

INTRODUCTION

Only twenty-five or so years ago, as the 1980's began, the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) Standing Committee on the Two-Year Colleges was dissolved for lack of participation from junior/community colleges. National surveys had shown that fewer than 10% of two-year institutions had honors programs and indicated no general agreement that they were even desirable. Much of the educational leadership in the country, including many in the community college hierarchy, relegated the two-year colleges to a permanent role of developmental, occupational, and continuing adult education.

That most socially sensitive and responsive component in higher education rebounded, however, with vigor and determination. Especially resilient and resourceful in the face of huge enrollment increases, budget shortfalls occasioned by difficult economic times and little political power, and a radical shift in student demographics, the two-year college found strength and inspiration in the very breadth of its comprehensive mission. Creative new programs appeared to balance the traditional, established programs.

The NCHC monograph *Honors in the Two-Year College* first appeared in 1983. By the mid 1980's, groups of community college representatives met, often outside the mainstream of academic times and places, and sometimes with interested colleagues from the university sector, to develop strategies for designing, funding, and managing honors curricula and full honors programs. The success of honors students after transfer to the university or in the workplace was becoming increasingly clear, not least to the students themselves.

Spurred by student and faculty enthusiasm for their classroom experience and aided by positive evaluations and a thirst for recognition and higher institutional profiles by administrations and elected governing boards, two-year honors programs burgeoned in the 1990's. Networking among institutions at regional and national conferences and the steadily increasing use of electronic communication pathways have spread information and support to these new programs. Consortia of honors-sensitive institutions have sprung up in many states (the Honors Transfer Council of California now numbers over forty colleges), and honors transfer agreements and alliances with four-year institutions are increasingly common.

The current institutional roster of NCHC reveals a two-year college institutional membership of 123 in a base of 773 institutional members; this total number includes the two-year programs. While these statistics

do not indicate the additional professional memberships held by directors, deans, faculty, and students as individuals, they do indicate that the two-year institutional memberships constitute, at minimum, sixteen percent of the membership. Two-year colleges are fully represented on regional and national committees, and the landmark NCHC document "Basic Guidelines of a Fully Developed Honors Program" includes phraseology specifically inclusive of community college programs. One NCHC president, Ron Link of Miami-Dade College, in the 1990's was a community college honors director.

The trajectory of honors in the two-year program into a recognized position of leadership in American higher education continues as both its internal constituency and an increasing circle of supporters work together to increase access to affordable, high-quality education. In light of the rising level of excitement about honors programs at the two-year institution, the revitalized Two-Year College Committee of the NCHC is presenting this volume as an informational and descriptive guide for prospective programs and those contemplating changes or growth.

This volume is first and foremost an idea book, and as such aspires to provide a useful description of the many options available to honors education for the several audiences who, as a matter of course, may become stakeholders in the operation of a two-year college honors program:

- directors of beginning or developing programs, concerned with options for planning, implementing, managing, evaluating, and reporting;
- members of honors committees, seeking to bring wisdom and clear counsel to discussions of new possibilities and difficult issues;
- academic officers of a college, charged with overseeing a program and balancing its particular concerns with those of the total instructional program of an institution;
- senior administrators, college presidents, chancellors/superintendents, and appointed or publicly elected trustees, who develop and monitor the image of an institution in the broader community it serves;
- classroom faculty and their students, who may be enriched by a deeper understanding of their options;
- academic counselors and staff within and outside of a program, who weave the fabric of support services that engender student self-confidence and a commitment to succeed;

- four-year college honors directors, admissions officers, and student service officials, who may be seeking ways to mediate the transfer of honors students to their institutions, especially to their own honors programs;
- external evaluators, consultants, or regional accreditation representatives, who perform their functions periodically by institutional invitation or by state mandate for systematic college-wide program review.

Beyond their need for initial suggestions about starting a successful honors program at their home institutions, readers may consider the author's full and various descriptions as an invitation to lift their eyes toward the horizon, to envision a full program that will truly serve the needs of the institution. This work also acquaints the audience with a selection of key examples that will aid an embryonic program in the sometimes onerous birthing process.

Especially in the next chapter, "Designing an Honors Program," information abounds about alternative approaches to honors program design and management, even at very similar colleges. At the very least it helps readers appreciate the classic NCHC admonition: "No one model of an honors program can be superimposed on all ... institutions" (NCHC "Characteristics" Appendix A). From the simple realization that one is not expected to consider descriptions as *prescriptions* can come the freedom and confidence to create a program that uniquely fits one's own institution, even if it fits no other.

The handbook closes with several appendices that list some useful research about honors, including a sample honors retreat and model honors contracts. The last appendix holds a bibliography of works in honors that combines a previously published bibliography by William A. Senior of Broward Community College with articles and monographs published by NCHC since Senior's work appeared.

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