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## CHAPTER THREE

# ROLES IN THE HONORS PROGRAM

### **Beyond the Honors Director**

The honors director may occupy the most important role, especially when a program is new, but the institution must create an environment that will support the program when the honors director's mantle is passed to another person. To create such an environment, the honors program must be well established and accepted at all levels of the institution. Documentation of administrative decisions and other historical data should be carefully kept and should demonstrate how the honors program is intertwined with the essential elements of the college's mission. Here are some of the players who may represent ways of establishing an identity on campus and making the program indispensable.

### **Honors Committee**

The honors committee may need people from many different areas, depending on the program. Students, members of the community, and other non-honors personnel may have creative ideas to offer a new honors program. The expertise of some or all of the following persons may be needed: the dean of students, a counselor, the student activities advisor, the admissions/records advisor, the articulation advisor, a foundation director, division or department chairs, a faculty senate representative, a union representative, and faculty representatives. A few words of caution: the more people included on this committee, the more difficult scheduling meetings will be. Even with frequent communications and virtual meetings, the group should convene in person at least once a semester or once a year. With a large group, some members of the committee may have competing values or interests. The best honors committee balances the commitment to excellence in honors education with a willingness to cooperate and experiment. Having a committee that will go along with anything the honors director says is often less productive than one might think because this committee may be charged with making sure standards are being met. A committee, however, that argues and labors its way through every decision will probably grind the director and the program to a nub. Too many strong personalities may impede the new program's ability to establish a footprint in the institution.

The honors committee may act as the steering committee to initiate and design an honors program. It may be formed later in the process

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and serve only in an advisory capacity or as a screening committee for applicants. It may be appointed by the college administration, the honors director, selected by the faculty senate, or composed of volunteers. The committee, at the very least, gives the program credibility and the director support.

The honors committee may need to meet on a regular basis, but this schedule will not rule out the occasional ad hoc meeting to deal with an issue or crisis. Some committees may meet less frequently because everyone is kept up-to-date by personal communication. If each member of the committee helps the honors program in a special area, such as scholarships, records, transfers, or discipline, then each person need not attend every meeting on every issue, provided everyone is receiving updates. The committee may need to meet more often if the institution has decided to keep the authority for the program in the hands of the committee rather than with the director.

While each institution is different, the honors committee may be involved in many of the following activities:

- determining and approving its own membership;
- establishing and updating program policies;
- ensuring compliance with program policies;
- selecting honors courses and determining curriculum;
- inviting, training, supervising, and evaluating honors instructors;
- conducting business related to the program;
- reviewing inter-institutional agreements with high schools, other two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and any other societies or agencies, and negotiating any needed changes;
- recommending sound inter-institutional agreements for approval;
- assisting in implementing the policies and procedures of the program;
- approving any exceptions to honors program requirements and/or approving all requests for honors independent studies (often called honors option agreements or honors contracts).

### **Faculty**

Although an honors faculty needs to be varied and needs to reflect the make up of the faculty at the college, the honors faculty should be the outstanding classroom teachers at the college. Their methodology

can vary. Although their philosophy and approach can vary to some extent, they need to love teaching, enjoy the students, and have the respect of their colleagues and students. They should exude enthusiasm for their discipline and inspire a curiosity on the part of the students. Most honors faculty members willingly attend honors events and write letters of recommendation for honors students.

Whatever the philosophical underpinning of the honors program, the honors director may wish to recruit faculty members whose methods agree with the philosophy of the program. These faculty members, in turn, may help the philosophy of the program to evolve as they discuss and debate teaching and learning. For instance, some faculty members make their classes as participatory as possible for the students; other faculty members may be gifted at presenting material through electronic explorations; still others may emphasize the idea that students must think for themselves. The honors program may call meetings on a regular basis so that everyone can share and describe their teaching styles, and the program can foster an ongoing conversation about teaching methodologies in the honors program. When instructors are brought on board, the honors director and committee may share the responsibility to train the new honors instructors and draw them into the discussion about teaching methodologies in the honors program. Honors instructors may wish to attend teaching conferences to provide background and material for debate. As the discussion progresses over time, the honors program will find that all instructional personnel are fully aware of the program's mission and responsible for updating it, as necessary.

### **Counselors/Advisors**

Honors students need guidance and advice from counselors and advisors as much as do non-honors students, and perhaps more guidance because they have so many options available to them. Honors students have just as many pressures on them and difficulty making wise decisions as do non-honors students. Some honors students may even have special concerns and exit high school with preconceptions that may be counterproductive to their educational well-being. The personnel who come into contact with honors students as advisors or counselors, including the director, instructors, committee members, and academic advisors, need to have an understanding of the special situation of honors students. Honors students need guidance concerning their immediate curriculum, their long-range educational plans and

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scholarship opportunities, as well as advice concerning study habits, class loads, motivation, and attitude.

Many honors programs do their own advising. If the program is small, the director may provide this service. Given a large honors population, an honors program may need an assigned honors counselor and/or advisor. Where honors students rely on the regular counseling staff, two approaches are prevalent: in some cases, one counselor is designated the honors counselor in addition to the regular counseling duties. All honors students are then assigned to this counselor. The other approach is for all counselors to advise honors students. An initial orientation for the counseling staff and an annual review session are recommended if this approach is used.

Many academic advising departments today are using innovative methods to counsel and teach students, such as theme-based meetings or one credit hour classes to make sure that students are fully informed and are prepared for the challenges that college can pose. These approaches have proven beneficial both for residential programs, whose students may be away from home for the first time, and for commuter programs, whose students may not feel as much of a connection with the program or the same level of support from the program as residential students.

### **High School Recruiters**

High school recruitment is essential for many successful honors programs. Sometimes the recruiting role can be filled by someone in the high school such as a counselor or one of the senior instructors. If feeder high schools have dual or joint enrollment, honors courses, a college prep or international baccalaureate program, one of the instructors may be trained to recruit for the honors program. The high school recruiter must be informed about the honors program at the two-year college and, more importantly, be convinced that it is a viable alternative to the first two years at a university. That person must have an appreciation of honors education. The honors director is often the most effective recruiter because of an understanding of, commitment to, and enthusiasm for the program. Honors students can make excellent recruiters at their alma maters if they are trained and supervised. They typically have credibility and often know students personally.

Depending on the service area for the college, representatives of the honors program may need to visit high schools and other locations. Once the honors program is up and working, videotapes or digital

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imaging of the various activities can be an effective recruiting tool if distributed to the area high school guidance offices. Honors literature—catalogs, brochures, a calendar of events, a schedule of classes, or *Peterson's Smart Choices: Honors Programs and Colleges*, the official guide to NCHC member institutions—can also be given to the high school guidance offices. Exceptional high school students may wish to go on honors field trips with the two-year institution or attend lectures and other high-profile events sponsored by the program. Such events can impress many potential new students as well as their parents.

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