Summary

The overarching goal of The Honors College is to create a community of developing scholars in which honors students and their professors learn together and support each other, and in which each member of the community attempts to be a better scholar at the end of each academic year than he or she was at the beginning. After one year, the honors community at UAlbany is vibrant and growing.

Students and Professors. The Honors College began its first year with 10 juniors, 25 sophomores, and 119 freshmen. In February, an additional 28 freshmen were admitted and in June we admitted 9 students after their freshman year. Currently, 165 incoming freshmen have accepted our invitation to join The Honors College next academic year.

Most students in The Honors College achieved at a high level academically last year. Among the freshmen, 5% had a cumulative GPA of 4.0 at the end of their first year, 48% had a cumulative GPA of 3.8 or higher, and 69% had a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher.

Two freshmen in The Honors College left UAlbany at the end of the first semester. At the end of the academic year, seven freshmen were dropped from The Honors College because their GPA each semester was below what is required. Three others were dropped because they had not taken any honors courses in their first year.

During the 2006/07 academic year, 30 professors taught 24 honors courses. During the 2007/08 academic year, 35 professors will teach 33 three-credit honors courses and 2 one-credit honors discussion sections that will be attached to a nonhonors lecture course. Professors have been uniformly positive about their experiences in The Honors College.

Informal feedback from the honors students suggested a high level of satisfaction with their honors courses. However, attempts to evaluate honors courses systematically has been only moderately successful.

Honors Activities; We created many educational and social activities to expand honors students’ educational experiences and enhance their sense of community. However, honors activities were the least successful part of our experience as most of them were poorly attended. During the spring semester, we instituted a requirement that honors students attend seven honors activities each semester to maintain their eligibility for honors housing.

Residential Life. Honors housing had a strong positive influence on our ability to build an honors community. About 100 freshmen in The Honors College lived together in Montauk Hall on Indian Quad this year. Next year, about 60 sophomores and 140 freshmen will live in adjoining halls on State Quad. Students in honors housing appreciated living in a residence hall where students were serious about their studies, where it was quiet enough to study each night, and where it was quiet enough to sleep.
After several years of preparation, The Honors College at The University at Albany came into existence in September 2006, as our first incoming class of students arrived on campus, moved into their honors residence halls, and joined their professors in their first honors courses. Our goal has been to create a community of developing scholars in which honors students and their professors learn together and support each other, and in which each member of the community attempts to be a better scholar at the end of each academic year than he or she was at the beginning.

I am pleased to report that the honors community at UAlbany is vibrant and growing. The academic performance of most of our students has been very high and many honors professors have reported being rejuvenated by teaching their honors courses. The students, particularly the freshmen, have formed a sense of community through their residence-life experience and their coursework, and feel that they are part of an important new undertaking at UAlbany.

The Honors College has benefitted from strong support across the University at Albany. The university administration; colleges, schools, and departments; library; residential life program; athletic program; and many other components of the university have contributed to our successful first year. In turn, The Honors College has begun to strengthen the environment at UAlbany through the development of an academic and living environment that will attract the best undergraduates to UAlbany.

Goals with our students have included attracting top high school students to UAlbany, propelling students forward in their development as scholars, and creating a sense of community among the honors students and their professors. Propelling students forward has been accomplished in several ways: (a) developing an honors curriculum designed to introduce students to a wide range of disciplines and require them to think and write more intensely, (b) encouraging students to become involved in research early in their college years and requiring this involvement during their last year, and (c) creating a set of educational activities outside the classroom. Creating a sense of community has been accomplished in the residence halls and through honors courses. The educational and social activities sponsored by The Honors College have helped in this regard, but the sense of community has largely been created by the students as they live and work together. It is anticipated that the goal of attracting top applicants to UAlbany will be accomplished through achieving the other two goals.

Admission and Retention of Honors Students

The admission plan for The Honors College, established when it was created, is to admit about 125 incoming freshmen each year and then add an addition 25 freshmen at the end of their first or second semester at UAlbany. The goal is to have about 150 students in each graduating class.

During the 2006/07 admissions process, all students offered a Presidential Scholarship or a Douglass Scholarship were invited to join The Honors College. Since this resulted in 119 incoming honors students, it was decided to continue this procedure for the 2007/08 academic year. The expectation is that, at some point, we will need to
establish an application process for incoming Presidential or Douglass Scholars, and possibly other students, to keep the number of incoming freshmen in The Honors College at about 125.

Once they have joined The Honors College, students are expected to achieve a 3.0 GPA during their first semester and a 3.25 GPA each semester after that. Procedures adopted by the Governing Board of The Honors College require that students who achieve below the expected GPA initiate a meeting with me. Based on this meeting, I can allow them to continue in The Honors College for an additional semester during which they must achieve at least a 3.25 GPA. For students who initiate a meeting with me, I require that they provide a written outline of the issues that impeded their academic performance and possible strategies to overcome these impediments before we meet. At our meeting, we discuss their academic performance and create a contract describing the requirements they must meet to remain in The Honors College.

**2006/07 Academic Year**

The Honors College began its first year with 154 students: 10 juniors, 25 sophomores, and 119 freshmen.

**Admission.** During the freshman admissions process the Office of Admissions admitted 1,134 students as Presidential or Douglass Scholars. Enrollment deposits were sent by 165 (15%) students. All were invited to join The Honors College and 119 (72%) did.

In February we announced that freshmen could apply to The Honors College and we encouraged freshmen with high first-semester grades to apply. Forty-five students applied, 30 were admitted, and 28 joined The Honors College. All had performed very well during their first semester. Several had a 4.0 GPA and all had a GPA of 3.75 or higher. These students were admitted in time for them to register for honors courses in the fall and have the option of joining honors housing during their sophomore year.

In May, we again encouraged freshmen with high grades to apply to The Honors College. Thirteen applied and nine were accepted. One had a 4.0 GPA and the others all had cumulative GPAs for their first year above 3.7.

**Retention.** Two freshmen in The Honors College left UAlbany at the end of the first semester. No students were dropped from The Honors College at the end of the fall semester for poor academic performance. Twelve students received a GPA below the expected 3.0.

At the end of the academic year, seven freshmen were dropped from The Honors College because their GPA each semester was below the expectation. Three other freshmen were dropped because they had not taken any honors courses.

Fifteen freshmen, five sophomores, and two juniors who achieved the expected GPA during the fall semester did not achieve it during the spring semester. All these students have been sent letters describing the required meeting with me. Several students have requested a meeting for later this summer and two withdrew from The Honors College. I will include additional information about these students in my next report.

At the time of this report it is not possible to know the number of honors students who will return to UAlbany for the Fall 2007 semester. I will include this information in my next report.

**2007/08 Academic Year**

**Admission.** Among this year’s incoming freshman class, 208 (16%) of the 1,301 students who had been granted a Presidential or Douglass Scholarship submitted a deposit to attend UAlbany. Of them, 165 (79%) have accepted our invitation to join The Honors College. Their average high school GPA is 94.2 (SD = 3.2) and their
average SAT score is 1307 (SD = 64.7). Folks in the admissions office advise that, based on past experience, the number of students appearing in August is likely to be about 10-15% lower than the number who make a deposit. Consequently, it seems reasonable to expect about 145 incoming freshmen next academic year.

Academic Performance of Honors Students

A review of the first-year grades of the freshmen in The Honors College shows that most of them achieved at a high level. Those achieving at various high levels are show in the following table, along with the mean, standard deviation, and median for all honors students (the median (the point at which half the scores are higher and half are lower) is included because a small number of very low grades skewed the data).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2006</th>
<th>Spring 2007</th>
<th>Cumulative 2006/07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>21 (18%)</td>
<td>21 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>±3.8</td>
<td>53 (46%)</td>
<td>51 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46 (38%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>±3.5</td>
<td>82 (68%)</td>
<td>83 (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82 (69%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>median</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, not all students achieved at a high level. The following table shows the percentage of freshmen achieving low grades during their first year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2006</th>
<th>Spring 2007</th>
<th>Cumulative 2006/07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≥3.25</td>
<td>22 (19%)</td>
<td>22 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19 (16%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥3.0</td>
<td>12 (10%)</td>
<td>10 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 (8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤2.0</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing honors students’ first- and second-semester grades shows that 56 had a lower GPA during their second semester (four students’ GPAs decreased by .8 or more), 10 had the same GPA, and 52 had a higher GPA during their second semester (five students’ GPAs increased by .8 or more). Interestingly, the average of the changes from the first semester to the second semester was 0.008, showing a very small change between the two semesters.

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1 Freshmen who have been in The Honors College the entire academic year are described in this section. I focus on freshmen in this report since they followed the admission procedure that honors students will follow in the future. The sophomores and juniors were accepted into The Honors College after they demonstrated high levels of academic achievement at UAlbany.


Discussion

Incoming students. The number of incoming freshmen honors students is likely to be much higher next academic year than it was this year. I have worked closely with people in the admissions office (primarily Bob Andrea and Jaclyn Bellotti) to increase awareness of The Honors College. I have taken trips to four areas around the state to talk with high school counselors and high school seniors, have met with high school counselors from around the Capital Region twice, and have promoted The Honors College at on-campus events for accepted Presidential Scholars and Douglass Scholars. In addition, we expanded our website this year.

I am pleased that the number of incoming freshmen will increase next year. However, the number raises the issue of whether we need to consider (a) creating an application process to reduce the number of incoming freshmen admitted to The Honors College, (b) admit fewer of our freshmen at the end of the first and second semesters, to keep the number of students in each class at about 150, or (c) expand the number of students in each graduating class of The Honors College.

There continues to be a meaningful number of Presidential or Douglass Scholars who choose not to be part of The Honors College. The reasons for this are not completely clear. Over the past year I have fielded questions from many high school seniors indicating that they are concerned that (a) honors courses will be harder than other courses and thus will hurt their GPAs and (b) honors students are primarily nerds and living with them will be a chore. These concerns may be why some Scholars choose not to be in The Honors College (although I attempt to address the concerns during my presentations and on our website: http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/FAQ.shtml). In addition, I have tried to make it clearer to incoming students that The Honors College has a direction and a set of goals that may be incompatible with their education plan. This may discourage students who would not be content in The Honors College from joining.

Mid-year applications. The number of applications from our current freshmen at the end of the fall semester presented a good-news/bad-news situation. I was pleased to accept so many highly accomplished UAlbany students into The Honors College. However, decisions about who to accept were difficult because all the applicants had done very well in their first semester; some who were not accepted had a first-semester GPA of 3.8. Of the 15 who were not accepted, 10 had accomplishments similar to many of those who were accepted. If UAlbany is successful in attracting more top undergraduates, the number applying to The Honors College during their first year is likely to increase.

One solution to this dilemma is to accept fewer incoming students and more students during their first year. This would allow more students who are highly accomplished at UAlbany to take advantage of the benefits of being in The Honors College. However, there is a distinct disadvantage to joining The Honors College partway through the freshman year. Only those accepted as incoming freshmen live in honors housing their first year, and living in honors housing is a critical part of the honors experience. In addition, those accepted during their freshman year do not join honors courses until their sophomore year. Consequently, students accepted during their freshman year feel less a part of the honors community.

Retention. I am bothered by the number of students dropped from The Honors College because of poor grades. About half the students who received poor grades in the fall continued with poor grades in the spring and were dropped. It is hard to know what else we might have done for the students who were dropped. It may be that some of these students simply were not as well prepared for the academic rigors of college as we had anticipated, based on their high school grades and SAT scores. Other students may have socialized too much or may have experienced significant personal or family issues that impeded their performance.

I work hard to let students know of the many people with whom they can consult if their grades are poor, including me. I sent individual notes to students who performed poorly in the fall, encouraging them to talk with
me. Few responded. I believe that we must be available to help our students but that students must ask for that help. While I recognize that many issues may inhibit students from asking for help, I believe that, at some point in their lives, they must take responsibility for seeking help. Consequently, although I am sad that some honors students have not been successful academically, I believe that we have done what we should to help each student succeed.

**Academic performance.** Overall, most honors students achieved a good cumulative GPA during their first year. Although a few students achieved high grades both semesters, there was significant variability in the grades of many students across semesters. Through my upcoming conversations with students who did not achieve the required 3.25 GPA during the spring semester, I hope to get a better sense of the issues that impeded their academic performance that semester. I also plan to talk with some students whose performance was markedly better during the spring semester to get a sense of what facilitated their improvement.

**Honors Professors**

Our goal has been to attract some of the best teaching scholars at UAlbany as professors in The Honors College and to facilitate their teaching intense, interesting honors courses. Each September we distribute a call for proposals for honors courses for the next academic year. All tenured or tenure-track professors are eligible to submit proposals. The curriculum committee of the Governing Board of The Honors College selects which proposals to accept.

**Professors’ Affiliations and Experiences**

During the 2006/07 academic year, 30 professors taught 24 honors courses (one course was team-taught by five professors and some professors taught more than one honors course). Honors courses were offered in the departments of chemistry, earth and atmospheric sciences, English, history, Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies, law, mathematics and statistics, music, philosophy, physics, political science, public administration and policy, sociology, and women’s studies. For a description of these courses, see: [http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/curriculum_this_year.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/curriculum_this_year.shtml)

All the professors who have spoken to me about their honors course have been very positive about their experiences. Many have stated that teaching an honors course was a qualitatively different experience from their other undergraduate teaching experiences at UAlbany.

During the 2007/08 academic year, 35 professors will teach 33 three-credit honors courses and 2 one-credit honors discussion sections that will be attached to nonhonors lecture courses. The professors will come from the following departments and schools: accounting, anthropology, chemistry, Chinese studies, classics, computer science, criminal justice, educational counseling and psychology, English, environmental science, geography, history, journalism, Judaic studies, languages, literatures & cultures, math and statistics, music, physics, political science, psychology, public administration and policy, public health, women’s studies. For a description of these courses, see: [http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/curriculum_next_year.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/curriculum_next_year.shtml)

**Faculty Consultation**

To ensure a continually improving curriculum for the honors students, I initiated the Faculty Consultation Program to Improve Teaching this year. In this optional program, professors are paired and each acts as a consultant for the other. The consultant observes a class session, and, part-way through the session the professor leaves and the consultant talks with the students about the class. The consultant and professor then meet to discuss the consultant’s findings and impressions. In the spring semester, professors who acted as consultants were eligible to receive $150 into their departmental faculty account. During the fall semester six professors
volunteered to participate in this program. During the spring semester, none of the professors participated in this program.

**Meals With Students**

With funding from the Office of Student Success, each professor teaching an honors course was given the option of having five meals in one of the quad dining rooms with his or her students. Only a small number of professors had these meals. Reports from the professors who had meals with students suggested that the professor and the students enjoyed the informal time together. One professor said that the meals became an integral part of the course experience.

Several professors had students in their honors courses to their homes for lunch or dinner.

**Sherry Hours**

Once or twice each semester I held a sherry hour for the honors professors. We met in my apartment for some sherry and good conversation.

**Discussion**

I was pleased to receive honors-course proposals from every college or school at UAlbany last fall. At least one proposal from each college or school was accepted. However, the professor designated to teach the course offered by the School of Social Welfare was not available next academic year, so that proposal was deferred. This suggests to me a broad-based support for The Honors College across units of UAlbany and a broad-based interest by professors in participating in The Honors College.

I was disappointed in the number of professors involved in the faculty consultation program. Although I understand that evaluations of one’s teaching can be anxiety-provoking, I tried to create a program to minimize that anxiety. For example, consultants were prohibited from sharing their impressions with anyone other than the professor they had observed. I did not approach professors in the spring to ask about their reaction to the consultation program as I was concerned that my approach might be considered pressure to participate. However, now that the semester has concluded I will ask some professors about their reaction to it.

I will work to encourage more professors to have meals with students next year. One strategy I will employ is to meet a group of honors professors on the academic podium and walk with them over to State Quad for lunch. The added familiarity of the quad and the dining room might encourage more professors to organize lunches or dinners with their students.

**The Honors Curriculum**

The curriculum of The Honors College includes many of the best aspects found at small liberal-arts colleges during the first two years and at large research universities during the second two years. During the first two years, students take at least six honors courses. These courses are small (limited to 25) and include only honors students. Courses are offered in many disciplines and most honors students use these courses to meet their general education requirements. The courses are intense and involve active learning. During their second two years, honors students join the honors program in their major, work as a research assistant with one or more professors, and write a senior thesis.
Honors Courses

A description of the range of honors courses was given in the previous section. I conceptualize honors courses as being taught in an overlapping two-year cycle (e.g., one cycle is 2006/07-2007/08, the next cycle is 2007/08-2008/09). Students are expected to take six honors courses during their first two years. Consequently, the goal is to have a wide range of courses during every overlapping two-year cycle. As seen in Appendix 1, we achieved the goal of offering courses from a wide range of disciplines and meeting a wide range of general education requirements during our first two-year cycle.

Informal feedback from the honors students suggested a high level of satisfaction with their honors courses. Students enjoyed being in small courses with other serious students and professors who challenged them. In addition, many professors of honors courses reported high levels of satisfaction with their courses. Several stated that teaching an honors course has re-energized their overall teaching.

Attempts to obtain a systematic evaluation of honors courses by the students have been only moderately successful. Our strategy was to e-mail evaluation forms to students. We did this to give students more time to complete their evaluation than they typically take in class. Only about 50% of the students completely an evaluation during the fall semester and about 25% completed an evaluation during the spring semester, despite repeated reminders to do so. Consequently, it is not clear whether the submitted evaluations represent the sentiments of all students in a course.

Next year, we will institute a two-step evaluation for honors courses. The first will be completed during a class period in about 10 minutes. The second step will involved a more detailed form e-mailed to the students as we did this year. I expect that this will allow us to gather some basic information about honors courses from all students and more detailed information from some of them.

Characteristics of honors courses about which students have given the most positive feedback are:

• Those involving ongoing, meaningful discussion in class: students like the opportunity to share and think about a range of ideas.
• Those in which the professors show obvious interest in the students’ learning and performance - students were particularly impressed when professors were willing to engage in activities with them outside class.
• Those in which the professors required that the students work hard and think intensely. Several students noted that their best courses were those where they felt in over their heads initially, but with guidance from the professor felt competent by the end of the semester. Rarely did I hear an honors student complain about having to work too hard in an honors course and I heard complaints from students who felt that a course was not challenging enough.

Characteristics of honors courses about which I heard the most complaint:

• Those in which the assignments were unclear. This drove our high-achieving students crazy. They had no problem with ambiguity during discussions, but felt awash completing assignments that they believed were vaguely described. This may be a particular problem for our first-year students who are unsure how well they will adjust to the demands of college.
• Those in which the professor spent most class sessions lecturing rather than facilitating discussion.
• Those in which the students believed that the professor was unwilling to entertain perspectives that differed from the professor’s. This may be partly due to their earlier educational socialization: some of the students feared that they might be “punished” for disagreeing with the professor and they believed that this impeded discussion.
We had some difficulty scheduling honors courses this year. Courses were scheduled through the departments, which led to many honors courses being offered at the same times. Courses next year were scheduled with input from The Honors College and the departments, which resulted in a more even distribution of honors courses.

Research

I have encouraged our freshmen and sophomores to become involved in faculty research. I organized several dinner meetings around this theme and information about this process is on our website (http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/research_opportunities.shtml). Several students became involved in research through the Undergraduate Research Initiative, directed by Vivien Ng. Two professors (Victor Asal and John Delano) organized research groups from their fall honors courses. I do not know the number of freshmen and sophomores involved in research, but most of them are not. Few responded to my attempts to get them together to talk about involvement in research.

I have sent numerous e-mails to the 10 juniors in The Honors College, describing where I think they should be in the research process and encouraging them to meet with me to discuss their progress. Most of them have responded to my e-mails and they are on track to completing their senior thesis next year.

Discussion

I believe that the honors curriculum is shaping up well. We offer a wide range of courses now. My hope is that, given the positive experiences of professors teaching honors courses, the number of professors proposing honors courses will increase in the future. This should give us a stronger and more varied curriculum.

We will continue to develop strategies to involve our students in research. Although first-year students who become involved in research often have a good experience, it is not clear to me whether I should be providing more pressure for our freshmen to become involved in research or whether it is better to let those who are reluctant wait until their sophomore or junior year.

A significant task for me is to work with departments to facilitate our students becoming involved in departmental honors programs, through which they will complete their senior thesis. Some departments/schools are popular majors among our students, including biology (33 students), business (20 students), and political science (15 students). I will need to begin work with these departments to ensure that our students have the opportunities they need to complete their senior thesis. I began this process during the spring semester by having meetings of directors of department honors programs. The meetings gave the directors a chance to know each other and me. Several useful suggestions came from the meetings, including a yearly poll of the intended majors of the honors students to help departments plan for the number of senior theses they may need to sponsor in two or three years. I will continue these meetings each semester next year, and may have separate meetings for small and large departments since they are likely to face different issues as they work with the juniors and seniors in The Honors College.

Honors Activities Outside the Classroom

During our first year, I organized many educational and social activities designed to expand the students’ educational experiences and enhance the sense of community in The Honors College. All activities took place during the evenings or on the weekends and most were located in the students’ residential quad.

Honors activities were the least successful part of our experience last year. A few activities were attended by about half the honors students but most were attended by only a few. The result was that I organized fewer activities during the spring semester.
During the spring semester, the Governing Board instituted a requirement that honors students attend seven honors activities each semester (about one every-other week) to maintain their eligibility for honors housing. I believe that this will provide motivation for students to attend honors events. Having higher attendance will allow me to schedule more events, and the wider range of events is likely to further encourage attendance. In addition, I expect that this requirement will help establish an expectation among the honors students that they attend events as part of their honors experience.

The following is a description of the honors activities we sponsored this year.

Public Lectures: Eight professors teaching honors courses presented an evening lecture to all students in The Honors College. In addition, I gave one lecture each semester.

Exploring the Campus Lectures: One evening, UAlbany’s head volleyball coach came with two players to give a lecture on The Science, Art, and Zen of volleyball. Once each semester, we were given a private tour of the exhibit in the University Museum by the Museum Director. I purchased blocks of tickets to ten performances by student groups at the Performing Arts Center (e.g., University Symphony) and took groups of students to those productions.

Honors College Dinners: Twice a semester a special dinner was held for students in The Honors College in the Indian Quad Dining Room.

Dessert Receptions: I hosted a series of dessert receptions in my apartment to meet students. Groups of 8-10 students came to each reception. Receptions for entering freshmen occurred early in the fall semester and three receptions were held in the spring semester for students who had been admitted after their first semester.

Academic Recognition Events: Each semester I had a dinner in my apartment for the five sophomores in The Honors College with the highest cumulative GPAs (I cooked, which the students seemed to find fascinating). Early in the spring semester I had a reception for all freshmen who had earned a 4.0 GPA in the fall.

Informal Dinner Meetings: I held several series of informal meetings during dinner in the Indian Quad dining room. Students could attend as they saw fit. Dinners focused on several themes, including research involvement, improving The Honors College, and social activities for honors students. I also had two or three informal meetings each semester with students in the Dutch Quad dining room.

Chocolate Tour 2007: Thirty honors students and I were given a tour of Albany and three places that make chocolate by DuckTours. Students had a chance to get off campus, eat lots of chocolate, and enjoy each others’ company.

Dinner/Dance(lessons): Many students were eager to have a “formal” dinner/dance. Because we were concerned about the whole issue of who would or would not dance with whom, we hired a couple to provide dance lessons after a catered dinner in the Campus Center. This allowed students to dance with each other in a more informal way. Students enjoyed this event very much.

Several activities were not successful, as assessed by only a very few students attending them. Movie Night: I had two series of movies, one featuring the movies of Alfred Hitchcock and one featuring the movies of Bill Murray. After several showings in each series, I ended them. (Students suggested that, with movies on TV, Netflix, and other sources, they were not as special as they once might have been (perhaps a dig at my age).) Coffee With the Professor: I had coffee available in my office in Indian Quad for about an hour in the morning, corresponding to times that students would be returning from classes or leaving for classes. After two attempts with no students appearing, they were ended. (Students suggested that no one appeared because they timed their
lives to the point where they rolled out of bed just in time to make it to their early-morning class, so would never have time for coffee, and that they wanted to get back to their room and back to bed soon after an early morning class.)

Discussion

My initial notion that students would be eager to attend most of our events was dashed by the middle of October. Perhaps this was expecting too much of freshmen, who are away from home for the first time and more interested in hanging out with each other than attending events with “adults.”

Although we had some purely social events, my goal was for there to be some educational value to most honors events. Students were more likely to attend the purely social events and requested more of them (e.g., trips to shopping malls, paintball games, downtown restaurants). However, I continue to believe that most events sponsored by The Honors College should expand the students’ educational experience. As noted above, I expect that attendance at these events will increase next year.

Residential Life

One of the decisions made as The Honors College was being established was to specify one or more residence halls as honors housing. This wise decision has contributed dramatically to the overall success of The Honors College in our first year. I live in a faculty apartment on Indian Quad, which has allowed easier and more frequent contact between me and the honors students.

Administrators and staff members in the Residential Life Program have been very supportive of The Honors College and have worked extensively with me to establish a viable honors housing program. I have been particularly impressed at the dedication of the Residential Life administration and staff to providing a positive living environment for students at UAlbany. In addition, I have appreciated their friendliness and support as I have adjusted to living among students again.

Students have the option of living in honors housing each year but are not required to live in honors housing any year. This past year, about 100 freshmen in The Honors College lived together in Montauk Hall on Indian Quad (the maximum that could live in Montauk). The other freshmen were housed in other residence halls on Indian and State Quads. Although an honors residence hall was established on Dutch Quad for sophomores and juniors, only a handful of honors students lived there.

Beginning next year, honors housing will be in two locations. Freshmen and sophomores will be housed in two adjoining buildings on State Quad. Juniors and seniors will be eligible to live on Empire Commons, in buildings reserved for honors students. About 60 of our current freshmen have decided to remain in honors housing and will be in Melville Hall next year as sophomores. Incoming freshmen will live in Steinmetz Hall and the remaining spaces in Melville. Students who cannot be accommodated in Steinmetz or Melville Halls will be placed in other buildings on State Quad. I will move into a faculty apartment in Steinmetz Hall.

Honors Housing and the Honors Community

Honors housing had a strong positive influence on our ability to begin to build an honors community. Honors students in Montauk Hall got to know each other quickly. The residence hall directors noted that a sense of community developed more quickly in Montauk than in the other freshman residence halls. My sense is that honors students living in Montauk were much more likely than honors students living in other residence halls to be actively involved in honors activities and to feel that they were an integral part of the honors community.
Comments from students about honors housing can be found on our website (http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/honors_housing.shtml). They appreciated living in a residence hall where all students were serious about their studies, where it was quiet enough to study each night, and where it was quiet enough to sleep.

As evidence of the sense of community in Montauk Hall, it is worth noting that the Quad Coordinator, Josh Hewitt, reported that there was no “chargeable” damage in Montauk Hall last year—the first time that he has seen a hall with no damage at the end of an academic year. He also noted with amazement that many of the students put their desk chair on their desk as they left at the end of the year—something he had never seen before. It seems to me that this is an example of the value of a strong, positive community developing in a residence hall. Whereas students in other halls might have been kidded if they went out of their way to straighten up their empty room as they left for the summer, this was the norm in Montauk.

Discussion

My epiphany. When I started at UAlbany, I requested to live in a vacant faculty apartment on Indian Quad. My sense was that this would make it easier for me to organize and attend many evening and weekend honors events. My experiences surrounded by 1,400 18-year-olds on Indian Quad made me understand the critical influence that the residential life program has on the academic environment of a university.

Professors have a significant influence on the academic environment of a university by the way they conduct their courses. My belief, however, is that almost all professors are serious about academics and conduct their courses in a way that reflects this seriousness. Consequently, it seems to me that the variability in the seriousness with which undergraduates view academics—across universities or within the same university over time—is not influenced much by professors. The influence of professors is strong, but because their influence is a constant across institutions or time, the variation in the seriousness with which students view their academics is likely to come from another source.

As I reflected on my experiences on Indian Quad, I came to believe that a significant source of the variability of how undergraduates view the seriousness of their academics across institutions and within an institution over time is their experience living on campus. If the living environment at 10pm or 4am, or all day on the weekends, is characterized by noise, goofing around, and drinking, the seriousness with which many undergraduates at that institution view their college education is likely to diminish. Alternately, if the environment is one in which students focus on their work, can sleep through the night, and enjoy reasonable levels of partying, the seriousness with which many students at that institution see their college experience is likely to increase.

The design of the residential areas at UAlbany increases the influence that a relatively small number of students can have on the living environment. The high concentration of students in a small area (e.g., about 1400 on Indian Quad), the concrete buildings, and the quad design mean that the rowdiness of some students can directly influence the lives and attitudes of many students.

Consider, for example, what it means that 75% of our students “party” two or fewer times each week (as described in a poll publicized last year). On the Indian Quad, it means that 300 students are out partying three or four (or more) times each week. Many (probably most) of them return to campus from 1:00am to 4:00am, and many of them cannot contain their exuberance as they go from their taxi to their residence hall. What message does this send to our students about their university experience? (Three hundred students coming in and out like this three or four nights each week creates a large and consistent disturbance, even if they represent only a small percentage of the student population.) What type of influence on the educational atmosphere is exerted by groups of students talking loudly outside at 3:00am each morning?
When we professors think about what needs to be done to improve our students’ learning, we almost always focus exclusively on what happens in the classroom: We need more professors, smaller courses, better technology, and students who have learned how to write better in high school. Yes. But what we also need is a strong focus on the environment in the residence halls. Without a consistently serious environment in the residence halls, new technology or increased numbers of small courses will have a smaller-than-desired influence on the education of our students. We professors need to see the Residential Life Program at UAlbany as a critical partner in our efforts to educate our students. The living-learning environment that we work to establish in the Residential Life Program does not simply refer to students continuing to learn in their residence halls. More importantly, it means that how they live in their residence halls will have a significant influence on how much they learn at UAlbany.

Other Issues and Activities

Web Development

With the help of the UAlbany web development group, we have created an expanded website for The Honors College. It can be viewed at: http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/index.shtml.

Nationally Competitive Scholarships

One long-term goal at UAlbany is to increase the number of our students competing successfully for the nationally competitive scholarships (e.g., Rhodes, Marshall, Goldwater). Although students from across the UAlbany campus can apply for these scholarships (not just honors students), one of my responsibilities has been to encourage students to apply and help them with their applications.

We have increased the degree to which we advertise these scholarships to our top students. We created a document describing these scholarships and how to apply for them and send it to our top students (http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/documents/NCS%20Guide%20for%20Students.pdf). In addition, I communicate directly with students who have the basic qualifications for one or more of these scholarships and encourage them to consider applying.

Students must apply for these scholarships through the UAlbany Committee on Nationally Competitive Scholarships. The committee determines which students to put forward. I then work extensively with the students to create a set of personal statements that are the heart of their application. Students also receive advice and mentoring from professors and advisors as they develop their application.

This past year, we nominated two students for a Marshall Scholarship, two students for a Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship, and one student for a Rhodes Scholarship (students are nominated for Goldwater Scholarships through a separate process that does not involve the UAlbany Committee on Nationally Competitive Scholarships). None of the students received these scholarships (about 35 of each scholarship is given annually across the U.S., so almost no one who applies for them receives them; for example, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation awarded 34 scholarships this year to the 977 students who applied). However, they all reported that the process of revising personal statements about their past experiences and future aspirations helped them think more clearly about their lives.
Undergraduate Research Conference

In conjunction with the Vice President for Research, Lynn Videka, and the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education for Research Initiatives, Vivien Ng, The Honors College co-sponsored the 4th Annual Undergraduate Research Conference (formerly called the Honors Conference). Students from across UAlbany presented their research or creative work at this two-day event held in the middle of April. The program for this year’s Undergraduate Research Conference can be found at: http://www.albany.edu/honorscollege/documents/Undergraduate%20Research%20Conference%20Program.pdf

Development Office

I spent considerable time this year working with staff members of the Development Office, in particular Carol Bullard. We created a document describing a wide range of opportunities for giving to UAlbany and The Honors College.

Directions for 2007/08

In addition to maintaining the high quality of our current program, I will increase my focus on several issues next year.

• Closer connections with departments, particularly around research.
• Establishing a series of 1-credit honors courses to enhance students’ honors experience.
• Improving the experience of students accepted into The Honors College during their freshman year.
## Appendix 1: Distribution of Honors Courses and General Education Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gen Ed Requirement</th>
<th>Fall 2006</th>
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