

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Honors Education

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Edited by

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DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN HONORS EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

GRAEME HARPER

The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development notes the following in its 2008 policy brief *Ten Steps to Equity in Education*:

Equity in education has two dimensions. The first is *fairness*, which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. The second is *inclusion*, in other words ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all – for example that everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The two dimensions are closely intertwined.

...

Fairness and inclusion: by the OECD definition here, the former is perhaps more obvious to those involved in honors education and the latter perhaps less obvious, given that honors education focuses upon, and has long focused upon educational achievement more so than access to education. Yet, the OECD definition unequivocally states “the two dimensions are closely intertwined”. Intertwined, not merely related. Thus, attention to the pursuit of fairness is also attention to the pursuit of inclusion, and vice versa.

How then can honors education – and in the case of the discussions in this book, largely honors in higher education – support the intertwined deals of fairness and inclusion? And if it does not do so, how can it claim to be offering principled “opportunities for measurably broader, deeper, and more complex learning-centered and learner-directed

¹ OECD, *Ten Steps to Equity in Education*,
<http://www.oecd.org/education/school/39989494.pdf> (2008), 2.

experiences for its students”² Further still, by direct reference to the notion of “being included” inclusion references the ideal of diversity, and equity, by its reference to “impartiality” clearly suggests freedom from bias. Are these things therefore not fundamental to an honorable honors education?

Ten Steps to Equity in Education goes on to discuss the design of education and resources needed, and is ultimately much more of a brief concerned with elementary and secondary education than with post-secondary education. But the suggestions made in it are nevertheless a productive starting point for a discussion of diversity, equity and inclusion in college honors education. Not least because *Ten Steps to Equity in Education* says this:

Traditionally, education systems have sorted students according to attainment. Evidence from studies of secondary and primary schools suggests that such sorting can increase inequalities and inequities . . .³

This surely must prompt us to ask if we in college honors education, for all our promotion of community service and support for aspiration and recognition of commitment and touting of the foundational importance of a civic responsibility, are in fact contributing to societal inequity rather than challenging it. Even the possibility of that surely cannot be acceptable.

The majority of the chapters in this book began as presentations at the first annual conference of the National Society for Minorities in Honors (NSFMIH), held at Oakland University, Michigan in March 2016. The NSFMIH (www.nsfmih.org) was founded the year before that, in an effort to bring together and further advance discussions, and action, in relation to diversity, equity and inclusion in honors education. Annual NSFMIH conferences have been held since then. Some of the chapter writers here, while not attending that first national NSFMIH conference, responded energetically to a 2016 call for additional explorations and lively contributions.

² National Collegiate Honors Council, Definition of Honors Education, https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/PDFs/Definition-of-Honors-Education.pdf (2013)

³ OECD, *Ten Steps to Equity in Education*, <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/39989494.pdf>, 3.

In **Chapter One**, Simon Stacey and Jodi Kelber-Kaye explore inclusive excellence at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), an institution well-known for its contribution to inclusive education and one whose long-time president, Dr. Freeman Hrabowski III, has made a notable personal contribution to improving diversity and educational equity in US higher education. Chapter Two offers an examination of “bringing together studies of great texts and intergroup dialogue”. Trisha Posey, Director of the Honors Scholars Program at John Brown University, “a comprehensive Christian liberal arts university located in Northwest Arkansas” inspiringly concludes that “it is clear that incorporating intergroup dialogue into the student class experience had immediate and long-lasting impacts on students in the area of cross-cultural engagement.”

In **Chapter Three**, Laura Hanna moves the conversation into the realm of professional advising, relating work going on in Valdosta State University’s Honors College in Valdosta, Georgia. One of her most interesting discoveries is related in the section “Group Advising as a Bridge for Achieving Creativity and Inclusion”, where she notes that a “more collaborative technique diffuses the authority to allow students to learn about the sorts of projects they can complete from their peers who actually completed the projects”. Perhaps indeed we sometimes forget that general student empowerment can aid inclusivity in honors, even provide a hub around which it can revolve. **Chapter Four** sees this book’s editor consider the philosophy and ideal of Ubuntu, and its application to honors education.

Marty Dupuis, Vanessa McRae and Zholey Martinez, writing of their experiences in The Burnett Honors College at the University of Central Florida, discuss “a pilot mentoring program” called The Elevation Fellows Program “established through a partnership between The Burnett Honors College and Elevation Financial Group” in **Chapter Five**. They analyze “the donor relationship with the community partner supporting the work of college access for underserved, economically disadvantaged high school students”. This is followed by Rod Raehsler’s exploration of minority student recruitment in honors programs at rural colleges and university in **Chapter Six**. Raehsler very usefully suggests some possible solutions.

In the wonderfully collaborative **Chapter Seven**, Peter Bradley, Jordan Dawkins, Melanie Trinh, Cindy Tran and Caitlyn Toering offer a case study of the 20 year old Honors Program at Ferris State University and a project to “make recommendations about how [the program could] better appeal to minority students”. While in **Chapter Eight**, Matt Jordan

offers “a criterion for determining which sorts of views, if any, may be considered out-of-bounds in an honors community”, strongly concluding that “our best approach is one that mandates respect for each individual as well as open inquiry concerning every topic compatible with that respect”.

In the final two chapters of the book, we move from California State University, Fullerton, with Sandra Pérez’s “Understanding Diversity in Honors at a Large, Public, Comprehensive, Hispanic and Pacific Islander Serving University” in **Chapter Nine** to Purdue University in **Chapter Ten** with Dwaine Jengelley and Jason Ware’s tiered mentorship study: “Multi-Year Initiatives For Enhancing Diverse Students’ Outcomes Within Large Public Honors Colleges and Programs” – an excellent concluding chapter due to its emphasis on the merits of “structured intentional interaction”. In other words, a positive, productive approach to diversity, equity and inclusion in honors education does not come about only through discussion but through intentional action.

It is recognized that *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Honors Education* is not on its own conclusive or even comprehensive. Its editor and its contributors would never suggest otherwise. It is hoped, however, that this is a book that contributes to raising of awareness of the possibilities of diversity, equity and inclusion in honors education, that it offers some practical indications of how this might be approached, and that it encourages others to take action.

CHAPTER ONE

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE IN HONORS EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, BALTIMORE COUNTY

SIMON STACEY AND JODI KELBER-KAYE

Introduction

This chapter describes how the Honors College at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) diversified its student membership. UMBC is well-known for its commitment to inclusive excellence, but until fairly recently, the Honors College, which ought to be a prominent site of inclusive excellence, did not fully make good on that commitment.¹ The initiatives employed over the past five years to make the Honors College inclusively excellent include:

- intensive, highly focused and multi-channel recruiting and/or outreach, to both applicants and potential applicants to the Honors College;
- a growing mentoring partnership with an anchor high school in Baltimore City, the urban area nearest to UMBC;

¹ The UMBC Honors College is not unique in facing diversity challenges. Honors Colleges and Programs at non-HBCUs rarely enroll substantial numbers of Underrepresented Minority (URM) students. See, for example, R.R. Harrison-Cook, *An Examination of Issues Affecting African American Students' Decisions to Enroll in Honors Programs or Honors Colleges at Predominantly White Postsecondary Institutions*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of South Carolina, Columbia, 1999. Harrison-Cook's convenience sample found that African American students made up between 1.1% and 6.7% of the population of the Honors Colleges and Programs surveyed, with most clustered around the lower end of the range. (pp. 3-4)

- an admissions process revised to be more holistic, flexible and sensitive to the many forms that academic promise can assume.

Though these initiatives are still being developed and refined, the demographic profile of the incoming freshman Honors College classes at UMBC has changed markedly over the past five years. In what follows we describe the impetus for our inclusive excellence effort, the different initiatives that made it up, aspects of what we believe helped make them successful, and where there remains room for improvement.

Background: UMBC and its Honors College

Established in 1966, UMBC is a medium-sized public research extensive and doctoral degree granting university emphasizing excellent undergraduate programs in the liberal arts and sciences and engineering. UMBC's undergraduate academic programs include 48 major degree programs, 38 minor programs, and 25 certificate programs. UMBC combines the emphasis on teaching found at liberal arts colleges with the innovation of a research university. The Carnegie Foundation ranks UMBC in the category of Research Universities with "Higher research activity."

UMBC's 2016 freshman class of 1,538 students was among the most diverse in the nation (45% minority, including 24% Asian, 14% African American, and 7% Hispanic and Native American). The class was also academically capable. It included dozens of high school valedictorians, students with 4.0 GPAs, and students with highly competitive SAT scores (a 1216 average SAT for top quartile students), and the average high school GPA of the class is 3.75. There is no stable achievement gap in the six-year graduation rate between white and African American freshman students (though a gap remains for white vs African American male transfer students).² UMBC's undergraduate population numbered 11,142 in 2016, and approximately 60% of all undergraduates enroll with an interest in STEM.

The Honors College at UMBC was established in 1988, and developed from an existing Honors Program. It enrolled its first class of eighty-one students in the Fall of 1989. The Honors College curriculum has evolved ever since, but currently requires that students take Honors Forum in their first semester at UMBC (freshmen only), complete six

² UMBC Institutional Research, Analysis and Decision Support, *Retention and Graduation Rates*, <http://oir.umbc.edu/university-data/retention-graduate-rates/>.

appropriately distributed Honors classes, an Applied Learning Experience and a writing course. Honors classes take the form of Honors Sections (enhanced versions of existing classes) and Honors Seminars, which are stand alone, small-group, discussion-focused classes taught by Faculty Fellows selected through a competitive application process.

In the close to thirty years of its existence, the Honors College has awarded approximately 1500 Certificates of Honors to UMBC graduates, and its graduates have gone on to prestigious graduate and professional schools in the U.S. and abroad, winning national and international awards such as the Goldwater Scholarship, the Marshall Fellowship and Gates Cambridge Fellowship, Fulbright Scholarships, and others. The average GPA of our graduates is above 3.7, and in recent years most Valedictorians and Salutatorians have been members of the Honors College. The membership of the Honors College is kept small (currently about 500 students, less than 5% of the total undergraduate population) in order to provide the personal quality of attention that is supposed to be the hallmark of Honors education.

The origin of the focus on inclusive excellence, and a path not taken

In retrospect, several factors coincided to jumpstart the UMBC Honors College's inclusive excellence effort. The first was the visit to Honors Forum of the university's President. Honors Forum is a mandatory class, designed to introduce first-year students to each other, the Honors College, and UMBC. One major feature of the class is that faculty and staff from around the campus are invited to visit the class and speak about their work or research, to help provide the students with a sense of the variety of activities taking place on campus. Perhaps the most anticipated visit is that of Dr. Freeman Hrabowski III, the university's charismatic President. After his 2011 visit to the class, Dr. Hrabowski noted to the Dean and Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education, to whom the Honors College reports, that the Freshman Honors College class was not nearly as diverse as the rest of the campus, and urged that efforts be made to remedy this problem. Dr. Hrabowski was not mistaken in his observation. In that year, the 82-person freshman class included only one underrepresented minority (URM) student. Nor had he observed something anomalous. The Honors College was indeed generally, and not just in this freshman class, less diverse than the campus around it.

That year also saw the appointment of an Honors College Associate Director well equipped to attend to this deficit. She had a

longstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion, a record of encouraging it as a faculty member in the Gender and Women's Studies Department at UMBC and in her ongoing research, and extensive connections to Baltimore City (and its public schools), a majority African American city less than ten miles from UMBC.

The high-level injunction to pay more attention to diversity, and the simultaneous appointment of an Associate Director with the right mix of skills and commitments, made 2011 the right time to design a plan to diversify the Honors College, while maintaining its rigorous standards. This was not the very first time the lack of diversity in the Honors College had attracted attention. But in prior years, a rather desultory diversity plan had focused on "double-dipping" into the university's flagship inclusive excellence program, the Meyerhoff Scholars Program (MSP). The MSP is a national model for efforts to increase diversity in the STEM fields and while it is open to students of all backgrounds, these students must demonstrate a commitment to advancing underrepresented minorities in these fields.³ The MSP typically enrolls a majority URM student class each year, and these students had seemed like a ready-made population from which to recruit diverse students for the Honors College. But the MSP has a very well-defined mission, which requires students focus intently on preparation for a STEM PhD program. There was some understandable apprehension that the demands of the Honors College curriculum might divert MSP students from that focus. Furthermore, the MSP is explicitly dedicated to supporting STEM students, and the UMBC Honors College, like almost all Honors Colleges, seeks a disciplinarily balanced mix of students. At a university and Honors College with a majority STEM student population, relying extensively on recruiting Honors College students from the MSP risked increasing demographic diversity at the expense of diminished disciplinary diversity. Accordingly, while the MSP would play a role in the Honors College's diversity effort, the bulk of our energy went in different directions.

³ For more on the Meyerhoff Program, see Kenneth I. Maton, Shauna A. Pollard, Tatiana V. McDougal Weise, and Freeman A. Hrabowski III, "The Meyerhoff Scholars Program: A Strengths-based, Institution-wide Approach to Increasing Diversity in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics," *Mt. Sinai Journal of Medicine* 79(5), September 2012, pp. 610-23.

Working with what we already had: Mining our existing applicant pool, and the university's

The Honors College receives as many as 3500 applications in some years, for an entering freshman class we hope will number around 100. The members of the small application reading team, inevitably, must make some hard decisions about where to focus their file-reading energy, and one way to rationalize the process is to focus on the applications from students who appear, numerically, to be the strongest--those with the highest GPAs and SAT or ACT scores. But these quantitative measures do not always pick out all of the most capable and promising students, and we know that we miss some truly excellent students simply because their abilities are not well-captured by their grades and test scores. Though this issue remains a hotly contested one, there is persuasive evidence that URM students, and especially African American students, are disadvantaged by standardized tests.⁴ One of our first 2012 initiatives was therefore to identify URM applicants who, while admissible to the Honors College, might not ordinarily have had their applications read early in the process, and to examine their application files. Doing so allowed us to gauge--from the record of accomplishments not captured in the numerical data, from the quality of writing, from the story of opportunities seized and obstacles overcome--which of these otherwise potentially overlooked students merited further consideration.

A second step was to try to ensure that all of the URM students who had applied to UMBC were apprised of the opportunity that the Honors College represented. We were concerned that some highly capable URM students might simply not have been aware of the existence of the Honors College and its advantages, or might have ruled themselves out and not applied. To address this problem, we obtained from the Office of Admissions and Enrollment Management the names and contact details of high-performing URM (and other) UMBC applicants who had not applied

⁴ An early contribution to this debate was R. Freedle, "Correcting the SAT's Ethnic and Social-Class Bias: A Method for Re-estimating SAT Scores," *Harvard Educational Review*, 2003 73(1), 1-44. Freedle's work was questioned on methodological grounds, but his original findings have since been confirmed (see M. V. Santalices and M. Wilson, "Unfair Treatment? The Case of Freedle, the SAT, and the Standardization Approach to Differential Item Functioning," *Harvard Educational Review* 2010, 80(1), 106-133.) The ACT appears to replicate the bias of the SAT. (see R. Reeves and D. Halikias, "Race Gaps in SAT Scores Highlight Inequality and Hinder Upward Mobility," *Brookings Papers on Social Mobility*, February 2017.)

to the Honors College. An intensive outreach campaign was then organized for these students. It entailed reading their UMBC application essays and materials, and then using Honors College stationery to hand write notes to them, mentioning aspects of their history, trajectory or aspirations that suggested they would find the Honors College a congenial and rewarding place, and inviting them to call, e-mail or visit (a staff member's business card was always included in the mailed correspondence). In its first years, the writing of notes (well over a hundred each spring) was undertaken by the Director of the Honors College. In subsequent years, other members of staff joined the process, both to spread the burden, and so that note-writers could, where possible, write to students with backgrounds or interests similar to their own. Though we did not know this at the time, and our outreach was directed at a variety of students, this note-writing approach followed one of Harrison-Cook's recommendations: to provide "information [that] will help African American students understand what honors education involves, what honors education requires of them, and how honors education can benefit them."⁵

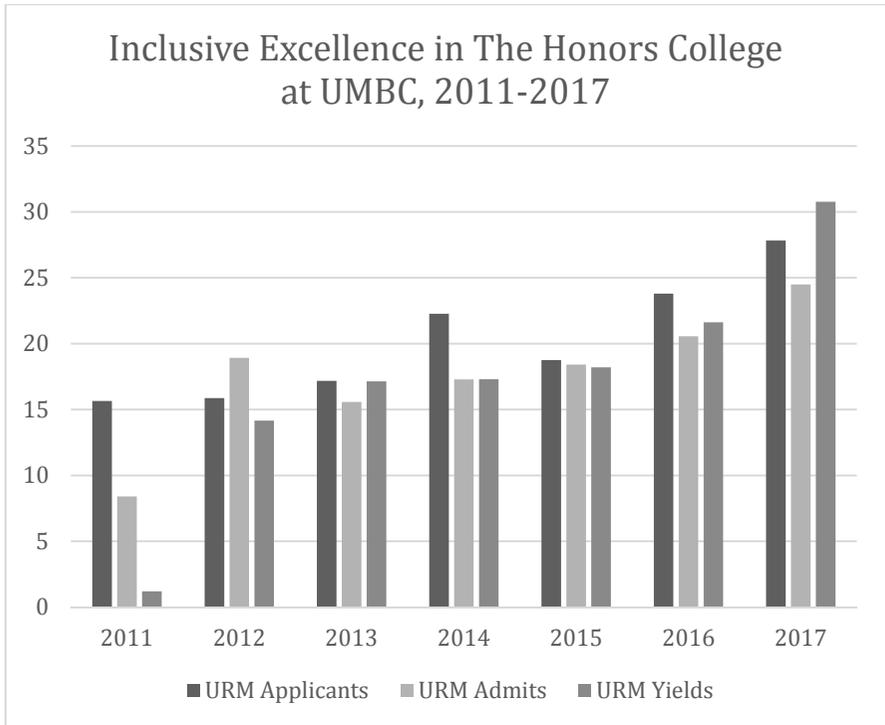
Third, the Honors College reached out not only to students qualified to apply to the Honors College in the hope of turning them into actual applicants, but also to students who had been admitted to the Honors College but whom we had not yet yielded. The goal here was to explain from their perspectives what the advantages of Honors College membership were. While this effort targeted many of our admitted students, we were careful to ensure that URM students were included. In its most recent iterations, the campaign has also included notes from sophomore Honors College students, who spend a pizza and soda-fueled evening with Honors College staff writing them. The rationale for the inclusion of students was that some of them had received notes as they were deciding which offers of admission to accept, and might remember which parts of the message resonated with them, and that some applicants might respond better to a communication from students just barely older than them. (At any rate, it was certainly true that notes from students had a flavor and an energy all their own, often including cartoons and sketches, poetry, anecdotes and other unique approaches to connecting with applicants.)

Finally, after May 1--National College Decision Day--the Honors College reached out again to students (URM and others) who had accepted their UMBC offer of admission and who had been admitted to the Honors

⁵ Harrison-Cook, *An Examination of Issues Affecting African American Students' Decisions to Enroll*, p. 95.

College, but had not accepted their offer of admission to the Honors College. These students were e-mailed, and invited to discuss the advantages of the Honors College with Honors College staff members.

This suite of efforts made an immediate difference, as the table below demonstrates:⁶



The enhanced outreach efforts also had other positive consequences, too. For instance, take just the first year of the initiative, the 2012 freshman class was more than 25% bigger than the 2011 freshman class, though it is true that the 2011 class was an unusually small one. And, the average SAT score of the freshman entering class increased from 2121 in 2011 to 2144 in 2012.

⁶ We are very grateful to Alexandra Graves and Michael Stone, the Honors College’s Academic Advisors, for valuable assistance in collecting, cleaning and analyzing the data represented in this table.

Making more of what we need: Rethinking recruitment in Baltimore City

The approach described above clearly produced some encouraging results. The UMBC Honors College in 2017 is a much more diverse place than it was in 2011, and that change has brought with it all the well-documented advantages and benefits one would expect.⁷ But in a sense it remained the case that the Honors College was simply maximizing opportunities it could (and should) always have been exploiting. As the momentum generated by our refinements to our admission and recruitment processes grew, we began to look for other ways to foster the Honors College's inclusive excellence.

UMBC has long cherished a variety of strong connections to Baltimore City, and the Honors College shared some of these connections. Until budgetary constraints ended it, the Honors College orientation involved a City-as-Text excursion every year, and the mandatory freshman service-learning experience often takes place at sites in the city. But the Honors College had not adequately incorporated Baltimore--and especially the Baltimore City Public School System (City Schools)--into its recruitment planning and practice.

Recruiting from City Schools would serve the cause of inclusive excellence in two ways. First of all, Baltimore City's, and its public school-going population, is predominantly URM: 80.6% of the public school population is African-American, and 9.4% is Hispanic or Latino.⁸ So, increasing the number of students from Baltimore City who matriculate to UMBC and join the Honors College would likely have a positive effect on the Honors College's ethnic and racial diversity. Second, much of the population City Schools serve is of relatively low socio-economic status: 64.7% of City Schools students are classified as "low income,"⁹ higher than for any other school system in Maryland, and a rate

⁷ For perhaps the canonical statement on this issue, see W. G. Bowen and D. Bok, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁸ Baltimore City Public Schools, *City Schools at a Glance*,

http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/about/by_the_numbers, accessed July 26 2017.

⁹ Baltimore City Public Schools, *City Schools at a Glance*,

http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/about/by_the_numbers, accessed July 26 2017. The low income designation is "based on eligibility for programs including Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance."

which compares unfavorably with the national average.¹⁰ So, recruiting from City Schools would enhance the socio-economic diversity of the Honors College as well.

In addition, UMBC as a whole has not recruited City Schools students at what might be regarded as an appropriate rate. In recent years, the total number of students attending UMBC who graduated from City Schools ranged from a low of 31 to a high of 57, with an average of 40.5. So, the Honors College's turn to the city was welcomed by many of the stakeholders on the UMBC campus (especially in the Office of Admissions and Enrollment Management), who recognized that a City Schools student recruited to the Honors College who would not otherwise have been was, a student recruited to UMBC who might otherwise not have been.

Our most recent effort, then, focuses on Baltimore Polytechnic Institute (colloquially known as Poly), one of the highest-performing public high schools in Baltimore City, and considered to be the STEM magnet high school in the city. After Poly's application to offer the College Board's AP Capstone class was approved, the course was offered for the first time in the 2015-16 academic year. AP Capstone is a "program that equips students with the independent research, collaborative teamwork, and communication skills that are increasingly valued by colleges." The course is "comprised of two AP courses: AP Seminar [for Juniors] and AP Research [for Seniors]- and ... [p]articipating schools can use the AP Capstone program to provide unique research opportunities for current AP students."¹¹ The two teachers primarily responsible for the implementation of AP Capstone were committed to providing these unique research opportunities, and looked to UMBC and the Honors College to help provide research mentorship and expertise for their students.

Serendipitously, one of these two teachers was a UMBC graduate and, to boot, the spouse of an Academic Advisor in the Honors College. This represented a golden opportunity for the Honors College to strengthen the cordial but mostly coincidental relationship it had until then had with Poly, and to build the fabled "pipeline" from high school to college. Discussions with the Poly AP Capstone staff resulted in a plan to pair UMBC faculty and staff mentors with Capstone students to help supervise their research projects. The mentorship relationship was to entail

¹⁰ In 2013, low-income students constituted the majority of students in the United States for the first time. Southern Education Foundation, *A New Majority: Low Income Students Now a Majority In the Nation's Public Schools* (January, 2015).

¹¹ College Board, *AP Capstone Overview*, <https://advancesinap.collegeboard.org/ap-capstone>.

multiple in-person meetings each semester between mentor and mentee, visits to campus by students for an introduction to the library and other academic resources on campus, to the process of research, and--our ulterior motive--to college life, to UMBC and to the Honors College.

The inaugural AP Capstone class graduated in June of 2017. At the urging of their mentors, and the Honors College staff, 14 of the 18 students applied to UMBC. In years past, the number of Poly students applying to UMBC has ranged from 59 to 87 with an average of 76. Applications to UMBC from Poly (the entire school) for Fall 2017, as of this writing, jumped to 102. We cannot, of course, be sure that students in the AP Capstone mentored by UMBC faculty and staff class would not have applied anyway, but the increase in the number of applicants to UMBC from Poly for Fall 2017 admissions is at least suggestive. On the other hand, the yield of AP Capstone students was not what might have been hoped for. Only one student decided to attend UMBC, though she did also (thankfully!) become a member of the Honors College.

Though disappointing, this outcome was not entirely unexpected. It would certainly have been gratifying to see more Poly AP Capstone students matriculate to UMBC and join the Honors College in the first year, but it is really the long-term payoff that we hope will justify the effort. For instance, one of our current challenges is that as we talked to the first eighteen Poly AP Capstone students about the advantages of the Honors College, we had only one member of the Honors College *from Poly* to help make that case for us. We can now add one more student voice at least to the chorus singing UMBC's praises, and that student will have a strong connection to the AP Capstone experience. Also, we anticipate that the greater visibility of UMBC and the Honors College at Poly, and the solidification of the relationship between our two institutions, will tend to increase the number of students who have UMBC 'on their radar,' with the result that even some students who are not part of the AP Capstone program will begin to consider it, and the Honors College, as destinations.

Finally, many City Schools students need significant non-loan financial aid in order to attend college. To address this need, we established (with assistance from the Office of Admissions and Enrollment Management) a set of Memorandums of Understanding between the Honors College and UMBC's specialty scholars programs,¹² and City Schools. This arrangement allows the Honors College and each scholars program to provide a four-year annual merit scholarship to at least one

¹² "Scholars Programs at UMBC,"
<http://undergraduate.umbc.edu/apply/scholars.php>.

student graduating from a Baltimore City public high school. UMBC's seven named scholars programs--the Center for Women in Information Technology Scholars, the Cyber Scholars, Meyerhoff Scholars, Humanities Scholars, Linehan Artist Scholars, Sherman Teacher Education Scholars and Sondheim Public Affairs Scholars--are competitive, scholarship-granting programs intended for students with particular academic interests. They "combine financial awards with special opportunities for advanced research, unique seminars, directed internships, study abroad and more." Cross-membership of the Honors College and a scholars program is heartily encouraged, and commonly taken advantage of. The funding arrangement was launched in Fall 2016 and the Honors College was able to provide significant scholarship funding to one student in Fall 2016 and another (the AP Capstone student, in fact) in Fall 2017.

What have we learned?

As is true of everything that happens in higher education, the job is never done (or, as our university President likes to say, 'success is never final.'). Our inclusive excellence effort will continue, and continue to be refined, for the foreseeable future. But, summarized below are some of the lessons we've learned in the past five years, and which will continue to guide us in the future:

Take advantage of a propitious moment or set of circumstances.

Our inclusive excellence effort was galvanized by the coincidence of a directive from the President and the arrival of a staff member equipped to carry it out. The collaboration with Poly was facilitated by the personal connections between Poly and UMBC staff. Honors Colleges have many priorities (diversity just one amongst them), and sometimes have to choose between them. But when the planets align to support the pursuit of a particular objective, it makes sense to seize the opportunity.

It helps to align your own efforts with university priorities. The Honors College and the university both aspired to establish and improve relationships with Baltimore City schools. The meshing of these interests allowed the Honors College to make (limited) claims on university resources to support this work that it otherwise might not have been able to make.

Increasing diversity happens one student at a time. Sometimes, an organization or institution can rely on its reputation and stated mission to attract diverse students. The highly successful and nationally-recognized MSP is an example. The Honors College, on the other hand, has to sell itself energetically to diverse students, one at a time. We hope at

some point to achieve critical-mass, a happy situation in which we can rely on the twinned fact and perception of our diversity to perpetuate and solidify our inclusive excellence. But for us, for now, increasing diversity is a person-by-person effort, and this is probably true for most Honors Colleges.

It may not be clear what worked. We are confident that our efforts played a causal role in increasing the diversity of the Honors College, but we have not been able to disaggregate the effects of particular initiatives. For instance, we cannot say whether outreach to high-performing non-applicants to the Honors College, or extra attention to already admitted students, ‘paid off’ best. We find ourselves in a position a little bit like businessman John Wanamaker, who allegedly once said: “Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half.” In the same way, we know at least some of our efforts have paid off in greater diversity in the Honors College; we just don’t know which ones!

The job is not done when the entering freshman class is more diverse. Diversifying an entering class is obviously the essential first step. But it is, arguably, more important still to support the members of a newly diversified class all the way to graduation, and beyond. The benefits of having been an Honors College member even for a short period may be significant, but they pale into comparison to graduating with an Honors College certificate, and we owe it to these students (as we do to all students) to ensure they enjoy those benefits.

CHAPTER TWO

“DIFFERENT CULTURES CAUSE ME TO HESITATE”: INTRODUCING INTERGROUP DIALOGUE IN AN HONORS GREAT TEXTS COURSE

TRISHA POSEY

Introduction

Incorporating experiences of cross-cultural engagement into existing curriculum can be a challenge. Nevertheless, experiences in dialogue across difference are essential if honors students are going to be effective leaders in civil society, the workplace, and their families. For these reasons, the Honors Scholars Program at John Brown University adopted as an imperative the revision of the HSP curriculum to include education in cross-cultural engagement. One of the first classes to undergo curricular revision was the Honors Western Civilization course, two sections of which are offered in the spring semester each year. While there were limits to the effectiveness of the curricular revisions, the incorporation of intergroup dialogue into the course proved to be an effective means of developing the cultural competency of JBU honors students.

Background—John Brown University and Diversity

John Brown University is a comprehensive Christian liberal arts university located in Northwest Arkansas. It is a largely residential college with a traditional undergraduate population of 1300. The university is situated in Siloam Springs, a town of 15,000 located near the Oklahoma border. The undergraduate student population is largely drawn from students in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Colorado, and Kansas. Most students (79%) identify as Caucasian. The African-American student

population is quite small (2%), and the non-US citizen student population is at 7%.¹ However, a number of the Caucasian students come from missionary families and grew up overseas, so that about 15% of the student population consists of students who spent their formative years outside of the United States.²

Institutional surveys of students reveal that John Brown University struggles in the area of providing cross-cultural experiences for our students. The JBU data from the Coordinated Institutional Research Project (CIRP) consistently show that students show little development in “Pluralistic Orientation” compared to students in the JBU comparison group.³ For the 2011 First-Year CIRP assessment, 43% of JBU students were identified as having low pluralistic orientation, compared with the 30.2% of students at comparison institutions.⁴ While the same cohort of students scored higher in the area of Pluralistic Orientation their senior year (46.8% self-identified as competent in this area), they still fell behind students at peer institutions (50.2% of whom self-identified as competent in this area).⁵ Institutional numbers from the National Survey of Student Engagement are even more concerning. The 2014 NSSE survey of JBU students revealed that first-year students were more likely to engage in discussions with diverse others than were their senior-level peers.⁶ Sadly,

¹ “JBU Facts 2016-17,” John Brown University, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.jbu.edu/about/facts/>.

² “Missionary Kids,” John Brown University, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.jbu.edu/admissions/international/mks/>.

³ Pluralistic Orientation is defined as “Ability to work cooperatively with diverse people, tolerance of others with different beliefs, openness to having my own views challenged, ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues, and ability to see the world from someone else’s perspective.” This information comes from the John Brown University Office of Institutional Effectiveness, “2011 CIRP Freshman Survey, CIRP Construct Reports, First-time, Full-time Freshmen, John Brown University,” accessed December 1, 2016, [https://eaglenet.jbu.edu/resources/oie/Assessment%20Data/Coordinated%20Institutional%20Research%20Project%20\(CIRP\)/Freshman%20Survey%20\(TFS\)/2011/TFS_2011_PDF_CONSTRUCT.pdf](https://eaglenet.jbu.edu/resources/oie/Assessment%20Data/Coordinated%20Institutional%20Research%20Project%20(CIRP)/Freshman%20Survey%20(TFS)/2011/TFS_2011_PDF_CONSTRUCT.pdf).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ John Brown University Office of Institutional Effectiveness, “2013-2014 Diverse Learning Environments Survey,” accessed December 1, 2016, [https://eaglenet.jbu.edu/resources/oie/Assessment%20Data/Coordinated%20Institutional%20Research%20Project%20\(CIRP\)/Diverse%20Learning%20Environment s%20\(DLE\)/2014/0091_-11-DLE_2014_XLS_FACTORS.pdf](https://eaglenet.jbu.edu/resources/oie/Assessment%20Data/Coordinated%20Institutional%20Research%20Project%20(CIRP)/Diverse%20Learning%20Environments%20(DLE)/2014/0091_-11-DLE_2014_XLS_FACTORS.pdf).

⁶ John Brown University Office of Institutional Effectiveness, “NSSE14 Engagement Indicators,” accessed December 1, 2016,

NSSE numbers in the Honors Scholars Program were even worse. Students in the Honors Scholars Program scored lower in the area of “Discussions with Diverse Others” compared to their non-honors peers (with the exception of students of “Other Economic Backgrounds” for first-year honors students), and they also saw a decrease in cross-cultural engagement over their time at JBU (with the exception of engaging with students of “Other Political Views,” which went up slightly).⁷

These results are inconsistent with one of the explicitly stated learning outcomes for the JBU Honors Scholars Program, which is to “understand one’s culture, as well as appreciate and learn from people of differing backgrounds and beliefs as acts of Christian hospitality.” In order to address the need for opportunities for cross-cultural engagement in the JBU Honors Scholars Program, in the spring of 2016 the HSP joined the great texts curriculum for Honors Western Civilization II with experiences in intergroup dialogue.

Great Texts and Intergroup Dialogue

In bringing together studies of great texts and intergroup dialogue, the JBU Honors Scholars Program was joining two things that might seem like strange bedfellows. After all, one of the critiques of great texts programs is that they tend to be Western-centric, focus on texts written by white men, and offer little in the way of diverse perspectives. The great texts approach to education grew out of a movement of American academics in the 1920s and 1930s who were concerned by the increasing specialization of the academy and sought to reclaim the educational ideal of educating for wisdom through the study of great ideas as presented by Western philosophers, theologians, and writers. Books in the great texts canon include texts like Plato’s *Republic*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and the writings of the American founders. Despite the narrow representation of authors in the great text canon, there is a good deal of overlap between the goals of teaching great texts and those of intergroup dialogue. Great text approaches to teaching focus on reading whole texts for the purpose of developing wisdom. Reading and discussing great texts provides students

<https://eaglenet.jbu.edu/resources/oie/Assessment%20Data/Forms/Assessment%20Data.aspx?RootFolder=%2Fresources%2Foie%2FAssessment%20Data%2FNational%20Survey%20of%20Student%20Engagement%20%28NSSE%29%2F2014&FolderCTID=0x012000DCCD5B402094E6499F4D7A9FD6DEBF94&View=%7BCDFC3F35-C695-4660-BFDB-2237D6306B86%7D>

⁷ John Brown University Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Report by email, August 29, 2016.

the opportunity to ponder deep questions of human existence: Who am I? What is my purpose? What can I know? How should I live? Many of these questions are also addressed in the intergroup dialogue experience, which uses “a pedagogy that creates learning communities where members share and learn from each other’s experiences, reflect on their own and other’s experiences to make sense of larger structural systems of advantage and disadvantage, and create new meanings for themselves.”⁸ The natural overlaps between great text classrooms and intergroup dialogue provide for an effective pedagogical pairing that has the potential to transform students.

Intergroup dialogue is a well-developed pedagogical technique that provides highly structured experiences for students for the purpose of cross-cultural engagement and personal transformation. It grew out of a movement in the early 1990s to foster conversations about conflict and accelerated after President Bill Clinton instituted his “Initiative on Race” in the mid-1990s.⁹ Since then, a number of researchers (many of them affiliated with the National Intergroup Dialogue Institute at the University of Michigan) have launched projects and research studies related to intergroup dialogue. Intergroup dialogue brings together students from different groups (usually with a history of conflict) for the purpose of engagement in a facilitated experience.¹⁰ There are four stages to intergroup dialogue¹¹, including:

1. Forming and Building Relationships. In this stage, the instructor develops an environment in which “honest and meaningful dialogue” can take place.¹² At this point the goal is to help students feel comfortable talking about difficult topics with each other. Part of the discussion centers on laying ground rules for engagement, with an emphasis on respecting others and listening to their experiences.

⁸ Maurianne Adams et. al., *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 29.

⁹ David Schoem et. al., “Intergroup Dialogue: Democracy at Work in Theory and Practice,” in *Intergroup Dialogue: Deliberative Democracy in School, College, Community, and Workplace*, eds. David Schoem and Sylvia Hurtado (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 1-2.

¹⁰ Ximena Zúñiga et. al., “Intergroup Dialogues: An Educational Model for Cultivating Engagement Across Differences,” *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35 no. 1 (2002): 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10-12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

2. Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience.

This stage is meant to provide students with an opportunity to explore their identities in particular groups and then identify ways in which cross-group interactions can create conflict. This stage involves both activities that require self-reflection (such as exploring early memories related to group membership) and activities that bring members of differing groups together.

3. Exploring and Dialoguing about Hot Topics. Moving beyond reflection to fuller engagement, students in this stage are provided an opportunity to discuss topics that are usually considered controversial through a facilitated dialogue experience. In an interracial dialogue, for example, one topic that might be explored is police shootings of unarmed black men. Through the course of the dialogue students are challenged to listen to each other across their differences and to consider how they might shift their understanding of a particular topic, if necessary.

4. Action Planning and Alliance Building. In this fourth and final stage, students are encouraged to develop a plan of action based on their new understandings. Suggestions for change can be both personal and group-oriented.

In the spring of 2016 the Honors Scholars Program at JBU combined readings in great texts with intergroup dialogues in the areas of gender and race and supplemented the dialogues with exercises in speaking up against offensive statements about others. Two sections of the class (a total of thirty-one students) went through the exercises. Most students in the classes knew each other from the honors first-year courses they had taken the previous semester, and about half of the students had been in a class with the instructor the prior semester. The primary text for the intergroup dialogue experience was Adams’s and Bell’s *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, which combines contextual readings in a variety of subjects with class and group assignments and experiences for use in the classroom.¹³

¹³ Adams et. al., *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*.

The Experience

Before the students participated in intergroup dialogues, they carried out a cultural diversity self-assessment (Appendix A). This provided a baseline by which the Honors Scholars Program could judge transformation over the course of the semester. Students generally scored themselves in the high median range in this assessment, averaging in the high 3's and low 4's on a 5-point Likert scale. After the self-assessment, the course shifted to readings and discussions related to gender. The students read two texts, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which usually stir up discussion on gender issues.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), while focused more on the rebellious character and actions of Satan, also spends a good deal of time describing the pre- and post-Fall relationship between Adam and Eve. *Paradise Lost* is notorious for its treatment of Eve, whose relationship with God is described as derivative—only possible through her husband, Adam. Milton clearly expresses this unequal relationship in lines 296-299 of book four in *Paradise Lost*:

Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed:
For contemplation he and valor formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace;
He for God only, she for God in him.¹⁴

Further on, in lines 637-38 of the same book, Eve says to Adam:

God is thy law, thou mine; to know no more
Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise.¹⁵

Book four of *Paradise Lost* always sparks intense discussion among students about historical and modern gender relationships and the oppression of women, a discussion that continues in our reading of Mary Wollstonecraft's Enlightenment text *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Strongly rooted in the Enlightenment idea of personal freedom through the use of reason, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) argues that until women are free to use their minds, without imposition from men who would have them serve only as "pretty things" to be admired, both men and women will suffer. Wollstonecraft rails against the

¹⁴ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. David Scott Kastan (1667; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), 120.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

limitations placed on women: “Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman’s sceptre,” she states, “the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming around its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison.”¹⁶ Wollstonecraft calls out Milton for his oppressive views of women. Both of these texts problematized gender for my students, forcing them to consider whether gender differences are innate or simply social constructs, to what extent social expectations of gender lead to the oppression of men and women, and whether gender-based oppression is common today. The discussion of these great texts thus opens the door to conversation for the first intergroup dialogue.

After reading *Paradise Lost* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, students participated in a gender intergroup dialogue. Outside of class, students responded to the following question prompts:

Three things you need to know about me are:

When you were a child, what is one message you were taught about relationships between girls and boys?

How were you taught this lesson?

When you were a child, what is one lesson you were taught about how males were supposed to relate to each other?

How were you taught this lesson?

When you were a child, what is one lesson you were taught about how females were supposed to relate to each other?

How were you taught this lesson?

Students brought their answers to these questions to class, and then they sat on the floor in their gendered groups. We made lists on the board of expectations that students identified for their own gender and the opposite gender. After we made the lists, each group (male and female) was then given five minutes to comment on the effects of these expectations on them. Female students listened to male students as they responded, and then male students listened to female students as they responded. Following these five-minute sessions, students were then permitted to respond to each other.

Several themes emerged from the intergroup dialogue, many of which came through in the post-exercise written reflections. As expressed by Wollstonecraft, many young woman articulated frustration at their

¹⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 2nd ed. (1792; Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1996), 43.

embodied experience of gender oppression. One young woman wrote, “For a girl you are pressured to have the perfect slim body, and the designer clothing with makeup that took 3 hours to put on perfectly.” The concern over gender expectations went both ways, however. Many young women in class realized, some of them for the first time, that men experienced pressure to conform to gender expectations as well. “Listening to the discussion today made me realize that gender stereotypes also put pressure on guys,” one student wrote. Many students expressed frustration with the effects of gendered expectations that kept them from flourishing in relationship with those of the opposite gender. “Cross-gender friendships are really hard,” one student expressed, “harder than they should be.” The most frequent theme in student responses was the realization that experience played a significant role in student ideas and expectations of gender. As one student wrote, “Overall, talking with different people reminded me that not everyone has my background and therefore universalizing my experience is incredibly dangerous and limiting.”

Students thus came away with new understandings about gender, which were shaped both by the texts they read for class and the intentional discussion regarding gender that provided opportunities for listening and sharing with each other.

Mid-way through the semester the students went through their second intergroup dialogue experience after they read *Night* by Elie Wiesel. One of the themes of *Night*, as well as Elie Wiesel’s 1986 Nobel Peace Prize speech, is the idea of witnessing to injustice in order to combat it. In *Night*, a young Wiesel reflects on the silence that others showed in the face of the Holocaust, refusing to recognize the seemingly unimaginable destruction of European Jews. Years later, Wiesel articulated the need to speak against injustice, famously stating in his Peace Prize speech, “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim.”

After reading *Night* students engaged in an intergroup dialogue in which they discussed the challenge of speaking up in the face of offensive statements about groups of people. For this dialogue, students first started by discussing why they scored themselves so low on the diversity assessment statement “I challenge others when they make racial/ethnic/sexually offensive comments or jokes.” Group discussion on this topic revealed a number of reasons for student silence, including a fear of being seen as self-righteous and an inability to offer articulate responses to offensive statements. Once these issues were identified, the class then went through an exercise in which they were introduced to a common way