
    ____ English
    ____ Other Please specify:
    _____

12. How many composition courses does your program require? 0 1 2 3 or more

13. How many of these are honors courses? 0 1 2 3 or more

14. What types of honors composition courses does your program offer? Please specify at what levels and under what titles:
    _____
    _____
    _____

15. Does your program offer a senior thesis or other written capstone project? Y N

16. Is the senior project required to complete the honors program? Y N

17. What percentage of students in the program complete this project? _____%

18. Do your students work with faculty mentors on their senior projects? Y N

19. Does your program offer publication opportunities for your students? Y N

20. Does your program offer oral presentation opportunities for your students? Y N

21. Do your students compile a writing portfolio as they progress through your program? Y N

22. Is writing skill included in a final evaluation of the students' honors program work? Y N

23. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview to discuss your responses in more detail? Y N
If yes, please complete the following information:

Name: _____

E-mail address: _____

Institution: _____

Phone: _____

Thank you for completing this survey.

# APPENDIX D

## Question Bank for Follow-up Interviews

Thank you again for participating in my survey on writing courses and components within honors programs at colleges and universities. To date, I have received over 300 survey responses from a variety of two-year and four-year programs, and the preliminary results are quite encouraging regarding the role of composition in the contemporary honors program.

I also appreciate your willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. These follow-up questions address assessment and evaluation of the writing projects which you indicated in your survey response; I am also interested in administrative and financial concerns, such as staffing and faculty load, involved in offering and maintaining such courses and projects.

To complete this follow-up interview, please use your Reply function to insert your responses after the appropriate questions and e-mail them back to me. Some questions may require additional information from individual instructors; if they are also willing to contribute responses, please feel free to forward questions to them.

**Admission**
You indicated that your admission process includes a writing sample.

*Student's previous paper or essay*
By whom is the writing evaluated?
With what criteria is the writing evaluated?

*Application essay on a specific topic*
What topics have you used recently?
How long is the essay on average?
By whom is the essay evaluated?
With what criteria is the writing evaluated?

*Timed essay on a specific topic*
How long is the timed essay session?
By whom is the essay evaluated?
With what criteria is the writing evaluated?

**Writing Courses**
You have indicated that your honors composition coursework includes ( ).
How does the content of each course differ from that of a similar non-honors course?
Who determines course content?
Do criteria for writing evaluation differ between honors and non-honors courses? If yes, in what ways?

You have indicated that your honors composition coursework includes contract work for English courses. Could you describe this contract system in more detail? Does it entail extra or substantially different work from that of non-honors students enrolled in the same course? Do instructors use different criteria when evaluating honors contract work?

**Thesis or Capstone Project**
You indicated that your program includes a (optional/required) (thesis/ apstone project .
What is the average page length of the (thesis/project)?
In what ways do students prepare for this project?
How much time does the average (thesis/project) take to complete?
By whom is the project evaluated?
With what criteria is the project evaluated?

**Other Projects**
You indicated that your program offers publication opportunities for your students. Of what types?
You indicated that your program offers oral presentation opportunities for your students. Of what types?
You indicated that your students compile a writing portfolio as they progress through your program.
What is included in this portfolio?
How is the portfolio generally formatted?
By whom is the portfolio evaluated?
With what criteria is the portfolio evaluated?
You indicated that writing skill is included in a final evaluation of the students' honors program work. In what ways and by whom is writing skill evaluated?

Thank you again for assisting in my research. If you are interested in the results, you may request a summary review at the address given below.

Annmarie Guzy
aguzy@nmsu.edu
Department of English
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, NM 88003

(505) 646-3931

# APPENDIX E

## Honors Thesis Rationale and Support for Azusa Pacific University

Rationale & Support for The Honors Thesis/Project
By Mel Shoemaker, Director of the Honors Program
Azusa Pacific University
May 14, 1997

I. The Process & Benefits of Having an Honors Thesis/Project
  A. Development of a "pre-thesis/project" community
    1. Providing preliminary discussions and preparation
    2. Faculty development with research mentors
    3. Interim assignments, projects, and deadlines (e.g. Junior Writing Intensive)
    4. Continuous feedback and support
  B. Content: In-depth study and creative thinking
    1. What? Select a topic having a distinguishing mark of originality, making it manageable and meaningful.
    2. Thesis/project might be a critical bibliography or extensive historical, recital notes.
    3. Why? Formulate the problem or question, finding the niche in the literature
    4. Writing a proposal
    5. Identify the resources
  C. Research: Strengthening research & problem solving skills
    1. Develop a working bibliography and other sources (primary literature is preferred over secondary materials)
    2. How? Defining the method and perspective
    3. Organizing material, recording insights
  D. Organizing/Writing/Communicating: Producing the final paper
    1. Submission of tentative outline
    2. Review the literature
    3. Draft copies & peer reviews
    4. Conquering writer's block
II. Evaluation
  A. Submission of 2-3 drafts to faculty mentor at specified dead lines.
  B. Other reader(s)
    1. Faculty within the major
    2. Faculty outside the major
    3. Friend/Family representative
    4. Optional: Honors Director

C. Completion & defense is not adversarial.

D. What determines an undergraduate honors thesis? Depth and comprehension, not always originality.

III. Other Guidelines

A. Written contract is required, which states the dates for —

1. Submission of thesis proposal
2. Submission of preliminary annotated bibliography
3. Topical literature review: narrative discussion of previous work upon which the specific topic builds.
4. Progress reports/deadlines
    a. Submission of rough draft of each chapter
    b. Submission of final draft
5. Defense of the thesis
6. Report of readers & defense to be submitted to the Honors Council for certification in time for submission of semester grades.

B. Proposal: Student must work with her/his faculty mentor to adapt the terminology posed in each section below to the particular discipline.

1. Background/literature review: Summarize the "body of knowledge" or range of perspectives that inform the particular research topic. Be specific in terms of the contributions of individual researchers, theorists, methodologists, critics, etc., relevant to the inquiry.
2. Research question: How does the work relate to the background above? What is the particular question or theme that will be addressed and how will it contribute to the inquiry in this field? State the working hypothesis or perspective.
3. Methodology/approach: How will the question be addressed? Be specific in terms of research design, statistical procedures, analysis of primary texts, use of archival sources or data bases, etc., as appropriate to the discipline.

IV. Benefits & Rationale

A. Student Development of discipline, independence, competence & confidence

B. Evidence of student's passion

C. Gives an edge for graduate school.

V. Problems Encountered in Other Honors Programs

A. Options are imperative: thesis, project, annotated recital, comprehensive exam or other

1. Necessity of multiple tracks as not every Honors student will complete a thesis.
2. Defense of a thesis is intimidating, frightening students and causing attrition.

B. Difficulty of recruiting faculty mentors
C. Inconsistency in quality
D. General studies vs. major: Should the thesis/project be within general studies and inter-disciplinary or within the student's major?

# APPENDIX F

## List of Follow-Up Interview Participants (Spring 1998)

| | |
|---|---|
| Adams, Nancy | St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley |
| Albritton, Thomas W. | High Point University |
| Barone, Robert W. | University of Montevallo |
| Beck, Liz | Iowa State University |
| Broadhead, Thomas | University of Tennessee, Knoxville |
| Campbell, Matt | Johnson County Community College |
| Carson, Jerryn | Geneva College |
| Case, Robert | Neumann College |
| Casey, Ellen Miller | University of Scranton |
| Colenbrander, Drew | Delta College |
| Cone, Sally | Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis |
| Corbett, Sr. Thomas | Ohio Dominican College |
| Digby, Joan | Long Island University/CW Post |
| Dutcher, James | Holyoke Community College |
| Evans, Jo Ann | West Virginia University |
| Finnell, Susanna | Texas A&M University |
| Greenberg, Mark | Drexel University |
| Harris, Duncan | University of Wyoming |
| Hawkes, Lory | DeVry Institute |
| Hirschoff, Aliina | American University |
| Kimbrough, R. Alan | University of Dayton |
| Knauer, Jim | Lock Haven University |
| Landuyt, Sandra L. | Penn Valley Community College |
| Lacey, Jim | East Connecticut State University |
| Lau, Andrew | Pennsylvania State University |
| Lay, William H. | Kalamazoo Valley Community College |
| Levy, Diane | University of North Carolina-Wilmington |
| Mack Jr., Maynard | University of Maryland |
| Malloy, Thomas | Mount Wachusett Community College |
| Mayberry, Lillian | University of Texas at El Paso |
| McFarland, Sam | Western Kentucky University |
| Murphy, Brian | Oakland University |
| Navarro, Mary L. | Sinclair Community College |
| Neff, Peter L. | Joliet Junior College |
| Oelke, Karl | Union County College |
| Otero, Rosalie | University of New Mexico |
| Patterson, David | University of Memphis |
| Paul, Jay | Christopher Newport University |
| Rigney, Daniel | St. Mary's University |
| Seager, Mary | St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley |
| Sederberg, Peter | South Carolina Honors College |
| Shankweiler, Jean | El Camino College |
| Shoemaker, Melvin H. | Azusa Pacific University |
| Townsend, Gavin | University of Tennessee at Chattanooga |
| Trinkle, Alison | Texas Christian University |
| Webster, Linda | University of Arkansas, Monticello |
| Westlie, John | William Jewell College |
| Whall, Tony | Salisbury State University |
| Williams, Al | Manchester College |
| Williams, Carrie | Mankato State University |
| Woodard, Martha C. | Marshall University |
| Zivanovic, Judith | Kansas State University |

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