

HONORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A journal of proceedings from HERU (Honors Education at Research Universities) published every two years, concurrent with the biennial meeting of the HERU conference.

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Preface

Welcome to the inaugural edition of *Honors in Higher Education*, the Journal of Honors Education at Research Universities (HERU). HERU was formed in 2013 by members of the Big Ten Academic Alliance (formerly the Council on Institutional Cooperation) as a biennial conference of honors colleges and programs at research-oriented institutions of higher education. It was the hope of the founding committee and inaugural conference that HERU would be an opportunity for our peers to come together, sharing best practices and building relationships that would benefit us all. Furthermore, it was hoped that this structure would allow for the organic growth of HERU that is responsive to changing needs without imposing a cumbersome or restrictive structure. Now, after two very successful conferences, I believe we can confidently say that HERU is a great success and *Honors in Higher Education* is the first of many tangible fruits of this important endeavor.

Honors education has existed in the United States for decades and each honors college or program is as unique and distinctive as the university of which it is a part. Recently more colleges and universities have created honors programs and colleges as a means to attract and retain the highest achieving students. This has led not only to greater awareness of honors education but also to a long overdue consideration of the value of such enhanced academic programs. Higher education in general has become increasingly subject to assessment and accreditation while everyone from parents and students to lawmakers simply look to immediate practical “results” (i.e., employment) as the ultimate indicator of a program’s worth.

Most honors programs, however, engage students in an holistic learning experience. Certainly our students are being educated at the highest level, engaging in challenging curricula, and producing honors theses that are often of publishable quality and worthy of master’s degrees. Yet so much of what our programs offer are less tangible and far more long ranging, such as fostering a community of critical thinkers who value learning for its own sake, developing mentoring relationships between faculty and

students and between the students themselves, and creating an environment where our students are challenged to think not just critically but ethically about the challenges facing our world. These are invaluable components of honors education even if they are difficult to quantify and measure.

Honors in Higher Education is expected to not simply be the official journal of HERU, but the premier outlet for research into the impact and effectiveness of honors education. We are a community based upon and built by those who value research and intellectual engagement and it is appropriate that we turn our gaze upon our own endeavors. In this first volume you will find what we might consider “baseline” essays that are pedagogical in nature, sharing best practices and methods, essays that consider the socio-emotional abilities fostered in honors education, and others that promote effective curricular innovations.

I have often commented that I believe honors education should have two fundamental pillars: innovation and integration. In honors education we are able to be nimble, to innovate and try out new techniques and approaches to education. But we are also to be well integrated into our host institution; when we develop something that enhances the educational experience of honors students, it should be shared with all students. *Honors in Higher Education* is an example of these principles at work, a vehicle for sharing our findings with the broader community so that all might benefit.

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