

2-1-2011

Honors Programs Best Practices: Le Moyne College, Gonzaga University, Creighton University, Rockhurst University, Regis University, and Loyola University Maryland

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Recommended Citation

Hayes, Elizabeth; Clancy, Tim; Cherney, Isabelle; Martin, Daniel J.; Bowie, Thomas; and Miller, Nicholas (2011) "Honors Programs Best Practices: Le Moyne College, Gonzaga University, Creighton University, Rockhurst University, Regis University, and Loyola University Maryland," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 39, Article 15.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol39/iss1/15>

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Honors Programs Best Practices

LE MOYNE COLLEGE *Volcanoes and Songs*

The signature offering in the “all-interdisciplinary” Integral Honors Program at Le Moyne College is a four-week study-abroad living/learning course taught in early summer in a Latin American country. An alternative to our contemporary world course, *The World of the Other* is taught and the trip organized by two Le Moyne professors from different disciplines, at least one of whom is fluent in Spanish. Seven classes with readings and discussion are held during the spring semester to prepare the group for immersion in a culture where they will be “the other.” The first week in the chosen country, classes are held at the local university and are taught by professors from that university. During the subsequent three weeks, classes are run by the Le Moyne professors as the group travels to different areas of the country.

Students climb volcanoes; hike and bike through the countryside; visit ruins, museums, open-air markets, and churches; sample local dishes, learn local dances and songs, and interact with the people of the area. Last summer in Guatemala, the students painted the classroom walls of an elementary school and created a mural on one wall with all the children’s hand prints and names.

Dr. Elizabeth Hayes is director of the integral honors program at Le Moyne College.

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY *Meeting Marginal Groups*

The honors program freshman colloquium, exposes students to a wide array of various marginal groups in Spokane. Each week we look at a different social issue — homelessness, the working poor, American Indians, battered women, public mental health, GLBT teens, illegal immigration, etc. Students are also placed in a service agency for 20 hours throughout the semester.

Each week the first hour is devoted to a question and answer session with a member of the community working in a local agency. In the second hour, the class breaks up into four groups, each led by an experienced honors student, to discuss the issue of the day. These four honors students receive a \$1,000 scholarship/stipend for their work. The third hour is a

general discussion on the assigned readings in light of what they had learned in the first two hours. After class, students write a short reflection paper.

Students develop a class identity and become active citizens in their new community. Many remain engaged in service activities throughout their time at Gonzaga and beyond. Last year seven of 26 graduates from the honors program committed to service work for the coming year.

Tim Clancy, S.J., directs the Gonzaga honors program.

CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY *An Emphasis on Individual Research*

The Creighton University Honors Program mission relies on the belief, articulated by Pope John Paul II, that “the united endeavor of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity.”

The fifty best applicants to Creighton are offered a unique, multi-disciplinary, research-oriented curriculum that students design with

the assistance of a faculty mentor. From day one, every student works toward the culminating senior experience: conducting original, faculty-supervised research for public presentation at the college’s annual honors day event and, in many cases, in print journals or professional conferences. Some of the resulting works of scholarship and art have garnered national recognition.

The Honors curriculum affords students the flexibility to pursue double majors, internships, study abroad, community service, and research opportunities. Also subsidized overload credits, travel grants, Honors summer research grants, admission to honors study abroad at the University of Glasgow, the AJCU Summer Institute (a site-specific “city-as-text” program with students from all of the Jesuit universities), and for research placements with health science faculty. We encourage them to apply for prestigious fellowships.

Students admitted to the program are housed in a freshman living-learning dormitory that forms the College’s most visible community of scholars and encourages students to share their intellectual gifts with the Omaha community through service.

Isabelle Cherney directs the Creighton honors program.



Creighton University chemistry professor Bruce Mattson, Ph.D., works with a student.

Honors Programs Best Practices

ROCKHURST UNIVERSITY *Poems and Public Art*

An observer might best understand the Rockhurst honors curriculum in roughly two parts: traditional honors courses in the first two years and honors options in the last two. While honors courses bring students together into shared intellectual experience, honors options provide them with individual learning opportunities. The honors option allows a student to convert a non-honors course by collaborating with a professor on a project with specified conditions formalized in a contract by the third week of the semester.

The possibilities are limited only by the imagination of the student and professor. Students have explored the physics of the guitar, written a set of poems about urban environment, created a customized user manual for a new piece of physical therapy equipment, developed a companion website for a musical performance, interviewed a children's book author, collaborated on a piece of art for a public space, produced a spiritual care guidebook for nursing students, just to name a few.

Daniel J. Martin is a past director of the honors program.

REGIS UNIVERSITY LOYOLA UNIVERSITY MARYLAND

Discerning the genuine from the counterfeit

Expert discernment in all things...how do you cultivate such discernment? Many Jesuit honors programs focus on the same questions: critically, in Samuel Johnson's phrase, "to tell the good and the bad, the genuine and the counterfeit," and to prefer the good and the genuine. Or, "to help develop," in Fr. Kolvenbach's words, "a deeply human person, one of integrity, wholeness, and dedication." Jesuit honors programs seek to transform the lives of their students even as they invite their students to transform the world.

Honors programs can serve as catalysts for entire institutions, inviting transformation of the curriculum and faculty well beyond the limited direct reach of the programs themselves. They provide a practical structure for

revisiting the values of the core curriculum itself. A recent comprehensive revision of the honors program at Loyola University Maryland, for instance, reshaped honors as an alternate core centered explicitly on "examined learning." As students progress through their honors courses at Loyola, they reflect on the progress of their studies, including a the critical re-reading of key texts studied in foundation courses, especially as students prepare for the research and writing of theses in their final year.

The Loyola program's capstone course, The Examined Life, during the last semester of the senior year, and designed in large part by the students themselves, serves as a culmination of students' engagement with their own learning process, preparing them to be lifelong learners. At the same time, it refocuses their study of previous texts through the lens of particular ethical concerns as they prepare to make the transition from college to careers and families.

A similar focus on the integrative power of the honors core led the honors faculty at Regis University to a substantial revision of its own curriculum five years ago. In a world that often values specialization over the hard-won but transformative effects of a liberal education, Regis took a dramatic step toward reimagining what educational excellence within a Jesuit context might look like for the twenty-first-century student.

Endorsing the view that a university education should offer a student opportunities to examine her life, challenge her to discern the good from the bad, and encourage her to integrate knowledge and diverse ways of understanding the world, the Regis faculty developed a series of five new integrated honors seminars, each thematically anchored by a timeless Jesuit question. Students engage central questions—the balance between faith and reason, or the role *magis* might play in a student's own quest for meaning—in an effort to develop their powers of discernment. At Regis, students are wrestling with the very idea of a university in the foundational freshman seminar, or probing notions of justice in a junior seminar titled Justice for All: Reflections on the Common Good.

Whether they go to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, or to El Salvador as an election monitor, or to Africa to work with HIV/AIDS victims, four years of "fruitful conversation," as one recent graduate puts it, invariably lead them to live their lives more intentionally, to discern the world's injustices more fully, and to share in the hope of redeeming their speck of the world more completely. ■

Thomas G. Bowie, Jr. and Nicholas Miller direct the honors programs at Regis University and Loyola University Maryland.



The chapel at Regis University.