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**THE CONSTRUCTION OF MERITOCRACY
WITHIN MASS HIGHER EDUCATION:
ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS OF HONORS PROGRAMS
AT AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

A Thesis in
Educational Theory and Policy
by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the ideology of contemporary honors programs functioning at different types of higher education institutions and their impact on the overall stratification system of American higher education. It presents the institutional model of honors programs in its evolution from a purely curricular innovation to a widespread organizational structure adapted to the conditions and constraints of its environments. In particular, employing multiple-case study research strategies, it investigates the honors program model as manifested in three different organizational units, i.e., honors programs at a large research university, a Master's (comprehensive) university, and a community college. The different interplay of factors that shape the identity of each program (pertaining to their technical and institutional environments) is at the core of their organizational dynamics. The host institution with its resources and charter and the honors ideology are identified as the factors with the strongest impact on their identities. The study also addresses the question of these organizations' role regarding the stratification system of American higher education and issues of social stratification and mobility. Paradoxically, honors programs, which act as agents of differentiation within their host institutions, help decrease the degree of overall stratification between colleges and universities. Moreover, they have a potential, not fully explored yet, to serve as important avenues for social mobility for intellectually superior students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The study reasserts the pervasiveness of honors programs as organizations and suggests a few policy changes that could lead to a better interaction and cooperation among programs and to a better synthesis between the meritocratic ideology and the mission of public colleges and universities to educate the masses.

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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Honors programs are a major organizational innovation of the 20th century American higher education. They have become a widely publicized organizational segment of an ever-growing number of colleges and universities (most of them public), providing a set of enhanced curricular and co-curricular experiences to a sub-population of college students identified as “superior”, “high-ability”, “best and brightest”, etc. Their ideological foundations go back to the 1920s (Aydelotte, 1925, 1944), but they assumed their current position in the American higher education system only in the late 1950s (Cohen, 1966a; Geiger, 2004).

Ever since the 1960s, two cultural beliefs have shaped the American system of higher education. On the one hand, the American society is dedicated to the belief that college education should be a right of every aspiring and deserving citizen rather than a small social elite. On the other, an equally strong conviction has been associated with the meritocratic goal of distributing the best rewards, including best education, to the most capable and talented. This is so, even though the consequences of a “pure meritocracy” could never be acceptable in this country. In the public consciousness and through public policy, the laws of meritocracy have constantly been challenged, ameliorated and complemented by the idea of social justice and the responsibility of education to eradicate social inequities (Jencks & Riesman, 1968; Riesman, 1975; Bell, 1977; Levine, 1986). Nevertheless, the modern higher education system would be inconceivable without its meritocratic foundations.

These two contradictory beliefs in the egalitarian and meritocratic foundations of education have been complementing each other in shaping the dynamics of American higher education since at least the 1950s. While the former has certainly been a fundamental driving force in creating one of the first systems of mass higher education in the world, the latter has largely contributed to the simultaneous process of increased differentiation and stratification within that system, both among and within institutions¹. The honors programs that started developing at some state universities in the 1950s – 1960s are an illustrative consequence of the institutional growth of a higher education system based on egalitarian access and meritocratic distribution of educational opportunities.

Honors programs and colleges at present are an acclaimed part of the organizational structure of postsecondary educational institutions in the United States, functioning at over 60% of all four-year and over 40% of all two-year institutions (Baker, Reardon & Riordan, 2000). Their emergence in the 1920s, induced by a concern for providing curricular experiences adequate to the needs of high-ability students (e.g., special seminars and independent project work primarily in the junior and senior year), was associated above all with a few elite private colleges, and, more specifically, with a few departments within them. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, honors programs underwent a qualitative transformation. First, their typical hosts became the large state universities. Second, the mere provisions for special academic work grew into separate organizational units that increasingly encompassed most of, if not all, the academic majors at their host institutions. And third, they expanded to cover all four college years,

¹ The term “institution” will be used in a double meaning throughout this study: as a single college or university, and as a sociological concept (see Chapter 2).

incorporating both general education and advanced, major-specific courses as well as a variety of co-curricular experiences.

The 1980s and especially the 1990s saw an ongoing transformation of many existing honors programs into colleges (there are over 60 self-identified honors colleges at present). Regarded as representing a higher stage of organizational differentiation, an honors college, compared to a program, is associated with an enhanced visibility, autonomy, and increased influence on the host institution's policies in attracting high-ability students, private gifts from alumni and other benefactors, as well as different academic policies. At about the same time, honors programs started proliferating at community colleges, institutions that have traditionally been focused on providing access to every high-school graduate, not on recruiting and providing services to high-ability students. Community colleges have been traditionally branded as low-prestige institutions and even accused of deterring their students' educational aspirations by performing a "cooling-out function" and diverting their expectations away from the full-fledged program of four-year institutions (Clark, 1960; Karabel, 1977; Brint & Karabel, 1989, 1991). Therefore, the adoption of the honors program model by community colleges could be viewed as an anomaly or at least a paradox by students familiar with the history and the original missions of honors programs. Yet, so far almost half of all community colleges have established honors programs.

The vast spread of honors programs across all types of postsecondary institutions (with the notable exception of the most selective private colleges and universities, which as a whole cater to the *crème de la crème*) could, of course, be generally explained with the massification of the higher education sector. The growing numbers of college

students also include high-ability students attending schools that are not clustered at the top of the prestige hierarchy. Having an honors program established for them would seem a reasonable policy, in accord with the honors programs' original mission. On the other hand, schools that perceive they don't have enough of these students may attempt to attract them by founding such a program and touting it as adequate to their needs.

Gathering even a small number of academically talented students into an honors program also provides faculty with a better teaching environment. For all these reasons, an honors program is a desirable formation at any school, even though different colleges may seek to discover or develop different characteristics in their honors students (Achterberg, 2004a). As a result, an extraordinary diversity in forms and models distinguishes the hundreds of honors programs currently in existence (Peterson's, 2002). This rich diversity still leaves the problem of their nature, goals and roles in different institutional settings largely unanswered. It has provided an impetus for this dissertation.

This study is about the content and consequences of the institutional ideology driving the proliferation of honors programs in a variety of American colleges and universities. This ideology is fundamentally the rationale for perpetuating the ideals of meritocracy within the organizational context of mass higher education. Its many projections are impossible to uncover without understanding the entire organizational mechanism of an honors program and the logic that guides the operation of this organizational unit. Therefore, the organizational dynamics of three specific honors programs, i.e., their structure, actors, policies, and operation, are at the heart of this investigation. Revealing how in each case the respective honors program is shaped by and in return affects its organizational context will also throw light on their potential

impact on stratification processes in higher education. Also, the dissertation speculates about the future of the honors movement and its significance for higher education in America.

Research Questions

In order to reach its objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. By virtue of what processes did honors programs evolve from a single idea and a couple of curricular innovations at a handful of elite colleges into a widely spread and well recognized organizational unit cutting across the postsecondary education sector in the United States? Over the years, what different factors have contributed to this evolution, shaping the ultimate organizational identity of those programs?
2. Given the huge diversity of colleges and universities that have established honors programs, how do honors programs function in different organizational contexts? What are the factors, internal and external, that shape their identity and make their existence and operation possible or necessary? What constraints, if any, do honors programs have to comply with in order to sustain their operations?
3. How is the meritocratic (“honors”) ideology constructed in diverse organizational environments and how does it shape the strategies (policies) and actions (practices) of honors programs functioning in them?
4. What is the significance of honors programs for the different constituencies of

their host institutions? What is their role in the overall stratification system of postsecondary education in the United States: are they carriers of more inequality, or do they have some other important functions to play?

Organization of the Study

The four research questions are also an organizing factor regarding the structure of this study. Chapter 3, which highlights the major moments in the evolution of the honors ideology and honors programs as organizations, provides the framework for addressing the first question. Situating these processes within a larger social and historical context, it shows how in the different decades the honors ideology has been modified and enriched and how, via its organizational enactment, it has permeated an ever wider terrain in the higher education landscape. This chapter also sets the stage and presents the rationale for choosing the three specific types of schools for the subsequent case study (Chapter 5).

The second question is about the organizational dynamics of honors programs, the entire arsenal of forces that play a formative role regarding their identities and behavior. It is addressed through the study of three programs functioning in different organizational environments. The distinction between technical and institutional influences provides a starting point and shape of the organizational analysis. The investigation also touches upon features of the current structure of the organizational field of honors programs (Chapter 6).

The “honors” ideology is the subject of Chapter 7, which deals with the role honors programs play as agents of differentiation and stratification. Contingent upon their

definition of the meritorious or the “honors” student, they may or may not construct considerable gatekeeping mechanisms and thus constitute their own “elite” group of students. How do these groups compare, first, to other students of the same university, and, second, to other elite groups allegedly focused at selective private colleges and universities? The discussion of these questions in Chapter 7 provides a clue regarding the fluctuating character of the “honors” ideology.

The last question draws together all the findings of this study. It is addressed most succinctly in the last concluding section of the dissertation.

Chapters 2 and 4 elaborate on the theoretical underpinnings and the methods chosen for this research, respectively. Chapter 2 explicates the conceptual model operating behind the exploration of the last three research questions, and Chapter 4 presents the rationale for a multiple-case study and the types of the studied cases.

Significance

The potential significance of this study is in contributing to a better understanding of the many facets that constitute the organizational dynamics of this widespread academic structure and hence a better appreciation of the multiplicity of channels through which the modern American system of higher education has accommodated an immensely wide range of educational needs and goals. Possible policy and research implications of its findings might also contribute to an expanded thematic terrain for future sociological studies of American higher education.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

This study seeks to understand how the meritocratic ideology is organizationally enacted in colleges and universities that have traditionally fulfilled a mission of educating the masses rather than a small elite, in whatever terms “elite” has been defined through the years. It is also about the nature, operation, and effects of the formal organizational structures established at mass postsecondary schools as conductors of this ideology. The study thus seeks to understand the multiplicity of forces that impact the dynamics of honors programs and their roles regarding processes of social and academic stratification in higher education. This chapter develops a basic conceptual model for the subsequent analysis. Drawing on some major principles of the three theories most commonly used in the sociology of education, i.e., the functionalist, neo-institutional, and conflict/class reproduction perspectives, it synthesizes their basic claims into a conceptual framework for the study of honors programs. The central place of ideology in this framework makes it necessary to adopt a working definition of ideology as a key theme of the study.

Ideology is probably among few concepts that have received an immense number of definitions and still do not easily yield to unequivocal interpretations. It has been associated by major historical figures and intellectuals with false ideas, distortions of reality, theories useful to specific groups, combination of factual statements with value judgments, and symbolic action with a practico-social function (Boudon, 1989). The common point in all these definitions is that ideology, which invariably emerges and persists in close relation to a specific historical context, explains reality with a view to changing it (or preserving the status quo), which usually benefits certain social groups

over others. Berger, Berger, and Kellner (1973) prefer a broader understanding of ideology as “any theoretically articulated propositions about social reality” (p.159). This study will take a middle path in that it will treat ideology as a theoretically elaborated belief system with a specific socio-political agenda, though not necessarily favoring certain groups over others. In particular, it deals with one specific ideology, meritocracy, and its significance for honors programs.

Meritocracy, or the belief in the distribution of opportunity according to personal merit, is the ideology of the modern rational democracies, whose agenda is inextricably linked to these societies’ visions of progress and worth of the individual (Meyer, 1987; Ramirez & Boli, 1987). Ironically, the term “meritocracy” was coined “for the purpose of damnation, not of praise” (Lemann, 1999, p.118). In a small anti-utopian treatise, supposedly a mock Ph.D. thesis in sociology written in 2030, Young (1958) described the meritocracy as a despotic society that emerged as a result of choosing the elite solely on the basis of IQ tests. Fortunately, the meanings and mechanisms of the meritocracy instituted in “real life” have transcended the identification of merit with IQ test scores. Nonetheless, the small book from the middle of the last century still reminds the reader of the threats inherent in any extremist application of the meritocratic principles.

The Meritocratic Ideology and Honors Programs

Meritocracy has been the predominant ideology in the elite American colleges and universities since the 1950s (Riesman, 1975; Karen, 1985; Klitgaard, 1985; Kingston & Lewis, 1990b; Duffy & Goldberg, 1998; Geiger, 2000; Reuben, 2001). Western democracies see meritocracy as the ruling mechanism in the distribution of different

types of education and occupational careers according to individual skills and abilities demonstrated at school and sanctioned by the education system. The meritocratic mindset is predicated on the view of modern society as technically complex, with a stratified economy and labor market that necessitate a corresponding stratification and differentiation in the education system. Such a differentiation is seen as beneficial to the production of the adequate human capital, i.e., people possessing different types of knowledge and skills (Collins, 1971; Baker & LeTendre, 2005).

For the American society, however, the meritocratic goal has always been viewed as complementary to the fundamental belief in equality of opportunity. Regarding education, this has been translated into a goal of providing every citizen with an education adequate to his needs. Because of this belief, the comprehensive type of school – an inherently American secondary education institution – has increasingly become the ideal type of school in higher education as well, intended to cater adequately to students with extremely diverse abilities, needs and goals (Cummings, 1999; Baker et al., 2000). In the age of mass higher education, all but the most selective colleges and universities aspired to fulfill this task. Large public universities, many of them with land-grant missions, were the first and foremost institutions that took on the responsibility to educate immensely heterogeneous student populations. They saw the biggest increase in student numbers after the GI Bill and the policy on expanded higher education access to every qualified person in the state (U. S. President's Commission, 1947). The influx of students resulted in policies ensuring that every student possessed a minimum level of academic skills. This, in turn, led many to believe that the university curriculum and administration were better suited to serve the “marginal student” rather than the gifted one (Waggoner,

1957; Idzerda, 1962; Cohen, 1966; Weir; 1970). At the same time, the large public universities were now enrolling a sizable number of academically talented students, whose needs had to be addressed in view of their crucial role for the national economy's future.

If it is true that the state universities will carry by far the greatest part of the burden of the large increases in enrollment to come; if a high proportion of the gifted continue to attend these universities; if top-level scientists, scholars, and academicians come, not from the universities but chiefly from the small privately supported colleges; and if it is the gifted who are the raw material from whom the scholars and scientists come—then it is completely clear that there must be radical changes within the state universities in the treatment of the gifted. (Waggoner, 1957, p. 417)

This statement by one of the leaders of the honors movement from the 1950s—1960s develops the rationale for establishing honors programs at large state universities. As it shows, the belief in a meritocratic sorting out of students within a state university was seen as the most adequate response to both the needs of the best students and the challenges of the increasingly growing economy.

Seen this way, honors programs were founded as formal structures responsible for educating the best students at a school with heterogeneous student population. Indeed, such were the intentions of the founders of the honors movement in the late 1950s-1960s, which embraced a few large research universities and some state universities of medium and smaller size (see Wynn, 1966). Identifying, among the vast numbers of students, the most talented and highly motivated, providing them with an enhanced academic

preparation, and boosting their chances of enrolling in a strong graduate program or making a highly desirable professional career was seen as a natural process in a society that was becoming increasingly meritocratically-minded (Karen, 1985; Davis, 1989; Lemann, 1999; Geiger, 2000).

This “honors” ideology (as the specific interpretation of meritocracy by the honors movement is referred to in this study) first found its propitious ground at some large state universities (Cohen, 1966a). In the course of time, these universities have almost unanimously adopted the model of the comprehensive or “institution-wide” honors program. They are the type of schools that possesses the most important prerequisites for the sustainable operation of this model. Among them are a large and heterogeneous in terms of ability student body (with sufficient numbers of superior students), and an established reputation of their scholarly activity and research. These create an atmosphere conducive to curricular innovations and likely to attract more material and financial resources and external gifts (Baker et al., 2000; Geiger, 2004).

This ideology, however, is also well alive in settings that have neither a heterogeneous student body nor a scholarly reputation of departments and research, i.e., in local state and community colleges. They started establishing honors programs in large numbers a little later in time (late 1970s—early 1980s), but the process is still well under way. Clearly, the widely accepted honors ideology turned out to be the more powerful factor in shaping the curricular structure of these schools than the rational considerations discussed above.

Diffusion of the Honors Ideology: Organizational Field

Contrary to the logic of pure rationality, non-selective four-year colleges and universities as well as community colleges did not just embark on founding and developing honors programs. Now they provide the most visible presence at national and regional honors conferences and other initiatives sponsored by the national coordinating agency, the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC Website). Studying such a wide organizational range of honors programs presupposes the application a conceptual model of diffusion of organizational structures, interorganizational relations and emerging macro-organizational patterns. The neo-institutional approach to organizations and its preoccupation with “the striking homogeneity of practices and arrangements found in the labor market, in schools, states, and corporations” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p.65) provides an adequate source for this model. The neo-institutional analysis of organizations pays special attention to the primary driving force underlying this homogeneity. Its nature is not rational or goal-oriented, but purely cognitive or cultural, induced by the search for legitimacy or social support and by the broader goal of avoiding risk and securing stability. An organizational structure created in keeping with widely shared beliefs regarding human behavior (e.g., what the best way is to educate the brightest students at a school that also enrolls many average and low-ability students) sooner or later becomes “institutionalized” or accepted as legitimate and even taken-for-granted by organizations perceiving themselves as similar, who ultimately adopt this structure as a highly desirable “token” of legitimacy and modernity (Strang & Meyer, 1994). Purely rational considerations as, for example, how efficient it is to have an honors program at a school that has an insufficient budget even for its basic operations, is

of lesser importance compared to the symbolic value of this innovation. The proliferation of honors programs, even in more unusual contexts such as small state colleges, is a part of “processes that make [organizations] more similar without necessarily making them more efficient” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p.64). This process is referred to as institutional isomorphism or “the tendency of organizations to take on the formal and substantive attributes of organizations with which they interact” (DiMaggio, 1983, p.157) and regard as successful models.

The isomorphic diffusion of structures leads to the formation of macro-structures that play an important role in shaping the operation of individual organizations as well as the broader social context (in this case, the entire higher education system). A construct referring to this phenomenon is the concept of “organizational field”: a complex of organizations that “together accomplish some task in which a researcher is interested” (DiMaggio, 1983, p.148; see also Scott & Meyer, 1994; Scott, 1994; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Since the questions of this research concern honors programs nationwide, the utilization of this construct appears to be an appropriate research strategy. Of course, this would automatically bring up the question whether honors programs are real organizations, i.e., whether all of them have developed formal bureaucratic structures, or they are more aptly defined as organizational sub-units instead (Scott, 2001, p.57). Clearly, honors programs, being part and parcel of their host institutions’ structure, are not independent units, and hence tend to fall into the second category. It is normal to expect that not all of them have developed complex bureaucratic structures, and that this is probably a function of their sizes. However, ever since the 1960s the idea of an honors program has been associated with some form of an organizational nucleus, even if it is

just the honors director's office. Furthermore, all honors programs share a common ideological foundation and in their totality participate in different forms of interaction and information dissemination. This justifies our reliance on the "organizational field" construct in the future analysis. Studying honors programs at this macro level would be helpful in understanding the aggregate effect they may have for the entire higher education system.

At the same time, it is clear that many honors programs, although being a part of a "field", are more dissimilar than similar. It is hard to imagine how an honors college at a large research university could be compared to a small community college honors program, for example. Yet, they both could be members of the National Collegiate Honors Council, both could attend the same conferences and engage in discussions of certain aspects of honors education. In such cases, it is the researcher's task to identify emerging or evolving trends of the field's "structuration" (Giddens, 1979).

The degree of "structuration" of an organizational field is regarded as its key characteristic. Borrowed from Giddens's "structuration theory" (1979), this term emphasizes the dynamic and dual nature of structure as both the media and outcome of human agency (Giddens, 1979, 1984; Scott, 2001). In the case of an organizational field, structuration processes reflect the degree and patterns of interaction among separate organizations. DiMaggio (1983) suggests four specific stages of the process of structuration: increase in interorganizational interaction; emergence of certain patterns of interaction, i.e., of domination and coalition; increase in the amount of information that circulates among organizations, and development of a field ideology, i.e., a mutual awareness in the actors of being involved in a common enterprise. This research seeks to

gauge the extent to which these trends take place and define the degree of structuration of the nationwide field of honors programs. Neo-institutional theory argues that, after a certain point in the structuration process, the prevalent processes within a field are aimed at minimizing diversity and maximizing the similarity among organizations (DiMaggio, 1983; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The following analysis seeks to understand the degree of structuration in the honors programs' field from this perspective as well. In doing this, it also speculates on a possible emergence of macro substructures (related to the organizational differences of the host colleges and universities) and the policy implications of such a trend.

The Honors Ideology and Institutional Environment

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the proliferation of honors programs is by and large due to the legitimating power of their ideological foundation, the belief in a differential education of students of superior academic ability within the same college or university. As already pointed out, the honors ideology is the more specific application of the wider meritocratic ideology in the rationale surrounding the entire process of an honors program's establishment and operation.

The institutional perspective, which stems from the foundational ontological belief in the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), views the meritocratic ideology as an inseparable part of the modern institution of education. Institutions such as education, the family, or the nation state, are systems of shared meanings, beliefs, and norms. They play a vital part in human lives by guiding and constraining human behavior (Scott, 2001; Meyer, Boli, & Thomas, 1994; Meyer &

Rowan, 1991; Baker & LeTendre, 2005). Some of the most salient shared meanings and beliefs have gained indisputable authority and are capable of sanctioning any type of human action. They function as “rational myths” (Meyer & Rowan, 1991), untestable and unquestionable, providing a generally acknowledged rationale for goal-oriented behavior. Rational myths are the fundamental constituents of institutions, hence their key role in shaping organizational structures. “By designing a formal structure that that adheres to the prescriptions of myths in the institutional environment, an organization demonstrates that it is acting on collectively valued purposes in a proper and adequate manner” (Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p.50).

The honors ideology, for example, is an organizational enactment of the belief in the value of merit and the need to recognize and cultivate it in a special educational environment. Merit is the key rational myth at the heart of the honors ideology, which this study seeks to understand. It explores the interpretation of merit in different organizational settings from the perspective that merit or ability is a social construct.

Rather than being an unchangeable attribute of individuals—like eye color—ability is in part a social status conferred to individuals based upon a multitude of social cues, including cues derived from individuals’ positions in institutional career structures. (Rosenbaum, 1986, p.140)

This research follows Rosenbaum’s (1986) view of merit as a myth reflecting the emphasis on certain characteristics in a specific organizational context, which in turn reflects the “career structure” or the set of social statuses available in this context. (Further on, I adopt and utilize a different, though similar in meaning, term, institutional charter.) An organization’s understanding of merit is most clearly demonstrated during

the process of selecting students. Since honors programs operate in very different organizational contexts, the generalizations about what properties constitute merit are expected to fluctuate in accordance with the respective anticipated pool of applicants. How does this understanding, then, affect the entire dynamics of the program, i.e., the design of its curriculum and co-curricular programs, the way in which it recruits faculty, and relation to the host institution?

In addition to merit, this study seeks to understand the role of other myths pertaining to the honors ideology, e.g., all academic and co-curricular constituents of honors programs, in shaping the organizational identity of these programs. Their specific interpretation and implementation is also expected to fluctuate in different organizational contexts.

The reconceptualization of organizational environments and the emphasis on the institutional environment (i.e., the cognitive and cultural foundation of organizations) as an identity-shaping factor is a major contribution of neo-institutionalism (Scott, 1983; Powell, 1988). The “older” version of institutional theory (i.e., the resource dependency theory) only recognized environments as related to the technical processes going on in an organization (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In contrast to it, neo-institutionalism introduces a major distinction between this type of environment, referred to as technical, and the institutional environment of organizations. Technical environments are built around a certain “production cycle”, including the market exchange of the respective product. They emphasize efficiency and output control, and are of crucial importance to organizations such as factories (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1983; Scott, 1991). Institutional environments, on the other hand, stress legitimacy and exert symbolic control by

imposing certain meaning patterns and categories on organizational behavior (i.e., the rationale for what organizations do, including ideologies). An educational organization's institutional environment is a much more powerful identity-shaping factor than its technical environment. The formal structure of these organizations reflects the institutional myths of their environment without necessarily heeding the actual processes taking place in them. For example, an honors program can function even without a day-to-day monitoring of the academic performance of its students. Technical (academic) standards can be adjusted so as to keep it going. Institutionalists refer to that phenomenon as a structure "loosely coupled" with its technical functions (Weick, 1976; Meyer & Rowan, 1983; Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1983; Scott, 2001). Each educational organization, be it a kindergarten or a college, acquires understanding of what it is or should be doing not so much from its immediate physical resources or surroundings as from a generally acknowledged set of institutionalized beliefs and norms. Institutional environments thus do not surround organizations. They penetrate and constitute them (Meyer, Boli, & Thomas, 1994, p.15).

A pivotal aspect of the institutional environment of educational organizations is their "charter", or the "institutionalized social definitions of their products", i.e., their graduates (Meyer, 1970, p. 577; see also Kamens, 1977; Meyer, 1979; Collins, 1979). Neo-institutionalism holds that the charter of a college or university exerts an important effect on its students by creating legitimating myths about the quality of their educational experience and their subsequent abilities as graduates and potential members of society, including their professional realization (Meyer, 1970; Kamens, 1977). In the case of honors programs, a case of a special "honors charter" might be in place, blending the

charter of the host institution (a public school built for the masses, emphasizing college access rather than elite status) with the honors ideology of preparing the ablest students of this school for special elite social destinations, such as graduate schools and professional careers. This blend (or maybe tension) is essential and should be taken into account when thinking of the role of honors programs regarding social stratification processes.

While focusing on processes driven by the institutional environments, institutional theory does not deemphasize the different human and material resources (i.e., the technical environment) as a complex factor impacting the operations of an educational organization. As all organizational units, honors programs are inevitably impacted by a multiplicity of constraints (and freedoms) stemming from their host institutions, which constitute their local, technical environments. Therefore, the question of the honors program's interaction with the larger organizational context of its host institution as a "resource pool" (including the constituencies of students, faculty and administrators, as well as possible benefactors) is of key importance in organizational analysis. It is the anticipated source of variation and thus an important asset in the institutional dynamics of honors programs.

Institutional and technical environments do not exclude each other. They are best viewed in terms of degrees of influence of different factors (technical or institutional in nature) rather than as a dichotomy of conflicting forces (Scott, 1991, 1994). Furthermore, neo-institutionalism posits the existence of "multiple" environments, a point that is quite relevant to the present study. For example, honors programs nationwide function in at least two institutional environments. The first one is the common agenda expressed by the honors ideology, while the second one is related to institutional influences coming

through their host institutions and their charters. The interplay of these two institutional environments is also expected to affect the dynamics of the respective honors program.

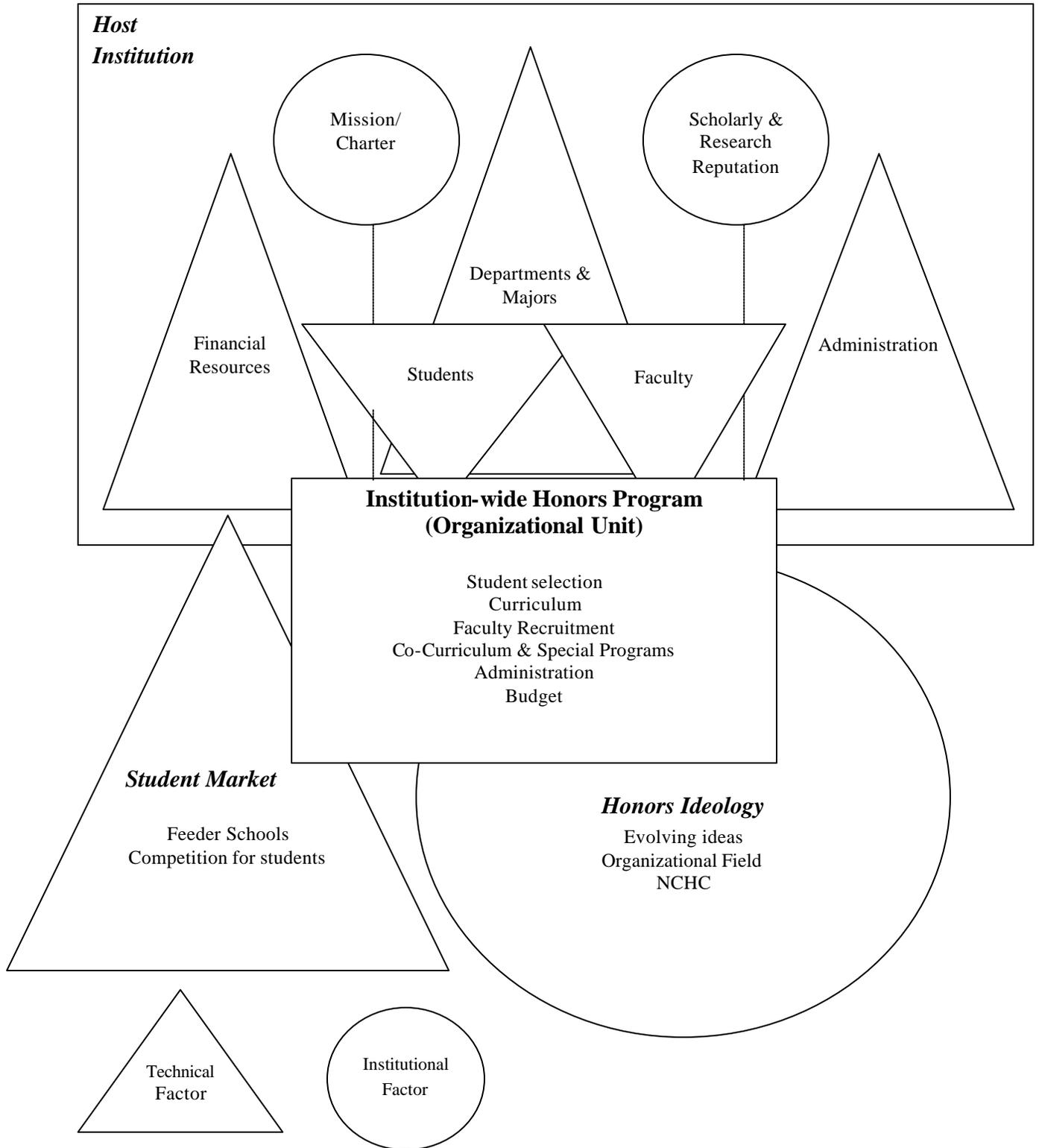
Figure 2.1 presents a conceptual model of the organizational environments (technical and institutional) of an honors program. The following chapters will follow its logic in tracing how the different technical and institutional environments affect the organizational structure and operation in each case. The overall effect of these different driving forces is what to a large extent determines an honors program's identity and dynamics. They may impact each program in a different way, however, thus creating a diversity of organizational forms (e.g., the honors ideology alone may be more salient in some forms than in others).

The Honors Ideology, Academic and Social Stratification

The present conceptual model is a dynamic one. The term organizational dynamics refers not only to the actual operation of honors programs but also to the effects of their functions regarding the higher education system as a whole. By identifying a group of academically superior students and providing them with a different, allegedly better, educational experience, honors programs act as agents of differentiation and tracking in higher education (Baker et al., 2000). What is the significance of this process regarding individual students in and out of these programs? Does it have any effect on the macro structure of the higher education institutional hierarchy?

The functionalist approach, which is the theory supporting the ideology of meritocracy, holds that processes of differentiation are positive and necessary because this is what a meritocratic society is all about: opportunity is distributed according to

Figure 2.1.
Organizational Environments of Honors Programs



merit, and the most meritorious receive the best education (Collins, 1971). Functionalism has been and still is a powerful belief system of reformers and policy makers. Most sociologists of education, however, recurrently emphasize the association between educational differentiation and stratification and intergenerational reproduction of class status and inequality. This perspective, most often referred to as conflict or class-reproduction, also focuses on processes that remain unanswered by institutional theory. Plentiful research findings about the strong positive relationship between the students' social background and different markers of their educational careers (e.g., their perceived academic ability, their college choice and self-selection, and the quality of the colleges they attend) reinforce the idea that the educational system is not a real but a quasi-meritocracy (Karabel & Astin, 1975), more successfully reproducing than counteracting old inequalities. Some of these studies are briefly reviewed below.

The reproduction mechanism of the educational institution functions successfully because of its hidden nature, presenting itself as meritocracy while in reality it legitimates social inequalities under the disguise of academic achievement. The key “accomplice” in making this process possible is one’s possession or not of cultural capital, i.e., of “instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.488). These instruments might range from knowledge about cultural events and figures to information about schools and strategies needed to get access to them, and from exposure to works of art to a cultivation of “appropriate” style of expression. Those who have a lot of cultural capital are rewarded by the educational system: they get better grades, perform better on examinations, and ultimately attend better colleges and achieve a higher social status. The

major problem with this cycle is that cultural capital is plentiful in families that have already acquired a high social status, while disadvantaged families are also deficient in cultural capital, which puts their children at yet another disadvantage. Moreover, in the United States in particular, family influence looms large in view of the decentralized secondary school system and the differences between schools and districts in the quality of curriculum (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Kozol, 1991; Bratlinger, 2003). According to Baker and LeTendre (2005), “coming from a disadvantaged home in the United States places a youth at greater risk of poor educational performance than in many other wealthy nations” (p.76). Ever since the Coleman report on *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966), the positive relation between socio-economic status and student achievement has been a continuous concern of education policy makers and college admissions officers.

Both the functionalist and the conflict perspectives acknowledge the hierarchical nature of the higher education system, where several dozen institutions at the top are nationally and internationally recognized as the gateways to the most lucrative and prestigious professional careers. In a real meritocracy the most talented and meritorious would be the ones to attend them. The conflict perspective, however, presents a different picture. Even though it acknowledges that the admissions policies of the most selective colleges and universities have undergone a fundamental evolution throughout the 20th century, it also sees many of them as still biased toward their traditional constituencies, be it children of alumni, major donors, or prep school graduates. Some major studies on the gatekeeping function of selective schools find class to be an important factor in ensuring entry to the nation’s top schools (Karabel, 1984; Karen, 1990). Some more

expanded research on the connection between academic stratification and social background also underscores the class bias of a system constructed to serve, under the guise of meritocracy, the social elite (Brint & Karabel, 1989, 1991; Clark, 1960; Hearn, 1991; McDonough, 1997; Bratlinger, 2003; Karen, 2002).

In an attempt to trace a relationship between “social class, academic ability, and college ‘quality’”, Karabel and Astin (1975) view the whole educational system as a quasi-meritocracy, since the sorting of people within the entire educational system is profoundly influenced by social factors: “[a]n educational sorting process which appears neutral, but which in reality favors children from relatively privileged families tends to perpetuate existing status differences” (p.383). The findings of their study highlight a significant positive relationship between entering students’ socio-economic status and college rank, which overall confirms their skeptical outlook. Two more recent studies confirm the persistence of this trend. Karen (2002) found that “being female, and/or black and/or of lower socioeconomic origins” (p.202) has a continued negative relationship with the selectivity of school one attends, even after controlling for academic variables. Carnevale and Rose (2003) point out that at the 146 most selective postsecondary schools, only 3% of the students come from the lowest socioeconomic quartile, while 74% of the students come from the top socioeconomic quartile.

The problem of the impact of class and other social background factors on the sorting of students to tertiary institutions of different “quality” and status is multifaceted. One aspect of it is the strong role that self-selection plays when it comes to making the college-choice decision. A number of researchers have emphasized the essentially social or class-related nature of factors that shape the individual decision making process.

Bourdieu's (1984, 1996) theory of "habitus", or the personal dispositions that reflect objective positions in the social hierarchy and generate certain practices, is often at the heart of this research. This understanding of the process of internalizing an externally determined social structure and adopting a practical stance toward its perpetuation is a more sophisticated version of the classical Marxist view that individual actions are a function of external conditions, i.e., one's place in the class structure of society. It emphasizes the relative importance of individual preferences and decisions on the basis of evaluating relevant available information, including consultation with others and gaining access to further information. In light of this view, factors such as high school counselors, peer groups, and the media, are seen to play an equally important role as the strictly objective conditions of family background.

This is clearly illustrated in McDonough's (1997) comprehensive study of the complicated decision-making process and the socially structured inequality of access to higher education. The book shows how the unequal pre-college settings have a major impact on the future student trajectories. The study demonstrates that the students who attended the more elite high schools were more likely to attend selective colleges because they were helped and guided in this direction, by both their families and their high school environments.

A strong thread of criticism permeates Bratlinger's ethnography *Dividing Classes* (2003). The book exposes the class-biased consciousness and logic of middle-class mothers, who claim to be liberally minded yet consistently attribute the lower school achievement and problems of students of lower social status to their being less intelligent

than their own children. In most cases they also refuse to send their children to “mixed” schools, i.e., schools that enroll children of both rich and poor families.

Of course, the question of choosing a college to apply to is not merely a psychological matter. Basic considerations such as college cost exert major constraints over the decision-making process of students from low-income backgrounds. Regardless of the elaborate system of financing one’s college career, consisting of different federal, state and institutional (need-blind) forms of financial aid, many of which target minorities and disadvantaged students, research invariably finds that low-income students find it more difficult to attend the prestigious and expensive private colleges and universities (Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2001, 2002; McPherson & Schapiro, 2001; Zuckerman, 2004). Geiger (2004) summarizes the current student demographic profile at selective private universities in pointing out that “students with the cumulative advantages of wealth and excellent schooling appear to have captured a growing share of these places” (pp.85-86). The only correction that the conflict perspective would make in this claim is that “excellent schooling” is not an independent variable but is itself related to wealth and socio-economic status, as is academic ability (Karabel & Astin, 1975). As aptly stated by Kingston and Lewis (1991b), the “undergraduates at elite institutions [are] the best, the brightest and the richest” (p.105; see also Hearn, 1990; Persell & Cookson, 1990).

How do honors programs fit into these claims of the conflict perspective? The answer to that question is largely contingent upon at least two other questions. First, what is the place of honors programs in the entire hierarchy of colleges and universities? Obviously, by definition, they are meant to serve the needs of superior students, those

who are considered to have exceptional abilities compared to their fellow students. Could honors programs, then, be considered a part of the “elite sector”? Second, how do honors programs function regarding the social reproduction argument: is their role one of enhancing social mobility for the honors students, or is it simply another aspect of the overall class reproduction mechanism? Or maybe they do not have any consistent and discernible effects?

As regards the first question, it should be noted that it is not quite clear where the lower boundaries of the “elite” sector are (Hearn, 1990, p. 121) and, even more so, what the different dimensions of this attribute are, in case we want to “test” a particular organization. Is it synonymous just with its degree of selectivity, or does it presuppose certain student characteristics, most notably those related to merit and social class? Few honors programs compare themselves in quality and prestige to the top private colleges. Most often, they function at institutions of medium selectivity such as the public research universities. Some of them indeed are very selective programs, in many cases already upgraded to honors colleges, competing for students with the elite private colleges and universities.

The question of honors programs’ effects regarding stratification and mobility, on the other hand, is applicable to all honors programs, regardless of their perceived prestige. If a community college honors program helps its students achieve goals that they would not have achieved otherwise, then it is clearly an agent of social mobility. Of course, this is an ideal situation; reality inevitably offers more shades and ambiguities.

No prior research has specifically looked at how highly selective honors programs conduct their student recruitment and selection with respect to social class. This

question is becoming all the more important because honors programs are generally known to provide their students with unique learning experiences, and it is logical to expect that these students enjoy certain privileges that boost their future academic and professional careers.

Therefore, tracing not just their organizational behavior but also their impact on the wider stratified higher education context is a part of the conceptual model of organizational dynamics of honors programs. To summarize, this model covers three major groups of issues: the structure and operation of separate honors programs in different contexts, the diffusion of these structures throughout the higher education organizational spectrum, and their impact on different constituencies and on more general differentiation and stratification trends in higher education. These three thematic groups are at the focus of the analysis in the final two chapters of this study.

CHAPTER 3

EVOLVING IDEOLOGY, SPREADING ORGANIZATIONS (HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS)

This chapter highlights the major historical events in the evolution of the honors ideology and honors programs as its organizational manifestation. Its objective is not to provide a comprehensive and detailed account of the history of honors programs. Such dissertations, even though with a specific temporal, regional or institutional focus, already exist. It rather outlines the major stages and points marking the development of the concept as well as the structure of honors programs and their spread throughout higher education. It thus provides a background and sets the stage for the subsequent study of three specific honors programs. It also offers the rationale for the particular choice of programs made for the case study.

The chief sources used for this overview are the books compiled by the two most influential figures of the first and second stages of the honors movement, Aydelotte (1925, 1944) and Cohen (1966a). The narrative also draws on several dissertations about the history of honors programs in the South and at the State University of New York – Buffalo against the background of national trends in honors education (Rickman, 1956; Capuana, 1993), as well as about specific features of honors programs in Texas (Irby, 1986), community colleges in Florida and Pennsylvania (Goldstein, 1986), and four mid-western honors programs (Huggett, 2003). The third major type of sources are journal articles on specific trends, issues, or separate honors programs (mainly from *The National Honors Report*, which is the official journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council). The historical narrative blends with sociological interpretations regarding evolving ideas and organizational structures.

The present analysis argues that the organizational evolution of honors programs passes through three major phases. The key developments that take place during these phases could be summarized as follows:

1. The pre-organizational phase from the 1920s until World War II, which affirmed the honors ideology as beneficial to (rather than incompatible with) the ideals of American democracy. The honors seminar and independent studies are the two curricular components of this period that still constitute the gist of the honors experience.

2. The period from the late 1950s through the 1970s, which brought about a major reconsideration of honors programs. First, from curricular arrangements within departments they increasingly became separate organizational structures. Second, “general” and “departmental” honors were integrated into institution-wide programs for students from all levels and majors. And third, their typical host institutions were now not the private liberal arts colleges but the state universities. The honors ideology was also enriched during that period with enhanced emphasis on a multitude of honors courses and on breadth of knowledge (reflected mostly in the idea of general honors and interdisciplinary courses). A newly envisioned role of the honors program as an agent of change for its host institution was also first suggested during this phase.

3. The 1980s to date, with broadening the scope of “merit” beyond academics and expanding the honors ideology from pure academics to co-curricular experiences such as community building and community service. This expanded ideology facilitated the upgrade of a few honors programs into honors colleges and their spread to smaller four-year institutions and community colleges, thus giving momentum to the emergence of an entire organizational field.

First Phase: Origin of the Honors Ideology

The emergence of the honors ideology in American higher education was one of the first indications that student ability or merit (regardless of inherited social privilege) was beginning to be recognized as a factor in designing curricular policies and distributing students into differential educational channels. Honors programs were conceived as a reaction to an age of expansion, standardization and regimentation in higher education, which occurred after World War I (Aydelotte, 1925, 1944; Rickman, 1956; Levine, 1986; Capuana, 1993). Their mission was to encourage scholarship among the students with the highest academic potential by giving them freedom in designing their college education, and keeping them accountable to higher academic standards through final examinations. Although some colleges had tried to organize honors courses at the beginning of the century (Rickman, 1956; Capuana, 1993), it wasn't until the early 1920s and the first systematic effort at Swarthmore College that a coordinated movement emerged to introduce a special program of study for the best college students.

The Swarthmore Honors Program

The Swarthmore program, founded in 1922, covered the junior and senior college years ("upper-division honors"). Its major constituents were honors seminars that comprised one or (more often) several related subjects or "fields" that belonged to a broader academic area referred to as a "course". Thus, a course in English featured fields in English literature, modern history, philosophy, and fine arts; a course in social sciences had fields in social sciences, history, philosophy, political science, and economics; and a course in physics had fields in mathematics, physics, and astronomy (for more details see Rickman, 1956, pp.105-106). The program also emphasized independent work in close

cooperation with a faculty member. The specific requirements were formulated in a syllabus given to the student at the beginning of his junior year and to the examiners at the end of his senior year. Attendance at lectures was voluntary, and final comprehensive examinations were conducted by outside examiners.

Admissions to the program were held during the sophomore year. Students who volunteered for “reading for honors” had to specify the field in which they were interested. A faculty committee for each specific field of honors study then granted admission on the basis of the students’ academic record in their respective fields of interest as well as their maturity and motivation (Rickman, 1956). Honors students would normally choose two subjects from one “course” and attend two seminars per week in these subjects (a total of eight seminars for the two years, four of which were in their major field of study). Students had to write papers every week, as they were the basis for the discussion during the seminars. The seminars were usually very small, with no more than four or five students in them. All the work done during the seminars and in the form of independent study was meant to prepare the student for the final comprehensive examinations. They were both written and oral: professors from other institutions came for the oral ones, and the written ones were conducted by correspondence. They were indeed a severe test of the student’s ability and a clear indicator of the essentially different nature of honors work compared to the traditional course system (Aydelotte, 1944; Rickman, 1956).

The Swarthmore honors program embodied in its purest form Aydelotte’s vision of honors education and the principles of its implementation (Aydelotte, 1925, 1994). It is also one of the few programs that have remained almost intact until the present day

(because of which it does not fit into the modern type of honors programs, which this study investigates). A factor of crucial importance to the success of the program at Swarthmore was the unconditional support that the college faculty gave to Aydelotte's plan (Clark, 1970). It culminated in a common effort to study and popularize the development of honors programs in America. In 1940, for half a year, the Swarthmore faculty traveled to all parts of the country to gather information about the existing honors programs, and the final product of this immense campaign was Aydelotte's 1944 book.

Genesis and Rationale of the Honors Ideology

The honors programs from the 1920s were an expression of a widely shared in academe concern over the consequences of the unprecedented expansion of American higher education after World War I. The huge increase of student enrollments was a function of the preceding massification of the secondary education system. If only 3 % of all age-eligible population were enrolled in secondary education institutions between 1870 and 1910, for the period of 1920 to 1940 they were already 21% (these numbers being 3% and 10% for higher education, respectively) (see Rubinson, 1986). The surge in enrollments meant above all a much greater heterogeneity of students, which in its turn brought about the question of offering an adequate curriculum to the different sub-groups of that diverse population. The general perception was that the uniform standards already established were made to fit the average student, which in its turn caused concern for the quality of undergraduate education². The proponents of the honors ideology saw the academic college experience as cultivating docility instead of independence and creativity. Most of the academic work the students had to perform was fragmented into a

² This was not only a concern of the honors programs' proponents. Charles Eliot, the former president of Harvard, expressed similar views in the *New York Times* in 1923 (see Capuana, 1993, p.25).

rigid set of rules and regulations about attendance, tests, written work, etc., which guaranteed successful graduation without demanding any special effort of the intellect. The college curriculum thus catered to the average student “adequately if not ideally” (Aydelotte, 1944, p.14), but was most inefficient and even harmful to the students of exceptional abilities, since it blunted their interests and wasted their talent and time (Aydelotte, 1925, 1944).

The proponents of the honors ideology were staunch advocates of the meritocratic spirit: it was their firm belief that the undergraduate curriculum should be differentiated according to the different abilities and interests of students. Above all, they claimed, the American college needed a reform that would raise the value of intellectual work, and the availability of an already existing model seemed to promise a solution. A former Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University, Aydelotte became a fervent advocate of the British model of distinction between the “pass” and “honors” degrees. It segregated students with serious intellectual interests from those interested only in receiving a degree, exempted them from the usual academic routine and thus gave them “more responsibility for working out their own intellectual salvation” (Aydelotte, 1925, p.7). The key emphasis in achieving this was placed on the students’ independent work (in cooperation with tutors) and the final comprehensive examinations. These were the two most advocated by Aydelotte elements of the British model, which he placed as a foundation of his honors plan for Swarthmore. The idea of freedom achieved through independent and more rigorous work was at the heart of the newly conceived honors programs of the 1920s (Aydelotte, 1925, 1944).

A considerable number of faculty members and institutions celebrated the innovation. Within only the first year of their existence honors programs doubled their number (Aydelotte, 1925). However, this spread did not happen smoothly and without controversies. Attempts to institute such programs at many colleges and universities were accompanied by “voluminous educational discussion” (Aydelotte, 1944, p. ix). The programs were often charged with being elitist and undemocratic, since they segregated only a handful of students and offered them preferential treatment. Interestingly, these accusations emerged with the very dawn of honors programs at some of the most elite colleges of the country (whose students disproportionately belonged to the upper social strata). Coming from such a context, the issue of “elitism” never carried social class implications and was not related to social background factors, i.e., it was not thought of as a relationship between social background and “honors” status. The opponents of honors programs at that time held that the American college was conceived as a democracy of equals, and therefore the honors approach runs against the ideals of American democracy (Riesman, 1975; Geiger, 1986; Horowitz, 1987). In fact, the rhetoric surrounding the debates on the honors programs’ “elitism” uncovered some deeper cultural tensions of the “American character”. They were undoubtedly related to the traditional strain of anti-intellectualism in American culture (Hofstadter, 1963), where the juxtaposition of the types of the “intellectual” and the “well-rounded personality” was made only to emphasize the superiority of the latter. This stereotype obviously had a strong impact on the collegiate culture of the time. Its influence was also especially strong in the business world, among the students’ future employers, who “value[d] successful participation in college activities more highly than they [did] academic

distinction” (Aydelotte, 1944, p.6). Because of this, Aydelotte felt even more strongly about the need to convince the public that honors programs did not contradict but rather reinforced the ideals of democracy and equality.

It is noteworthy that both the deprecators and the proponents of the honors ideology used the ideals and values of “democracy” as a key part of their arguments. Aydelotte (1944) dedicated substantial sections in his two books to discussing and attempting to rectify different misinterpretations of this concept. The major common misconception about democracy, he claimed, was the view of it as equality in everything and hence uniformity (Aydelotte, 1944, pp.12 – 19; 128-130). This view inevitably led to the wrong assumption that all students were essentially alike, while in reality the variation in ability among students was a recognizable and undeniable fact. Therefore, he maintained, the true value of democracy was in the emphasis not on the uniformity of everybody, but on the freedom of each individual to develop their unique personality to its fullest potential. It was the duty of democracy to give each individual the right to achieve this. The value and relevance of honors programs to the ideals of democracy thus consisted in their being an “extension of undergraduate freedom from the personal to the intellectual sphere” (p.12). Therefore, the honors ideology was beneficial to the democratic society, since “a society that is not to be condemned to mediocrity must demand the best of each individual” (p.19).

Features of the Early Honors Programs

Regardless of the controversies that surrounded the institution of honors programs, they achieved an impressive growth during the first couple of years of their existence. Swarthmore’s plan was initiated in 1922. Aydelotte’s report for the National

Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences in 1924 described 44 existing programs. In a year's time after that report their number more than doubled: according to the second edition of the same report, 93 honors programs were in operation in 1925. And in his 1944 book Aydelotte counted 130 programs and provided descriptions of 116 of them.

Even though in his accounts Aydelotte constantly emphasized the great diversity of programs with respect to the different arrangements of courses, seminars, and different requirements, from a modern perspective it is clear that all these early programs shared a few major characteristic features. First, they were not conceived as separate organizational entities and were entirely subordinate to the already existing academic structures, i.e., the academic departments. "Reading for honors" was initiated by faculty in these departments, and all arrangements concerning specific policies remained within the decision-making power of the respective department. Second, they were usually open only to upper-level students, juniors and seniors, although some institutions, e.g., Princeton, Yale, Boston College, Mount Holyoke, Stanford, and the University of Chicago, tried out honors work for freshmen and sophomores (Rickman, 1956). Third, the major constituents of the programs were honors seminars, independent work supervised by faculty, and final examinations.

Aydelotte (1944) called the honors reform "the most important educational development of the period between the two world wars" (p.ix). In an unusually short period of time a distinctive pattern of special curricular arrangements for the academically talented students emerged, which undoubtedly speaks for honors programs

as a major catalyst in the process of curricular differentiation at the beginning of the last century.

The honors program reform was first successfully implemented mostly in the Eastern private colleges, institutions that had the most bountiful resources for that kind of innovation. The public colleges and universities responded to it at a much slower pace. Aydelotte (1944) pointed at a “threefold problem” of the state universities, preventing the smooth institution of honors programs. Great numbers of students with below-average performance and the need to provide remedial instruction to them, the consequent stronger regimentation of the curriculum, and the difficulty in soliciting funds from state legislators for a program designed for a small minority of students were the parts of this problem (pp. 90-91). Only a few state colleges and universities experimented with some form of honors programs, and only Ohio State and the University of Virginia were cited as having done something more than making “steps in the direction of honors work” (Aydelotte, 1944, p.95).

The early honors programs had very few students and thus remained limited in scope. Many of them did not survive until the 1950s (Cohen, 1966b, p.xi). It is their long-term significance, however, that matters above all: these early programs proved that the American colleges and universities could be quite flexible in responding to the increasing range of student potential and goals. Their significance was captured very precisely by their founder: “the actual achievement here recorded is less important than the promise implied” (Aydelotte, 1925, p.18).

First Phase: Summary

The major significance of the first phase in the development of honors programs was in laying the ideological foundation of honors education (Aydelotte, 1925 & 1944), which found fertile soil in the American academic climate in the years to come. The honors ideology, instituted during the 1920s, which was yet to be explored and modified in the following decades, could be summarized as follows:

- The higher education curriculum in institutions catering to a heterogeneous student population should be differentiated and made adequate to the individual abilities and needs of all students.
- Honors education should not be focused on attending lectures and receiving high grades. It should be a liberating intellectual adventure, a remedy against the intellectual mediocrity latent in the collegiate culture. Honors students should be exempted from the standard college requirements and should be left to sculpt their own studies and be held accountable for their overall progress.
- Recommended forms of honors work are the special seminars, individual studies and student research, all of which should encourage close contacts between students and faculty. These should constitute not additional but different, more challenging and creative, coursework.
- Honors seminars should build connections between two or more subjects, thus emphasizing breadth of knowledge. The ultimate goal of the honors, however, is to prepare experts in specific academic areas, who will most likely continue their studies in graduate school.

Second Phase: Emergence of an Organizational Structure

The late 1950s and the 1960s marked a new era in the history of honors programs. While the thread of continuity with the 1920s was tangible, this period witnessed some major innovations in the evolution of the honors ideology. It now assumed its own bureaucratic image in the new honors programs, which were separate organizational structures that transcended the boundaries of their traditional “hosts”, the academic departments. The old type of departmental honors program for upper classmen became increasingly complemented by and integrated with the general (or lower-division) honors program for freshmen and sophomores into an institution-wide structure. It was also in those early years that some new honors programs started to call themselves honors colleges (Cohen, 1961; Idzerda, 1962; Clark, 1965; Cohen, 1966a), a trend that did not come into full swing until the 1980s.

Another major development during this period was the change of the typical host institutions of honors programs: it was now the state universities that took the lead in giving honors programs their modern structure and image. The post-World War II period saw the greatest expansion in student enrollments in the history of American higher education. This massification put the greatest pressure on the state universities, whose mission was to take care of the “numbers”, i.e., of all successful high school graduates in their states. The state universities thus found themselves in a situation similar, though on a much bigger scale, to the one facing the private colleges after World War I: they, too, had to take care of a very heterogeneous student population. Unlike the private colleges in those years, however, they had to deal with immense numbers of students who needed remedial instruction. The identification and placement of these students took a great deal

of their efforts and resources (Waggoner, 1957, p. 420). At the same time, unlike their own situation in the 1920s, now they were enrolling an increased number of high-ability students. The National Merit Scholarship Corporation published lists of the top 1-2% of the high school graduates for the different states, and a substantial number of these students were enrolled in the respective state universities (Waggoner, 1957, pp.416-417).

The 1950s and 1960s also highlighted a new image of the large state universities as generators of advanced research economy heavily sponsored by the federal government and big corporations (Geiger, 1993). Consequently, “in order to accommodate their expanding and changing research role they had to become larger, more complex, more segmented organizations”(p.viii). The need for highly qualified conductors of this research, both faculty members and graduate students, as well as a nationwide emphasis on the importance of human capital for the competitiveness of American economy during the Cold War, made the quality of education in large state universities an urgent issue. The launching of Sputnik in 1957 was another major catalyst for education reforms in this period. In particular, there was a growing perception that the universities’ increased emphasis on graduate and professional education as well as research was hurting above all the best undergraduate students, who were not challenged enough by the existing curriculum. Honors programs were therefore seen as a most appropriate means of correcting this state. The foundational honors idea thus repeated in bold strokes the concerns of the 1920s (Cohen, 1996a).

Unlike the 1920s, however, the honors movement now was conducted on a more rationalized, regulated and coordinated basis. The years 1957 to 1965 marked the emergence of a formal interorganizational network of honors programs, which played a

crucial role in their institutionalization nationwide. The first harbinger of this qualitative change was the established in 1957, with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS). Its inception marked the beginning of a coordinated effort to encourage the development of honors programs on a national scale with a specific focus on the state universities (Cohen, 1966a). ICSS was conceived as an “instigator of cross-fertilization” (p.xiii) and a “clearinghouse for information on honors activities” (Cohen, 1966c, p.27) that played the role of a major catalyst in fostering the formation of honors programs on new principles. This work was accomplished via three major channels: a specific journal on honors, professional meetings with faculty, students, and administrators, and discussions about the feasibility of honors programs at different institutions (Angell, 1960; Cohen, 1966c), and national and regional honors conferences (Cohen, 1966d). It was through the coordinating effort of ICSS that the new direction in the evolution of honors programs took shape.

Structural and Ideological Innovations

The honors ideology of the 1950s and 1960s continued to build on the foundation laid in the 1920s. The leaders of the second wave of the honors movement had a clear sense of continuity with their predecessors. In many of their publications they reiterated Aydelotte’s arguments about honors and democracy, and the necessity to have a differentiated type of education at a comprehensive higher education institution (Waggoner, 1957; Idzerda, 1962; Clark, 1965; Cohen, 1966b). The old pattern of an honors program, “junior-senior-departmental, independent study, senior thesis” (Cadbury, 1966, p.196) was still seen as legitimate, but not as sufficient any more for the provision of a complete honors experience at a multipurpose institution such as the large

state university. This prompted the ICSS, in drafting the conclusions of the national honors conference in 1957, to design a list of “The Sixteen Major Features of a Full Honors Program” (Cohen, 1966d). This document synthesized the points of continuity as well as departure from the previous understanding of honors programs. A major divergence from the old model reflected a widely publicized controversy of the time between the proponents of honors as liberal education (emphasizing breadth of knowledge) and honors as a specialization in a given area (Cohen, 1966b; Capuana, 1993). The goal of the old model was obviously to prepare top specialists in certain disciplines and future graduate students. It was now increasingly counteracted by the view that high-ability students had to be identified as early as during high school and given the freedom to develop their talents in college (Cohen, 1996b). This justified instituting honors programs for freshmen and sophomores as well as juniors and seniors, and making the honors experience “continuous and cumulative through all four years, with honors counseling especially organized and equally continuous” (Cohen, 1966d, p.46). Furthermore, the old emphasis on independent research (with just a few honors seminars) now was subdued by the assertion that honors work should encompass a good part of a student’s entire curriculum. This called for the design of many new forms of honors courses, e.g., honors sections and colloquia, as well as for a continuous process of counseling by faculty rather than professional advisors (Cohen, 1966d).

Other major points in the “Sixteen Major Features” dealt with the necessity to have an actual university honors center, with its own facilities for the honors students, e.g., “library, lounge, reading rooms, and other appropriate décor” (p.48) – an indication of the effort to promote honors programs as viable organizational structures. Establishing

and maintaining close cooperation between the honors program and the graduate school was another innovative idea. A few publications from this time elaborate on the opportunities that might arise for honors students as a result of this cooperation. Some of the more specific recommendations focus on opening graduate courses to gifted honors students and encouraging such students to complete both the BA and the MA degrees in four years (Waggoner, 1966).

A special contribution of this period to the honors idea was the emphasis on the relationship between an honors program and its host institution. Honors culture, its advocates believed, should not be cultivated in opposition to the institution as a whole but should be its “nucleus of quality”:

The problem is not how to give something to the best students alone in an isolated and small-scale way. Instead, it is how to set in motion a force of change that will spur the institution as a whole to work to make as many students as possible into first-rate products. (Cohen, 1966a, p. ix)

Viewed this way, an honors program would undoubtedly seem less elitist and isolated from the regular curriculum, even to its most fervent critics. Even though so very promising, however, this idea did not receive a full-fledged realization during this period. Its promise remained to be fulfilled later in time.

Among the other major circulating ideas during that time were a renewed emphasis on interdepartmental cooperation and interdisciplinary courses (Wynn, 1966), special residential arrangements for honors students (Angell, 1960, p.84), as well as a single administrative unit for both the general and departmental honors, usually including an honors council and a director (Wynn, 1966). In the course of time, all these ideological

and structural innovations became deeply engrained in the identity of the modern honors programs operating at large state universities.

Champions of Innovation

The process of shaping this modern model, however, was a slow one. The late 1950s and 1960s were above all an age of experimentation, and most of the honors programs existing at the time were only beginning to adopt (some of) them. The one major innovation, the extension of the programs to the lower levels, was accomplished via the intermediary stage of the co-existence (in some institutions) of two forms of honors programs, general and departmental, which were considered entirely separate, in terms of structure and administration (which is still the case in some public universities). Many of the state universities had established departmental honors before they thought of introducing the general program. This situation led to certain tensions and resistance from some departments that had to relinquish part of their power, e.g., in rewarding degrees. The reason for that was the shift of decision-making power to an all-university Honors Council upon the introduction of general honors. Another problem stemmed from the perception that introducing general honors might make it more difficult for some students to graduate with honors. A good illustration of these early tensions between the two coexisting forms of honors programs was the University of Colorado (Wynn, 1966).

The work of the ICSS was inextricably linked to the honors program at the University of Colorado, which played a role somewhat similar to that of Swarthmore in the 1920s. In many respects, the idea of founding the ICSS grew out of the work of its director, Joseph Cohen. As was the case in the 1920s, the unique leadership role of a single person facilitated the introduction and spread of a major educational reform. Many

of the new ideas that the ICSS disseminated were first tested at the University of Colorado. The single most significant feature of the honors program at the University of Colorado was the strong emphasis on developing general in addition to departmental honors. Ever since its founding in 1930, it championed the idea that academic breadth was as important as depth. At a time when the vast majority of honors programs were confined within the limits of separate departments and were offered only to upper classmen exploring the depths of their majors, the University of Colorado honors program started experimenting with a freshman colloquium and honors theme groups – seminars on topics outside the teacher’s primary field of competence and also outside the students’ major academic area. The general and departmental honors were kept separate, however, and tensions between supporters of the two approaches led to a revision of an early requirement to take both the general and the departmental honors. After the revision, which took place during World War II, a student could take both or only one of the two (Cohen, 1966c).

Two other well-known honors programs at large state universities, the Universities of Michigan and Illinois, experienced similar tensions between their general and departmental honors. The University of Michigan offered general honors courses or sections to freshmen and sophomores from all colleges, but had departmental programs only in liberal arts, music, and medicine. The University of Illinois, on the other hand, had to cope with an atmosphere of “extreme departmentalism”, where the different departmental honors programs were very isolated from each other, and the administrative authority was divided among different college honors councils and an all-university faculty honors council (Wynn, 1966).

The most complete integration of general and departmental honors was probably achieved in the first two honors colleges, at Michigan State University (founded in 1956) and the University of Oregon (founded in 1960). They were popularized as “all-university in the truest sense of the word” (Wynn, 1966, p. 129). Most of the features of the new model discussed above were being implemented at these two honors colleges. At Michigan State, it was possible for students in any academic college or major to do honors work, and the general education part of the whole program was particularly strongly emphasized. The Honors College relied heavily on honors advising. The advisors were faculty members from the regular colleges who were also nominated as Honors-College advisors. They worked individually with the students designing their plans of study that had to be approved by both the Honors College committee and an honors committee from the student’s academic college. The honors courses themselves were entirely organized by the student’s academic college, which also granted the students their degrees. The Honors College only organized different co-curricular evening discussions that did not carry credit and were not a required honors component. Its primary responsibilities were thus restricted to student recruitment and advising (Angell, 1960). Clearly, this was still a very early form of an honors college, with too much authority still residing with the other academic colleges of the university.

A somewhat higher degree of autonomy was achieved at the University of Oregon Honors College, which was launched in the fall of 1960. Above all, it took full responsibility for providing an honors curriculum to the honors students. A special committee on the curriculum designed the major policies and requirements, which were accepted by the Honors College faculty. The two major features of the honors curriculum

were a solid core curriculum for the lower level as well as an interdisciplinary colloquium in the junior and senior year (Wynn, 1966). The College also had clear policies as to faculty composition: every department or school had to have its representative among the Honors College faculty. It had its own student center, a place for reading, study, and discussions. Its administration was conducted by a director and a director of curriculum, and it was negotiated that the name “Honors College” would appear in parentheses after the student’s regular college at graduation, i.e. , a student could graduate in Liberal Arts (Honors College) (Clark, 1965; Wynn, 1966).

About six honors colleges were established during the time of ICSS. This organizational innovation undoubtedly challenged the traditional division into colleges and made a path for a further reconsideration of the place and significance of honors programs within their host institutions. A crucial factor for establishing and sustaining the work of the Honors College in both cases was the unconditional administrative support from the host institution as well as the financial support in the form of external grants – two other important prerequisites for future honors colleges (Angell, 1960; Clark, 1965).

The ICSS stopped functioning in 1965, and in 1966 a new agency, the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), was founded in its place. The honors movement during these years was still in its “explosive stage” (Cohen, 1966a, p.xiv). Therefore, the NCHC obviously had to continue the work of its predecessor in stimulating the development of honors programs. However, the perception that “the honors movement had reached the point where the colleges and universities could themselves carry forward its development” (Cohen, 1966d, p. 28) captures a substantial difference between the second and third phases of the evolution of honors programs. The more missionary spirit

gradually had to give way to a more rationalized (and bureaucratized) type of agenda for the new coordinating agency.

The Pioneers' Fate

While honors programs at large state universities were obviously having their heyday, those at the liberal arts colleges had a quite different destiny. Although many of the early honors programs of the 1920s did not survive until the 1950s, some of the private colleges that first established them did not abandon them after World War II. However, they did not expand their departmental honors into institution-wide structures. Under the pressures of the huge higher education expansion after the war, those schools chose to put a limit on their enrollments in order to preserve their quality and prestige. As a result of their high selectivity, high-ability students virtually constituted their entire student population. These institutions “lacked” an organizational context beneficial to the further development of honors programs in their new form: a heterogeneous student body with only a part of it considered “high-ability”. Therefore, the old departmental honors programs that still existed at some colleges simply did not evolve into separate organizational structures³. In most cases they continued to exist as “reading for honors” in one or more separate departments (e.g., at Columbia and Harvard). Swarthmore, too, has preserved its old program almost intact since the 1920s. Overall, however, this initial type was beginning to die out as a viable form in the 1960s. Since it never evolved into an organizational structure, this departmental and upper-division type of honors remains outside the research focus of the present study.

³ This was not recognized as an essential difference at the time, however. The 1961 inventory of honors programs published in “The Superior Student”, the journal of ICSS, thus lists newly founded institution-wide programs at state universities together with the old type of departmental honors at Ivy League and other elite private colleges and universities (Cohen, 1961).

Second Phase: Summary

The late 1950s and 1960s introduced substantial new aspects of the honors ideology as well as a new conception of the honors program model as its organizational manifestation. The following features are indicative of these innovations:

- State universities became the leading hosts of the new type of honors programs.
- Institution-wide programs, integrating general and departmental honors, became the most popularized model of the time. The underlying objective of this innovation was to counteract overspecialization and emphasize breadth of knowledge.
- These new organizational structures were characterized by a common administrative center, director, a coordinated curriculum, advising, honors residence, as well as policies of attracting external gifts. The first honors colleges, which appeared at that time, attempted to integrate most of these features.
- Honors programs started to be seen as forces of change and catalysts of quality for their host institutions, an idea whose potential has yet to be explored.

Third Phase: Diffusion and Differentiation of Structures

The 1980s marked the beginning of the institutionalization of honors programs as a universal organizational structure in American higher education. This period of two and a half decades saw their pervasive spread across all types of postsecondary institutions (Baker et al., 2000), including small four-year colleges and community colleges. It was also marked by a crystallization of the idea of the “fully developed” honors program, and the transformation of many existing honors programs into honors colleges. These trends

reveal the transformation of honors programs into a normative structure, a “rational myth” (Meyer & Rowan, 1991) in a mass higher education system aspiring to accommodate an immense variety of educational needs and goals.

A “Fully Developed” Honors Program

The model of a “fully developed honors program”, encompassing all undergraduate levels and majors, which emerged during the time of ICSS, reached a point of institutionalization in 1994, when, following a process of evaluating existing honors programs, a document listing the basic characteristics of a fully developed honors program was approved by the NCHC Executive Committee (Cummings, 1994; also see Appendix A). This document was created on the basis of the 1957 list of “Sixteen Major Features of a Full Honors Program” (Cohen, 1966d). The new document strikes above all with its enhanced rationalized and regulatory nature. It contains much less rationale for establishing an honors program and much less description of what steps should be taken in this direction. Instead, it purports such objectives as the establishment of clear admissions requirements, a clear mandate from the central administration in the form of a mission statement, a director reporting to the chief academic officer, honors curriculum constituting a certain percentage of the student’s total workload, clear policies on faculty recruitment, and the use of novel and experimental techniques that could further benefit the institution as a whole. This document was never recommended as normative, “because our mission is not to dictate policy or, even less, to denigrate honors programs whatever their faults, but rather to provide support to all honors programs who seek it, regardless of their size and strength” (Cummings, 1994, p.28). It clearly displays, however, the markers of an increased bureaucratic style of honors governance and

coordination (e.g., emphasis on more and stricter rules and regulations). The significance of this list now is mainly seen in providing certain broad guidelines. Whether an individual honors program decides to follow them or not depends on its own leadership.

Honors Colleges

While the first honors colleges were established as early as the 1960s, the trend took off only in the 1980s. A survey conducted in 1994 identified 23 existing colleges (Madden, 1994). Of these, only six (Indiana University at Bloomington, Kent State, Michigan State, Arizona, Oregon, and Washington State) existed in the 1960s (Peterson's, 2002). Another survey was conducted recently (2004) with 68 self-identified honors colleges, which were asked to submit information on their major characteristic features. On the basis of this survey, a specially appointed NCHC committee drafted a new document, "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College" (Appendix B).

The major organizational attributes of an honors college and its difference from an honors program in particular are still in the process of discussion and clarification. Quite a few of these attributes still spur disagreement among the community of honors college administrators. As the Ad Hoc Committee on Honors Colleges points out, for a few of the self-identified honors colleges the name change is the only change that has taken place. At the same time, many honors programs are at an organizational level very close to an honors college, but they prefer their old designation as programs. What, then, are the major features distinguishing an honors college from a program? The Ad Hoc Committee on Honors Colleges specifically cautions against a conversion in which the new designation "becomes just a devalued misnomer designed as a marketing strategy intended to mislead potential applicants that something new exists where, in fact,

substance remains unchanged”. It also states that “an ‘honors college’ is a particular subset of species, neither relevant nor desirable for all institutions” (Ad Hoc Committee on Honors Colleges, 2004). A helpful hint to identifying actual (or potential) honors colleges in its view are the current honors programs or colleges that allegedly combine the advantages of small liberal arts colleges and comprehensive (research) universities, a quite unequivocal delimitation of this organizational structure to the context of large research universities.

The most salient difference between a college and program, as perceived by many administrators and practitioners, is the rise in status within the structure of the host institution. As Zane (2002) specifies, “an honors college would have a higher institutional profile than an academically equivalent unit that found itself grouped with the larger, less homogeneous collection of units called programs” (p.21). This enhanced profile embraces a number of meanings, from a greater visibility to students, parents, and donors (the marketing and development aspect), to a higher position in the administrative structure and hence a direct link to (and a potential impact on) the host institution’s senior administration. This usually entails a change in reporting lines: if many honors programs’ directors report to a chief officer for undergraduate education, honors college deans, just like deans of other colleges, report directly to the chief academic officer for the entire university.

The list of characteristics shows an increased number of responsibilities entrusted to an honors college (e.g., coordination and control of departmental honors, if applicable; control over student recruitment and admissions and over curriculum and selection of faculty; and involvement in alumni affairs and development), which would normally

presuppose a more elaborate administrative structure. This, in turn, is generally associated with a higher degree of autonomy and influence compared to programs. As one of the cases of this study shows, an honors college could also conduct activities that would not be considered typical of an honors program, e.g., maintaining an alumni association and sponsoring national conferences.

It is through such units, i.e., honors colleges or organizationally complex honors programs, that a broadened understanding of “honors” as encompassing the entire undergraduate experience rather than just academics has been established in the past couple of decades. While broad and integrated knowledge and developing the power to think are still at the core of the honors idea (Batson, 1994), honors is increasingly becoming a platform for structuring the students’ entire college experience (Price & Johnson, 1998). Honors conferences and publications focus more and more on this expanded ideology (NCHC, 2004).

As honors programs and colleges are becoming more and more complex enterprises, however, it is clear that building a full-fledged program (or college) needs substantial resources in order to prove itself a viable organization. (Goldstein, 1986; Austin, 1986; Madden, 1994; Cummings, 1996; Huggett, 2002). The issue of resources is one that most often confronts many honors programs’ administrators (Irby, 1986; see also *The National Honors Report* for numerous articles about insufficient funding of honors programs), especially those leading small college and community college honors programs. Nonetheless, these types of programs have been proliferating at an astounding rate in the recent years.

Honors Programs at Small and Community Colleges

The time from 1989 to 1999 has been referred to as “a decade of small college honors” (Case & Raia, 1999). The spread of honors programs to small colleges (below 4,000 student enrollment) contradicts the logic behind the initial honors idea, i.e., an honors program as designed for high-ability students who constitute a sizable proportion of the heterogeneous student population. Small non-selective colleges obviously lack the student heterogeneity as well as the numbers of high-ability students that would necessitate the founding of an honors program. In many cases the honors programs established at those colleges lack resources and institutional support to turn them into stable and autonomous structures. They very often depend on the dedication and hard work of a few committed faculty and students and, above all, on the boundless efforts of their directors. Unlike programs at larger universities, these programs do not have stable organizational structures and tend to change rapidly, operating “under severe budget restraints” (Case & Raia, 1999, p.46). Very few of them meet the guidelines suggested by the “Fully Developed Honors Program” list of features (Steinhauer, 2002). In spite of all these problematic aspects, however, honors programs have become an enduring feature of many small colleges, with some 360 colleges being members of the Small College Honors Program section of NCHC (Steinhauer, 2001). Therefore, a question about the factors promoting the spread of honors programs to small colleges points beyond the internal organizational characteristics of their host institutions. As Baker et al. (2000) show, it is rather the external spread of common institutional forms perceived as legitimate and, what is more, as myths, that exerts the most powerful pressures on the colleges adopting honors programs. Structures persist even without the rational technical

functions behind them – this is clearly illustrated by the spread of honors programs to small colleges. These processes are to be explored in detail in the second case selected for this study.

It is tempting to assume that the same factors operate in the case of community colleges, which also seem very atypical host institutions of honors programs. On the one hand, the external influence of common forms has obviously played a role here as well (Friedlander, 1983; Heck, 1985). On the other, the foundation and development of honors programs at community colleges could be viewed as an effort to reinstate their initial collegiate or “transfer” function after a profound shift toward vocationalization that reached its peak in the 1970s.

Community colleges were conceived as an inexpensive alternative for students who could not afford to go directly to a four-year college. Their original curriculum from the early 20th century was predominantly a liberal arts one, with some emerging ideas about a complementary vocational track (Zwerling, 1976). In the 1960s, a period pervaded by strong egalitarian mood, they were increasingly perceived as the embodiment of the equal educational opportunity ideal and hailed as “the people’s college”. Charging no or very low tuition fees, practicing open admissions, and being in close proximity to one’s home made these colleges particularly well suited to the needs of non-traditional (e.g., minority, women, adult and part-time) students, many of whom would never have attended college otherwise.

At the same time, sociologists have increasingly uncovered a major dichotomy in the community college nature, for which it has been called a “contradictory” institution (Dougherty, 1990; see also Levin, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2003). It certainly helped

many underprivileged students get a college education, but it was also seen to perform a hidden function of “cooling out” and diverting large numbers of deserving students away from four-year colleges and universities (Clark, 1960; Zwerling, 1976; Karabel, 1977, Alba & Lavin, 1981; Brint & Karabel, 1989, 1991). According to Tinto (1975), “[i]n communities where a public junior college was easily accessible, students tended to substitute attendance at a four-year state college or the state university for attendance at the junior college” (as cited in Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 91). Marxist critics also see the community college as an instrument in a hidden agenda of the capitalist class to reproduce the existing social stratification in an age of a dramatic push toward an increased higher education access (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Consequently, as a result of a “complex concatenation of forces” (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1990), by the end of the 1970s, the community college was seen less as offering the first step toward a baccalaureate degree than as a vocational school. At the same time, the continuing existence of other functions besides academic transfer and vocational training, i.e., general education, community education and services, and remedial or developmental education, prompted policy makers and analysts to discuss the future of its mission (McCartan, 1983; Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

It was in this cultural context that the idea of honors programs as a form appropriate to and boosting the functions of community colleges began to take shape. The early and mid-1980s were a time of general preoccupation with quality in higher education (Boyer, 1980). This period witnessed a general dissatisfaction of the public with the growing image of community colleges as places where the academically talented students should not go (McKeague, 1984; Behrendt, 1984; Cohen, 1985). Universities

that relied on feeder community colleges also showed a growing concern for the preparation of their transfer students (Kane, 2001). At the same time, the mandate to increase diversity turned them to the community colleges, which were perceived as a “recruiting ground for minorities” (Clemons, Kane, & McLeod, 1995; Chiang, 1998). Honors programs were seen as necessary to strengthen the transfer function in many community colleges. By the 1980s, honors programs had become widespread and popular nationwide. Moreover, the NCHC also set up as a priority goal the development of community college honors programs: it established a committee that had to oversee and coordinate efforts in that direction. As a result, in the 1980s and 1990s the number of honors programs at community colleges grew faster than at most of the other types of postsecondary institutions (Selingo, 2002a).

Among the factors perceived as crucial to the development of honors programs at many community colleges are seen the different “formal and informal academic liaisons” (Jackson, 1986) between them and nearby four-year colleges and universities. It is usually the large-size community colleges and those in close proximity to four-year colleges and universities, which offer a large proportion of transfer courses, that are most likely to establish honors programs (Outcalt, 1999). An illustrative example of a well coordinated effort in this direction is the Transfer Alliance Program (TAP), a network between the UCLA and about 20 community colleges, focused on enriching the community college curriculum and building an efficient transfer mechanism (Clemons et al., 1995; Kane, 2001). To that end, community colleges established TAP or honors programs (the interchangeability of the “honors” and “transfer” names is significant in itself) with clear admissions, performance, and graduation criteria. The successful

completion of these programs was certified to the UCLA by the program director, after which the students were eligible for priority admission consideration at UCLA.

But even without formally established alliances, honors programs at many community colleges were increasingly seen as a way to enhance the prospects of transfer for many students. Anecdotal evidence abounds about many graduates of such programs who transfer to Ivy League and other highly prestigious colleges and universities (Wilson, 1992). The honors curriculum of these programs is tailored to fit the transfer requirements of four-year institutions. Faculty members and counselors in these honors programs usually work in close cooperation with admissions officers at four-year colleges, securing the networking vital to successful student transfer (Wilson, 1992; Cane, 2001).

The foundation of honors programs at community colleges could thus be viewed as an expression of their quest for reaffirming their charters (see Chapter 2, p.20) as comprehensive schools. The honors program model was simply available at a time when these colleges needed a legitimate means of reinstating their collegiate function, and they took it, adapting it to their unique nature. In many cases honors programs were the best response to the demands of local communities to keep high achieving students closer to home (Selingo, 2002a). Additionally, they were also hailed as a means of enhancing the community college image within the community and of improving its faculty job satisfaction (Deckelbaum, 1994). The spread of honors programs to community colleges in the 1980s and 1990s, then, is a result of external influences as much as of these colleges' own search for an adequate expression of their multi-purpose identities. The third case explored in this dissertation clearly demonstrates this synthesis.

Third Phase: Summary

The third stage in the evolution of honors programs was marked by an ultimate institutionalization of this organizational form across the mass higher education spectrum in the United States. The final strokes that have made this process complete are the following:

- The idea of a fully developed honors program as an established bureaucratic structure
- The transformation of a few honors programs into honors colleges as higher-order organizational structures
- A simultaneous process of expanding the honors ideology beyond academics, into structuring the realm of the students' co-curricular experiences
- The spread of honors programs to atypical organizational contexts, i.e., small and community colleges

The specific cases that the following chapters explore represent the distribution of honors programs in the mass higher education context as a consequence of their evolution and diffusion. The study thus focuses in greater detail on the existing programs at a large public research university, a small state college, and a community college.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS

Case Study Research Design

This study aims at understanding meanings of concepts and processes constructed by specific organizations and giving shape to their identity. These meanings are largely affected by the environments that penetrate the studied organizations. Therefore, the exploratory case study design (Yin, 1994) has been identified as the most pertinent research strategy for this study. As exploratory research, this study is intended to be “open and problematic”, leading to its own “reconstruction or reinterpretation” (Lincoln & Guba, 2002, p. 209). It does not seek to prove or disprove hypotheses. It rather aims at giving a “thick description” (Geertz, 1970), a disentangling of the multi-layered meanings constructing the dynamics of honors programs. Its goals are thus left quite general and open: to understand what drives the existence and proliferation of this organizational structure, and how it affects higher education. The research conclusions are not intended to pronounce judgments but rather to offer reflections calling for further research in this area (Wolcott, 2001, pp.120-122).

The diversity of colleges and universities that currently have honors programs as institution-wide organizational structures has prompted the choice of a multiple-case, multi-site study design (Yin, 1994). This strategy seems appropriate for the combined interest of this research in specific and general processes that concern honors programs. It gives an opportunity to synthesize data about the unique profiles of separate organizations (the diversity of honors programs is currently acknowledged as their most

salient feature as organizations) and the common aspects they may display with other organizations sharing the same ideology.

The central goal of a case study design is to “appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of the case, its embeddedness and interaction with its contexts” (Stake, 1985, p. 16). In studying honors programs, understanding the tradition behind them, the historical context associated with the emergence of honors programs at that particular type of institution, is of vital importance to understanding the uniqueness of the specific case. Therefore, the historical perspective on the evolution of honors programs as organizational forms has just been presented as a necessary introduction putting the specific cases into perspective. This chapter also provided real-life illustrations of the theoretical underpinnings of institutional theory regarding the dynamics of honors programs over time, i.e., it showed how the evolving ideology has impacted the shift in structures regarding their scope, venues and complexity, and how it has incorporated but also transcended the original honors idea.

At the core of this investigation is a multiple-case study of the honors programs established at three different types of postsecondary institutions. The choice of these three cases reflects an effort to present adequately the prevalent current distribution of this form in various types of colleges and universities. Despite the great diversity of programs and the absence of an “average” model, the waves of their spread throughout higher education provide a good basis for sampling. Of the four major types of postsecondary institutions identified in the *Carnegie Classification* (2005), honors programs, as defined by this research in organizational terms, are not found only at the selective liberal arts colleges (which may have, of course, their departmental honors

course offerings). This is the type most noticeably excluded from the study (together with the elite private universities, i.e., the Ivy League schools and their equivalents). By virtue of their high selectivity, they lack a crucial organizational prerequisite for the establishment of an honors program, i.e., an academically heterogeneous student population.

The three distinctive groups of institutions that most commonly host honors programs are large research universities, smaller state colleges (or comprehensive universities, as they are almost universally designated now), and community colleges. Furthermore, even though honors programs have started spreading to private colleges and universities, they still proliferate and are much more common to the public sector (Peterson's, 2002). Therefore, the three sites chosen for this study are all public institutions: a large public research university, a state college (comprehensive university), and a community college.

Stake (1995) differentiates between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. The former deals with a case because of its uniqueness or particularity, while in the latter the case serves as a medium for the exploration of certain issues. This investigation gravitates toward the instrumental type, though, at times, its focus shifts towards appreciating the authenticity of each case. Above all, however, all three cases are studied in order to demonstrate how the processes of differentiating their curriculum and setting up structures legitimating this differentiation have been affected by the honors ideology, on the one hand, and their host institutions, on the other. Then, their operation is also interpreted regarding their impact on students, host institutions, and higher education in general.

To add another typology, this study is also a holistic as opposed to an embedded one (Yin, 1994). It is intent on understanding the organizational features of the three programs in their totality, i.e. their organizational identities, versus a study of only one or several aspects of a case. A holistic approach was adopted because of the conceptual framework for this study, which acknowledges the interpenetration of educational organizations and institutional environments, hence viewing the entire organizational dynamics of honors programs as shaped by the honors ideology (see discussion in Chapter 2).

Research Sites

While the choice of the three types of higher education schools was made on the grounds of representation, the choice of the actual three schools belonging to these types was made entirely for reasons of access. Knowing that I would never find an average case, representing all others from the given type of college or university, I contacted the three honors programs that I found the most convenient to work with. I had a more extensive contact with one of the programs and made several visits to the other two. I gained access to all three of them through their chief administrative officers, who also provided a lot of guidance and help in getting access to more actors, events, as well as documents and other illustrative materials. The trust and willingness of the participants to share their viewpoints and experiences with me was of vital significance to the validity of this project.

The three institutions whose honors programs are studied here are referred to as Parkland University, Springfield University, and Greenville College. The three names are

pseudonyms without any relation to the schools' real names or locations. All three are situated on the East Coast side of the United States of America. Furthermore, all three of the actual schools have more than one campus, and, in most cases, have honors programs operating independently or semi-independently on each campus. For purposes of clarity, this study is only about the honors programs on their main campuses. Needless to say, this is a simplification that detracts from the richness of the real-world picture. It is, however, deemed necessary under the time and resource constraints, and also because it is unclear at this point whether the dynamics of programs operating on different campuses of the same university bring substantial new information about the issues studied here.

The Three Cases: Nature and Boundaries

The discussion so far has made it clear that three honors programs, defined as separate organizational structures offering special curricular and co-curricular experiences for students from most majors of a college or university, have been selected as the cases for this research. They are, in other words, the three cases encompassed by the present multiple-case study design. The opinions as to the nature and boundaries of "what is a case" are far from being straightforward, however. Some of them are important to mention here, since they are related to the nature of this study.

In talking about the indeterminate nature of the term "case", Ragin (1992) summarizes different scholars' opinions that present an essentially dichotomous view of cases. Some see cases as empirical units, entities existing "out there", while others view them as theoretical constructs designed for the sake of conducting the investigation.

These two views reflect the realist versus the nominalist mindsets. “A realist sees cases as either given or empirically discoverable. A nominalist sees cases as the consequences of theories or conventions” (p.8). It is indeed difficult to take a firm stand and define our three cases as either objectively existing entities or theoretical constructs. In accord with the conceptual framework of this study, honors programs are organizational units, and as such they are social constructions (since this research is built on the premise that reality is socially constructed, it does not obviously endorse the realist, or positivist, viewpoint). At the same time, they are not entirely theoretically constructed, since they are recognized as existing entities outside the boundaries of this research or any theory, for that matter.

However, it should be noted that theoretical construction has played a role in one of the cases. Greenville College, the community college chosen for this study, actually offers a variety of arrangements that are covered by the umbrella name of “Greenville Honors Program”. Some of these arrangements, however, do not satisfy the criteria established for an “honors program” unit in this study. Therefore, only two of the four arrangements are studied as constituents of the “Greenville” case. Moreover, they also feature in the study as separate “honors programs”, since they function as different units at their host institution. Theoretically, however, they are part of the same case. A few important features of this case are related to the simultaneous operation of the two arrangements.

Therefore, a case in this study is the honors program as an institution-wide organizational arrangement (that may consist of more than one specific structure) at a college or university. It is a socially constructed entity, which, however, is not constructed exclusively for the purposes of this research and is studied more as an existing convention.

A case is also defined as a system bounded in space and time (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995; Creswell, 1998). The investigation of the three cases continued for about 15 months. Simultaneous data collection and analysis were conducted for about 11 months, and the write-up stage was about four months long. During this time, some major administrative changes took place in one of the programs (its director moved on to a new position, which had grown out of his work in the Honors Program), and some major organizational revisions began to be planned in another one. Changes were not uncommon for the third case, too, though they did not affect its deeper structure or operations. The investigation was thus able to capture the cases in their “real-life”, dynamic nature, which was another projected goal at its outset.

Data Collection

A case study is employed “in order to gain in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1988, p.xii). The bounded nature of the case presupposes the gathering of ample evidence from different sources about the issues at stake. The use of multiple sources of data and their triangulation is a key data collection strategy (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995; Creswell, 1998). Data for the current case study come from three major sources: document reviews, observations, and interviews. Stake (1995) cautions the case study researcher to minimize intervening into the case by choosing, wherever possible, non-intrusive methods of data collection, i.e., reviewing documents and observing rather than relying too much and primarily on interviews. In keeping with this recommendation, I conducted a preliminary review of the existing literature on honors programs in order to understand the specificity that I might expect in

each studied case. This review assisted me in compiling the chapter that highlights the major historical moments in the development of honors programs, and it also helped me to shape the specific questions with which I entered the research field. I approached each case with some generic ideas about its structure and operation, but also acknowledging its authenticity and keeping my mind open for unexpected discoveries. I also reviewed different types of documents as a first step before conducting observations or interviews. Document analysis was an especially preferred strategy in the Parkland case, which has the most elaborate bureaucratic structure with abundant documented data. In the other two cases, which did not have as much written evidence about their development (above all, not so many and detailed administrative reports), observations and especially interviews were used to obtain the information that could not be found otherwise.

I reviewed four major types of documents: circulating information about the programs, including different brochures and web-site information; periodic publications (e.g., program newsletters and listserv announcements); policy documents (e.g., strategic plans, annual reports, descriptions of policies, etc.); and “working documents”(e.g., student applications, honors course syllabi, previously conducted student surveys and interview summaries, minutes from administrative meetings, etc.). In most cases the information gathered from these sources was further corroborated by observations and interviews. The document review sharpened my interest in specific issues, for which I decided to seek more information from other sources. Thus, the different number and nature of documents about the two honors arrangements at Greenville evoked certain questions about the different degree of visibility of these programs. As it turned out, this

was an aspect of their being conceived with different goals for organizational visibility in mind.

All of the reviewed documents provided me with important information, but the policy and “working” documents were especially valuable sources of specific data as well as insights about the unique features of each program. Annual reports provided the statistical backbone of the programs’ dynamics. Student applications (complemented by information about the entire admissions process) illustrated how each program has conceptualized its understanding of merit.

Direct observations of major events, administrative and student meetings, and honors courses supplemented the data gathered from documents. The field notes made throughout these observations helped me clarify and enrich my perspective. Sometimes I also asked the people I was observing to comment on some of the observed events or activities, which provided deeper insight into their meanings. I also engaged in participant observation while doing some real work as a member of the student selection committee at Parkland. The experience provided me with a unique look on the process, which is of pivotal significance in studying selective honors programs and issues of social stratification, and helped me understand a lot of its intricacies.

The final source of data were in-depth, semi-structured and open-ended interviews with key administrators, staff, faculty, and students participating in the three honors programs. Comparatively early in the investigation, I identified key informants in each of the three programs, and relied on their views and insights throughout the whole data collection process. While I interviewed at least once all actors who could provide important information, I had at least three interviews with each of my key informants, in

addition to an almost constant contact and exchange of information via electronic mail. I conducted a total of 33 interviews, most of which were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Some of the interviews (probably conversations would be a better word to use here) were conducted in rather informal settings (e.g., in a café or in a car) or without special previous arrangements, and were not recorded. I wrote memos as soon as I had an opportunity to do that after the interviews. All substantial points of these conversations have also been integrated into the descriptive and analytical part of this report. All participants in these and the more formal interviews were informed of the purpose of my study and had given me their consent to participate.

The diversity of the respondents and their potential to give thorough and insightful information about the processes that took place at the program was a primary criterion in their identification. Key staff members talked about their roles and the significance of what they did. The chief administrators narrated how their overall visions about the organization evolved during the years, how goals were constantly reconsidered and complemented by new aspects, and how they would like to see their organizations in the near future. Associate directors, admissions officers, and honors faculty were the other chief sources of information. Admissions officers were the key suppliers of information about the meaning of “merit”, i.e., the characteristics expected to be discovered in a successful honors candidate. Since the set of “available statuses” (Rosenbaum, 1986) and the finite pool of applications are crucial to the construction of the concept of merit, the respondents provided evaluations of the applicant pools of their institutions, and described these pools in terms of its socio-economic, geographic, and ethnic background.

During the interviews it was important to “refrain from assuming the role of the expert researcher with the “best” question” (Creswell, 1998, p.19) and to leave my informants to freely elaborate on the discussed topics. I left them to lead me to new themes in the conversation. It was also extremely important to gain understanding of the specific mindset of each program’s personnel, which in each single case turned out to be unique. I never dared to compare the academic seriousness at Parkland with the relaxed activity mood at Springfield, or the many (and every time different) student and teacher faces at Greenville. The three programs lived in three different worlds: this is probably the most important message that all collected data conveyed.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

I started analyzing the collected data quite early, in an attempt to refine my research questions and determine the best steps in further data collection. In the long run, data collection and analysis remained closely intertwined until the data collection process had to come to an end because of time and resource constraints. I also continuously compared the data with the theoretical constructs I intended to apply in the analysis, thus employing a technique similar to what Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to as the constant comparative method. This interrelation of the data collection, analysis, and the writing of the narrative report allowed me to make some adjustments during the data collection process (Eisenhardt, 2002). It also helped me to refine and refocus the research questions at each new stage in understanding the characteristics of the three cases. For example, initially I was primarily interested in how merit was socially constructed in different organizational settings. This remained a central issue throughout the study, but my

encounters with diverse organizational contexts complemented it with a focus on how the different honors programs, in diverse contexts, formulate different needs and goals for their constituencies and host institutions. This led to an expansion of my research questions from the more narrow understanding of merit to studying how the entire honors ideology was constructed to serve different college and university constituencies (a concept that included, among other things, the goal of pioneering innovation and spreading it throughout the entire host institution). This change of attention naturally led to focusing on a new set of relevant data (i.e., a greater interest in the curricular and co-curricular components of the studied honors programs and their relationship with their host institutions).

The data analysis relies both on constructed categories or codes and on direct interpretation of data (Creswell, 1998). The final report is presented in three chapters. A narrative chapter provides the descriptive foundation for the further analysis by drawing a relatively uncontested, matter-of-fact profile of each program. Codes identifying the separate structural components of each case are used as an organizing principle in presenting the description. Chronology also has some role in the organization of the narrative in that it helps present the introduction of different features into the programs over time. As a rule, codes were generated in keeping with the research questions and were also identified during the data analysis, e.g., administrative structure, admissions policies, curricular and co-curricular features. Interpretation in this chapter is kept at a minimum, though it is not totally excluded from the narrative. At times the interpretation of processes and features comes from the actors themselves. As a rule, this chapter attempts to present the “multiple realities” of each case by revealing the different actors’

views on the studied phenomena. Additionally, a short summary of each of the three cases emphasizes its major characteristics and foreshadows the future analysis.

Although the narrative chapter precedes the actual analysis, its organization is actually a reflection of the process of data analysis, during which the major codes for understanding each case have been identified. The analysis itself was a two-stage process. The research questions and goals provided the guidelines and structure for the interrelated process of data collection and analysis. The collected extensive data were reduced to two major sets of codes or conceptual categories. They belong to two levels, which could roughly be referred to as structural and ideological. The first set revolves around the whole spectrum of features and processes encompassed by the term of “organizational dynamics”, i.e., the totality of structural characteristics of each program, the actors and their relations with each other and with external constituencies, the policies and practices of the program as well as its relations with its host institution and other relevant organizations. This level is complemented by the theoretical construct of “organizational field”, which refers to the spread of these organizational structures throughout higher education (a phenomenon that the collected data also refer to). The second set of conceptual codes is related to the nature of the honors ideology, including each program’s understanding of merit as reflected in its student selection processes and curriculum design, as well as each program’s emphasis on certain unique experiences that are also considered an aspect of honors education. A specific mission, vision, or goal statement for each program also embodies their interpretation of this ideology. The roles of the three honors programs in the wider higher education context are also explored mainly at the ideological level.

The major conceptual categories took shape exclusively in the particularities of the respondents' descriptions and accounts and the analysis of the policy and the working documents. On the basis of the data analysis, these categories helped in the final revision and refinement of the research questions. Some of their components, e.g., the emphasis on unique experiences, occurred as a result of unexpected shifts in the findings, which subsequently modified the data collection strategies (e.g., the shift from academics to civic education as a major component of the Springfield honors program). Triangulation of different actor perspectives was utilized to ensure the uniformity and consistency of the category sets. These categories became the foundation for identifying themes, which in turn were used throughout the analysis sections and became the basis for the patterns that emerged as the organizational profiles of the three cases.

The analysis proper is presented in the last two chapters. Chapter 6 deals primarily with the structural dimensions of the three cases and presents some generalizations about their organizational identities. It incorporates a within-case and a cross-case analysis, aimed at constructing a holistic picture of the operation of each program. The within-case analysis summarizes the major themes of the previous chapter, introducing a neo-institutional theoretical perspective on the three organizations. It employs the major concepts identified earlier in this chapter as tools in understanding their organizational dynamics. The significance of different technical and institutional factors in shaping the three organizations is at the core of this analysis.

Further on, the cross-case analysis explicates the variation in relations between the three cases and their contexts. It delineates the different factors that serve as driving forces in the operation of honors programs. The major typology of these factors reflects

the distinction between the technical and the institutional environments of the three organizational units. The analysis shows how the interplay of technical and institutional factors shapes each specific program. This part of the analysis also reflects on the current state and possible future trends in the development of interorganizational structures, i.e., an organizational field.

Finally, the last chapter is dedicated to an issue that looms large in most discussions of honors programs, i.e., their relationship to the stratification system of American higher education and to issues of social stratification and social mobility. The question of their impact on their constituencies and host institutions from the point of view of social equity provides another set of generalizations about their nature.

Validity

The constructivist paradigm, which constitutes the epistemological basis of most qualitative research, champions a reconsideration of the concept of validity in comparison to the positivist view. Instead of looking for objectivity and freedom from bias, the qualitative researcher usually aspires to the goal of building a trustworthy and authentic account and interpretation of the events she studies (Maxwell, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Since the major instrument in qualitative research is a human being, bias and values are interwoven into the deepest texture of the research. Therefore, Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend as “good medicine...for researchers to make their preferences clear” (p.4). My own preferences, or maybe bias, have led me to the theme of this study, in the first place. Coming from a strongly meritocratic Eastern European background, I have always been fascinated with the differences in the

meritocratic mindset of Europe and America. For a number of reasons, I find the ideology behind the honors programs in this country closer to the European mindset, regarding higher education in general, than any other segments of the tertiary sector in America. The focus on academic achievement and intellectual breadth might be the chief reason for that. At the same time, many inherent traits of the American character and many turns of the American social context have placed on honors programs a continuous demand to substantiate their existence and reaffirm their goals. The tensions involved in this have prompted the topic of the present study.

In an effort to minimize my own meritocratic bias, then, I have followed the recommendations of Maxwell (1998, 2002) to meet the requirements of several different kinds of validity, at least two of which are of crucial importance to the credibility of this study's general findings.

Maxwell (1998, 2002) distinguishes between three major types of validity in qualitative research: descriptive, interpretative, and theoretical. Descriptive validity refers to the lowest level of inference in the study and is concerned mostly with the accuracy and completeness of the data presentation. This type of validity is relatively easy to achieve: in this case, the prolonged contact with the participants in the study, the multiple visits, and the triangulation of different sources of information could guarantee the accuracy of the data. Of course, as Wolcott (2001) observes, "[t]here is an implicit evaluative dimension in all description; the antidote is restraint" (p.121). Even though the narrative part is the longest chapter of this study, it has been revised several times to make sure that it contains data that have been corroborated by at least two sources (in

most cases it has been more than two), and have been presented as central to understanding the three organizational identities.

Interpretative validity, which is associated with the meanings of the data, is a higher-order requirement, central to building a trustworthy qualitative study. Interpretative validity is threatened when the research does not go beyond the researcher's own perspective, and when it does not delve into the "multiple perspectives" of the different actors involved in the study. For credible accounts to be built, an "emic" or insider's view should be presented before further generalizations are made. Since "interpretative validity is inherently a matter of inference from the words and actions of participants in the situations studied" (Maxwell, 2002), interpretation should be grounded in the participants' own accounts but it should also ultimately transcend the limits of each single participant's perspective by constructing meanings on the basis of the totality of collected data. This is why the richness of data and the triangulation of sources is of such a crucial significance to boosting the interpretative validity of the study. The interviews for this project were always conducted after a review of documents or an observation of one or more events related to the topics of discussion. Additionally, different participants were often asked to comment on the same topics and on other respondents' comments on these same issues. To this end, I have maintained an active communication with the key participants via electronic mail throughout most of the time of study. Consequently, the interpretations of policies, practices, and relations presented in the analysis chapters are a complex amalgam of different actors' views of them and of the researcher's own reconstruction and interpretation of these views.

Theoretical validity of a study is achieved when it presents a credible theory of the studied phenomenon. According to Maxwell (1998), the ignoring of discrepant data or of alternative explanations of certain phenomena could pose major threats to this type of validity. The current analysis incorporates discrepant data, especially concerning controversial issues such as the role of honors programs in counteracting social stratification and achieving social equity. It also presents different theoretical perspectives on these roles, utilizing key concepts of the three major sociological theories discussed earlier in this chapter. In fact, the theoretical constructs employed in this analysis have already been applied in similar studies of organizational fields as sets of organizations immersed in a common institutional environment (DiMaggio, 1983) or the relation between selective college admissions and social stratification (Karabel, 1984; Karen, 1985, 1990; Farnum, 1997). They are used here as tools in understanding how similar issues apply to honors programs.

Generalizability

The three studied cases have their unique features, but they are not totally unique. Of course, generalizability is not a serious concern in qualitative research. A case study is above all “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case” (Stake, 1995). This study is no exception. However, it also recognizes the interdependence between each separate organizational unit and its context, and the importance of this context for other units, not studied here. Therefore, certain generalizations about each case, especially the ones linking an honors program to characteristics of its host institution such as charter and organizational complexity, could in fact prove valid for other

programs operating at the same type of colleges or universities. Moreover, if “organizational field” does prove to be a viable construct in the case of honors programs, some trends in its development delineated here might affect a large number of honors programs.

Limitations

This study has several inherent limitations that have been acknowledged at its outset. First, compared to a single-case study, a multiple-case study brings breadth but takes away from the depth of the analysis. As Creswell (1998) aptly observes, “the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis...What motivates the researcher to consider a large number of cases is the idea of generalizability, a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers” (p.63). This research, however, does not aim at generalizability per se. It rather seeks to show the variation in the nature and operation of honors programs in different settings. The research questions call for considering this variation, hence the choice of a multiple-case study design.

Nevertheless, the holistic approach to multiple cases is certainly a more difficult venture than a holistic single-case study. Taking into account also time and resource constraints, it is of primary importance to maintain the right balance between the attention to details and the general focus of the research goals and questions. Even this right balance, however, inevitably detracts from the depth that might be achieved by a holistic single-case analysis or a more embedded (restricted to one major issue, i.e., ideology) multiple-case study. This research was conducted with the full awareness of this inherent limitation. The major reason for which the design was kept at this level was

the scarcity of sociological research on honors programs, in both the organizational and stratification research areas, and the initial conceptual argument that ideology permeates organizational structures, hence their inseparability in the studied cases.

A second limitation refers to the nature of access I was granted in the three cases. It was easier for me to gain access to one of the cases, and my contacts with participants in this program were more extensive than with the other two cases. At the same time, this also turned out to be the largest, most elaborately developed and complex of the three cases, and it would probably have required more time and effort in its study anyway. Regardless of this, I acknowledge the different degree of exposure to the three cases as a possible threat to the completeness of some findings, especially the ones related to the organizational identities of the programs.

Lastly, the scope of the study did not allow for an institution-wide recruitment of participants. The difficulty to get participants who do not belong to the program could be a potential threat to the interpretative validity of the study, since it has excluded the outsider's perspective from the overall picture of the honors programs' identities. These perspectives are sometimes referred to through the views and opinions of the "insiders", but this is still not an authentic perspective. Their presence is more tangible in the review of opinions on the effects of honors programs, which include positive as well as negative viewpoints. A more comprehensive presentation of these perspectives might be the goal of a future study of how external constituencies accept honors programs.

CHAPTER 5
THREE HONORS PROGRAMS:
A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

This chapter presents a descriptive profile of the honors programs operating at three different postsecondary institutions. Table 5.1 outlines the major components in the description of each case. Each case is studied as a unique entity, which results in three unique profiles. These profiles consist of some general and some specific categories, which are not necessarily included in Table 5.1. Additionally, the order in which these are presented is not necessarily the same across all three cases. Thus, at Parkland, administration is an aspect of the “cultural transformation” from an honors program to college, which is a major event in its organizational life, setting the stage for many organizational features that are discussed subsequently. Therefore, it is presented at the beginning of the narrative, when this transformation is being discussed. At Springfield, on the other hand, the administrative model is predicated on the idea of student self-governance and is closely connected to the co-curricular components of the program. It is therefore presented after the description of the different forms of student participation. Each description, then, while largely adhering to the structure indicated below, follows the logic of the specific case.

The Three Settings

The sites of this study are three postsecondary institutions, belonging to three different types as defined by the Carnegie Classification: a public research university

Table 5.1.
Organization of Chapter Content

	Parkland	Springfield	Greenville
History	Founded 1980 as University Scholars Program	Founded 1988	General-mid 1970s Scholars-1999
Administration	Elaborate Structure; Aspect of the “Cultural Transformation” process (Program to College)	Director + Self-governance model	Directors + Honors Committee
Student Recruitment and Selection	Very selective; freshman and junior entry gates	Inclusive	General: requires basic academic skills; Scholars: selective
Student Profile	Ivy League caliber	Motivated	Academically prepared
Curricular Components	Hon. courses, Options; Thesis Required; Research; Innovations; International; Service Learning	Augmentations; Thesis not required; International – optional, together with other state colleges	General: Different Courses; Scholars: fixed curriculum
Co-Curricular Components	Optional component Extensive Programming	Activity Honors – mandatory component	Optional Component
Relationship with Host Institution	Cooperation across colleges and departments	Open to everyone interested	Part of a multi-functional structure

(extensive), a comprehensive state university, and a community college. All of them are multi-campus institutions. For the sake of clarity, however, the three fictitious names of these institutions will actually refer only to their main campuses and the honors programs operating on them, respectively.

Parkland University is the large research university with an honors college. It is among the nation's leading public research universities, with a long tradition of research in practical areas and a high reputation of its engineering and natural science departments. The middle 50% of its first-year students' SAT scores (fall 2004) are between 1090 and 1300. Over 15% of these students have SAT scores that fall within the range recommended for admission to its Honors College.

Springfield University is the small state college (designated as a comprehensive university), a former teachers' college with regional significance and recruiting students primarily from the local rural area high schools. It is open to all candidates with a high-school diploma.

Greenville College is a large urban community college, operating in an economically, ethnically, and socially diverse metropolitan area. It also has a very high number of international students coming from over 130 countries.

Table 5.2 presents some basic institutional characteristics, such as total student enrollment, honors program enrollment, number of undergraduate programs, and tuition cost at the three institutions.

Table 5.2.
Institutional Context of the Three Honors Programs

Institutional Characteristics	Parkland	Springfield	Greenville
Total Undergraduate Enrollment	35,000	3,400	15,000
Honors Program Enrollment	1,850	170	50 (Scholars) 900*(General Honors)
Total # Undergraduate Degree Programs	150	65	40**
Resident Full-Time Tuition in Dollars (2004-05)	10,900	4,800	1,800

* Total number of enrollments in honors courses (General Honors)

** Credit programs

Parkland Honors College

Parkland Honors College (PHC) is generally acknowledged as one of the exemplary honors colleges nationwide at the present moment. Its first external review, conducted five years after its founding as a successor to the university-wide Scholars Program, concluded that “[Parkland] University can rightly claim that it has the best honors college among [its peer group of universities], and it is likely one of the best of its kind in the country.” (External Review, 2002, p.8). According to the reviewers, two senior administrators at doctoral research universities and a senior corporate business executive, Parkland Honors College is unique among honors colleges in the United States in at least several aspects:

- It is the only honors program that offers at least 150 international travel grants to honors students every year. (At the present moment this number is 170.)

- It sponsors the only national conference of its kind on innovations in honors teaching and learning.
- It is a national leader in offering more than 200 honors courses per year.
- It provides great opportunities for undergraduate research, and
- It provides extensive co-curricular programming.

The glowing external review report clearly recognizes Parkland Honors College as a leading organization of its type in the United States. Its conclusions are substantiated by a multitude of achievements of the students and graduates of PHC, which the College regularly publishes in its annual reports. But how does this complex mechanism function, what are the forces that impact its dynamics and how are they coordinated so that we have this record? Which of them have contributed the most to the success of the organization and which might be potential challenges or sources of tension? The answer to that question might not be one but a number of factors, including its increased selectivity, a generous external endowment, and the integration between undergraduate and graduate majors as a possibility for the most ambitious “scholars”, among others. These and other features that make up the unique profile of this program will be explored in more detail below.

History

Honors education at Parkland University does not have a history as long as the honors programs at some other state universities. Prior to 1980, Parkland had departmental honors for juniors and seniors established in some 13 departments, but the university did not really have a plan to establish a university-wide honors program until

the mid-1970s, when faculty and administrators observed that the university had fewer high-achieving students than its peer institutions. The issue could be addressed in two ways: either by a dramatic increase of funds for scholarships for top students, or by setting up an honors program, a form that had become well known by that time and that was being developed in almost all institutions considered Parkland's closest peers. This led to the founding of the University Scholars Program (USP) in 1980. Its stated goal was to "provide the ablest students with opportunities to achieve an education different in character and substance from the ordinary, one which offers greater richness, excitement, and greater reward." The rationale for setting up the program, as developed in different documents, reiterates the generally acknowledged significance of honors programs for research universities (Director's Report, 1988). Starting with 300 freshmen in 1980, by the mid-1980s the program already had 1400 students. It took just a few years to make it one of the biggest honors programs at a research university, which compared quite well with programs (most of them much older) at similar institutions (Directors' Report, 1988). Some of the landmark points in its development are outlined below.

It became quite clear during the first years of its operation that the successful recruitment of high-ability students was strongly related to the availability of financial support. To that end, an Academic Excellence Scholarship in the amount of half the tuition fee for state residents was instituted in 1985. Its effect was felt quite rapidly: in just three years, from 1984 (the year before the scholarship plan was adopted) to 1987, the number of matriculating first-year students increased from 158 to 288 (Director's Report, 1988).

Another important year in the history of USP was 1988, which marked the beginning of a student selection process based on the screening of a separate application including essays and teacher recommendations. Until then, admission to the college was granted through an invitation to those university applicants who had highest grades and SAT scores (and there was no separate application to the honors program). The underlying rationale for the transition to the screening of separate applications was that ability and motivation for honors work were not evident from the numbers only, and, as a selective program which the USP was becoming, it needed a more comprehensive application package that would present a fuller picture of the candidate.

Many of the original features of USP still provide the backbone of the academic policies and operations of the present Honors College. In the first place, USP had more than one entry point: qualified students were admitted not only as freshmen, but also at the beginning of their sophomore (more rarely) or junior year. Second, the USP was initially designed as “advising intensive” versus “curriculum intensive”. That meant that there was no set core curriculum that everyone was required to take, but rather that each student’s academic plan had to be constructed in close cooperation with a faculty honors advisor. The curriculum of the host institution offered vast opportunities to satisfy individual interests and goals, and the honors program enhanced them by adopting a flexible academic policy allowing students to convert any regular course into an honors experience through the so-called “honors supplements” (which later became known as “honors options”). This individualized, advising-based nature of studies is still at the core of the students’ academic experience in the Honors College.

Among the other features of the academic honors experience that the Honors College inherited from USP is an Annual Academic Plan (AAP), which each student has to design in cooperation with her advisor early in the fall semester each year. It should be noted, however, that although the Honors College inherited the AAP general idea, the actual form is now undergoing a major revision. The objective is to provide more guidelines as to the different aspects that constitute a meaningful advising relationship, e.g., it encourages both the student and the advisor to discuss matters transcending mere course scheduling, such as participation in research projects, internships, and even choice of a future career. The overall academic requirements for participation in the program, i.e., number of honors credits, choice between honors courses proper, honors options, and independent study, average grade point average that has to be maintained, and the final senior honors thesis, have also remained largely the same, though most of them have undergone some considerable revisions (PHC Student Handbook; PHC Policy Documents; PHC Internal Correspondence, 2004, 2005).

The establishment of special honors residence is another enduring aspect of the honors experience at Parkland. Since 1984 a big part of the honors students lived in an honors residence hall, and parts of two other halls were designated for scholars, too. This residential arrangement was considered of pivotal importance to creating an “honors community” in a program that did not offer any curricular opportunities for interaction among all honors students. The honors residence arrangement made it possible to engage a great part of the students in different extracurricular activities and events. Residence Scholar Assistants were put in charge of planning and organizing the co-curricular programs, in return for which they received free room and board. They still function

within PHC, though their number has been reduced. The link between academic and residential structures has become a central feature of the new Honors College. PHC persistently endeavors to create an atmosphere of a small residential liberal-arts-type college amidst the plentiful resources of a major research university (an advertising commonly used by similar honors programs operating at major research universities). The honors residential arrangement became the core of the “living learning community” concept: a multidisciplinary and service-oriented center for honors students, faculty, and administrators.

Even though PHC inherited and further improved and developed all these policies and features of the old honors program, it certainly brought about as much change as continuity. Above all, the old structural pattern has not just been expanded or improved, but has been infused with new atmosphere, priorities, and style of leadership (Annual Report, 2002; PD1, 2004).

A Cultural Transformation

Parkland Honors College was founded in the fall of 1997 after a multi-million gift by a prosperous university alumnus and a long-time university benefactor. This was the largest contribution from an individual in the history of the university. Three years before the founding of PHC, in 1994, the same benefactor funded an Institute for Innovation in Learning at Parkland University with the sole purpose of disseminating good teaching and learning models and practices throughout the university. The creation of the PHC, then, was to fulfill a special vision for this organizational tandem: it was expected to be the conductor of the most vanguard ideas and techniques in teaching and learning throughout the whole university community.

The five-year report, prepared in 2002 for the external review, states that the transitional phase from an honors program to college has been accomplished in these five years. What are the grounds on which this conclusion is drawn, and what are the specific dimensions of this transition?

As discussed in Chapter 3, the “upgrade” of an honors program into a college has first of all the symbolic significance of achieving a higher status and enhanced visibility by joining the other colleges as primary units in the structure of the university. This symbolic upgrade in itself is a sign of the host institution’s dedication to honors education and the overall positive attitude to the idea of a special honors curriculum. To the staff of PHC this symbolic change also has very tangible dimensions that have affected the way the Honors College functions and the way the university as well as the external community perceive, think, and talk about it. The old program is perceived as having been much more isolated from the central university administration. None of its staff had access to the senior university administration and governing bodies:

In the honors program there was very little direct faculty engagement, conversation or decision-making. There was little contact with faculty, but there wasn’t any contact with senior administrators. As a program, it was nested under several layers, and the people working in the program only interacted with their peers, most of whom were staff, not faculty....I’ve also noticed this in other honors programs: no one there has a conversation with a Dean or a Development Officer, or with anybody on the Board of Trustees, or with anyone from the President’s Council, let alone the President. So, a big shift from a Program to College is in terms of who the leaderships think with, who you solve problems

with, who you project the future with. ... By engaging in conversation as a College with these other people, it also gets them thinking more about the nature of honors education. (PD1, 2004)

The founding of the College gave impetus to many structural changes considered vital to accomplishing the cultural transformation. The newly appointed Dean and Associate Dean automatically obtained membership in the Councils of Deans and Associate Deans, two committees with pivotal importance in the university's administrative structure. Furthermore, a few people from the university administration participate in the governance of the Honors College. This is accomplished above all through the External Advisory Board, one of the two major consultative bodies of PHC, which includes two members of the University Board of Trustees and other influential representatives of the university alumni community. The other consultative organ, the Faculty Advisory Committee provides connection to and feedback from the university faculty, probably the second most important PHC constituency after the students.

Another key aspect of the difference between the program and the college pertains to their internal organizational climate. The atmosphere of the old program is seen by the present PHC staff as having been focused more on paperwork than on the students' development, as more preoccupied with its own preservation than with moving forward and leading all the others. The old style of governing the program is seen as more of a "caretaking" than a leadership type. Subsequently, the transformation to a college also changed the spirit within the organization and the mindset guiding all the functions of the organization. This was the major expression of what is referred to as a "cultural transformation ...from a small, staff-centered and bureaucratic culture to a student-

centered, service-oriented culture, from an elitist honors culture to a culture of engagement across the entire university community and beyond” (Annual Report, 2002).

Table 5.3 gives a concise summary of the major aspects of PHC structure, operation and position within its host university as they compare to those of the old USP. It clearly shows that a lot of them have already been in place by the time PHC started operating, but it also highlights the changes and transformations made in the directions discussed above.

As Table 5.3 indicates, the “upgrade” has quite tangible, rather than purely symbolic, dimensions. Now PHC has a central and prominent place in the university. The President of Parkland University is famous for his personal commitment to it, and certainly most members of the university community have heard about the Honors College. PHC is also very popular externally in the university community, and is often mentioned in different college guides as one of the best university attributes regarding undergraduate education. This has engendered a correspondingly heightened self-esteem in the college staff, who are working toward the ambitious goal to become “the nation’s premier honors college” and “to be recognized as a leading force in honors education nationwide” (Strategic Plan, 2002-05; Annual Report, 2002). A natural consequence of this enhanced visibility is the intensified interaction with other units of the university, mainly other colleges, as well as organizations outside the university, both in the academic and the co-curricular area. Details of the different partnerships as well as the components specified in Table 5.3 will be discussed below.

Table 5.3.
The Transition from University Scholars Program to Parkland Honors College

	Major characteristics	Scholars Program	Honors College
Structure	Full-time staff (excluding admin. assistants)	3	6
	External Advisory Board	No	Yes
	Faculty Advisory Committee	Yes	Yes
	Student Council	Yes	Yes
	Faculty recruitment (instructors, advisors, thesis advisors)	Yes, together with department heads	Yes, together with department heads
	Alumni Society	No	Yes
	Student Council	Yes	Yes
	Honors Housing	Yes	Yes
Activities	Course innovations	No	Yes
	Faculty development seminars	No	Yes
	Study Abroad Opportunities	No	Yes
	Leadership development seminars/courses	No	Yes
	Community Outreach/Volunteer Activities	No	Yes
	National Conference	No	Yes
	Undergraduate Research Exhibition	Yes	Yes
Status within host university	Reporting Lines	Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education	Provost
	Leadership in curriculum innovation	No	Yes

Sources: PD2, 2004; & Miles & Huberman, 1994

PHC Mission Statement

The cultural organizational transformation to a prominent and innovative honors college is epitomized by a new and broader mission that PHC adopted in accord with a much more daring vision about its role within the university, community, and the nation.

Whereas USP focused exclusively on striving for academic excellence by “educating the ablest and most motivated students”, including in this a number of extra-curricular aspects and activities, PHC seems to have greatly expanded and raised its goals.

PHC was conceived as an ambitious enterprise. Building on the achievements of an already highly regarded honors program, it now set forth goals befitting a true leader in honors education at a national level. The vision statement of the college, reflecting the all-time ideal that the organization aspires toward, clearly demonstrates this confidence:

To educate men and women who will make important difference in the world, affecting academic, professional, civic, social, and business outcomes.

To improve educational practice and to be recognized as a leading force in honors education nationwide.

PHC embraced the major goal of USP, but added to it new dimensions, consistent with the will of the benefactors. The three components of their vision of honors education: excellence, global perspective, leadership and service, present a clear indication that the honors idea has undergone a major transformation with the creation of the Honors College structure. Obviously it has transcended the pure academic enrichment focus, which is reflected in the three-part College mission: “Achieving academic excellence with integrity. Building a global perspective. Creating opportunities for leadership, civic and social engagement”.

These three components of the mission, in addition to the newly created collegiate status of the organization, inform its entire organizational structure at the present moment. Consequently, even without faculty members and academic departments of its own, PHC organizationally has all the attributes of a full-fledged academic division

within the university. The different facets of the newly emerged college (some of which have already been referred to), which would have been quite atypical of an honors program, can be summarized as follows:

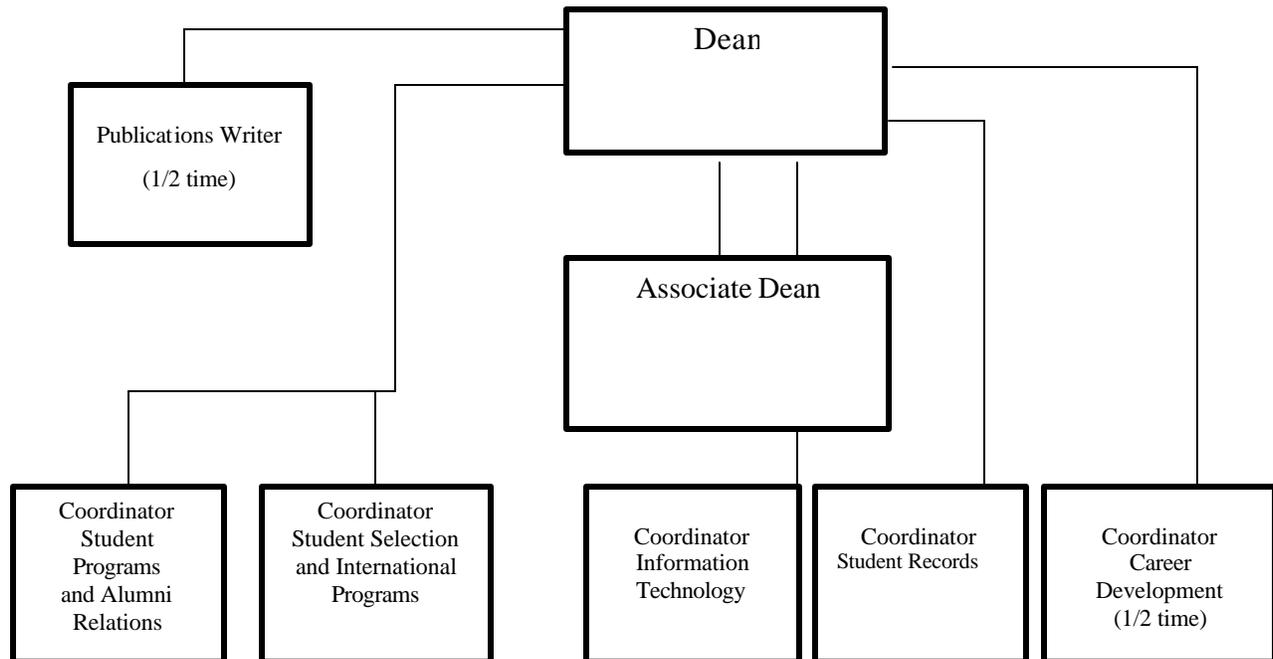
- Administrative structure characteristic of a collegiate unit, which fits well within the model of the university-wide administration, consultative style of leadership through different advisory bodies,
- Cultivation of a living-learning community, a collective of honors students, faculty and administrators, open to the broader university and local community and engaged in numerous forms of service and leadership activities,
- Formally organized alumni society network, and
- Sponsorship of major events, both at a university and nationwide level.

Administration

In comparison with USP, PHC has expanded and modified its administrative structure to reflect its new status and mission. The administrative staff of PHC consists of six full-time employees (compared to three in the USP) and an increased number of administrative support staff.

Figure 5.1 presents an illustration of this expansion and transformation into an elaborate bureaucratic structure. The distribution of responsibilities reflects the new collegiate status of PHC as well as the three major emphases of its mission. The **Dean** of PHC is a member of the Academic Leadership Council or the Council of all College Deans, functioning under the direct authority of the university executive vice president and provost and providing advice on academic matters to him and the president. The

Figure 5.1.
Organizational Chart of Parkland Honors College*



*Administrative staff assistants not included

Dean reports directly to the executive vice president and provost, who is the chief academic officer of the university. In addition to providing leadership to PHC, the Dean also teaches at least one honors course every semester. The **Associate Dean** is responsible for all curricular and academic matters at PHC, including course scheduling, advising, and the Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate Program, which gives highly motivated and talented students the opportunity to pursue simultaneously their Bachelor's and Master's degrees. The Associate Dean is also a member of a university-wide council, the Academic Council on Undergraduate Education, which comprises all Associate Deans responsible for undergraduate education. This group meets every month and discusses pertinent academic policies and concerns.

Another key position in the college is the **Coordinator of Student Selection and International Programs** (currently these two functions are being performed by one person). In the last five years PHC invariably has had applicants with better credentials compared to previous years and hence has been getting more selective. International programs is another key constituent of PHC mission. The college promotes many courses with international content and international travel components, and also encourages any type of international experience related to the students' academic major, research, or service activities.

The **Coordinator of Student Programs and Alumni Relations** is responsible for all extra-curricular events and for maintaining the alumni network. She works directly with the Scholar Assistants in planning and organizing these events and also maintains regular contacts with the PHC Student Council. With the creation of the Scholars Alumni Society this position has acquired a new prominence within the entire administrative structure of the College.

When this administrative team is compared to the one of the old honors program, it is evident that the new administration reflects the expanded and enriched Honors College mission and its more ambitious vision and goals. At the same time, the staff positions and working time are kept to as few hours as possible, which is in keeping with its strict budget accounting regulations.

Governing and Consultative Bodies

Two major governing bodies play an important role in directing the leadership of PHC: the Faculty Advisory Committee and the External Advisory Board.

The **Faculty Advisory Committee** consists of eight faculty members, the Dean and Associate Dean of PHC, a student representative, usually appointed by the Student Council, and the Director of the Institute for Innovation in Learning. It meets at least six times per year and approves all its major policies. It also participates in the strategic planning and in the making of any decisions concerning honors students or faculty. Each spring it discusses and decides which three students from each graduating class would be the winners of the three most prestigious PHC awards.

The **External Advisory Board** is shared with the Institute for Innovation in Learning. Some of its members are Parkland University alumni, and several are also honors alumni. The chief benefactor of PHC and a few other influential businessmen are also on the Board. They provide the stakeholders' perspectives on undergraduate education and inform the Dean about the needs of different external constituencies, e.g., the local community, alumni, and different industries. The Board provides support and advice on issues related to fund-raising, public relations, and the overall functioning of PHC vis-à-vis its external constituencies.

The **Student Council** is the major student governing organ. It consists of four committees on the academic, recruitment, service, and social activities of PHC students. The president of the Student Council is a member of the Faculty Advisory Committee.

Alumni Society

The establishment of the PHC Alumni Society is one of the major aspects of the “cultural transformation” of the honors program and its elevation to a new college status. The PHC Alumni Society was founded in 2000, during the celebration of 20 years of honors education at Parkland University. Its mission is

to unite alumni of [PHC] and reconnect alumni from the USP with the Honors College; to promote the professional development of students directly through mentoring, internships, shadowing and other career development programs; and to publicly recognize the varied accomplishments of Scholar Alumni. (PHC Alumni Society Mission Statement)

The Alumni Society is still in its formative stage. Most of the initial activities, among which organizing alumni meetings in different cities, establishing different mentoring programs, and simply keeping in touch with the current staff and students of PHC, are being conducted by ten Alumni Society Board members. Among them are senior business executives, journalists, professionals, and an assistant professor at Parkland University. Before embarking on any big projects, the Board had to cope with the initial challenge simply to gather information about who the actual USP alumni were. Since no special records of alumni were kept in the Scholars Program, it took some time to find out who the 3,567 USP alumni were (i.e., graduates from the period 1980-1997, the founding year of PHC). The next step now is trying to reach everyone. A special newsletter and a website for alumni are two of the means “to maintain the information flow” and “keep a warm and fuzzy feeling”(PASM, 2003) in all alumni about PHC.

One of the central aims of creating this dynamic relationship between alumni and current honors students is to maintain a flexible mentoring program keeping alumni connected with honors students at three different levels of involvement, i.e., as an alumni friend, mentor, or sponsor. The three levels of involvement range from just maintaining regular contacts and communication to extensive contacts, hosting and sponsoring students on different occasions (PCA, 2004).

A Sponsor of National and University Events

The image of PHC as an honors college of national significance is reinforced by a biennial national honors conference, which the College organizes together with the Institute for Innovation in Learning. So far there have been three such conferences, focusing on issues of innovations, undergraduate research, and internationalization in honors education.

In addition to the biennial national conference, PHC regularly co-sponsors many university-wide events, the major one being the Undergraduate Research Exhibition, a competition for the most original undergraduate student research. Even though open to all Parkland students, honors students have always been the chief participants.

Besides achieving a much greater visibility, the transformation into an honors college may have been a contributing factor to the rising popularity and hence selectivity of PHC. Understanding its student recruitment and selection policies undoubtedly reveals another aspect of its newly acquired status.

Student Recruitment and Selection

By its recruitment and selection practices PHC has established itself as a highly selective college, successfully competing for superior students with the most prestigious private colleges. The student selection process, accordingly, emulates the same process at Ivy League and other similar highly selective schools.

At present PHC has about 1850 students. The major points of entry to the College are two: as entering freshmen, after applying directly to PHC (i.e., first-year entry gate), and as rising juniors, after applying to PHC through the respective academic department (i.e., junior entry gate). Additionally, through a courtesy petition process, a few students

are also admitted at the beginning of their sophomore year. Table 5.4 shows the distribution of the different “gaters” in the hypothetical “class of 2005”, which does not actually exist, since students do not necessarily graduate in eight semesters. Obviously,

Table 5.4.
PHC Enrollments from the First-Year, Sophomore, and Junior Entry Gates for the Class of 2005

First-Year (2001)	Sophomore (2002)	Junior (2003)	Drop-outs	Total Class 2005
293	51	245	39	550

the first-year admission process is responsible for recruiting the majority of students, but the enrollments resulting from the other two entry gates taken together equal those of the first-year gate.

First-Year Entry Gate

Each fall Parkland Honors College starts accepting first-year student applications for the next academic year. Out of an average 1,400 applications, it generally enrolls 300 first-year students. The entire first-year admissions process is very similar in nature to the one conducted at a selective private college.

PHC channels its recruitment activities both as a part of the Parkland University recruitment campaign and as its own initiative, relying on the reputation it has established with certain high schools and communities. It regularly buys lists of high scoring students from the Educational Testing Service, mainly from its own state, but also from the surrounding states and nationwide. It then sends these students postcards and electronic mail messages inviting them to Scholars Day, the major recruitment event held annually at the beginning of October. For any single year, the College sends about 13,000

postcards and another additional 8,000 electronic invitations to students from more remote places, who are less likely to apply.

As far as the actual admissions procedure goes, at PHC it is coordinated in terms of calendar with its host university. Everyone wishing to apply to PHC has to submit two separate applications, one to the university, and another one only to the Honors College. The end of November is the priority registration deadline for PHC as well as for the entire university. As a matter of fact, in 1999 PHC adopted the priority application deadline in order to coordinate the process with Parkland University. The priority application procedure thus exists merely for the sake of convenience, and is something very different from the early decision or early action policies of many elite private colleges and universities. No admissions decisions at PHC are announced before February, while an early decision process takes place in the fall and all the decisions are usually made in December.

Those who apply by November 30th generally hear from PHC in mid-February. The applications submitted after November 30th are reviewed on a rolling basis, every two weeks or so. The last acceptances and rejections are sent out in mid-April. All applicants to PHC, even those who applied before November 30th, have time until May 1 to make their decisions.

After the first big group of applications arrives by November 30th, it passes through a pre-screening process. The PHC Coordinator of Selection reviews every application in terms of “the numbers”, SAT (or, in few cases, ACT) scores and Grade point average. Even though no one is prevented from applying, PHC has a recommended minimum SAT combined score of 1,350 and a recommended high-school GPA of 3.5.

The pre-screening process aims to sort out the applications according to these “hard numbers” criteria. At this point the selection coordinator reads more carefully the applications that are below the established threshold and has to decide which of these applications, despite not meeting the numerical standards, are still strong ones and deserve to be passed on to the attention of the Faculty Selection Committee. Usually most of these applications do not make it to the selection process proper, but a few of them do. They are usually applications of students who scored lower on the SAT but are still very strong students in their respective schools. Or, some of them may have special circumstances, e.g., English as a second language, which may have affected their SAT scores.

The actual rating of honors students is done by a Faculty Selection Committee (FSC), consisting of about 60 full-time tenure-line faculty members at Parkland University who work with honors students, i.e., either teach or supervise them. Once the set of applications is complete for the FSC reading phase, the SAT scores are erased from each application, the applications are randomly put into folders, and each folder is read independently by two members of FSC. Each application is rated on a scale of 1 to 6 (with 2 being absent for unspecified reasons). After the reading and rating of applications is complete, the Coordinator of Selection now has to resolve the problem of possible “reader intersubjectivity” or the so-called reader “outliers”, i.e., to make sure that the criteria applied throughout the entire pool of applications are as uniform as possible. On the basis of the FSC ratings, as well as his own third reading, whenever necessary, he then makes the final admissions decisions.

PHC sends out about 700 offers, about as many rejections, and about 100 alternate offer letters. All accepted students are offered a merit fellowship or the “Academic Excellence Scholarship” (AES), currently \$2,500 per year, renewable for all the four years in college, as long as the student is in good academic standing according to PHC criteria. This scholarship is awarded only to first-year entry gate students (i.e., it is used as a recruitment tool). Students who are accepted as sophomores and juniors (i.e., who have already matriculated at Parkland University) may take advantage of all the small grants PHC gives out (e.g., for travel and research), but they are not eligible for the AES.

In some cases, depending on the students’ declared major or college, AES might be supplemented with scholarships from the respective academic college or department. Currently the Colleges of Science and Engineering are the most generous ones to the top students they admit (and these students almost invariably are also admitted by PHC). Since they have a well established reputation of their programs as well as sufficient external funds, they are the two best represented colleges in the Honors College (see section on Student Profile below).

After the offers have been sent out, PHC has to ensure that it gets as high a yield rate (i.e., percentage of accepted offers) as possible. To that end, each spring after sending out the admission offers, it organizes a series of information sessions for the newly accepted students. At these sessions, accepted students and their families have the opportunity to meet and talk with the staff members of PHC and current honors students, visit courses, and stay overnight in honors housing.

Table 5.5 summarizes the admissions numbers for the first-year entry gate in the last four years. It indicates a quite steady level of applicants and enrollments, both in terms of total numbers and academic qualifications.

Table 5.5.
PHC First-Year Admissions

Fall of	Applications	Yield	Enrolled	Average Weighted GPA	Average SAT
2000	1686	41.7%	300	4.06	1420
2001	1707	39.6%	293	4.08	1415
2002	1646	41.0%	322	4.08	1419
2003	1658	40.4%	296	4.09	1426

After following the selection procedures, it would now be interesting to look into the “black box” of decision making during the selection process. A selective admissions process is often full of intricacies, subjectivity and irregularities (Toor, 2001; Menand, 2003), and the need for an unusual approach to certain cases comes up more often than one would expect. Exceptions may sometimes be more than standard cases. Nevertheless, the entire selection process seems to be based on a few foundational principles, which also determine the relative weight of the different components of the student application (See components of PHC first-year application in Appendix C).

Thus, the first issue involved in the selection process that needs to be further elaborated is how to treat cases that fall below the advertised expected minimum SAT score of 1350. Another minimum threshold, if only internally known, is a 3.5 high-school GPA. As mentioned above, applications in which both of these numbers are lower than the recommended minimum usually do not make it to the Faculty Selection Committee.

However, some of these do, when the rest of the application components turn out to be sufficiently strong. In most cases, these are applications with lower SAT scores, while the high school grades of these students are still excellent. It is usually among such applications that very promising students from less privileged backgrounds could be identified. They usually attend rural high schools that do not offer very strong college preparatory curricula. However, these students usually take the strongest curriculum at their respective their high schools, and in some cases take extra courses outside the school (e.g., at a community or a four-year college). These are often the people “boosted” from the category of “visuals” (i.e., rejected during pre-screening) to the regular application pool read by the Faculty Selection Committee. The Coordinator of Selection emphasizes the importance of this step, when “it is our responsibility to step out of the parameters ...set by a handful of institutions in defining who is deserving of the most enriched college education” (PCS3, 2004). Sometimes a less than stellar test score and less advantaged background circumstances may obscure a promising and talented student’s record, and the pre-screening phase of the selection process at PHC is targeted at detecting and “correcting” such problematic cases.

While a lower SAT score may not always send an application out of the selection process, a lower high-school GPA almost certainly will. This is understandable, because students who are not among the strongest in their high schools can hardly be expected to master the demanding curriculum at PHC, even if they have attended a very good high school. A helpful guiding principle to the selection coordinator in making these generalizations is that while SAT scores work well for groups of people but not so well

for individuals, GPAs are a quite good individual measure, though not a good measure across schools of very different quality.

This issue is closely related to the difference in the quality of high schools, which is a distinctive feature of the U.S. secondary education system. The accurate evaluation of every applicant's academic performance is dependent on the reader's knowledge of this difference. For example, two applicants with the same high-school course record may actually be very different in their academic potential, simply because they went to very different high schools. The one who attended an academically strong high school might have taken just some of the advanced courses it offers, while the other candidate might have taken all there is to take. The Faculty Selection Committee is expected to be able to make this distinction and give a differential rating of these two candidates. To facilitate this understanding, the selection coordinator has recently prepared a high school profile of the 50 schools that most often send candidates to PHC.

Another important question in defining the boundaries of "merit" as displayed in the student applications is what requirements to apply regarding the scope of one's academic ability. Should the Selection Committee favor those who are equally good at all subjects over those with exceptional abilities in one or a couple of subjects but a modest achievement record in all other areas? The ruling principle at PHC is that a successful applicant should have demonstrated intellectual breadth and excellent academic record in most, preferably all, disciplines.

If someone doesn't have good grades in all subjects they can't be in the Honors College. Even if they are great poets or great mathematicians. Because at Parkland you cannot take only poetry or mathematics. You have to take general

education, and be expected to take honors general education, and if [a great mathematician] is going to have B-s in Honors Senior English, we can't have them here. [An extremely talented student in only one area, but with poor grades in most other disciplines] is maybe the particular type of person for whom the Honors College is a harder place to get in than, say, Harvard or MIT. If you are a fantastic poet, but did not do especially well at school, Harvard might take you. ...We want people who have a vocation for something, but they have to have intellectual breadth. If they don't have it, how are they going to be successful, given what we want them to take? (PCS1, 2002)

Intellectual (and academic) breadth thus stands out as the single most important criterion in evaluating each application. To the staff engaged in taking admissions decisions this is by far one of the most important characteristics of an honors student: "We think that one of the defining characteristics of being an honors quality student is not just that you do better at the thing you're best at, but that you do better at a whole range of things" (PCS1, 2002).

Another important issue, for the PHC application readers as well as for all selective American colleges, is the relation between an applicant's academic and nonacademic attributes. Numerous studies emphasize the significance attributed to the different extracurricular activities of applicants to selective schools (Karen, 1985; Duffy & Goldberg, 1998; Hernandez, 1997; Paul, 1995; Toor, 2001; Steinberg, 2002).

Generally, the stronger the academic credentials of an applicant pool are, the more weight is attached to the students' non-academic characteristics. This is why the most selective private colleges and universities consider them so important and many times crucial to

their final decisions (McQuaid & Stahl, 1985; Steinberg, 2002). At PHC, however, the different extracurricular activities as a rule are considered important but secondary or supplementary to the student's academic record. Part of the reasons may be related to the fact that the applicant pool of PHC is not 100% academically superb, and part are invariably related to the nature of PHC as an honors program:

[We] make a distinction between what are more co-curricular and what are totally non-academic activities. We would like to see everybody having some sort of co-curricular activities, something related to knowledge. But even if all the activities are what we would call completely non-academic, if they are sports, or cheerleading, or music, although for music you could argue that it's academic, those things are important to us because they have to do with the people's ability to allocate their time. If you do well at school, in your academic schedule, and also take part in all those activities, is better than if you just do well at school. (PCS1, 2002)

A final important application component is the essay. The attention given to the application essay and hence the literature on how to write winning essays have undoubtedly flourished recently. Among the plenitude of hints, opinions, and advice, it seems that, regardless of the variety of themes, subjects or genres, the most important quality of an essay to the majority of admissions officers is how well it conveys the student's authentic and genuine personal voice (Hernandez, 1997; Toor, 2001; Steinberg, 2002). Of course, most if not all of the published accounts deal with applications to highly selective private colleges. As with the issues previously discussed, the situation is slightly different at a selective honors college such as PHC. Above all, the essay is valued

as another indicator of the applicant's intellectual ability. The criteria placed upon it may not be as demanding, especially concerning that "uniqueness" of the candidate's voice. It is expected to be an adequate reflection, however, of a mind sufficiently mature for its age:

If you have a distinctive style, that's a benefit. But my impression is that if you just have a good straightforward expository style, sophisticated enough... It may not have the most distinctive voice but formally it is very good, it is adult writing. That will get you enough of the way there. (PCS1, 2002)

Furthermore, because of its mission and goals, PHC places a special significance on any information that an application may yield as to a candidate's research potential and creativity. Since a direct involvement in research activities is a very rare experience for high-school graduates, and those who have it usually owe it to the privilege of attending a high school with such a special program, the essay is often regarded as a surrogate of creativity and research potential. Moreover, one of the two essays PHC asks students to write is a reflective or argumentative essay, and requires analytical reasoning as a major writing strategy.

Junior (and Sophomore) Entry Gate

The second major avenue for admission to PHC is the junior entry gate, which exists for students considered especially strong and promising by their academic departments. The requirements are 3.7 GPA, a nomination from the student's department, a statement of goals and an essay or a writing sample from the student.

As noted above, even though the first-year entry gate seems to be the major channel of admissions, ultimately the numbers of students admitted as freshmen versus

sophomores and juniors become almost equal by the time of graduation (see Table 5.4 on p.102). These numbers reveal a picture of a flexible and “open-minded”, while still fairly rigorous, admissions policy, aimed at attracting meritorious students at different points of their undergraduate college experience.

Even though PHC does not have formal policy of a sophomore admission, it has a petition process as a courtesy to students with “exceptional academic accomplishments” (PHC form), who seek admission immediately after their first year. Students with a GPA of 3.8 at the end of their first year, whose application is strongly endorsed by one or more faculty members from the student’s main academic department, are considered eligible to apply. They have to write two essays, one similar to the type included in the freshman application and a second one explaining why the student wants to be a part of the Honors College.

Student Profile

PHC is very proud of the quality of students it enrolls every year. They are considered to be among the “top 1%” of all college students in the country (Dean’s Speech, 2003). As Table 5.6 shows, the caliber of the students who matriculated in Fall 2001 is entirely compatible with those accepted at the nation’s elite colleges and universities.

Another interesting complementary statistic on where the students from the class of 2005 (admitted in 2001) at PHC stand with regard to other selective colleges and universities is about the schools where some of them were admitted but preferred to

Table 5.6.
PHC Freshmen's SAT Scores Compared to Elite Private Colleges

SAT Scores for Middle 50% of Incoming Students	
Harvard	1380-1570
Princeton	1380-1560
PHC	1380-1470
Stanford	1360-1550
Yale	1360-1540
Dartmouth	1330-1510
Columbia	1320-1510
Duke	1320-1500
Cornell	1270-1470

Source: PHC Annual Report, 2003

enroll at Parkland and PHC instead. During their first-year orientation session, freshmen are asked where else they applied and were accepted. Students who decline the PHC admissions offers are also asked which school they are going to attend. For the class of 2005 (admitted in 2001), three of these other schools are shown here. Thus, 24 students said they were admitted at Cornell but preferred to enroll at PHC; 22 students, on the other hand, preferred to go to Cornell and declined the PHC offers. 13 preferred PHC to Johns Hopkins, and five reported to have chosen it over PHC. Seven students preferred to enroll at PHC after being accepted at Duke, while ten preferred to attend Duke rather than PHC (PHC First-Year Admissions Survey, 2001). While these numbers should not be read as a 100% correct and reliable statistic, they give an idea of the reference group which PHC compares itself with in terms of admissions. These numbers also suggest that PHC is Parkland's major "tool" for recruiting top students.

Of course, the separate academic colleges and departments are also largely responsible for the specific mold of each entering class. Engineering is by far the college best represented in terms of numbers of students (its share of the total PHC enrollments fluctuates between 25 and 28%), followed by Liberal Arts (19-20%), and Science (16%). Separate colleges do not have quotas in the admissions process (and information on prospective major is not disclosed to the FSC while rating the applications), so the final distribution by major is totally dependent on the academic strength of the respective candidates.

Another asset to the collective profile of PHC students is the number of national scholarships and fellowships they won in the past two years, which is greater than the one at any of Parkland's peer institutions (Annual Reports, 2002, 2003). Also, many honors students publish their work before graduation, alone or as co-authors, in peer refereed journals such as *Science* and *Nature*. For example, students from the class graduating in 2002 have published in 13 journals (Annual Report, 2002).

As a number of senior and graduate surveys have established, about 80% of all PHC graduates continue their studies at graduate schools within three years upon graduation, with 100% acceptance rate at graduate professional schools of medicine and law. PHC makes sure to give as much publicity as possible to its graduates' achievements, and a major event serving this purpose is the Medals ceremony. It takes place three times a year, but is most visible in the spring, when the major cohort of students graduates. Even though the actual graduation ceremonies for all honors students take place with their main academic colleges (usually on the following day), it is still a very formal and very high-profile event. In spring it is usually held in the main concert

hall on campus and attended by the university president and many senior university administrators and faculty. The president traditionally delivers a speech highlighting the achievements of the graduating class and presents the medals to each student. Besides the presentation of medals, three students annually are selected to receive the three most prestigious awards of PHC: an Academic Excellence Award, established by the first director of the University Scholars Program, the PHC Mission Award, recognizing the achievements of the student whose work best exemplifies the threefold mission of the college, i.e., integrating excellence, global perspective and social service, and the Dean's Award for outstanding research. An important part of this ceremony is also recognizing the most dedicated honors faculty, instructors and advisors. Two awards, for excellence in honors advising and in honors teaching, are given to the two faculty who have received the greatest number of student nominations during a senior student survey. As the medals ceremony suggests, PHC is convinced that the success of its graduates is due not just to its efficient selection mechanism, but also to the way student experiences are shaped in its unique academic environment.

Academic Content

Since PHC has no faculty of its own, it works in close cooperation with and relies on the support of all other academic colleges and departments. Honors instructors and advisors are identified at the department level and selected by the department head after discussing and getting the instructor's agreement. As teaching and advising honors students in itself is a rewarding experience, faculty often self-select and after that receive departmental and PHC approval (PF, 2003).

A student admitted to PHC as a freshman is expected to get in touch with her honors advisor as soon as possible, and work out the details of her Annual Academic Plan. The AAP includes the courses that the student intends taking toward satisfying her honors credit requirements. A recent revision focuses more on guiding the student and the advisor toward a process of establishing a meaningful advising relationship. It asks the student to give feedback on different thematic areas she discusses with her advisor that transcend the mere coursework and thesis project, i.e., issues like professional development activities, application to graduate school, and research involvement from a broader perspective (New AAP Form).

The first requirement to remain in good standing at PHC is to maintain a GPA of 3.33 (changed recently from 3.20). All honors students are required to take at least three honors courses or 7 honors credits during their first and second year at PHC. (This requirement is currently being revised, and from 2005–06 academic year the required credits for the first two years will be 18 instead of 14). Another 14 honors credits are required during junior and senior year. Six of them might be recognized as research credits for the mandatory honors thesis. Thus, at present 28 honors credits constitute the graduation requirement (and the number is about to increase to 32), which is about 23% of the total number of credits necessary for receiving a Bachelor's degree. The chosen courses could be honors courses proper (including honors sections of general education courses offered usually for first and second-year students), "honors options", or independent study courses

Honors Courses

PHC offers more honors courses than any of its peer institutions and thus has “one of the most comprehensive honors programs in the nation” (Annual Report, 2002, p.17). PHC also aims at a comparatively even distribution of honors courses across all four years of study. The College requires that only senior tenured or tenure-track university faculty teach honors courses. All honors courses are open to non-honors students as well, but honors students can register for these courses before anyone else, so the non-honors students can enroll in these courses on a space-available basis. Depending on the major, some honors courses may have enough available spaces left after the priority registration is complete, and they may enroll quite a few non-honors students. As a rule, professors do not ask how many of the students registered in the course are honors or non-honors, and the students themselves are not aware of this most of the time either. And, even though these classes usually are small, it may happen that some honors courses do not get all their spaces filled (PAD, 2003; & PS, 2005). This perceived difference in the students’ interest in courses, which might be associated with different course quality, has prompted the current PHC administration to initiate a new student evaluation process particularly concerning honors courses. This initiative is still in its planning stage (PD3, 2005).

The honors courses offered at PHC have been praised above all for their unique features, including strong international and service learning components. The so-called *Signature Courses* are the “trade specialty” of the PHC (Appendix D): they are deliberately intended to provide a unique experience integrating the three mission elements, i.e., achieving academic excellence; building a global perspective; and creating opportunities for leadership, civic and social engagement (Annual Report, 2002, p. 21).

An “honors option” gives the student an opportunity to turn any regular non-honors course into an honors one and receive an honors credit for it. The special arrangements through which this would happen have to be negotiated between the student and the instructor, who has to be a university faculty member with a professorial appointment, not a graduate assistant or part-time instructor. The honors project in such a course is expected to be an alternative to some or all of the assignments within the proposed course syllabus, not a mechanical add-on work to the regular requirements. “Honors options” are usually recommended and chosen in the students’ majors, when there are no suitable honors courses reflecting a particular interest.

Research

Student research looms large in the PHC academic experience. PHC is the chief generator of undergraduate research at Parkland University. All honors students are required to write a senior honors thesis, and the basis for that is usually laid with independent study or advanced-level (even graduate level) courses. Special summer research and internship scholarships are available for students engaged in advanced research projects. The PHC website contains information on thesis writing as well as a newly created (i.e., in 2005) database of research projects of faculty at Parkland University which need undergraduate research assistants. Furthermore, the Undergraduate Research Exhibition is the focal annual university event celebrating the students’ research achievements. PHC is a co-sponsor of the exhibition, together with the Office of Undergraduate Education. The students are given an opportunity to display posters with the findings of their research or give original performances (those involved in the arts). Students compete in five major areas of entry: Arts and Humanities,

Engineering, Health and Life Sciences, and Social and Behavioral Sciences. Several cash prizes are awarded to the best entries in each category, and the top award goes to the best presentation of unique research. The 2002 winner, for example, was an honors student exploring the properties of miniature wires and circuits to create better computing devices. (PHC Student Handbook, 2003).

Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate Program

PHC has inherited from USP an excellent opportunity for the most exceptional honors students “whose progress in the major is so advanced that they would be taking graduate courses in later semesters even without [this program]” (PHC Information Brochure). The Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate (IUG) Program allows these few research-oriented and highly motivated students to pursue and receive both their Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in five years. The approval process for enrolling in this program is quite stringent, and none of the rigors of graduate study are spared to the students (PAD, 2003). It is contingent upon designing a very coherent plan of studies in cooperation with the honors advisor, which usually allows for certain credits to be applied to both undergraduate and graduate programs and thus shorten the overall period of study. The number of students engaged in this program has fluctuated between 5 and 18 per “class”.

The PHC administration is now at the planning stage of introducing an even higher step in the direction of integrating students’ undergraduate and graduate experience. A new joint BS-PhD program in the Life Sciences (a broad term covering a large number of science undergraduate majors) is being introduced. It would aim to discover (and keep at the university through the doctoral level) exceptional students who

have identified at a very early point in their lives research and advanced studies as the primary goal of their lives. This program for the time being envisions a completion of a full academic cycle ending with a Ph.D. degree in 7 years.

Teaching Innovations

From the time of its foundation, PHC has dedicated its efforts to testing and popularizing innovations in undergraduate teaching and learning. It subsidizes many innovative honors courses (Appendix D). What is more important here, however, is the impact that different learning innovations, initially sponsored and developed by PHC and the respective faculty members, have later been adopted by other academic programs across the university. This is a very interesting process, since it takes place without any mandate given to PHC by the university administration and without any direct mechanisms of exerting pressure on other departments to adopt these innovations.

I would perhaps describe the Honors College as a catalyst to other parts of the university. ... Essentially we start something, we pilot it, and demonstrate feasibility. And then other units pick it up independently. It's not that we are lobbying others to do that directly. We do a little bit of that..., but mostly we are just providing an example. And the faculty, or it could be other administrators, observe it, pick up on it, and then start their own initiative. (PD1, 2004, p.3)

Some examples of innovative courses that were started in the College and later were further developed by the academic departments are the Nutrition Service and Education program, an Architectural Engineering course with a service component of building homes for Native Americans in a Montana reservation, and the course "Rethinking Urban Poverty" with a service component in an inner-city context. All of

these courses now enroll mostly non-honors students, some of them have served as models for creating other similar courses, and the last one has even been adopted as a model by departments on other campuses (Appendix D).

International Programs

Building a global perspective is one of the three aspects of PHC mission, and this is an endeavor the College takes very seriously. International issues are at the core of many honors courses. In many cases they are present not just as an aspect of their content but as actual international experiences comprising an entire course or (more often) being a part or extension of the course.

More than a third of the students who have entered PHC since 1998 so far have taken part in at least one international study, research, internship or service experience as of February 2003. For this period, PHC has funded approximately 1500 international experiences of its students. "It is, by far, the largest program of its kind in the country" (PHC Information Brochure). In promoting international educational experiences PHC is greatly facilitated by its host university. Parkland University has a rich international education program, featuring 140 programs every year (Annual Report, 2002, p.25). In addition to that, PHC has developed a number of study-abroad programs, both as parts of offered honors courses or stand-alone experiences, often with a research and/or service focus (Appendix D).

PHC offers two types of financial support to honors students with a serious interest in international study, service work or research experience. The PHC Ambassador Travel Grant covers international travel expenses for up to \$1,500 for longer types of international experiences and \$300 for short-term programs not initiated by PHC. The International Thesis Research Grant is a special assistance to a few selected

students whose thesis research requires a prolonged stay and work overseas, for at least six weeks. This grant covers the transportation expenses and also some additional costs such as room and board up to \$2,000-3,000. So far PHC has awarded from three to five such awards every year.

Community Service

Participation in different voluntary and service projects is another major part of the PHC mission, penetrating both its curricular and co-curricular policies. Service learning is an indispensable aspect of the Signature courses, incorporated into the academic curricular content itself. Service-oriented courses, with both domestic and international content, are among the College's most cherished creations. PHC also offers an array of co-curricular community service opportunities, many of which are initiated by the honors students. Having started at PHC, many of them are popularized and spread throughout the entire university (Appendix E).

PHC and Its Host University

Despite its high selectivity, PHC insists on building an open model of partnership with all other organizational units of Parkland University. The Dean and Associate Dean maintain active contacts with the senior university administration. PHC manages by itself its student recruitment and selection mechanism. It is, however, a "virtual college" (PHC Dean, Web-site Information), and it relies on its cooperation with the other colleges and departments in recruiting honors instructors and advisors, implementing the Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate Program, and putting into practice innovative ideas and policies. Summarized below are a few of the many manifestations of the partnership between PHC and units or individual representatives of its host university.

A significant part of the rationale that PHC uses in attracting and recruiting high-ability students is the reputation of Parkland as a **top research university**. Advertising the many resources and opportunities for research that a university of its kind can offer to talented and motivated students is certainly an important aspect of the recruiting strategies used by PHC.

PHC also relies greatly on the volunteer work of about sixty faculty members (the **Faculty Selection Committee**), who every year participate in the first-year selection process. Furthermore, the academic departments are responsible for nominating and recommending students to PHC once they are Parkland students, which is another contribution these departments make to the selection of honors students. Practically every honors student has received a positive evaluation by a Parkland faculty member (either during the reading of their applications or, for those entering as juniors or sophomores, as a recommendation for admission) in order to be accepted into the Honors College.

Furthermore, the entire honors experience is linked to the dedication of **over 500 faculty members** from all academic colleges and departments of the university: again a number bigger than that of faculty engaged in honors education at any of the university peers (External Review, 2002). University faculty engaged in honors teaching and advising as a rule are full-time, tenure-track faculty. A small number of faculty members are also elected as members of the **Faculty Advisory Committee**, one of the two most important governing bodies of the College.

The cooperation with the **Institute for Innovation in Learning** plays a formative role to PHC. It is a part of its being designed as a laboratory for innovative teaching

methods that would benefit all the university community. The two units co-sponsor a biennial National Honors Conference.

Incessant **information exchange** is a key to the dynamic partnership with all other units at Parkland. The PHC student newsletter and student and faculty listservs are the two forums which provide students and faculty with timely information on all sorts of events taking place within the College and the entire university, information about scholarships, internships, career opportunities and application deadlines, anything important they need to know. Regular meetings with faculty, administrators, and visiting scholars, regular information sessions about important career and scholarship opportunities bring the students in contact with numerous opportunities within the university, across the country and even overseas.

The partnership between PHC and its university also stems from the recognition that PHC does a lot for the university by **bringing many outstanding students** into it, and by raising its reputation in the minds of many more. **Honors courses** are believed to be testing grounds for new teaching methods and techniques which, upon proving to be successful, could be adopted in other courses with non-honors students. Departments are, somewhat to the surprise of the external reviewers, wholeheartedly committed to teaching honors courses:

It is unusual, at least in the experience of one of the external reviewers, for departments so willingly to permit faculty to teach small courses, but even departments such as psychology that are pressed with large undergraduate majors and graduate students, regularly offer courses because the department faculty find

it not only a pleasure to teach the students, but recognize the value of [PHC] to [Parkland University]. (External Review, 2002)

Given the dedication of PHC to testing innovative courses and popularizing them throughout the entire university, a more pronounced policy of the central university administration encouraging this process would be extremely beneficial to creating a better environment for undergraduate education across all colleges and departments at Parkland.

Parkland Honors College: Summary

For two and a half decades, the university-wide honors program at Parkland University has transformed itself into an elaborate organization and a highly regarded part of the university community. Especially since its conversion to an honors college, it has also received a national recognition for its efforts, mainly through hosting a biennial National Honors Conference. In both its internal structure and public appearances, it displays the attributes of a developed collegiate unit within a major national research university.

Relying on its established name of a desirable place for high-achieving students and the excellent reputation of a few undergraduate majors at Parkland University, PHC conducts a policy of recruiting and selecting high-ability students through a rigorous admissions mechanism, very much in the mode of selective private colleges. Being an honors program at a public research university, however, has led PHC to slightly reconsider or modify the interpretation of certain application components, e.g., the value placed on extra-curricular activities and non-academic personal attributes, and the

application essay. All of these are judged in relation to the overall academic potential of the applicants and, above all, their academic and intellectual breadth.

As in its admissions policies, PHC comes very close to the profile of a selective private college as regards the perceived academic quality of its students. It can never be an exact replica of a liberal-arts type of college, however, if only because the largest group of its students is enrolled in engineering majors, and the College of Engineering is perhaps the most highly regarded college at Parkland University.

PHC claims to be offering the greatest number of honors courses and the largest international program of all honors programs in the country. By implementing a synthesis of undergraduate and graduate courses of study, it seeks to encourage exceptional students, devoted to academic work and research, to explore the full range of their potential. The Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate Program also gives academic departments the opportunity to keep the brightest students for another year at Parkland. PHC also aspires to spread innovative courses and experiences throughout the entire university. All of these features emphasize a long-term dedication to the integration of student research (as a proxy of academic excellence), international experience and service learning.

Springfield Honors Program

One does not need to spend too much time with the staff and students of the Springfield Honors Program to understand what sets this program apart from many others. Both the director and the students are eager to say at the very beginning that they have a unique honors program. All information materials about the program convey the

same impression. The most conspicuous hallmark of Springfield Honors Program allegedly is its strong emphasis on student self-governance, civic participation and student engagement in a variety of co-curricular activities. This is how the program is defined on its website: “An engaging learning community where students with diverse backgrounds and interests live and learn together, challenging and supporting each other as they create the conditions for their own success in college and life”.

This definition is not explicitly in any contradiction with the spirit of honors programs – the co-curricular aspect and civic participation are certainly commonly recognized features of honors programs. As we saw, Parkland Honors College has incorporated service learning into the most innovative part of its curriculum. Still, such an exclusive focus on civic engagement is not associated with the traditional image of an honors program. In this case, however, the nucleus of the program – and germ of all innovations here – is to be found not so much in the realm of pure academics, but in the co-curricular activities and the very governance model of the program. The brief historical outline below will present an account of how and why things happened the way they did at Springfield Honors Program.

History

The Springfield Honors Program (SHP) was established in 1988 with an inaugural class of 20 freshmen. It was largely the initiative of one person, the program’s founding director, a professor of philosophy and political science, who led the program until the spring 2004 semester. He left the program to head an Institute for Civic Life at the same university. This Institute grew out of the civic education projects of SHP, and now its

projects involve students from SHP as well as honors programs from state colleges all over the country. The founding director, therefore, still remains very much a part of SHP.

The early conception of the SHP was aimed at developing the widely accepted honors program model founded on a more demanding curriculum for academically talented students. According to the initial plan, this special curriculum was to be complemented by a “service” component requiring every honors student to contribute two hours per week as a member of the honors learning community. Students were to engage in some extra-curricular activity during those two hours. It was this component that later turned out to be “one of the most critical decisions that we made”, in the founding director’s words.

I did have a vague idea that I wanted to have time with [the students], provided they were going to take special classes which I was not going to teach. I had ideas about the experiences I thought it was important for them to have, especially simply engaging in reflective conversation about their experience, their expectations of a college education, doing things that would get them to see through links between their classroom and their, as many of them put it, “real” life. (SD1, 2003)

Initially the program offered two tracks called General and University Honors, and for a short time there was a third track, Upper Division Honors. University Honors was the most comprehensive honors track, covering all four college years. It was an optional extension of General Honors, i.e., after completing General Honors one could get a certificate and finish or one could continue being in “honors” until graduation with a University Honors degree. Upper Division Honors, as the name suggests, was only for

upper classmen who had not joined the Honors Program as freshmen or sophomores. This option was very short-lived. General Honors required six honors courses, Upper Division Honors – five, and University Honors – ten courses. A senior capstone project, equal to one three-credit course, was included in the requirements for Upper Division and University Honors.

The above model strikes as being flexible enough to accommodate the preferences of any student at any point of their studies, as long as they are willing to join the Honors Program. Actually, the situation was quite different. Very soon the model had to be revised and adapted to the realities of the day. Upper Division Honors was abolished due to lack of interest and very low enrollment rate. A compulsory liberal arts seminar during the junior or senior year was cited as the major reason for a high level of attrition from General to University Honors. It suited the students in the Bachelor of Arts but not in the Bachelor of Science tracks: the BA students already had three liberal arts seminars in their regular requirements, while the BS students had none. So they had to take an extra course. Therefore, to make the requirements list the same for everyone, the liberal arts seminar was taken off it. This, however, still did not solve the retention problem. Attrition from General to University Honors was still high. This was due, according to the founding director, to the capstone project requirement and also to the fact that many students were satisfied with the General Honors certificate (it was an honors credential!) they received after the first two years and did not want to do the extra work required for University Honors.

In the meantime, the service component of the program evolved into a whole set of initiatives centered on civic engagement and self-governance. Part of this process was

an increased power of the students in making decisions about the program. As a result of numerous discussions the model was changed dramatically. The change was made in order to make the program accessible to more students, to literally open it to every interested person at Springfield University. In a couple of words, the program was made “easier” and more “student-friendly” in the sense that joining and remaining in the program did not necessarily require exceptional academic skills.

The retention problem induced another major revision of the program in 1998. First, of the old types of tracks only the comprehensive one, University Honors (UH), was preserved. Additionally, a second first-year track called First-Year Excellence (FYE) was introduced. In theory, it was possible for all students enrolled in FYE to continue in UH from their second year onwards, provided they had the required Grade point average. Second, the graduation requirements were also revised in order to have more students successfully graduate from SHP.

Recruitment, Admissions, and Student Profile

Recruitment for SHP is usually done every September, during the program’s Open House. Since Springfield mainly recruits students from the regional public high schools, SHP sends different information materials to high school counselors and students at these schools, encouraging them to apply. The Admissions Team, a student group which participates actively in the SHP recruitment and admissions process, gets in touch with prospective students, negotiates their visits, and organizes meetings and luncheons with them. The Admissions Team is also responsible for conducting admissions interviews, a required component for the University Honors track.

With the recent introduction of a second first-year track, the honors program in practice has become open to every interested first-year student. The actual admissions decisions are made by the Honors Committee, which consists of five faculty members, two students, the Director of the program, and the student Associate Director who is also the Admissions Team leader. The program currently admits 90 students, 40 in the traditional University Honors Track, and 50 in the more recently established First-Year Excellence. The numbers of students in these two tracks roughly take care of all first-year applicants to SHP. The application process to University Honors is competitive: to be admitted, a student has to have good academic credentials and a good interview score. The application resembles the one for a selective school, with the required teacher recommendation, list of extra-curricular activities, and an essay (see Appendix F). The average SAT scores for the middle 50% of students enrolled in University Honors usually fluctuates between 1,100 and 1,250. Those who are not selected for University Honors are offered a place in First-Year Excellence. As the Admissions Team leader explains, “it is very hard to get rejected if you apply” (SS1, 2003).

Therefore, sometimes getting students to apply to SHP may be more important and challenging than actually admitting them. The program has a very small budget and not enough financial resources to use as a marketing and recruitment tool. A few merit scholarships (\$1,000 to \$2,000 per year) are awarded to the top admitted students, but most of these awards are given by the university and do not require that the student remain in the program in order to keep the scholarship. Altogether, no more than 10 to 15 honors students receive some form of scholarship (about 10% of all students in the program). The high drop-out rate of upper classmen has made first-year students the most

numerous member group in the honors program: 90 freshmen and about 70 upper classmen are the current honors students. The main reason for dropping out of the program is when a student's GPA falls below the required 3.2. Because of all this, finding new ways of attracting more students to SHP is a continuous challenge to the program leaders.

Academic Content

To participate in SHP, students have to satisfy certain curricular and co-curricular requirements. While the curricular requirements are quite flexible, the co-curricular requirements seem to be very straightforward and impossible to ignore; without satisfying them, a student cannot be a part of the program.

A mandatory first-year set of honors courses, different for the two tracks, is at the core of the academic requirement. For both tracks, it consists of four honors courses in the humanities, two offered in the fall and two in the spring semester. First-year students in University Honors must have a GPA of 3.0 in both honors and the regular courses in order to continue in the program. After the first year the GPA requirement to remain in the program becomes 3.2.

FYE students receive a certificate at the end of the year. Those who have earned a 3.2 GPA can continue in University Honors. The actual situation is somewhat more complicated due to the fact that the FYE courses are not counted as honors courses and hence do not carry honors credits (which certainly does not encourage students to strive to continue in UH). It is possible, however, for FYE students with 3.2 or higher GPA at the end of the first semester to take the two remaining FYE courses in the spring as honors options or "augmentations" (a standard procedure for honors students).

After the first year, several options are offered to the students remaining or continuing in UH. The first is the “classical” honors path of completing a significant number of honors credits and doing a senior honors thesis. Completion of this requirement leads to graduating in University Honors with Distinction. More specifically, this honors degree requires the following:

- 27 honors credits
- A minimum of three honors courses (since honors credits could also be earned in other types of work, as explained below)
- A minimum GPA of 3.2
- A capstone project, i. e., a research paper of 30 – 50 pages, the completion of which carries three honors credits and appears as an independent study course on the students’ transcript, thus satisfying also a part of the curricular requirements. A student would typically get two grades after completing this requirement: one for the “course” by the faculty supervisor, and one for the final product by a project committee.
- A co-curricular requirement (discussed below).

This set of requirements, generally quite typical of an honors program (with the exception of the mandatory co-curricular component, which will be discussed below), does not enjoy real popularity among the SHP students. No more than a couple of seniors would usually decide to complete all of them and graduate with distinction. Students who usually do that are obviously considered exceptional by their peers. Their names are often mentioned as examples of students who have accomplished this endeavor, even years

after they have graduated. Most students, however, do not choose this path mainly because of the capstone project. As one of the Student Associate Directors explained, “most people just don’t want to do it because it’s a lot of work. A lot of people don’t have the time to do it” (SS1, 2003).

In the few cases of students who have undertaken the capstone venture, there have obviously been some failures to complete it thoroughly and receive the two grades, one for an honors course and one for the product itself.

Since the two evaluations of the project (for a transcript grade and for honors recognition) are independent, it is entirely possible for a student to complete the independent study and receive a grade from the independent study director without ever finishing work the honors senior project committee deems necessary to receive honors recognition. This, in fact, has happened. It is also possible for a student to receive a grade for the independent study in time to graduate and to complete the honors project after graduation. Although possible and attempted several times, this alternative has rarely been successful. (Director’s Instructions)

Apparently, the stringent initial requirements of the program, and above all the capstone project requirement, could not fit smoothly into this particular organizational context. A second “degree option” was then instituted, which allowed for a considerably less amount of work. This option is graduating in University Honors (without Distinction), and the requirements for it are the following:

- 21 honors credits
- Three honors courses

- 3.2 GPA
- The co-curricular requirement

The academic requirements are quite flexible as regards ways in which one can acquire honors credits. This can be done in the traditional way, by successfully completing honors courses, options or “augmentations”, or independent study courses. In case of an unsatisfactory grade (C- or anything that lowers the required GPA), it is recommended to retake an honors course in order to raise the grade.

A student could receive an honors credit also by submitting three articles to the SHP newsletter during one semester of full-time study, submitting three articles to the SHP newsletter during a study abroad semester, and (only for the Student Associate Directors) Submitting a report at the end of their service. Each one of these activities has been approved as an honors course “augmentation”, so it could bring three honors credits to a student. Thus, even getting honors credits (a part of the purely academic requirements) is tied to student engagement in co-curricular activities.

Honors Courses

The most important honors courses in terms of satisfying the academic requirements of the program are the two sets of four humanities courses for the first-year students in the University Honors and the First-Year Excellence tracks. They are selected and designed with a view to satisfying the students’ general education requirements as well as giving them the basis of their honors experience.

Students at SHP see a distinct difference between honors and non-honors courses. Above all, they point out the smaller class size and the emphasis honors courses put on

discussion (SS2, 2003). It should be noted, however, that the difference in size is not as drastic at Springfield as at Parkland. Here a non-honors class consists approximately of 40 students, while an honors course is limited to 20. At Parkland, however, non-honors undergraduate courses may be as big as a few hundred students.

Besides the first-year core curriculum for the two honors tracks, there are three other honors courses offered in 2004-2005 at Springfield (they were five in 2003-2004). This small number of honors courses corresponds to the accepted set of requirements and the options for satisfying them, i.e., the possibility to obtain honors credits without having to take honors courses, and even without having to do academic work per se. SHP is advertised to prospective students as emphasizing “augmentations”, i.e., the independent conversion by individual students of regular courses into honors ones.

Activity Honors

As the discussion above shows, the co-curricular component of SHP seems to be one of its most important requirements (together with the first-year core curriculum), since it is not possible for it to be substituted by anything else. Student involvement in different co-curricular activities is considered the “hallmark” of this honors program, its “independently valuable aspect” (SHP Director’s Report). It is commonly referred to as an “honors community service requirement” or “activity honors”. The underlying rationale for developing this model is the importance of civic and leadership education through building an engaging learning community of active partners “rather than consumers of special perquisites and opportunities” (SHP Director’s Report). The student activities are conceived as a kind of internship that all honors students have an opportunity of doing during their years in the honors program.

The required community service time is usually two hours per week, during which students engage in different activities. It is more for first-year students from both tracks in their first semester: four hours for University Honors, and three for First-Year Excellence students. This is because there are certain required “core” activities in the first semester, e.g., the so-called freshman discussion groups, where first-year students talk about different aspects of their academic and social adjustment to college. First-year students also participate in lunch discussions, where outside speakers talk about issues of general interest (e.g., religion, alcohol abuse, etc.) and facilitate discussions that build the foundation of the students’ future involvement in civic education events.

What are the other activities that students engage in and the roles that the students assume? The most immediate forms of co-curricular participation are the student activity groups, special groups and project teams. Each of them meets once per week for an hour. In the 2003 fall semester 21 activity groups were functioning, with themes ranging from feminism to local community service, from care for the elderly in a nearby retirement home to knitting and crocheting and board game playing. Each group usually meets for one hour per week, which means that a student will typically have to participate in two groups in order to satisfy her co-curricular requirement. Students keep track of their co-curricular engagement through the so-called “green sheets”, which contain the students’ names and the dates and times of all the activities they have participated in.

The Honors Center

Despite the small size of the program, it has its own Honors Center, or “the House”, as most students call it. Formerly it has not been a part of the university, but now it happens to be located just across the street from the major buildings on campus. It is a

two-story house, which the Honors Program shares with the Recreation department. The Honors Center is on the first floor. It consists of the director's office and a living room, where most activity groups and committees meet, and students can just stay there and read or meet with other students. There is also a computer lounge with four computers in the basement, which is another typical venue for some of the student group meetings.

The Public Issues Forum

Besides the regular weekly discussions on topics of their interest, honors students also participate in a major discussion forum event, which is organized two or three times per semester. This is probably the major event signifying the commitment of SHP to civic education. At its heart is the belief that democracy and mutual understanding depend on everyone's ability to engage in "a practice of deliberative discourse about things that matter" (SHP Director's Report, p.1). Some of the discussion topics have been the purpose of general education, the Americans' role in the world today, the troubled American family, racial and ethnic relations, alcohol abuse, and euthanasia.

Besides the substantive enrichment and exposure to multiple perspectives, these forums are also quite beneficial in helping students to develop their communication and discussion skills. Students have special moderator training sessions that prepare them for participating and leading the discussions.

Governance and Administration

The freshman and lunch discussion groups and the student activity groups are really only the base of a whole "ladder of responsibility" (Director's Report, p.2), created to give all honors students the opportunity to directly participate in the governance of the

program. The different roles and teams, through which the self-governance model is accomplished, are the following:

- **Student Associate Directors (SADs).** Usually three students perform the roles of Student Associate Directors and work closely with the director in managing the program. One of them is responsible for recruiting and admissions, one for public and alumni relations (including the program website), and one for the different group meetings and all co-curricular activities. The appointment process looks very much like a real job application procedure: students apply for these positions, get interviewed, and those who are selected have to undergo a certain training process, working closely with the respective outgoing SAD. While serving as Associate Directors, students are paid a modest wage for their work. (So are all other students whose co-curricular responsibilities go beyond the mandatory two hours. This concerns above all the activity group leaders).
- **Activity Leaders.** Besides working with their respective groups, they also meet as a group. Since most of the regular group members are first-year students (while upper-classmen are either group leaders or members of special teams and committees), most of these meetings are focused on the progress of the freshman class. Some of the meetings are dedicated to leadership skills development activities.
- **Project Teams.** These are teams that typically perform program staff duties. The following teams operate currently: Admissions, Newsletter, Website, and Public Issues Forum. As their names suggest, their responsibilities are focused on some of the major aspects of the program's operations.

- **Program Coordinating Committee.** Its members are all honors students with any type of leadership responsibility, above all group and team leaders. The committee holds biweekly meetings in an attempt to facilitate communication about and ongoing evaluation of the program functions. This is one of the forums where student concerns and suggestions for changes in the current policies are voiced. The meetings are chaired by a Student Associate Director and sometimes the Program Director (or the secretary) attends them as well.
- **Student Assembly.** This is the main student governance organ of Springfield Honors Program, where every student has the right directly to share her concerns and ideas about the program. The Assembly meets two or three times per semester, and has average attendance of 60%.
- **Honors Committee.** This is the chief administrative body overseeing the program. Its composition is another reflection of the role that students play in running the program. It is composed of five faculty members and two students, elected by the students. The program director and the Admissions Team leader serve on the committee ex-officio.

To sum up, about 50 students, group and team leaders and special team members, - about 30% of all enrolled honors students – are at each point of time entrusted with some specific area of responsibility pertaining to the organizational functions. Compared to other honors programs, this may well turn out to be a unique case of student participation in an honors program governance structure. Of course, when talking about this aspect of their organization, both the **Director** and the students like to remind the

listener that despite everything, the honors program is not a democracy. The Director actually has a lot of power concentrated in his hands, in some cases even more than his counterparts in the other two studied organizations. He is the one who selects honors courses and invites faculty to teach them, he is basically the architect of most of the program's current features. The director reports to the Provost, the chief academic officer of the university. The Honors Committee, on the other hand, is responsible for making the most important decisions concerning the program's policies. However, and maybe just because the founding director was so committed to the citizenship participation and civic education idea, the numerous channels for student involvement in the program governance in practice have institutionalized the "genuine sharing of authority and responsibility with students" (Director's Report).

SHP and Its Host Institution

At the time of its founding, SHP was expected to accomplish very much what honors programs do for their host institutions, i.e., to "function as a curricular and co-curricular laboratory and create a student cohort that would serve as critical mass, helping to spread academic seriousness and creativity across the institution. And of course we looked to the program to help us attract and keep the best students" (Springfield University President). The program's development obviously took a non-conventional path. Academic standards in their initial form were too high and had to be revised. On the other hand, the civic education idea took a firm shape and added a new dimension, maybe the most important one, to the organizational identity of the program. The most important effect of all this was the high return rate of honors students (93%), not necessarily to the honors program, but to the university. By and large, the primary contribution of the SHP

is improving student retention for its host institution. Because of that the decision to expand the freshman class was made.

Springfield Honors Program: Summary

For the 16 years of its existence, SHP has continuously struggled to adapt itself to the realities of its host university, and the needs of its students in particular. It has begun as a typical honors program, featuring a rigorous academic set of requirements and a smaller co-curricular service requirement, but has had to modify its policies several times in order to cope with attrition problems. In its latest form, it includes two first-year tracks, University Honors and First-Year Excellence, which practically enroll all freshman applicants and the majority of all honors students at Springfield University. Keeping students in the program, as well as attracting new students and thus preventing the program from shrinking in the upper classes is still its priority goal.

The flexibility in academic requirements reflects a policy focused on improving student retention at SHP. Even with this flexibility, however, keeping students in the program after the first year remains a problem.

Unlike the complicated scheme of academic requirements and the many ways to satisfy them, the co-curricular component of SHP is clearly articulated and uniform for everybody. Its accomplishment is of key significance to a student's remaining in the program. A wide spectrum of engagement in different activities (some of which student-initiated) and leadership roles creates an opportunity for students to develop their skills in communication, public speaking, and management. They are also a constant stimulation for them to inquire about topical issues and engage in lively debates and discussions.

The Springfield administration and the SHP founding director have found that after their first year in SHP honors students return to Springfield University at rates much higher than non-honors Springfield students – probably the single most significant contribution of SHP to its host institution. By a general consent, the model of active student engagement in civic activities and the program governance is the most probable reason for this.

Greenville Honors Programs

Greenville Community College has not one but several arrangements for “high-ability, motivated” students (Greenville Course Catalogue), who are interested in doing academic work at a collegiate level. All of these arrangements, listed below, fall under the umbrella designation of “Greenville College Honors Program”.

- **General Honors Program** It is comprised of a number of different types of courses that vary every year and deal with more advanced or specialized topics. In some cases, the classes may be quite small, with no more than two or three participating students.
- **The Greenville Scholars Program**, which is the closest to a “standard” honors program model as established at most four-year institutions. It is a selective program admitting 25 students after a screening of the applicants’ activities, achievements, and writing skills demonstrated in an application essay. The Greenville Scholars Program offers a specially designed interdisciplinary curriculum. While the mission statement of the program focuses on “challenging and enriching” the students, its fundamental technical goal is to ensure the

successful transfer of all 25 scholars to a four-year institution at the end of their second year at Greenville.

- **The Business Honors Program.** This is a separate, departmental offering during the sophomore year only. Theoretically (and practically, even though this is not a common situation), a business-major student could simultaneously be a member of the Greenville Scholars and The Business Honors Program.
- **Internships** with two major cultural institutes of national renown. Anyone from the general student population is eligible to apply, which means that these internships are not limited to participants in any of the three programs described above. Certain criteria for academic achievement have to be met, however, and because of this the internships are under the Honors Program heading. Completing an internship is equal to taking a three-credit honors course.

This arrangement of options is quite different from the two previously described cases. On the one hand, all the components, in their totality, perform functions that are common to honors programs (e.g., providing general and departmental honors courses, internship opportunities, and specialized topics seminars). Additionally, three of the four arrangements are supervised by the same administrative body, a college-wide Honors Committee. The Business Honors program has its own budget and is run separately.

Of all these arrangements, however, only the General Honors and the Scholars Program satisfy the criteria of this study regarding an honors program as an organizational unit. Both of them could be considered (in the case of the General Honors Program this is more of a future trend) as tracks of comprehensive curricular offerings

across all or most majors, having their own organizational structure and administrative body. The internship by itself is clearly not an honors program in this study's terms, since it does not constitute an entire curricular track. It is open to all Greenville College students who satisfy the registration requirements, and quite often students who take honors courses or students from the Scholars Program are among those who do this internship. The Business Honors program, even though well developed academically and very successful in terms of preparing students for transfer to four-year institutions, is a purely departmental arrangement resembling the one at the small liberal arts colleges which, again, do not belong to the subject area of this research.

The Scholars Program is the type that most fully matches the criteria of the study. It is offered to students from all majors, even though it is not open to students of all age groups, a limitation that has its consequences for the college-wide honors experience. This program will be explored in detail later in this chapter.

The General Honors Program presents an interesting case, even though (at present) it is somewhat difficult to be defined in organizational terms. Currently it is no more than a number of different types of "honors" courses that are offered in most academic disciplines (or credit curricula). Still, it has a few good reasons to be included in this study as one of the two major constituents of the Greenville Honors Program.

First, because it fills a gap left by the Scholars Program. The Scholars Program is open only to traditional-age students who graduate from high school during the year of their college application. For Greenville, as well as for community colleges in general, these students constitute a minority of the population. It is rather returning-adult (average age is 28 years) and part-time (60%) students who predominate among the Greenville

students. Therefore, even though open to students from any major or transfer curriculum, the Scholars Program is actually closed to most Greenville students. The General Honors Program is thus designed to cater for the majority of students, typically a very diverse group regarding not only their age, but also ethnicity, nationality, interests and goals.

Second, this is the oldest honors arrangement at this college, directed by the college-wide coordinator of the Greenville College Honors Program (encompassing all possible “honors” arrangements on this and two other campuses). As such, it occupies a symbolically central place in Greenville’s conception of an honors program.

Third, students who satisfy the initial registration requirements may take as many honors courses as they wish. Those who take a certain number of honors courses and maintain a certain GPA receive an Honors Scholar’s award (i.e., a special certificate) at the time of their graduation, which is somewhat similar to “graduating with honors”.

Fourth, this kind of an “honors program” is not uncommon to community colleges nationwide. A considerable number of community college honors programs described in *Peterson’s Honors Programs and Colleges* (2002) follows the same model of offering an assortment of honors courses and leaving it up to the students to decide how many they would take.

Last but not least, the program’s administration is now in the process of planning a major revision of the General Program, which would eventually transform it into a structured curricular track and a more sophisticated organizational structure. The planning process is at its final stages during the writing of this research.

Therefore, the following description focuses on the General Honors and the Scholars Programs as the two major constituents of the community college-wide Greenville Honors Program.

Greenville General Honors Program

The General Honors Program (GHP) has been in operation for a much longer time than any of the other honors options currently in operation at Greenville College. In fact, nobody at the college remembers when it was started (and there are no written records of this), though it was most probably around the mid-1970s or early 1980s.

Honors Courses

The honors courses offered through GHP are three major types: honors sections of regular courses, honors tutorials, and honors modules. Additionally, independent studies are also counted as honors courses.

The college offers about 12 honors sections of standard courses per year at the moment. Most of the subjects involved constitute general education requirements, transferable to four-year colleges (e.g., the program offers honors sections of courses such as English, literature, biology, mathematics, and history). These generally have large enrollments, which has allegedly necessitated the introduction of honors sections for the better prepared students.

The modules are “attachments” to regular courses, as defined by the program director (GHD1, 2003), or they correspond to the honors options at Parkland or the augmentations at Springfield. They are by far the most numerous type of an honors curricular arrangement at Greenville: currently about 60 courses are approved to offer

honors modules. Among them are courses that also have honors sections, so whether in any given semester a section or a module (or both) is offered depends on the student enrollment size. Modules are not separate courses; they do not meet at different times than the regular course. Honors students participate in the same course together with non-honors students, but they do some extra work or get involved in some special project in addition to the regular work of the course.

The tutorials are the unique “specialty” courses, as the honors director calls them, which deal with topics not listed among the usual credit courses. Their format is quite similar to small seminars or even independent study courses. They enroll a very small number of students, normally around eight, but very often the students in them are no more than two or three. Some examples of these unusual tutorial topics are seminars in Graeco-Roman Culture, Women in Film, Women in Philosophy, and History of Medicine. These courses clearly depart from what one would normally expect to find in a community college curriculum. They are equivalent to 300-400 level courses, and most of them are recognized as 300 or 400 transfer courses by four-year institutions. Some of them even resemble graduate seminars, not just by their advanced topics, but also by their seminar format and the students enrolled. It is these courses that enroll a lot of adult students, many of whom already have degrees and take these courses mainly for personal enrichment.

All types of honors courses have to be approved by the governing administrative body of the program, the Honors Committee. The sections and modules belong to the respective departments and the Honors Program, while the tutorials belong to the individual instructor and the Honors Program. When the instructor leaves, the respective

tutorial is not offered any longer, unless another instructor submits a proposal for the same topic.

Registration Requirements

In order to register for those honors courses, students must have completed 12 credits at Greenville College; must have a 3.2 high-school GPA, and at least a B in English 101, which is the required freshman composition course. A typical honors student, therefore, could start taking honors courses during their second semester at the earliest.

Besides the standard requirements for admission, however, there are a few special cases when students are automatically eligible to take honors courses. Any student who applies to Greenville College is considered for one of the most prestigious college awards, the Board of Trustees scholarship. The College gives out about 100 scholarships to students with 3.4 high-school Grade point average or higher. These scholarships cover up to 15 hours per semester of tuition, which is equivalent to a full-time student status. All of the recipients of the Board of Trustees scholarships are automatically eligible to enroll in honors courses.

Also eligible for that are some high-school students (not graduates) who have demonstrated exceptional abilities and desire to take college courses simultaneously with their high-school studies (or have already completed an accelerated high-school program of studies). Anecdotally, the Director had just had a meeting before one of our interviews about a home-schooled student who had achieved exceptional SAT scores and was looking for a more challenging academic schedule. “Why should I say no to such an

outstanding record?” was the director’s response to this student’s desire to register for honors courses (GHD1, 2003).

Student Profile

When asked to describe the typical honors student, the GHP director immediately points out their heterogeneity, i.e., different age, different ethnicity and even nationality, different college experience, and different goals. The main distinctive feature about this college, in contrast to four-year schools, undoubtedly is the large part of adult students taking courses for a variety of reasons, from professional development to personal enrichment. Some of them are the first in their families to go to college. There is also the “opposite” group of students with undergraduate and even graduate degrees, who take honors courses simply for personal enrichment. Access to honors courses is automatically granted to such students. They like the environment, the professors and the topics offered (GHS1, 2004). The professors also enjoy working with more mature students (GHF, 2004; GSD2, 2004).

Even though as a rule students do not get any tuition discounts for enrolling in honors courses, there are a few possibilities for scholarships that they can explore. Many of the winners of the Board of Trustees Scholarships take honors courses. Additionally, the Greenville College Foundation awards 10 scholarships each spring semester to honors students from all three campuses. One scholarship covers the tuition fee for one honors course. Decisions about scholarship winners are made on the basis of the students’ Grade point average and a faculty member’s letter of recommendation for a specific student. The scholarship application also asks the students to indicate the specific honors course that they intend to take.

Students who have completed 12 credits of honors courses in at least two different disciplines and who have maintained a 3.4 or higher grade point average, are eligible to be recognized as “Honors Scholars”. They receive this certificate at a special ceremony. 21 students were awarded the certificate in 2004. This, however, is not an actual graduation recognition, and the currently planned revision of the program, aimed at creating a college-wide honors track, aims to rectify this by instituting an honors diploma (GHD3, 2004). The GHP Director is actively consulting with other community college honors programs in implementing this plan.

Co-curricular Features

The General Honors program at Greenville currently functions mostly as a collection of honors courses, with few co-curricular initiatives. This probably has something to do with the students’ profile, the fact that many of them are commuting adult students with full-time jobs, who cannot commit their time to extracurricular activities. Yet, a couple of events complement the courses. One of them is the Honors Forum, usually held in the fall semester (and sometimes in the spring as well, depending on student demand). This is a recruiting event, at which honors faculty present their courses to students, and a transfer counselor helps them with registration depending on their future transfer goals. Also, most honors courses have a goal to encourage the students’ independent research activities. Every April since 1994, an Honors Colloquium has been held on the premises of the Honors Program office. Usually it is a day-long event featuring student presentations of their research papers or projects in a broad range of subjects.

A recently established Honors Student Club is another indicator of the aspiration to build a program that is more than just a collection of courses. The purpose of the club is primarily to obtain and disseminate information about all relevant events at the College that might benefit all the groups of students involved in different types of “honors”.

Administration

The program is headed by a (half-time) director, who is also the coordinator for all types of honors arrangements on the three campuses. She is the head of an Honors Committee, which approves proposals for new honors courses (i.e., makes sure they could be transferred to four-year schools), and is currently working on the major program revision. The director reports to the Instructional Dean of Humanities.

Greenville General Honors Program: Summary

GHP currently exists mainly as a number of honors courses of several types, offered in most of the academic programs of the college and satisfying the transfer requirements of most four-year colleges. Even though quite a few students every semester take honors courses (900 honors course enrollments for 2003-04), a permanent honors students' group has not been constituted yet. Given the great part of adult students (some of whom are automatically eligible to take honors courses, since they already have a college degree) who take honors courses mainly for personal enrichment, it would hardly ever be possible to achieve a permanent student composition of this curricular track. Current plans are, however, being developed about making GHP more visible by introducing consistent admissions, participation, and graduation requirements.

Greenville Scholars Program

If GHP is designed with the specificity of a community college in mind, so that any qualified college student, at any point of time, could take advantage of the more advanced or specialized courses satisfying their specific needs and goals, the Greenville Scholars Program (GSP) is a very different kind of program. It is selective (one could even call it restrictive), targeted at a population of students very atypical of the community college as a whole. It enrolls only 18-year-old high-school graduates.

The Scholars Program started functioning in 1999 as “an academically rigorous program designed for transfer at the end of the sophomore year” (GSP Website). Very much like the founding of honors programs at community colleges in the 1980s, then, GSP was launched with a view to reaffirming the significance of the transfer function and achieving a faster and more efficient transfer track. Even though the preparation for transfer to four-year colleges is certainly one of this community college’s major functions, it most often takes more than two years for a student to accomplish this. The official college statistics on transfer rates take that into account, and percentage of transfers is calculated for a period of time 150% of the normal time-to-completion, i.e., for three years. According to an official Greenville College policy document, the transfer rate for the college as a whole in 2001 was 12.1%. The transfer rate for the first graduating class of the Scholars Program, also in 2001, was 82.6%. This rate has been quite steady (around 80%) ever since.

Every year the college admits 25 students into its Scholars Program. All accepted students automatically receive two-year (four academic semesters) full-tuition (15 credits per semester at the county resident rate) merit scholarships. The scholarships also include

international travel and most expenses during a summer program between the two college years at the University of Cambridge, England.

Since GSP has been set up as a benefit to its local community, it practically accepts only local county residents. Even though non-residents could apply, they do not qualify for the scholarships. Only county residents have been accepted into GSP so far (GAO, 2003).

Student Recruitment

Since the applicant pool of GSP is confined within Greenville County, the GSP administration makes sure that every public high school junior knows about the program. Information leaflets are mailed to high school students as early as in their freshman and sophomore high school years. The culminating events during the recruitment campaign are two information sessions for the program during the so-called Open Houses of the college every fall, usually in November. At these sessions faculty and administrators involved in the program meet with prospective students and their parents and provide information about admissions policies, the program curriculum, the summer international program, the internship opportunities, and transfer counseling. This event is of utmost importance to attracting well-prepared students. The immediate impressions they get from the professors who will be teaching them, the small size of the program, the scholarships, and the travel to England have been good enough reasons for a few students to choose this community college over much more famous and prestigious four-year colleges and universities in that area. Most of the interviewed students said that they didn't know much about the program and were not considering applying until this recruitment session, which obviously changed their plans (GSS, 2003).

Admissions

The selection process is fairly rigorous, quite similar to a selective college application process. The number of applicants for the 25 places has been over 100 every year since the founding of the program, and in 2003 the program saw a record number of applicants, 203. Admission is usually offered to 33 – 37 students, and, depending on “the caliber of applicants” (GAO, 2003), from 20 to 50 are waitlisted. The admissions officer emphasizes that the difference between the accepted and waitlisted students is not substantial, and sometimes it could be really minimal. It is her perception that usually the applicants qualified for the program are more than the spaces available. Students who apply to the program complete only one application to the Scholars Program, i.e., they do not have to file a general application to the college as well. They do have to submit an application for financial aid, however, in case they are not selected for the program. In such cases they are eligible for federal and state financial aid, as well as a merit scholarship by the Greenville Board of Trustees. There are students who do not get accepted into the Scholars Program, but, because of their good academic record, are offered Board of Trustees scholarships, and they choose to attend the college. They are then eligible to register for the honors courses that constitute the General Program.

The application to GSP also resembles those at selective four-year colleges (Appendix G). The Admissions Committee consists of the GSP director, the coordinator for the college-wide Honors Program, the scholars’ counselor, the director of Greenville College admissions, and an admissions officer specifically in charge of the program.

Student Profile

The most important requirement for a candidate to be selected to this program is the level of academic preparation. Grades and standardized test results are the first indicator of this. The selection process has to sift those who are well-prepared from those who are not (and among the applicants there are always cases of students who do not meet the minimum criteria), and then to establish, from all the “good” cases, which ones will be offered admission and which (and how many) will be waitlisted. Admissions decisions are mailed in early April, and accepted students have to decide if they accept the offers by the beginning of May.

The socio-economic profile of the students who apply to GSP is not in any stark contrast to the profile of the other community college students. The majority come from low to low-middle income families and have made their choice largely for financial reasons.

As a whole, the students accepted at GSP are defined by the admissions officer as “academically prepared”. The GSP director claims that they are not dramatically better in their preparation from other Greenville students (GSD2, 2004). As a matter of fact, because of their age, they often impress less than some of the more mature students. Their big advantage, however, is their potential and the right age to start developing it, as well as the ideal of building a community in each Scholars’ class.

The desirable SAT score, set by the program and listed in its information brochures, is 1200. The lowest SAT score that has been accepted is 1000, the highest – 1400. Table 5.7 shows the basic statistic numbers regarding admissions to GSP for fall of 2001, 2002, and 2003 (i.e., classes of 2003, 2004 and 2005).

Table 5.7.
Admissions to Greenville Scholars Program

	2001	2002	2003
Applications	130	130	151
Average SAT of incoming students	1196	1204	1225
Average weighted GPA of incoming students	3.82	3.89	3.98

Academic Content

What sets this program apart from all others studied so far is its prescribed nature. There is a certain set of courses (carrying 22 credits) that are mandatory for the Scholars. They satisfy general education requirements and are good for transfer to almost all four-year schools (GHD1, 2003; GHD2, 2003; & GSD1, 2003). This is a little more than a third of the overall credit requirement for graduation, which means that the students also have the opportunity to choose courses which fit their specific interests and/or majors. There are still some unresolved issues pertaining to the fit between the GSP requirements and some majors, especially engineering.

First-Year Core Curriculum

At the heart of GSP is an interdisciplinary humanities core course, “Perspectives on World Cultures: History, Thought, and Culture from Early Modern to Post-Modern”, which consists of four honors courses: world literature, world history, philosophy, and art history. This four-discipline course is offered throughout the first college year. The separate disciplines are integrated into one continuous flow, following the chronological development of human civilization from the beginning of the 16th century. Four faculty members, one from each discipline, team-teach the course and are present in class at all

times. The class meets for six hours every week (twice a week for three hours). Students who successfully complete it receive 12 honors credits for it. Much of the class time is conducted in a seminar style, with one of the professors usually leading the discussion on the topic of the day, and the other instructors and students participating in it. In December the students have a mid-term, and in May the following year – a final examination.

In designing the multidisciplinary core course, the Honors Committee has built in an extracurricular component that contributes to the program's goal of building an honors learning community. In and of itself, the familiarization of students with the discourse of four different disciplines and the broad, integrated study of world civilizations are very important goals of any honors curriculum. Additionally, a broader civic engagement component is incorporated into this course. Besides the seminar format, a number of other features of the course, outside class events, require the students' active participation. The most important of them are five roundtable discussions, a Japanese tea ceremony, a Middle East simulation, and several visits to museums, galleries, and political institutions. The roundtable discussions are hosted by internal and outside speakers, usually professors in different fields who talk about their research or about topics of common interest. Thus, some of the previous discussions have focused on postmodernism, quantum physics, the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism in Guatemala, etc. Then there is the popular "Philo-Café", informal gatherings accompanied by philosophical discussions with the GSP Director and the philosophy professor, both of whom teach the core course. The students and the two professors choose the topic for discussion in advance and then gather at the philosophy professor's home.

Besides the core curriculum, in their first year the Scholars have to take two more honors courses, anthropology and English honors composition.

Summer Abroad: Cambridge

For most of the interviewed students the most attractive asset of the program was the Summer International School at the University of Cambridge, which takes place between the two academic years. The students travel to Cambridge with a few of their professors and complete courses of their choice at the Cambridge International Summer School. They also attend plenary lectures at the University of Cambridge. The experience is an opportunity to combine an intensive academic program with a variety of social and cultural experiences as well as short trips to other cities and countries. At the end of the course students receive three honors credits for their work.

Second Year: Capstone Project and Colloquium

The major requirement of the program during the sophomore year is the students' capstone project. The final product is expected to be usually a research paper (presented during a special event, the Scholars Colloquium), but it can also take a non-traditional form such as a video or a work of art. The accomplishment of this project has to comply with certain requirements. As a prerequisite for it, all scholars take a three-credit speech communication course that gives them the basics of group discussions and public speaking. The other required course is called Fundamental Concepts of Inquiry (in different disciplines), carrying one credit. The research also has to follow a common theme, which is different every year (Most recently it has been related to the relationship between technology and the humanities.)

Transfer Counseling

Counseling plays an important role in a community college routine operation. Because of the great variety in student goals, interests, and demonstrated performance, counseling is often crucial to keeping or putting a student on the right academic, career or life path. For students intending to transfer to four-year institutions, counseling is an indispensable tool in managing their course schedule, obtaining information about other colleges and universities, about scholarship and other financial aid opportunities, and resolving any potential issues that might arise on the way. Greenville College provides counseling services to all its students, holds orientation sessions on transfer, but none of the other programs are so strongly focused on transfer counseling as GSP.

Among the several special privileges of the Scholars is their direct and easy, even mandatory, access to a counselor working with them on their schedules and transfer plans. Even before the beginning of their first semester, accepted students are invited to an orientation session in early June, where they plan their fall course schedule and register for classes. During the academic year, students are strongly encouraged to keep a continuous contact with their counselor (Each class has one counselor, so the whole program works with two Scholars' counselors).

Having a counselor is certainly a right of every college student. However, in reality very few students seek counseling on a regular basis. That is why this institutionalized commitment of counselors to the Scholars Program is considered one of the most important program's benefits to students.

Administration

The program is run by a collective governing body, the Scholars Steering Committee. It includes GSP Director, the recruitment coordinator, the Director of Admissions, the two Scholars counselors, a representative from the sophomore capstone Faculty, and a representative from the freshman core faculty. As a rule, the Committee meets once every two weeks. The common topics for discussion on its agenda revolve around student recruitment, retention, graduation and transfer, as well as planning current events.

The Director of the program, a history professor, was named a State Professor of the year for 2003 by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Half of her time is spent as a Director of GSP, and half as a history professor, teaching at least one other course per semester. Most of the courses she has taught are honors courses. Both the GSP Director and the College Honors coordinator teach the honors core course.

Even though the Greenville Scholars program is advertised as just one of many structured possibilities for high-achieving and ambitious students, it certainly enjoys more organizational autonomy than the other honors arrangements. It is the only program that has its own administrative body and a distinctive organizational structure. Its director is granted a complete autonomy and reports directly to the Instructional Dean of Humanities, just like the director of the General Honors Program, who happens to be the college-wide honors coordinator.

Greenville Scholars Program: Summary

Greenville Scholars Program is a recently established, selective program for academically prepared, traditional-age students (high-school graduates during the year of admission), who plan to transfer to a four-year college or university. It is a very small program, which allows the Admissions Committee to make a selection of 25 students (out of 120-130 applications) capable of doing the work and accomplishing their transfer in two academic years, which is a very rare achievement for community college students. Accepted students are granted full tuition scholarships and a free summer study-abroad program at the University of Cambridge, England.

The main reasons for applying to and enrolling in this program, according to both the students and the director, are financial (i.e., the free tuition and the study abroad course). Students also point out the small class size and personal attention from faculty as benefits of the program. It is not quite clear, however, that all the students of the program would have necessarily enrolled at Greenville College if GSP had not been in place.

The most salient academic characteristic of GSP is its prescribed and mandatory nature. Students cannot choose courses within GSP (constituting over a third of their credit requirements), though they can choose the courses they take out of the program. The honors curriculum is designed to satisfy the students' general education requirements and is transferable 100% to four-year institutions. Special focus on counseling provides the students with all the support they need for a timely completion of their first two college years and a painless transfer process. The co-curricular components complement and enrich the rigid academic requirements.

CHAPTER 6

ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

This chapter will present a summary of the organizational characteristics of the three discussed cases. Taking into account the different factors that impact their operation, it will attempt to outline their organizational identities. Further on, drawing on a synthesis of the major findings and supplemental information on general trends in the development of honors programs, the chapter will attempt to speculate about the current state of the whole organizational field of honors programs at American colleges and universities..

Three Honors Programs: Summary of Findings

Parkland Honors College

As the discussion in the previous chapter shows, Parkland Honors College is an exemplary organization and a recognized leader among honors programs at peer host universities. Its administration, aware of this, is now looking for a new reference group consisting of honors colleges that have been recognized by the honors community nationwide as the best ones in the country.

Two primary factors have contributed to the creation of this high-profile organization. Above all, Parkland Honors College benefits a lot from its host university, which offers plentiful resources and opportunities for research, curricular and co-curricular innovations, and international programs. Indeed, this link is of vital significance to both the Honors College and the host university. On the one hand, the

Honors College is cited as one of the preeminent symbols of excellence in undergraduate education for its host university, an indispensable aspect of the image it presents to all its constituencies and the external public. On the other, its overall smooth and successful operation would not be possible without the support of the central university administration, and the special attention it enjoys from virtually all university governing bodies (starting with the Board of Trustees) and academic colleges and departments. No constraints or impediments of any sort on the part of the different university constituencies toward any of the Honors College policies or activities were witnessed during the data collection process. Of course, at this university, as probably in all others, there is a handful of faculty who are ideologically opposed to honors programs in general as agents of stratification at a mass education institution (Personal Communication, 2003, 2004). In this respect, it would be fallacious to claim that every member of the university community totally supports PHC. On the other hand, however, like other major research universities, Parkland dedicates increased attention and resources to strengthening undergraduate education, and in all its policies supports rather than counteracts the philosophy behind its Honors College. Thus, Parkland University has adopted different teaching and organizational initiatives as demonstrations of this. First-year seminars focusing on small class size and taught by senior faculty members have become a well-established tradition across all colleges and departments of the university. The Institute for Innovation in Learning, founded with an endowment by the same benefactors as Parkland Honors College and working in partnership with it, is the testing ground for new ideas about effective teaching. The annual undergraduate research exhibition, which was mentioned in the previous chapter as a major venue for showcasing honors students'

research, is actually sponsored by the university and open to all university students with research interests. Being a part of a university such as Parkland is indeed a major factor conducive to building and elaborating the PHC mission with its focus on academic excellence, global perspective, and leadership and civic engagement.

The second major prerequisite for building an exemplary honors college is, of course, the multi-million dollar founding gift. The merit scholarships offered to all accepted first-year students, the special grants for international studies and research, and the resources supporting different special programs and innovative honors courses have made it possible to attract some very high-achieving students. The entering students' profile has given the staff the confidence to state that "the SAT scores for the middle fifty percent of our students are equal to or better than all other Ivy League schools except Harvard and Yale" (Annual Report, 2002). Of course, both students and staff of PHC still feel that resources for scholarships could be more so that the college could attract even more outstanding students for the university. According to the student selection coordinator, the most common reason for declining the PHC offers are financial, i.e., better financial aid packages offered by "wealthier" institutions. Additionally, the PHC administration is focused on raising more money for need-based scholarships to supplement the merit scholarships for students from low-income families (PD3, 2005).

The relationship between Parkland Honors College and its host university is clearly one of mutual support and benefit: the university research reputation, a wide range of undergraduate majors and the large student enrollment boost the attractiveness of the Honors College. In turn, by the mere concentration of students with outstanding qualifications and achievements and by the many innovative programs in international

education and service learning, the Honors College has become a landmark symbol of the university, enhancing its reputation in recruiting outstanding students and in attracting major sources of funding from donors who seek to encourage excellence in undergraduate education.

By all rational considerations, the emergence of an honors program and later an honors college at Parkland University is quite a logical and natural event. Taking into account the fact that this university established itself as a leading research university nationwide in the last couple of decades, it is certainly not so unusual that the university-wide honors program was founded in 1980, at a time when Parkland was taking off as a major research university, and not before that. Of course, the existence of other honors programs served as a catalyst in the design and implementation of the program, which allows for institutional factors, i.e., isomorphism, to have played a role in the process. Institutional factors seem to have played a greater part in the early years, especially in the effort to attract high-achieving students. Since their number was perceived to be inadequate compared to similar research universities, a major goal of the newly instituted honors program was to bring them to the university (USP Director's Report, 1988). The process was evidently giving results, since in 1987 a new form of application was adopted (and students were not invited any more, they had to declare that they wanted to be in the Scholars Program themselves). Obviously at about this time, the late 1980s, the honors program was becoming a truly selective one.

Later on, institutional factors only reinforced what was already in place for the founding of Parkland Honors College. The human and material resources and the scope of activities of the host institution as well as the founding gift naturally stimulated the

dedication to excellence and innovation in education to flourish in the newly established organization. Within the honors college, the accomplishments of a major research university, in addition to enhanced curricular and co-curricular opportunities, led to the creation of an organization comparable with the nation's top private colleges. Briefly said, the operation of Parkland Honors College demonstrates a very close to perfect fit between technical (i.e., resources) and institutional (i.e., beliefs and norms) influences on the organizational structure.

Springfield Honors Program

Springfield Honors Program could be viewed as either a non-selective one because of an insufficient number of high-achieving students or as deliberately designed to be open to every applicant willing to try the honors experience. Of course, in and of itself, this is a divergence from the "orthodox" honors idea, which presupposes a separate curricular track for students with superior abilities who are not challenged enough by the regular academic experience.

The strong institutional influences here have created a model that could be viewed as the best manifestation of the "loose coupling" argument (i.e., lack of synchrony between formal structure and technical performance; see Chapter 2) of the three investigated cases. Initial stringent academic requirements of the program led to a high attrition rate. Therefore, policies had to be thoroughly revised. On the other hand, the "community service" requirement and the civic education passion of the founding director worked fine to compensate for the purely academic components that were to be dropped from the program requirements. The "activity honors" requirement thus emerged, complemented by the elaborate structure of the student self-governance model.

The old graduation requirement, which included the senior capstone project or thesis, remained, but just as an option, which is usually completed by no more than one or two students per year. The academic requirements were revised after discussions with the students, making sure that the new ones would be acceptable to most students in the program. Consequently, the academic requirements of the program were considerably reduced for the sake of those who did not want to write a thesis. Essentially, the burden of taking honors courses now falls within the freshman year, after which the students can practically stay in the program without taking any honors courses proper. The honors credit requirements can be satisfied in a number of ways, including non-honors course augmentations and submitting articles to the SHP newsletter.

The revision of Springfield Honors Program, which was carried out in 1998, involved not just a reduction of the academic requirements, but also an expansion of the freshman class. With the introduction of a second first-year honors track (called First-Year Excellence), SHP is now, for all practical purposes, open to any interested student. The obvious reason behind those changes is to keep more students for a longer period of time enrolled in the program. What is the rationale behind this decision; why could the program not remain just a small and selective one?

First, building a viable small selective program in this setting may not be possible to achieve. As was already shown, setting up high requirements initially had a disastrous effect on student retention. As a regional state college, a former teachers' college, relying mainly on the local rural high schools for its student pool, Springfield University simply does not, by the standards of truly selective colleges, enroll a sufficient number of high-achieving students. Its limited budget and the small financial incentives for being in the

honors program might also act as deterrents from attracting students with better academic credentials.

Second, the founding director of Springfield Honors Program is an active figure in the national honors movement. Being well acquainted with the tensions traditionally surrounding honors programs, he feels very strongly about charges of elitism and insists on the value of an open model (SD2, 2004).

Third, and probably most important: by a general consent of the SHP and the university administration, the program is doing something very good for the university and its students, and the more students it involves, the better. Even though it has problems with its own retention rate, it somehow keeps the students at the university. 93% of the students who enter the honors program return to the university for their second year (though not necessarily to the program), compared to an average second-year retention rate of about 70% for the university as a whole. A similar effect is captured by a recent dissertation, dealing with honors students' outcomes at a research university (Shushok, 2002). The study found that, compared to non-honors students with similar academic qualifications, the honors students achieved higher GPA grades and greater retention rates into the second year. This positive effect on student outcomes has obviously been recognized and promoted at Springfield.

The second major benefit to the university is the national popularity of the SHP civic education initiatives. They gave rise to a whole new organizational unit at Springfield University: the Center for Civic Life, which develops internet resources for different civic education projects and involves students from colleges all across the

country. Because of all this, SHP is famous as a leader in certain civic education projects within the honors community nationwide.

To sum up, Springfield Honors Program in its present form is quite different from its original conception, and certainly quite divergent from a typical honors program model, if such a model really still exists. Actually, recent research (Huggett, 2003) found similar processes, referred to as “customized learning experiences” (p.51), to be ongoing in all of the four programs it investigated. Regarding SHP in particular, these involve an opportunity given to every interested applicant to “check it out”, and the incorporation of community service component in the form of student self-government. Its elaborate governance structure is the perfect illustration of the “loose-coupling” argument of neo-institutional theory. The structure and operation of this program are affected much more by the beliefs and values concerning civic education as part of the honors experience than by any “technical” goals of efficient instruction.

Greenville Honors Programs

The two honors arrangements among several at Greenville Community College that are organizationally shaped, college-wide offerings, are the General Honors and the Scholars Programs. By and large, they are designed for different student populations and fulfill partially different goals. Although theoretically it is possible for a student in the Scholars Program to be taking courses from the general Honors list, this is not a requirement of the Scholars Program. The reverse is never possible, since the Scholars’ curriculum is designed exclusively for that program.

The General Program is comprised by a set of tutorials or “specialty” courses, sections of regular courses, and modules (the same as options at Parkland or

augmentations at Springfield). It is accessible to the broad student population regardless of their interests and goals, as long as they meet certain minimum academic requirements. The different types of honors courses are often characterized as more advanced or dealing with more specific and rare topics than the regular ones. They are offered to an immensely diverse student population and hence serve more than one purpose. Challenging the brightest students and giving them a good basis for transfer is certainly an important purpose, but there are others as well. These courses are also offered to part-time students, some of them with degrees, who take courses for personal enrichment, and, in some cases, to very accelerated high-school students and even graduate students with special interests.

The Scholars Program, on the other hand, is a purposefully designed and well-structured, fixed-curriculum program. If the General Honors lacks a single purpose, this one is focused exclusively on the purpose of transfer. Its content, however, transcends the mere function of preparation for transfer, mainly with the international component it offers, as well as a few other extra-curricular initiatives. The Scholars Program enjoys the availability of more funds than any other of the Greenville honors arrangements, especially for organizing the Cambridge summer course. It also enjoys considerable popularity among state and community colleges in the region. In 2003, its director was named Renowned Professor of the year for the whole state. Within the community college, however, it seems that not too many people have heard about it. A faculty who had taught in it questioned its being a necessity for the college. She maintained that the program isolated the 50 students and cultivated in them unrealistic beliefs about their high abilities (GSF, 2004).

The presence of two different arrangements falling under the designation of honors program within the same host institution is a function of two major factors: the original mission of serving a community and the marketing strategy of attracting well prepared students and reinforcing the college preparatory track. Above all, a community college is expected to be of service to its community (McCartan, 1983). This involves attending to the interests of all groups of people represented in the student population. And the students at a community college are most often a very different group from the ones enrolled at most four-year colleges and universities. Greenville college students are extremely diverse with respect to age, ethnicity and, last but not least, nationality. Quite a few of them are recent immigrants or immigrants' children from Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia. Such a diverse student population naturally brings equally diverse needs and interests. Therefore, an honors program clearly has to be flexible enough to respond to that diversity, and at the same time it has to be true to the honors idea: it has to challenge its students and help them develop their potential. The General Honors Program obviously functions with these needs in mind. It has certain criteria for admission, but it is not restrictive: there is no cap on the number of students who can take honors courses. Anyone who satisfies the academic requirements can do that. A student can take any number of honors courses, as long as they maintain the required GPA. The current certificate given to those who accumulate 12 honors credits in two disciplines is just a symbolic recognition. The major program revision, which is currently under way, will make the whole experience more structured by introducing more elaborate admissions and graduation requirements (the plan is to give an honors diploma upon

completion of the required work). The opportunity for anyone to be able to take honors courses, however, will be preserved.

In addition to serving its community, Greenville College employs certain strategies to reassert another major component of its mission, i.e., the preparation of students for transfer into four-year institutions. The Greenville Scholars Program is the most important of these strategies. The Greenville Scholars do take unique courses, designed only for them. Access to the program is restricted. Students have to follow a very rigid schedule, a fixed curriculum, which prepares them for transfer in just two years (which in itself is a major accomplishment at this community college). On the other hand, thousands enroll at Greenville every year as full-time students, planning to transfer to a four-year institution, and in about three years' time only 29% of them do so (Greenville College Policy Document). Obviously, the Scholars program is helping only a minute number of students compared to all who enroll at Greenville with transfer plans in mind.

The significance of the Scholars Program to its students was best summarized by its director. When asked about the most important reasons for students to choose and enroll in this program, even after being accepted by four-year public universities, she promptly pointed out finances as the number one reason. In most cases, students who come to the Scholars program have very good academic qualifications and are able to do college work at a four-year institution. The real issue for them is paying all the bills at these colleges. The free tuition as well as the international experience is what attracts them to the community college in the first place. They, however, have not relinquished any of their plans to transfer to (very good) four-year schools. This gives us a reason to surmise that these same students would probably not come to a community college, were

it not for that special program. Thus, the Scholars program benefits academically able students from the local community whose families may not have the financial resources to pay for a four-year education at a large public university or a private college. This is consistent with the findings of a dissertation by Viger (1993) about why students enroll in community college honors programs. Finances is by far the major reason, followed by the small class size and, to a much smaller degree, encouragement by parents and family (which, however, is counterbalanced by discouragement by high-school teachers and peers). All the Greenville scholars interviewed for this study stated exactly the same factors (GSS, 2003).

Finally, the Scholars Program also gives the college the self-image of an institution that can compete for students with four-year institutions. And the combination between the Scholars and the General Honors Program indeed gives the college the confidence that it values merit and equality alike, i.e., it has a mechanism to select its “favorites”, but also gives everybody the chance to partake of the honors experience.

Organizational Identities and Interorganizational Patterns

A major goal of the present study is to trace the organizational dynamics of honors programs as manifested in three organizational units hosted by different types of postsecondary institutions. A neo-institutional framework has been chosen as a major “lens” for accomplishing this investigation. The three cornerstone ideas that will guide the present discussion, stated briefly, are the following:

- Institutions as systems of meanings and norms which constitute organizations; foundational ideas and beliefs that function as rational myths,

- Multiple, differentiated and integrated at the same time, influences coming from the institutional and technical environments of the three units and impacting their organizational identities, and
- Diffusion of organizational forms and structural uniformity or isomorphism of organizations sharing the same meaning systems and patterns of activity (i.e., belonging to the same institutional environments), which leads to the formation of an organizational field.

Rational Myths and Evolving Organizational Structure

The ideology of honors education rests on the belief that a minority of students at a given institution, identified as “superior” in their academic talents and potential, need to be streamlined into a special curricular track (Aydelotte, 1925, 1944; Cohen, 1966a). This original “myth” gave rise to the early forms of honors programs for juniors and seniors in the 1920s and 1930s. This original honors idea is still alive today in the hundreds of current honors programs at all types of postsecondary institutions. In the course of time, it only became more elaborate, first by expanding its constituencies, and later by diversifying its components. In the 1950s and 1960s, it came to encompass the whole undergraduate student population, expanding to cover the first two years of college as well. The increased scope of its operations created the prerequisites for setting up a separate organizational structure, the institution-wide honors program. The departmental honors program still remained an option, but was increasingly supplemented or substituted by the institution-wide model, which became most popular at public universities (Cohen, 1966a).

Subsequently, new categories were identified as appropriate aspects and goals of honors education. In most cases they penetrated into the honors communities from the wider higher education context. The most important of them were service learning, international education, and (living) learning communities. The institutionalization of those led to an elaboration of the organizational structure of honors programs. An honors program at present, as the three investigated cases show, has many more aspects than just the special coursework and independent study promulgated in the 1920s. The identification of different roles of the people engaged in creating these categories within honors programs led to an elaboration in the honors personnel structure. The most elaborate structures were increasingly designated as “honors colleges”.

The discovery of new “myths” also impacted the student selection mechanism. In the late 1980s and 1990s many programs started employing the “scanning” selective admissions mechanism (Stoller, 2004). Students were no longer invited to join the honors program, they had to apply to it with a whole package of documents showing their academic as well as extra-curricular and personal accomplishments.

As illustrations of these processes, all three cases in the present study have undergone significant structural elaboration. Of them, Parkland Honors College has the longest history and has obviously achieved the highest degree of organizational complexity. An interesting contrast stands out when we compare the goals of the early University Scholars Program at Parkland with the current mission statement of the Honors College. In the 1980s it was firmly believed that the program should “emphasize development of research ability as one, if not the ultimate, objective of honors experience” (Director’s Report, 1988). In the late 1990s it was already taken for granted

that academic excellence is only one part of the priorities of PHC and that it should also be complemented by the cultivation of global understanding and leadership abilities.

A similar process of expanding the honors program's goals and even shifting them essentially in the direction of service learning and civic education took place at the Springfield Honors Program. At Greenville, the Scholars program is a fairly recent one, and, even though explicitly dedicated to preparing students for transfer, it has incorporated the elements of international education and service learning roughly since its inception. It is interesting to note that even the General Honors Program there, which has always consisted of just a set of honors courses, recently has initiated some new forms in the direction of building a self-governing learning community, e.g., a new student club, The Honors Network.

Isomorphic Features

The three studied honors programs function at three higher education institutions with different missions and a different place in the stratified higher education sector. They cater to different student populations. They do not maintain any direct relations among themselves. Nevertheless, all three programs display similarities in their structure and operation. Some of these common aspects are the following:

1. Special criteria for admissions, special recruitment practices
2. Special honors courses, similar types of curricular forms, a capstone project, focus on the students' independent work and research
3. Certain privileges for their students, e.g., scholarships
4. Focus on constructing a learning community, in some cases – a living learning community

5. Opportunities for international experiences
6. Administration participating in different interorganizational honors events, including annual meetings of the NCHC
7. A common discourse, i.e., very similar language describing who they are and what they do

In some cases these features are present only “ceremonially” (Meyer & Rowan, 1991), simply because this is the accepted practice at most honors programs. Such are some of the student selection practices at Springfield (e.g., the interviews) and to some extent in the Greenville Scholars Program (e.g., the application essays rarely impact the final decision making process). The learning community at Greenville is certainly a valuable asset of the program, though there is no evidence that it boosts the students’ transfer success.

Besides these similarities between the three specific programs, different examples of mimetic isomorphic influences from other programs came up many times in the interviews and document analysis regarding each one of them. Thus, the University Scholars Program at Parkland was founded in 1980 after numerous visits to other honors programs around the country (Director’s Report, 1988; Annual Report, 2002). Its inception was due to a major effort to increase the number of high-achieving students, which was perceived to be smaller than the ones at peer institutions. Later on, in the mid-1980s, professional trips were made again to five peer institutions’ honors programs. The objective was to gather information about different features of these programs and to incorporate the most successful of them into a future reform. Summarizing the findings of those trips, the Director’s Report from 1988 gave an account of some problematic areas

in USP that needed to be addressed. One of them was the “lower” place that the program had on its host institution’s organizational chart, due to the fact that the program’s director reported to the Dean of Undergraduate Education instead of the chief academic officer of the university, which was the practice at most peer institutions (Director’s Report, 1988). Of course, now the times have changed, and Parkland Honors College has gained enough momentum and reputation to be setting standards and providing models for other honors programs, as a few NCHC publications and internal documents testify.

The Springfield Honors Program works in close cooperation with programs at other universities from its state system of higher education. Together, these programs hold an annual summer “honors semester abroad”. Each of the dozen or so programs sends two honors students to participate in these honors semesters. SHP is also a national leader in developing the self-governance and the civic education model, and honors programs at state colleges and universities across the country are now adopting many aspects of this model, mainly through participating in the national projects at the Springfield Center for Civic Life.

The Greenville Scholars program was consciously designed after a specific honors program at another community college. Subsequently, it introduced a few changes and innovations, but its foundation is a conspicuous result of organizational diffusion. As regards the revision of the General Honors Program, it is entirely based on consulting with the “best practices” of similar programs.

Technical and Institutional Influences

The neo-institutional perspective underscores the importance of institutional environments in shaping the structure and dynamics of educational organizations (Meyer

& Rowan, 1991). Institutional factors, which are non-local, non-material and essentially cultural and ideological in nature, combine with factors of the local and “material” environment as driving forces of organizational life. The two types of factors do not exclude but rather complement each other with a varying degree of significance.

Prior research on the founding and spread of honors programs (Baker et al., 2000) found that the complexity of the host institution is the most powerful predictor for the occurrence of honors programs at large four-year institutions (enrollment size > 7,000). Complexity is measured as diversity of academic undergraduate programs, student enrollment size, and presence of doctoral programs as a proxy for focus on research. This same research found that for institutions displaying all these indicators of complexity, which had not established an honors program during the big wave of 1960s, the odds to start an honors program were the greatest in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Our first case perfectly illustrates these findings. The Parkland University Scholars Program was established in 1980. Its host institution displays all the features of organizational complexity: as a matter of fact, it is probably one of the most complex universities in the country. Additionally, the multi-million gift fostered the founding of an Honors College and made it possible for it to compete for students and offer grants for domestic and international research, and for many international and service-learning programs, which in turn enhanced its institutional image.

Organizational complexity is a very strong predictor not only of the founding probability but also of the entire organizational dynamics of the honors program. Large enrollment size also means more “superior” students to choose from, and hence stronger peer effects within the honors program (Geiger, 2001). Research productivity means the

program will have no obstacles to raising its students' research as its top priority and requirement. A large number of undergraduate majors is a prerequisite for a rich honors curriculum with lasting interdisciplinary connections woven into its texture. An honors program that has all these features in its structure would have the potential to function much more efficiently than the program that does not have them. It would then be characterized by a less loosely-coupled structure and its functions would be performed in an "orthodox" meritocratic fashion. Such an organization is Parkland Honors College.

Of course, rational or technical factors could never act alone in shaping the identity of an educational organization. As was previously shown, a lot of features in the structure of PHC emerged as a result of institutional influences, i.e., mimetic isomorphism. The more rational factors, such as research productivity, eventually, are also institutional in nature, since they stem from the mission of the research university. Internationalization and community service as constituents of PHC mission are also related to the service component of the host university's mission. Therefore, it is important to underscore that a whole spectrum of technical and institutional influences produces the kind of organization we have. In other words, the conceptual map for the study of organizational dynamics (See Figure 2.1, p. 22) includes the complete arsenal of impacting forces in the case of PHC. All of them have an important place in shaping this organization, with the decisive role of influences stemming from its host university.

The picture significantly changes with the second case. Technical prerequisites are not present there: the host institution's enrollment size is small to medium, it is non-selective and draws its students mainly locally. The number of its programs is not as large as Parkland's. Its mission does not emphasize research and it does not have doctoral

programs. Clearly, the local or technical organizational environment is not extremely conducive to the founding of an honors program. Yet the Springfield Honors Program has been in existence since 1988, and for a few years now it has had a quite stable organizational image. Clearly, this image has been shaped predominantly by institutional influences, both at the time of its founding and during the program revision process. As the discussion of Springfield's history showed, the original honors idea – a special and more rigorous honors curriculum – has been modified to incorporate a salient service component and an extensive array of civic education activities. Civic education as a part of the modern honors ideology could thus be surmised to be the single most important factor shaping this organization's behavior. It is a legitimate part of the honors experience nationwide and it also gives the program's actors the confidence of being the sculptors of an innovative honors program, as numerous publications and presentations show. The greatest weight of identity-shaping factors regarding Springfield Honors Program will then reside with the honors ideology in its expanded modern content.

Greenville is certainly a very interesting case as regards its honors programs' identity-shaping factors. Community colleges in general adopted the honors program model after it became institutionalized at large four-year institutions and started spreading throughout higher education nationwide. Therefore, the emergence of an honors program at any community college is undeniably a function of mimetic isomorphic processes coupled with the need to reaffirm the collegiate aspect of their missions. On the other hand, Greenville also exhibits a high degree of organizational complexity for a community college, mainly through the large student enrollment size and the number of credit programs. This complexity undoubtedly boosts the vitality of

the General Honors program, which aims at offering a variety of courses in most majors, satisfying a wide range of preferences and interests. Therefore, Greenville General Honors Program operates under the combined impact of institutional (i.e., ideology and collegiate mission) and technical (i.e., complexity) factors, the former being of primary importance. Above all, (unlike Springfield), this is the original honors idea, the more narrow academic understanding of honors as an enriched academic experience provided through special courses. In this, the program resembles the “reading for honors” model, the purely departmental curricular arrangements that still exist at some elite private colleges and universities.

The Greenville Scholars Program emphasizes transfer as its single highest priority. This somehow deprives the original honors myths of their supremacy in the shaping of this program, or rather modifies them to fit the more technical aspects of the transfer process. For example, the program has a special transfer counselor instead of honors advisors. Its entire curriculum is designed partly with the enrichment idea, but above all with the transfer goal in mind. The program thus operates largely under the directive of fulfilling an important part of the mission of its host institution. Students-as-resources is the next important factor necessary for this program’s vitality.

To sum up, different types of technical and institutional influences have a varying role in defining the organizational dynamics in the three cases. The two strongest concentrations of such influences appear to be the program’s host college or university and the honors ideology in its different aspects (see Figure 2.1, p. 22). The operation of Parkland Honors College is most tightly associated with influences coming from its host university, and so is the operation of the Greenville Scholars Program. The difference is

that for Parkland this is a whole set of interrelated influences, while for Greenville Scholars it is primarily the collegiate or academic part of the community college mission. Springfield Honors Program, on the other hand, is the extreme case of a program whose operation is exclusively shaped by the modern honors ideology with its emphasis on service learning and civic education. The General Honors Program at Greenville is also shaped primarily by ideological factors, centered around the original “special courses” and (with the current revision) “special track” idea.

Organizational Field

The three studied cases are just a minute fraction of the hundreds of currently existing honors programs at American colleges and universities. 800 programs are listed as members of the NCHC at present, but their actual number is higher (Baker et al., 2000). Most programs are drawn into a national organizational network, with the NCHC in the role of a coordinating body. Its member organizations participate regularly in conferences sponsored by NCHC, both at national and regional levels. Sometimes they organize meetings or conferences together with their peer institutions. Therefore, when talking about honors programs in their totality and trying to understand current interorganizational trends in their development, it seems pertinent to apply the neo-institutional construct of “organizational field” (DiMaggio, 1983) and its “structuration” (Giddens, 1979, 1984; DiMaggio, 1983; Scott, 2001) as its most telling characteristic.

Our three cases have never maintained any relations between or among themselves. Still, as the discussion of their isomorphic features suggests, they demonstrate a degree of similarity (if only structural and not necessarily related to their actual performance) that cannot be explained by anything else but their common

institutional environment. Neo-institutional analysis interprets homogeneity of features in institutionally similar organizations as an indicator of a high degree of structuration of the respective organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The surveyed prior literature as well as the cases investigated now clearly show that the process of structuration is under way as regards the nationwide spread of honors programs. Its degree, however, is not very easy to gauge, given the limited scope of the present research and the paucity of prior studies in this direction. Therefore, the discussion below will attempt to speculate about this process on the basis of available information, mainly from NCHC sources and descriptions of honors programs at institutions similar to the three schools studied here.

Understanding the level of structuration of an organizational field focuses on structures as “both the result of past actions – social products – as well as the context or medium within which ongoing action occurs”(Scott, 2001, p.52). This dynamic conception of structure is particularly appropriate in this research, which underscores the evolving nature of the honors ideology and the structural changes occurring as a consequence of its evolution. Even though ideology is not exactly an “action”, it is a purposefully constructed outlook with certain specific goals and ideals as a foundation that determines and guides human action. The interorganizational structures, occurring with the diffusion of honors programs through higher education, are thus a reflection of certain aspects of the honors ideology.

How developed or even distinct are these structures? Can we discern tendencies of increasing homogeneity throughout the field, or does it display more complicated structural patterns? To answer that question, we utilize the four processes highlighted by DiMaggio (1983) as indicators of the degree of structuration (see Chapter 2). The

organizational field of honors programs seems to have been affected by almost all of the four structuration process components, i.e., increase in the level of interaction among organizations, increase in the load of information on organizations; emergence of a structure of domination and coalition, and development of a field ideology. As already pointed out, DiMaggio's last indicator, the development of a field ideology, has the primary and predominant factor in the origin and spread of honors programs ever since the 1920s. Adoption of this ideology has always gone hand in hand with the founding of new and the reconsideration of old honors programs.

Increased level of interaction and increased load of information on the organizations in the field has been ongoing since the first institution-wide honors programs were founded at state universities, and the then coordinating agency, ICSS, made persistent and continuous efforts, through numerous meetings, conferences and publications, to disseminate information about honors nationwide (see Chapter 3) . NCHC has inherited this mission from ICSS in an era of unprecedented proliferation of honors programs across the entire postsecondary spectrum. Interaction and information exchange currently take place above all during different forums on honors education. Most notably, this is the annual national conference organized by NCHC, but also different regional and theme-oriented conferences, such as the one organized biennially by Parkland Honors College on innovative issues in honors education.

Even though both interaction and information exchange seem to be making headway, the three studied cases show that these processes are more productive within the respective peer institutions' (or similar institutions of the same type, e.g., community colleges) subgroups than throughout the entire organizational field. Parkland

communicates more with its peer group of a dozen or so research universities than with others; Springfield interacts with the state colleges from the same state and also some other programs via the civic participation initiatives of its Center on Civic life; and Greenville regularly participates in an annual conference that fosters community college student research, and in sessions related to honors programs at community colleges at the NCHC national conferences. The nationwide field of honors programs is thus more like an amalgamation of sub-fields with discernibly different identities. Certainly, large research university honors programs have little in common with community college honors programs. As the analysis of Parkland shows, the structure and operation of this honors college is very strongly tied to its host institution. An honors program at a community college, or even at a four-year comprehensive school such as Springfield, would probably not benefit much from the experience of PHC. They just fit into different segments of the postsecondary hierarchy, being part and parcel of their host institutions. In some cases community college honors programs establish special articulation contracts with the state universities in their areas, and engage in intense interaction with them, but again, they do not normally interact with these universities' honors programs.

Certainly, these emerging patterns of interaction among honors programs call for a systematic policy making that acknowledges and stimulates them. This has obviously been acknowledged by NCHC in at least two ways. First, in designing the two official descriptions of a "fully developed" honors program and, quite recently, of a "fully developed" honors college. An underlying idea behind these documents is the diversity of programs and the impossibility to recommend a single model as appropriate for everyone. Second, by establishing three different committees on honors programs at large

universities, small four-year colleges, and two-year or community colleges.

Unfortunately, the existence of these committees has not translated yet into a more active policy toward stimulating interaction within these three basic groups through special conferences or meetings (NCHC Website). Furthermore, regardless of the seemingly abundant flow of information on honors programs (mainly through the publications of NCHC), a number of researchers (Long, 2002; Huggett, 2003; Achterberg, 2004b) have pointed to a lack of scholarly or theory-driven research on honors programs. Such research could raise the information exchange to a new level of seriousness.

Therefore, even though interaction and information exchange are active ongoing processes, they only underscore the mosaic character of the field. Achieving a complete homogeneity throughout the field is therefore not foreseeable in the near future, nor is it deemed appropriate in view of the differences between honors programs' host institutions. The structuration of the field of honors programs may thus be defined as depending on the structuration of the three subfields most clearly differentiated at present.

The emergence of patterns of coalition (not so much of domination, even though it seems to be a common knowledge who the "leaders" in each sub field are) is also restricted to peer subfields and rarely transcends these boundaries. A good illustrative example is provided by the civic education initiatives of Springfield Honors Program and its outgrowth, the Center for Civic Life. Although appropriate for any type of honors program, they attract participants mostly from similar state colleges.

Even with all the different aspects of structuration present within subfields of similar organizations, these interorganizational structures still have a long way to go

before achieving a high degree of homogeneity. This is evident from a brief overview of the structures existing in the peer groups of our three cases. Although they move toward achieving greater similarity, the process is still incomplete. Thus, the peer institutions of Parkland University, all big public research universities, host honors programs that could roughly be categorized as belonging to one of the following structures:

- a) dispersed honors programs in different departments and colleges (three institutions)
- b) a combination of an institution-wide general honors program during the first two years and separate programs at the different colleges afterwards (two institutions)
- c) unified institution-wide programs (four institutions).

The future trend is clearly in moving toward the third structure, as one of these programs has just demonstrated very recently. It used to have only dispersed honors programs in different colleges, and has now moved toward a university-wide honors program. Here it is counted in the third group.

The peer honors programs of Springfield also display considerable diversity of features, ranging from just a set of honors courses (similar to the Greenville General Honors Program), to a differentiation between general and upper honors, to setting up an honors college; from a mandatory community service component to required attendance of the program's meetings; from required core courses to supporting independent student initiatives (Website Information). As regards Greenville, the structural diversity is present even in this one case, especially after taking into consideration the departmental business

program and the internship offerings in addition to the two studied programs. The currently planned revision will make the General Honors look more like the Scholars Program, so obviously structure is in a dynamic state here, too.

The discussion above shows that the process of structuration is still far from complete in this organizational field, though it is certainly making progress. All this makes persistent policy efforts in enhancing interorganizational interaction and facilitating information exchange even more important.

CHAPTER 7

HONORS PROGRAMS, SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC STRATIFICATION

After analyzing the structural characteristics and operation of the studied cases, this chapter elaborates on their place in the larger higher education context and their role as agents of differentiation in an already stratified system. The question about the effect of these programs regarding issues of social mobility and inequality is the overarching theme of the following discussion.

Two Admissions Models

The studied honors programs display different degrees of selectivity, which form two models as regards their openness, both toward first-year applicants and students already enrolled at their host institutions. We could tentatively call them the exclusive and inclusive model, following the designation suggested by Geiger (2004). While Parkland Honors College and the Greenville Scholars Program, even with the significant differences between them, both belong to the exclusive type, Springfield and the Greenville General Honors Program gravitate more toward the inclusive model, though, again, in a different way. The following discussion focuses on the common aspects and diverging features of the studied programs from the point of view of their selectivity (and hence the different degree of their exclusiveness or inclusiveness).

Sufficient and adequate human and financial resources are a necessary prerequisite for building the selective or exclusive model. Parkland Honors College operates at a major research university with a student draw often transcending its state

(the ratio is roughly 80% in-state to 20% out-of-state students) and a very large general student population, which ensures a significant pool of highly qualified applicants. It relies on its merit scholarships and the reputation of certain academic programs and faculty in recruiting desirable students. In its turn, Greenville Scholars has the advantage of being hosted by a large, diverse and affluent metropolitan community. The community public schools are the chief feeders of the program, and selecting 25 sufficiently prepared and motivated freshmen is not a terribly difficult task, especially when they are offered free two-year college education, a free summer course in Cambridge, England, and are promised a successful and timely transfer to four-year colleges. Especially for low or middle-income families, this is certainly not an alternative to ignore in an area with a big state university and several private colleges that charge respectively over 10,000 and 20,000 dollars per-year tuition.

The two exclusive-type programs display certain major differences from one another. The Parkland Honors College follows a very selective model, but it also gives “second chances” to students attending its host institution. The sophomore and junior entry gates demonstrate a policy of recognizing merit not only as a function of past high-school achievement, but also as a quality possible to flourish later, during the college years. The availability of latter-stage entry gates also makes an important point in the argument for the college’s articulation with the other academic units at Parkland University. It is a sign of tribute to the opinion and expertise of the different departments, which can identify and nominate their best students for membership in PHC. Furthermore, the distribution of students in PHC clearly shows that the college is strongly affected by the reputation of the different majors and departments of its university. The

greatest numbers of honors students (42 to 45% on the average) come from science and engineering, the two most acclaimed research areas at Parkland. In this respect, the Honors College apparently mirrors the academic strength and renown of the different divisions of its host. This might be a source of potential tensions between PHC and academic colleges that do not have as many honors students. Student and faculty concerns about this situation are not unheard of at PHC.

Greenville Scholars Program, on the other hand, does not allow for a second “wave” of admissions once the freshman selection is over. Of all honors programs discussed here, it is the only one with a fixed mandatory curriculum, a structure that makes it practically impossible for anyone who has started on a different track to be smoothly included in it. It thus follows a more restrictive (and divisive) model with respect to its host institution. Maybe for this reason, quite a few Greenville College students have not heard of the Scholars Program: it is advertised only to the potentially eligible candidates, who in this case are the seniors of the dozen or so community public schools (GHS2, 2004; GSF, 2004). Of course, being just a two-year program is somewhat of a justification for not allowing multiple entry points. This, however, does not diminish the contrast in which the program stands to the community college mission of open access to all. Therefore, it may be appropriate for the program (and the college) administration to reconsider the degree of exclusiveness of Greenville Scholars, i.e., to introduce a second point of entry to the program.

The contrast in which this program stands to the other studied cases is even more pronounced when compared to the Springfield one. Both the Springfield and the General Honors program at Greenville also employ certain selection procedures. However, in the

Springfield case, especially with introducing the First-Year Excellence track, these are more ceremonial than real. At Greenville, too, requirements for enrolling in an honors course are not prohibitively high. Besides, they are only applicable to a portion of the students, with high achievers (winners of the Board of Trustees scholarships) and returning students with degrees automatically being eligible for them. Therefore, the Springfield and the Greenville General Honors are practically open to any interested and motivated student. The two first-year honors tracks at Springfield allow the program to conduct a selective admissions process and still to welcome anyone interested in being an honors student. Moreover, because attrition is identified as the biggest problem at Springfield University and the honors program has proven efficient in counteracting this trend, it makes constant efforts to attract students at any point of their college careers. The Greenville General Program is also targeted at a wide number of students, without any limitations. The revision now under way might change this situation a little by introducing higher participation and graduation requirements, but in many ways honors courses will still be accessible to a large population of students. Of course, the inclusive nature has its tradeoffs. The Greenville General Honors Program could be better suited for reaching out to larger masses of students, but it does not guarantee a successful and fast transfer, as the Scholars Program does. Springfield Honors Program, in its turn, continuously has to deal with the problem of keeping its upper classmen, considerable numbers of whom drop out because they cannot maintain the GPA requirements. Of course, both programs also have bountiful anecdotal stories of successful graduates who continued their studies at top colleges and universities (GHD1, 2003; GSD1, 2003; GSS, 2003).

The distinction between the exclusive and inclusive models demonstrates, at the specific organizational level, how tensions between two fundamental American beliefs regarding education have been enacted in a variety of organizational structures. On the one hand, there is the meritocratic belief that the best need to be educated in a special way, appropriate to their particular interests and goals. On the other, the egalitarian belief in the universal human right to education and the deeply engrained anti-elitism of American society is also reflected in a number of organizational features. These two beliefs are not just epitomized by the two models (i.e., the meritocratic drive in the exclusive model, and the egalitarian in the inclusive one) – they are also in a state of continuous dynamic tension within each of them. The selective nature of Parkland Honors College is counterbalanced by the fact that all honors courses and all its programmatic initiatives are open to the general student population. The Greenville Scholars Program, which follows the most restrictive and rigid model, is comparatively well tolerated only because the General Program had been in place for a couple of decades before it was founded. To that we should add the many smaller “honors” arrangements for students from certain majors or with special interests. This variety of “honors” opportunities somehow moderates the exclusive character of Greenville Scholars. Otherwise, such a small and restrictive program would not be acceptable and viable at a community college catering to thousands of nontraditional and minority students.

In the light of the issues this study seeks to address, it is obviously the exclusive model that might arouse questions concerning educational equity and the relationship between academic and social stratification. An exclusive honors program clearly draws a

dividing line between the experiences (and advantages) it affords its students and those available to the general student population of the host institution. The outcomes of this differentiation might be better chances for enrollment at prestigious graduate schools (Parkland) or a smooth and efficient transfer to a four-year institution (Greenville). The question that a sociologist of education might ask here is how this differentiation of experiences and future opportunities is related to the students' socio-economic background. Does a selective or exclusive honors program act as an agent of social reproduction and inequality or does it act more as a conductor of mobility? The answer to that question is to be sought again at the point of entry to such programs.

The Gatekeeping Function of Selective Honors Programs

Are Honors Programs Gatekeepers?

To view selective postsecondary institutions as gatekeepers means to understand the specific student selection strategies they adopt in order to control access to the highly desirable social statuses that their graduates enjoy. The selective or exclusive type of honors program identified in this chapter might in some cases come very close to an institution that performs a gatekeeping function (very much like the top private colleges and universities, which have traditionally been seen as the major gatekeepers). While prior research has extensively studied the student selection policies of the prestigious private colleges, there have been no studies of how these policies might be similar or different in selective honors programs.

What are the major prior research findings regarding elite private institutions? Throughout the 20th century, student selection policies of the top private colleges and

universities have undergone a fundamental evolution toward meritocracy as a guiding principle (Jencks & Riesman, 1968; Riesman, 1975; Karabel, 1984; Karen, 1985, 2002; Cookson & Persell, 1985, Kingston & Lewis, 1990a; Lemann, 1999). However, social class is still recognized as an important and enduring factor in the process college choice, application and selection. (Bratlinger, 2003; McDonough, 1997; Clark, 1960; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Karabel & Astin, 1975; Karabel, 1984; Karen, 1990, 2002; Kingston & Lewis, 1990b; Hearn, 1990; see also discussion in Chapter 2).

In contrast to selective private colleges, selective honors programs are not independent organizations: they are structural units within a larger college or university, and they share many of the resources and organizational characteristics (e.g., faculty, facilities, many aspects of the institutional mission and goals) of their host institutions. Therefore, an important factor determining an honors program's potential of performing a gatekeeping function is the type of its host institution. Most truly selective honors programs operate primarily within large public universities, which are less selective than the top private colleges and universities. They have much larger freshman classes (Geiger, 2004) and generally large and heterogeneous student populations. At the same time, however, the 35 public research universities enrolling the greatest number of high-scoring students (over 700 on the math or verbal section of the SAT) and the respective 35 top private schools enroll roughly the same number of superior students (Geiger, 2002, 2004). The top public research universities, the n, have a sufficient number of high-ability students to accept in their honors programs. (Maybe they have them exactly because they have honors programs.) Furthermore, the top public research universities have a highly reputed faculty and a plenitude of resources, and usually a few very

prestigious undergraduate programs (often in the fields of sciences and engineering). All this makes them a truly propitious ground for developing selective and prestigious honors programs. Indeed, the large public research universities have been the first and ideal venues for such programs, and they have by now almost universally adopted the honors program model (Baker et al., 2000). These are the universities that need honors programs as signs of quality and as marketing tools in the competition with the private colleges and universities for superior students (Long, 2002). They also can afford to develop them to the fullest by recruiting students from all or most of their majors, employing a variety of curricular innovations, individualized academic advising, and special co-curricular programs.

Smaller non-selective colleges also establish honors programs, even though at lower rates (about half of these institutions have such programs, according to Baker et al, 2000). The number of high-ability students (by the standards of the most selective honors programs) in these institutions, however, is often insignificant, and they cannot afford the selection rigor of the big universities. This was clearly demonstrated by the Springfield case (see Chapter 5). Additionally, they often cannot afford a full administrative support and the variety of curricular forms practiced at large universities. Regardless of this, they still aim at accommodating the needs of their “best” (however they define this notion) students within the range of their institutional and faculty resources and in keeping with the honors ideology. Additionally, they also boost the image of their host institution. As the Springfield case shows, the honors program is highly regarded by its host institution because it helps keep the students involved and counteracts attrition processes. In this specific case, an added benefit of institutionalizing civic involvement through the

creation of a specific center was also observed. Similarly, honors programs at community colleges work for reaffirming their image as comprehensive institutions and refuting old theories that associate them with prevalent vocational objectives and “cooling-out” academic aspirations (Clark, 1960; Karabel, 1977; Brint & Karabel, 1989, 1991; Dougherty, 1990; McCartan, 1983).

Obviously, honors programs at smaller institutions and community colleges can play significant roles within the structure of their host institutions. In terms of their macro effect, however, they lack the organizational potential as well as a satisfactory position in the postsecondary prestige hierarchy. Therefore, they do not have the necessary foundation, i.e., the “right” host institution, to perform a gatekeeping function. Thus, the Springfield Honors Program has some very important functions to play, but gatekeeping is not one of them, and the picture would not be much more different if it were a more selective type. As if conscious of its “predicament”, SHP has chosen a frankly opposite behavior to the gatekeeping one, i.e., a strategy of widely opening its doors to any student willing to contribute his or her effort and demonstrate involvement in the community. By doing this, it obviously tries to maximize the function it is really efficient in performing, i.e., the increase of student retention at its host university.

The selective Greenville Scholars Program is also not positioned to perform a gatekeeping function. No matter how selective or exclusive an honors program at a community college is, its major goal is the students’ transfer to four-year undergraduate programs. This function is more likely to be defined along the lines of providing access and social mobility to academically prepared low (or low-to-middle) income students by offering them two years of free college education. By and large, the students who attend

this program are also eligible to attend the major state university and/or some of the private colleges in that area, though they probably would not be eligible for merit scholarships at these schools. (Even if they are, their scholarship would not cover all their expenses, and they would still need to pay a substantial tuition bill.) Financial considerations are among the major factors shaping their decision to enroll in Greenville Scholars. Clearly, then, even though selective, the Greenville Scholars Program will not be used as an illustration in the following discussion.

Therefore, the potential function of being a gatekeeping mechanism can be exercised only by a small number of existing honors programs, i.e., the selective programs functioning at large research universities that are also somewhat selective. (The numbers for Parkland for 2004 are 31,000 applications, 17,000 admitted, and 6,000 enrolled). Since selective honors programs are internal concentrations of high-ability students, otherwise not so easily achieved at a public institution, they can produce substantial peer effects that can further have a significant effect on the quality of the curriculum and hence the overall institutional prestige (Geiger, 2002, 2004). They also promote a special ethos of the “collegiate scholar”, a subculture virtually identical to the student culture at elite private colleges, on large public university campuses (Ellis, Parelius, & Parelius, 1971; Ellis & Manderscheid, 1974). Thus, by attracting students whose academic qualifications are commensurate with those of students at elite private colleges, honors programs at public research universities boost the image of their host institution in the market competition for students, faculty, and funds. The experiences they promise and provide tout them as “Ivy League programs at state school prices” (Sullivan & Randolph, 1994; see also Lord, 1998).

Therefore, only one of our cases is in a position to be a gatekeeper. Moreover, Parkland Honors College is probably one of the few honors programs in the country that have the potential to play a pronounced gatekeeping function by exercising control over access to a potentially very successful academic and/or professional trajectory. A very selective program functioning at a major research university, it could be one of the best cases nationwide to use as an illustration of gatekeeping conducted by an honors program. As shown in Chapter 5, the profile of its students is very close to that of an elite private college, and it compares very well with Ivy League schools in its students' academic credentials (see Table 5.6 on p.113). Therefore, the remaining part of the discussion will focus on the nature of Parkland's gatekeeping mechanisms.

Selective Honors Programs as Gatekeepers: the Case of Parkland

On the one hand, very selective honors programs at large research universities are concentrations of super students and hence could be considered as a second major avenue (besides the Ivy Leagues) toward high social status (even though they are still difficult to compare to Ivy Leagues in the public consciousness). At the same time, their distinctive institutional identity has always been different from that of the elite private colleges. The unique ideology that was laid as their foundation and also the specific charters of their parent institutions are the other major factors that have shaped this identity. Therefore, a discussion of a gatekeeping model at a selective honors program has to deal with the following issues:

1. Honors programs as **selective concentrations of students**. Some major prior research findings will be summarized to highlight what is known about the gatekeeping function of selective colleges.

2. The role of the **honors ideology** in interpreting merit, i.e., the emphasis on superior academic ability and research potential.
3. The role of the **host institution's charter** (Meyer, 1970; see discussion on p.19) in affecting the specific "make" of the student pool and, subsequently, class of its honors program.

The Modern Selective Admissions Mechanism

Substantial research on the issue of entry to elite colleges and selective admissions has been conducted from a class reproduction or status conflict perspective, viewing status group struggle as the primary impetus behind the modern system of student recruitment. The relationship of merit and class and their relative importance is at the heart of a few major studies of selective college admissions (Karabel & Astin, 1975; Synnott, 1979; Karabel, 1984; Karen, 1990; Kingston & Lewis, 1990b; Hearn, 1990; McDonough, 1997), all of which acknowledge the multi-faceted and multi-layered nature of this process.

The obvious effect of social background and class is a major challenge in the gatekeeping function of selective colleges, which adhere to an ideology celebrating individual merit and achievement. The degree to which the admissions mechanism can be defined as class biased has been explored in two seminal studies: Karabel's (1984) socio-historical analysis of the transformation of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton in 1918-1940 and Karen's (1990) case study of the Harvard selection process as a gatekeeping mechanism. Karabel (1984) views the gatekeeping processes that occurred between the two world wars at the Big Three in the light of status group conflict and organizational interests largely determined by the "limited institutional autonomy" of these colleges in

their reliance upon external constituencies for essential resources. A major implication of this model is the strategy of “social closure” employed by these organizations in order to protect the privileges of their “cultural arbitrary”, the upper-middle class. Karen’s (1990) political organizational perspective, on the other hand, is an attempt to transcend the limits of both structural-functionalist and class reproduction theories in moving the focus of the analysis to the organizational level.

Rather than focusing on the use of class or merit as *the* criterion that elite colleges use to select students, we must analyze the origin, and maintenance of specific selection criteria *and* see these criteria as a function of the interests of various groups, both within the institution and within its organizational field. (Karen, 1990, p.228)

Karen (1990) presents gatekeeping as a complicated black-box process, in which both class and merit mutually but inconsistently (in different degrees regarding different groups of applicants) determine the selection outcomes. Ultimately, the whole process is shaped by political considerations and the admissions officers’ perception of what is “best” for the institution. Taking into account the dynamics of the shifting socio-political context in relation to the “bounded” choices that gatekeepers make, Karen adopts Bourdieu’s (1984) focus on making classifications and constructing categories that “process social reality” and maintain “unequal distribution of power”(Karen, 1990, p.334). Changes in the organizational field, which usually reflect changes in power relations, lead to changes in the classification system, as the establishment of the racial/ethnic categories by the Harvard Admissions Office in the 1960s aptly illustrates. In view of these considerations, the modern gatekeeping mechanism of Harvard operates

on meritocratic foundations and “tends to select students who are likely to be academically successful, regardless of their other characteristics”(p.237). However, the best chance of being selected have candidates who satisfy some other constituency *and* are high academic achievers at the same time, “since they can be legitimated as meritocratic selection” while satisfying some socio-political organizational mandates (p.237). Among those special categories are minorities, athletes, children of alumni and faculty members, and, even though at a much lesser degree than in the past, alumni of elite prep schools.

Karen’s perspective on gatekeeping seems to work quite well in evaluating selective honors programs as gatekeepers. As the Parkland case shows, the student selection process in highly selective honors programs can also be viewed as a black box, involving a multiplicity of considerations regarding the different categories that construct a specific reality and reflect the nature of this organizational model. The composition of these categories, however, is obviously different at Parkland, due to its different socio-historical and organizational context (and hence the different organizational field to which it belongs). Children of alumni are not likely to be recognized as special categories at Parkland (or in any other honors program). Prep school graduates are not a relevant applicant group either. Furthermore, for the admissions staff at Parkland it is obviously a higher priority to discover a high-potential and high-ability student from a disadvantaged background than a candidate who might have some relationship to the institution (although such cases are not totally disregarded, of course). It is also more important to identify candidates with superior academic record in as many disciplines as possible than prodigies with ingenious talents in one discipline, e.g., mathematics, but low performance

in the humanities. At the same time, a nationally recognized fiction writer will almost certainly be admitted to Harvard (Karen, 1985).

Therefore, even if the selection process of an honors program may look a lot like the one at an elite private college, with a complex mix of categories applied, the logic of ascribing importance to specific categories is different. The degree of this importance largely results from the specific ideology that infuses the honors program organizational model and from the charter of the respective host institution.

Educational Ideology

In one of the most thorough and convincing critiques of Karabel's status conflict analysis of the Big Three transformation, Farnum (1997) suggests transcending the purely material aspect of organizational interests as depending on specific status groups for resources. Instead, he argues, one should focus on ideological factors such as educational philosophy and values, as an integral part of the organizational interests that dictate the gatekeeping process. This combination of a neo-Weberian and an institutional approach to the driving forces behind organizational functions is especially important when considering honors programs, which were established upon unique ideological foundations.

Even though honors programs radically changed their organizational nature in the 1960s, the ideology behind their establishment has been preserved since the 1920s. It still stemmed from the same criticism of the curriculum and the grading system, which neglected the needs of the superior students. At the same time, it increasingly envisioned the big public universities, which attracted many superior students of more modest social backgrounds.

This educational ideology clearly defines the gatekeeping function of the modern selective honors program as one built firmly on the principles of meritocracy, and placing a special value on the academic superiority and the *academic* well-roundedness of the students. Since the first distinctive feature of Parkland Honors College is associated with the rigorous academic requirements in all subject areas, the most important prerequisite for admission is an academically superior high school record. This means not only stellar GPA, but above all a very strong academic schedule, featuring the maximum number of the most demanding courses offered by the respective high school. Exceptions can be made for lower SATs, if the case is of an otherwise very bright student coming from a relatively disadvantaged background. Exceptions are never made, however, about a less than superior high-school record (related to the specific high-school context).

The essay is another important component of the application, which Parkland Honors College interprets somewhat differently from some elite private colleges. It is evaluated not so much as a key to the student's unique personality, but rather as reflecting the student as an independent thinker. Excessive demonstrations of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1996) do not really impress the admissions coordinator at PHC (PCS1, 2002), which is another indicator of a certain de-emphasis of upper-class markers during the PHC selection process.

Institutional Identity and Host University Charter

The third factor playing a formative role in the gatekeeping strategies of Parkland Honors College is the link with its host university's charter. Large public research universities are chartered to provide education in a variety of academic areas (with an emphasis on the more technical and practical ones, e.g., engineering) to a large part of

their state's population. These universities were founded and exist in an opposition to any principles of social exclusiveness. Parkland's original charter was also one of a land-grant university founded as the main agricultural college in its state. Even in its modern guise as a leading research university, its traditional commitment to the ideals of education for the masses and equality of opportunity is in a sharp contrast to the Ivy Leagues' image of elite institutions. This carries some important implications for Parkland Honors College. Even though PHC boasts of educating some of the brightest students by national standards, it also emphasizes the atmosphere of the public university as an asset to its overall environment. As a matter of fact, some of the interviewed Parkland honors students underscored this atmosphere and lack of "stuffiness" as a major factor that has positively affected their or their friends' decisions to enroll at PHC, even though a few were also accepted at elite private colleges. Many honors students participate in university-wide activities and belong to university-wide organizations. Many of the Honors College initiatives, too, are advertised to non-honors students. Despite its exclusive character, then, PHC also makes persistent efforts to project a self-image of an organization that is part and parcel of its host university rather than simply an "elite" college. Does it also do that regarding its students' social backgrounds?

The relation between host university charter and a student's social background manifests itself as early as the phase of self-selection. As Karen (1984) writes, one of the strongest effects of the charter of an elite institution such as Harvard is that "people eliminate themselves from the competition for seats at Harvard before Harvard has a chance to eliminate them"(p. 54). He explains this process with the specificity of different social groups' "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1984; see also discussion in Chapter 2):

The habitus is structured in such a way that some people will see Harvard as virtually risk-free, while others will see it as very high risk. ... It is possible that they fear that if they attend Harvard, they will have to relinquish all the people – friends, parents, and relatives – that provided the structural support for their habitus. (p.56)

The difference in charters undoubtedly results in a different social composition of the applicant pools of Harvard and an institution such as Parkland University. Of course, the applicant pool for PHC is still a third case, combining students from the typical pool of Parkland with students who also apply to elite private colleges and would not have applied to Parkland if it did not have an honors college. Therefore, at the stage of self-selection, the composition of the applicant pool at PHC will be somewhat of a mix of students headed to elite schools (and perceiving PHC as such) and students whose habitus has probably prevented them from applying to these schools. As the Dean of PHC noted, a few of the students she knew were not fully cognizant of their own ability on a larger scale, and their aspirations were below their potential. This is a problem that PHC tries to “fix” (PD3, 2005).

For both types of students, then, the fact of applying to PHC is, in and of itself, significant. For the former, because they have recognized PHC as an elite college on a par with their other choices. For the latter, because they have probably challenged their habitus by applying to a “different” kind of college, while at the same time feeling comfortable about its being a part of a public university.

As far as the selection proper is concerned, the impact of the public university’s charter is reflected in an enhanced sensitivity to socio-economic differences and a policy

of encouraging applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds. As pointed out by the selection coordinator, a foundational principle in the student selection mechanism at PHC is the rating of applicants *in relation to* their background (above all, high school quality). This presupposes an expert knowledge of the entire secondary school system in the area that supplies most of the applicants to the university (not just the Honors College, since exceptions to the usual number of feeder schools might always occur). Admissions decisions are often affected not just by how much a student has achieved but also by how much she has overcome (PCS1, 2002).

Therefore, a privileged social background, in and of itself, does not play any role, or sometimes may even be a negative factor, in the PHC selection process. Of course, we know from prior research that the effect of class and social background can never be entirely neutralized, if only because some of the student's background characteristics are internalized as cultural capital, recognized as academic ability and sanctioned by grades and test scores (see Chapter 2). Under the current meritocratic social system, however, selective honors programs as exemplified by PHC seem to be offering a more socially equitable gatekeeping mechanism than elite private colleges. This obviously applies less to high-achieving students who belong to some highly sought after groups such as minorities or athletes (Karen, 1990). It concerns mainly high-ability students from middle-income families in the same state, who either do not apply to elite private colleges because of high costs or are not accepted there because something in their "personality profile" was not deemed exceptional or unique enough. Such students, Geiger (2004) writes, constitute a "protected local market" for universities such as Parkland and its Honors College. "For middle-class students who qualify for little financial aid, education

at a state's flagship university, or even at out-of-state public university, can provide high quality at a compelling saving" (p.91).

Within a system that avowedly adheres to the principles of meritocracy, selective honors programs could be expected to act as the carriers of these principles to the fullest in venues that formally espouse them but, by virtue of their large size, cannot take full advantage of them. Parkland Honors College is such a case. By placing a stronger emphasis on meritocracy and academic superiority and displaying a heightened attention to any indicators of these, it reasserts the image of its host university as an advocate of excellence (a highly valued attribute in a meritocracy) and enhances its competitiveness on the market for superior students. At the same time, compared to the Ivy League colleges, it is less class biased and socially exclusive, if only because it has no traditional links (via private schools and alumni clubs) with the old social elite. Moreover, its sensitivity to differences in social background and above all high school quality gives us a reason to argue that its gatekeeping functions also include facilitating the social mobility of academically talented students of less privileged social backgrounds.

Of course, it should also be pointed out that, especially concerning Parkland, there certainly is more to do in this direction. A simple example illustrates that. The number of first-generation college students in the same "class of 2005", which we have been using throughout the study as an example, is very small. Out of 96 applicants 35 were accepted and only 11 enrolled at PHC. The selection coordinator surmised that the reason for the small number of students who matriculated at Parkland is their lower income and the lack of competitive financial aid offer from Parkland. It could be that some of them decided to enroll in prestigious private colleges, which offered them better financial packages. In

such a situation there is little PHC can do, since it does not and hardly ever will have the resources that private colleges use in attracting desirable students. However, it is also possible that some of these students did not enroll just because they could not pay their bills. It is potential cases such as these that need to be put in the center of the College's attention. PHC's efforts should be aimed even more at developing special policies on assisting such students. Such practices currently exist (a few low-income students receive some need-based aid in addition to their merit scholarship), but they could be much more persistent.

Conductors of Inequity or Catalysts of Mobility and Innovation?

After looking at the selection strategies honors programs (both exclusive and inclusive) adopt as parts of a stratified higher education, it is now important to address the question how, with their entire operation, they impact higher education. By definition, honors programs increase the total degree of differentiation in higher education. The more subtle aspect of this process, however, is whether this differentiation is making mass higher education more inequitable, depriving the majority of students of substantial resources, which are concentrated in honors programs and made available only to honors students. Or, on the contrary, whether honors programs make valuable contributions to most of the constituencies in their colleges and universities. Ultimately, what can these programs, which are so widespread throughout the whole system of higher education, be expected to bring to it and in what direction are they likely to shift its development?

In the research and more popular literature on honors programs one can find quite polarized answers to these questions. In their most distilled essence, the two opposite

sides consist in accusing honors programs of being inequitable (“elitist”) versus pointing out the positive and novel experiences they spread into the entire host institution (Davis, 1989; Sperber, 2000a, 2000b; Digby, 2000; Selingo, 2002). The most extreme criticism of honors programs states that they are taking the best resources available at a university away from all other programs and giving them to students who need them the least, since they are already advantaged by being identified as “superior”. Thus, Sperber (2000a, 2000b) emphasizes the “striking contrast” between honors and non-honors undergraduate programs at the same university (2000a, p.135). In his opinion, all generally praised features of honors programs, such as small class size, the seminar class format, access to full faculty members, and the emphasis on knowledge production versus reproduction, only prove, by contrast, how neglected the general undergraduate curriculum at large universities is. These programs, he argues, are just a dust in the eyes of the public and a prestige tool for the institutions obsessed with improving their rankings.

[F]or Big-time U officials to pretend that an honors college or program will benefit all undergraduates is worse than hypocrisy, it is bold-faced lying. How can an honors program help “the entire undergraduate experience” at Maryland or any other school when it siphons off the best students as well as many of the best faculty teachers? Numerous experts have commented on the well-known phenomenon of removing the brightest and most articulate students from a course, and leaving the rest, as well as the instructor, to sink. (Sperber, 2000b, p.138)

These accusations may be not totally unfounded. Having in mind the immense diversity of forms honors programs take and the great number of institutions they operate in, it is not difficult to imagine a situation just like the one described by Sperber. Overall,

however, it seems that his accusations are a little extreme, and it is more often the case that the founders and leaders of honors programs take steps in counteracting these tendencies. In a reaction letter to Sperber's article (2000a), Digby (2000) summarizes many honors programs' features as they exist "in reality":

In reality honors students participate in the main stream of college-course programming to a very large extent...At most colleges, the honors program constitutes only a fifth to a quarter of the total undergraduate degree. This means that honors students...become leavening agents in all of their courses outside the program. This is a tremendous benefit to any institution...Not only do honors students filter their talents and perceptions into the general college or university offerings, but honors courses also filter into the mainstream. At many institutions...honors seminars are testing grounds for innovative courses subsequently adopted as departmental electives. (Digby, 2000)

The cases from this study confirm this latter view. Parkland currently offers about 250 honors courses open to honors and non-honors students alike. The only privilege of the honors students is that they can register for them before everyone else and thus there is a theoretical possibility that some courses are filled before non-honors students can register for them. It is difficult to gauge exactly how this works, because in many cases the ratio between honors and non-honors students depends on the students' major, what other honors courses are offered during the same semester, or simply the students' preferences during the specific semester. In any case, a lot of honors courses enroll a mix of honors and non-honors students. It is also not uncommon that sometimes some honors courses remain unfilled. At the same time, honors students do not take only honors

courses. Some of the courses they take are the same introductory two- or three-hundred-student courses that anyone else has to take. And again, it is not uncommon to have very good teachers and experiences in non-honors courses as well as in honors ones (and vice versa, unfortunately).

The honors courses at Springfield are very few. The emphasis of this program's academic component after the first year is on turning non-honors courses into "augmentations" by doing extra work than on selecting honors courses proper. Moreover, trying to get as many students as possible involved in it, this program really does not function as a stratifying agent. Of course, it has its standards and aims at identifying more students who would be motivated and persistent enough to work up to them.

Honors courses at Greenville are also open to everyone who satisfies the minimum academic requirements. Of course, the picture is very different for the Scholars Program, which might be close to the case that Sperber describes, were there no other honors opportunities at Greenville College.

The scholarships given to honors students, Sperber continues, are another injustice, since they do not take into account the students' real need for financial aid. "Again, this money could help regular undergraduates in the traditional form of need-based aid" (p.140). This situation is certainly common to the most selective honors programs. Many public universities have been drawn into an intense competition for students with elite private colleges and universities, and the chief "weapon" in this competition most often is merit aid (Geiger, 2004). Even though public universities do not have the boundless resources of elite private schools, they have to do the same in order to attract bright students who otherwise would enroll at other schools. Of course,

honors programs at these universities are the best strategic players in this competition, hence the merit scholarships they offer. All three of the studied cases offer some kind of merit aid. At Parkland over a third of the Academic Excellence Scholarships comes from the private gift made for the founding of the College. The benefactors had very specific restrictions on how the money was to be used. Scholarships for all honors students are the major part of the multi-million gift, complemented by smaller grants for international studies and research and innovative honors courses, e.g., a course on global trends and issues. In addition to the merit scholarships, however, PHC persistently raises money for need-based aid, and during the present academic year (2004-05) it has granted an additional support to 19 low-income students from supplemental endowments.

Parkland's central administration has also invested considerable resources in the Honors College budget, which surpasses three million dollars. The total university budget, however, is in the billions. Therefore, even if we redistribute all the financial resources invested into the Honors College throughout the rest of the university, the overall gains of the non-honors student population (95%) would be negligible. Clearly, the picture at Parkland (and probably at many other honors programs functioning in similarly complex organizational environments) is quite elaborate and multifaceted, and the argument for taking resources away from non-honors students seems a little oversimplified.

Of course, it would be hard to deny that being a part of Parkland Honors College does not in itself give something special to the students. What matters here is probably not so much material or financial in nature, but is more symbolic and psychological (Steenstra, 1985; Shushok, 2002), i.e., more a matter of how the students perceive their experiences, feel about themselves, and what level of confidence they have. This is where

the special honors “charter” (Meyer, 1970; Kamens, 1977) has the most impact. The scholarships, priority registration, the faculty advisors, and the special mentoring programs with honors alumni are undoubtedly important factors bolstering the effect of this charter. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to measure this effect – as it is difficult to measure the effect of attending a selective private college versus a large public university. Some hold that the difference is significant (Hoxby, 1998), others—that it is not (Dale & Krueger, 1999). One major consequence of being in the Honors College, however, is certain: the first-hand experience in research. Regarding the over 80% of the honors graduates who continue into graduate schools, this is an immense asset. At the same time, however, quite a few interviewed students pointed out that they knew many other smart and exceptional students who did not want to be a part of the Honors College. They also pointed out that a super large and structurally complex university such as Parkland offers a tremendous variety of opportunities for different types of people, and the Honors College, though being an excellent place to belong to, is certainly not unique in providing these great opportunities (PS, 2005).

For Springfield, as the discussion throughout the study has shown, it is simply difficult to make a case for a stratifying agent taking away resources from the general student population. Moreover, none of the specific accusations Sperber (2000a, 2000b) raises actually apply to this program. A program of modest financial resources, it does not rely on material incentives in recruiting students. It is also not a part of any “selectivity sweepstakes” (Geiger, 2004), so it does not “worry” about getting those super SAT-scorers. It rather seeks to identify students who are motivated enough to enroll or

who would love to be challenged with the unique civic foundation of the program. The more students like this, the better.

In this respect, a couple of changes might make the selective Greenville Scholars Program more open toward the wider community college constituency. It is a very small program operating at a large college (50 students out of 15,000). It really does some very good things for its students, and it most probably does not deprive all others of substantial resources. As a matter of fact, Greenville is a very complex college with many different programs and institutes, and resources are certainly not concentrated in its honors programs. However, the way it is set up leaves room for making it a more equitable program. The students it enrolls are not the typical community college population. They are academically well prepared, and the transfer to a four-year college for them does not seem to be an extremely difficult goal. On the other hand, among the larger student population, there certainly are students who could take advantage of this program, even if they enroll later or take one or two more semesters to complete it. Moreover, this may be possible to do without having to invest much more money. The Cambridge trip, whose budget is equal to or slightly bigger than the two-year tuition of a whole class of Scholars, could be made only partially paid for by the Program. The students then could choose whether to go to England or not. A simple revision such as this one might make the program more open to and maybe more likable by the entire college community. Of course, the General Program will always be there at Greenville with its variety of courses for different kinds of aspiring students to complement and mitigate the image of the small exclusive Scholars Program.

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE (CONCLUDING REMARKS)

Beginning as a cluster of curricular innovations designed for the brightest students at several dozen colleges, in the past half a century honors programs have spanned the entire postsecondary spectrum, concentrating primarily in the public sector, which is the pillar of mass higher education. Under both institutional and technical influences, stemming from their host institutions, these programs have differentiated their functions to better accommodate the goals of their host institutions as well as the needs of the (different groups of) students who matriculate in them. The three studied cases of honors programs functioning at a large research university, a state-owned comprehensive university, and a community college, illustrate compellingly this differentiation. They all share a common foundational ideology and some basic structural constituents, yet each one has its own agenda and performs its unique functions.

Functional Differentiation

The large university honors program functions as its host university's major strategy and "weapon" in the competition for high-ability students with elite private colleges. It also allows the most academically talented students attending the same university to achieve a better realization of their abilities by joining it after the first or second college year. Thus it conducts a policy of actively seeking and catering for the most outstanding students of its university, a function which transcends the narrow marketing one. Moreover, focusing on innovation in the undergraduate curriculum and setting as a goal the spread of this innovation to the "non-honors" university community,

it clearly transcends even further the notion of being a closed-society, elitist type of organization.

The honors program at the state-owned comprehensive university has taken on a different task. By building a model of student self-governance and emphasizing student engagement and civic participation, it helps its host university to keep its students, and it also helps its students from dropping out from college. Thus it plays an important social mobility role in strengthening the chances of low-income students to get a college degree.

The community college honors program(s) play more than one function, in accord with the variety of functions a community college sets as its goals vis-à-vis its different student subgroups. The honors courses of the General Honors Program are designed to provide personal enrichment to adult students with degrees and stimulate the intellectual development of academically qualified traditional-age students on a college-transfer track. The small exclusive Scholars Program performs the latter function in a more efficient way, binding it to the immediate goal of transferring these students after two academic years in the community college. It also performs a social mobility function by providing two years of free college education (virtually no different from that at the four-year schools where most of the students end up matriculating anyway) to students for whom the tuition cost at most four-year colleges is prohibitively high. It also plays a marketing function in giving the community college more prestige by affirming its potential to attract academically prepared students, thus “raising” it into the market domain of the four-year state colleges.

Drawing together this study's findings about the three studied cases, as well as honors programs in general, several major aspects of their roles concerning students, host institutions, and the entire higher education system, could be summarized as follows.

Roles and Significance of Honors Programs

Honors programs boost the motivation of their students for their further realization, both academically and professionally. They provide them with a "shortcut" to institutional resources (e.g., honors courses, faculty members, counselors, research facilities, information about scholarships, internships, etc.) that are available to everyone but usually only a minority of students takes advantage of. Some tangible advantages, such as priority registration, merit scholarships, and research grants, often reinforce the "special" status honors students enjoy at their schools.

However, by giving these perks to honors students, honors programs do not deprive non-honors students of (substantial) resources. They may even benefit motivated non-honors students who take honors courses or participate in co-curricular honors initiatives. Also, honors students take more than half of their required academic workload in regular, non-honors classes, where they interact with non-honors students. This in itself may be a further benefit to non-honors students.

Honors programs (ideally, as a function of many factors, e.g., resources, faculty initiative, and administrative support) facilitate the spread of innovative ideas about undergraduate teaching and learning across the entire host institution.

Honors programs increase the overall degree of stratification in higher education, but this stratification is not as significant as the one *between entire* institutions. Whether

one goes to Harvard or a second or third-tier state college probably has more bearing on one's future social destinations than whether one has or has not been a part of Big State University's Honors Program (and even less so in respect to smaller and community colleges).

An ineluctable motif of this research is the recognition that, praised or criticized, honors programs are here to stay. They are a pervasive organizational structure that needs to be accepted and made the most of by the entire higher education community. Honors programs may be the finishing touch in an internal differentiation trend that started with the massification of higher education. The time may not be very far away when they become universal in the mass higher education sector. A plausible question, then, might be to ask if there is anything beyond this internal differentiation. Paradoxically, more *internal* differentiation may also mean less hierarchical distance *between* institutions (especially those situated not very far from one another in the prestige ladder). Parkland may be dozens of places below Princeton or Penn on the *U S News and World Report* rankings list, but its Honors College comes very close, is in fact almost an equal, to them. Even inclusive programs such as Springfield might indirectly play a role in raising the perceived quality of their universities by helping them improve important institutional characteristics such as retention and graduation rates. Ultimately, honors programs may also become a part of a reverse trend in which “the differences between [top] schools and the next tier down have never been smaller” (Easterbrook, 2004; see also Samuelson, 2005), this holding true all the way across the entire landscape of postsecondary institutions.

This trend is not necessarily well accepted by the public. Researchers and policy makers have pointed out that its effects might be quite disturbing for the society at large. The quest for prestige, they say, may jeopardize the traditional responsibility of public universities to serve the masses of people and to be agents of social mobility (Newman & Couturier, 2002; Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004; Lovett, 2005). Honors programs, which are at the forefront of this quest, should therefore do their best to keep the balance between these two processes.

Implications for Future Research

A central finding of this study, which leaves an ample opportunity for further research, is the dynamic nature of the honors programs' organizational field. The processes taking place in it point to a few possible developments. What final patterns of subfields will emerge? Are they going to become more homogeneous, having in mind the lack of normative legislation (in most states) regarding honors programs? Are honors colleges going to become the prevalent model in the subfield of the large research universities? How will community college honors programs evolve, given the multitude of functions of their host institutions? Will small college honors programs increasingly emphasize civic education? All these questions are worth exploring on a larger scale and in greater detail.

A lot of issues regarding honors programs and stratification remain unexplored. A more detailed study of the efforts of honors programs in counteracting social inequality would be an important complement to the studies of stratification and social mobility in higher education.

As regards smaller colleges, a more detailed study of the effects of different honors programs on their students and host institutions could be an important contribution to the future policy making in this area. Given the diversity of currently existing structures, some findings about the ones that work best might help honors programs' leaders to capitalize on them and make their programs more viable.

Implications for Policy

This research has identified several areas in the operation of honors programs that deserve more persistent work on the part of policy makers and administrators.

The first important issue revolves around the need to overcome the image of honors programs as being just marketing tools (Long, 2001; Selingo, 2002; Sperber, 2000a, 2000b) and to emphasize their roles as conductors of innovative practices that benefit everyone at their host institutions. This could be done in a number of ways: by increasing the number and raising the quality of their honors courses and giving more opportunities to non-honors students to participate in them, by exchanging ideas about innovative practices with the other departments and helping them institute these innovations, and, generally, by gearing their curricular and co-curricular programs more toward a cooperation with other units from their host institutions. Of course, such a policy presupposes the reciprocal recognition and effort on the part of other departments and, above all, the central college or university administration.

A second major set of issues is related to what honors programs could do as agents of social mobility, in keeping with the public mission of their host universities and colleges. Obviously, they could be even more proactive in the search for

academically talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds. They could take the initiative in working with high schools in poor areas toward achieving this goal. Raising funds for more need-based scholarships is another worthwhile strategy, however challenging this may be to pursue in the public sector. Furthermore, enrolling more disadvantaged students could be achieved though working with the other departments in identifying such students already enrolled at the same university. Having more than one point of entry is always a better option in recruiting honors students, especially for the programs that have established an exclusive admissions model.

Finally, regarding the entire organizational field of honors programs, it is clearly stratified into subfields. The type of the host institution remains the most powerful predictor of an honors program gravitating toward one or another subfield. Therefore, the current policies of NCHC should also be more pro-active in facilitating the cooperation and communication between different programs in view of this differentiation. For example, conferences for honors programs from similar institutions (e.g., honors programs from the state systems of higher education) would probably be of more help to them than meetings at which they are expected to exchange ideas with organizations with whom they have very little in common. (Because, as this study shows, *technically* honors programs can be very different from one another, even though they share a common ideology.) While no one would question the necessity to gather everyone involved in the honors movement together at least once a year (at a national conference), smaller and more frequent events should probably pay more tribute to the naturally occurring coalitions among peer institutions' honors programs.

These are just a few suggestions that have emerged from the speculations of this study. At the same time, honors programs undoubtedly present a rich possibility for explorations in both education theory and policy. This research is yet to come.

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APPENDIX A:

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED HONORS PROGRAM

No one model of an honors program can be superimposed on all types of institutions. However, there are characteristics which are common to successful, fully developed honors programs. Listed below are those characteristics, although not all characteristics are necessary for an honors program to be considered a successful and/or fully developed honors program.

- A fully developed honors program should be carefully set up to accommodate the special needs and abilities of the undergraduate students it is designed to serve. This entails identifying the targeted student population by some clearly articulated set of criteria (e.g., GPA, SAT score, a written essay). A program with open admission needs to spell out expectations for retention in the program and for satisfactory completion of program requirements
- The program should have a clear mandate from the institutional administration ideally in the form of a mission statement clearly stating the objectives and responsibilities of the program and defining its place in both the administrative and academic structure of the institution. This mandate or mission statement should be such as to assure the permanence and stability of the program by guaranteeing an adequate budget and by avoiding any tendency to force the program to depend on temporary or spasmodic dedication of particular faculty members or administrators. In other words, the program should be fully institutionalized so as to build thereby a genuine tradition of excellence.
- The honors director should report to the chief academic officer of the institution.
- There should be an honors curriculum featuring special courses, seminars, colloquia and independent study established in harmony with the mission statement and in response to the needs of the program.
- The program requirements themselves should include a substantial portion of the participants' undergraduate work, usually in the vicinity of 20% or 25% of their total course work and certainly no less than 15%. Students who successfully complete Honors Programs requirements should receive suitable institutional recognition. This can be accomplished by such measures as an appropriate notation on the student's academic transcript, separate listing of Honors Graduates in commencement programs, and the granting of an Honors degree.
- The program should be so formulated that it relates effectively both to all the college work for the degree (e.g., by satisfying general education requirements) and to the area of concentration, departmental specialization, pre-professional or professional training.

- The program should be both visible and highly reputed throughout the institution so that it is perceived as providing standards and models of excellence for students and faculty across the campus.
- Faculty participating in the program should be fully identified with the aims of the program. They should be carefully selected on the basis of exceptional teaching skills and the ability to provide intellectual leadership to able students.
- The program should occupy suitable quarters constituting an honors center with such facilities as an honors library, lounge, reading rooms, personal computers and other appropriate décor.
- The director or other administrative officer charged with administering the program should work in close collaboration with a committee or council of faculty members representing the colleges and/or departments served by the program.
- The program should have in place a committee of honors students to serve as liaison with the honors faculty committee or council who must keep the student group fully informed on the program and elicit their cooperation in evaluation and development. This student group should enjoy as much autonomy as possible conducting the business of the committee in representing the needs and concerns of all honors students to the administration, and it should also be included in governance, serving on the advisory/policy committee as well as constituting the group that governs the student association.
- There should be provisions for special academic counseling of honors students by uniquely qualified faculty and/or staff personnel.
- The honors program, in distinguishing itself from the rest of the institution, serves as a kind of laboratory within which faculty can try things they have always wanted to try but for which they could find no suitable outlet. When such efforts are demonstrated to be successful, they may well become institutionalized, thereby raising the general level of education within the college or university for all students. In this connection, the honors curriculum should serve as a prototype for educational practices that can work campus-wide in the future.
- The fully developed honors program must be open to continuous and critical review and be prepared to change in order to maintain its distinctive position of offering distinguished education to the best students in the institution.
- A fully developed program will emphasize the participatory nature of the honors educational process by adopting such measures as offering opportunities for students to participate in regional and national conferences, honors semesters, international programs, community service, and other forms of experiential education.

- Fully developed two-year and four-year honors programs will have articulation agreements by which honors graduates from two-year colleges are accepted into four-year honors programs when they meet previously agreed-upon requirements.

Approved by the NCHC Executive Committee (3/4/94)

APPENDIX B:
BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED HONORS COLLEGE

A quality honors educational experience can occur in a wide variety of institutional settings. When institutions embark on a transition from program to college, they face a transformational moment. Although no one model defines this transformation, the National Collegiate Honors Council recognizes the following characteristics as typical of a successful honors college.

- A fully developed honors college should incorporate the relevant characteristics of a fully developed honors program.
- A fully developed honors college should exist as an equal collegiate unit within a multi-collegiate university structure.
- The head of a fully developed honors college should be a dean, reporting directly to the chief academic officer of the institution, and serving as a full member of the Council of Deans, if one exists. The dean should be a full-time, 12-month appointment.
- The operational and staff budgets of fully developed honors college should provide resources at least comparable to other collegiate units of equivalent size.
- A fully developed honors college should exercise increased coordination and control of departmental honors where the college has emerged out of such a decentralized system.
- A fully developed honors college should exercise considerable control over honors recruitment and admissions including the appropriate size of the incoming class. Admission to the honors college should be by separate application
- An honors college should exercise considerable control over its policies, curriculum, and selection of faculty.
- The curriculum of a fully developed honors college should offer significant course opportunities across all four years of study.
- The curriculum opportunities of the fully developed honors college should be relevant to all the undergraduate majors and degrees of the institution.
- The curriculum requirements of a fully developed honors college should constitute at least 20% of a student's degree program. An honors thesis or project should be required.

- Where the home university has a significant residential component, the fully developed honors college should offer substantial honors residential opportunities.
- The distinction awarded by fully developed honors college should be announced at commencement, noted on the diploma, and featured on the student's final transcript.
- Like other colleges within the university, a fully developed honors college should be involved in alumni affairs and development, and should have an external advisory board.
- The establishment of an Honors College should entail a significant enhancement of core physical facilities.
- A fully developed honors college should offer an opportunity for an interdisciplinary degree program to supplement standard departmental majors.

Submitted by the Ad Hoc Task Force on Honors Colleges, 11/13/04.

APPENDIX C:
FIRST-YEAR APPLICATION TO
PARKLAND HONORS COLLEGE

1A: Personal data, e.g., name, address, birth date; optional parents' information (used only for statistical data, not for evaluation)

1B: Please read this important additional information before you start!

Selection criteria: Entrance to Parkland Honors College is highly competitive. Selection is based on the applicant's complete credentials, including transcript, test scores, evaluations, and essays. The Faculty Selection Committee expects that applicants will have a minimum combined SAT I score of 1350 (from one test date). Exceptionally qualified students with scores below 1350 may apply, and will receive an initial screening for overall academic accomplishment; some, but not all, such applications will be forwarded to the Faculty Selection Committee for full review.

If you are not currently attending high school, you must describe in detail, on an additional sheet, your activities since graduation. Please contact Parkland Honors College if you feel that portions of this application are not relevant to your educational experience.

A note about teacher evaluations: Your teacher evaluations should come from teachers who know you well, and would be able to provide meaningful information about you. At least one teacher must be able to address your oral and written communication skills. You should choose teachers who will do more than just check the rating boxes!

Please provide the names of two teachers from whom you seek references.

2: School Counselor Report

Please review the student's application and describe any unique features of this student's academic program that relate to exceptional abilities that have not been reported. Also, please explain any unusual features of the student's transcript, such as any unexplained changes in academic track. What makes this student outstanding or unique in the context of your school?

Student's class rank (rank/total class) or percentile; Does your school offer AP courses? Honors courses?

If the school does not provide a School Profile with information on grade weighting for honors or AP courses, please explain the weighting system (if any).

Please check the materials that you are sending in this envelope to Parkland Honors College: school counselor report; school profile (if available); student's completed application; two teacher evaluation forms; and student transcript (including all senior-year courses).

3 & 4: Teacher Evaluations

To the Teacher: We appreciate your candid evaluation of this student. After completing this form, please submit it to the student's guidance counselor listed above for inclusion in the Parkland Honors College application packet. You may place this evaluation in a

sealed envelope for submission with the rest of the application, but please do not mail separately.

Background information

How long and in what capacity have you known this student?

Which courses has the student completed with you, or is currently taking? Please indicate level of difficulty (AP, Honors, etc.) and any special course requirements or expectations.

Ratings

On the scale provided, please rate this student in comparison to other college-bound students you have instructed in the last few years (Scale: from “Below Average” to “One of the Best Ever”):

- Intellectual qualities: general intellectual ability; research aptitude; enthusiasm for Intellectual pursuits; creativity/imagination
- Communication skills: Oral Expression of Ideas; written expression of ideas; interpersonal skills; technology skills
- Personal qualities: task orientation/work habits; motivation/initiative; independence/maturity; potential for growth; ability to work in teams; reaction to adversity.

This student is applying for membership in a special program that involves several honors courses per year, out-of-classroom seminars, research towards an honors thesis, and significant academic and extracurricular opportunities. We receive a large number of applications from highly qualified candidates each year, so we would appreciate your candid assessment: what, in your opinion, distinguishes this student?

5A: Essays.

The essays are read with great interest by the Faculty Selection Committee, and you should take the opportunity to display your writing, analytical, and creative talents to their fullest. While we do not require a specific essay length, you should write efficiently: generally, you should not write more than 1½ double-spaced pages for each essay unless you have something exceptional to say. Shorter essays can be effective, but one-paragraph essays usually are not. *Be sure to read the academic integrity statement on the back of this application—we do not permit the use of commercial editing services.*

Instructions: Choose one essay in Section 1, and one essay in Section 2. Section 3 is entirely optional (see below).

Section 1: Answer one of these questions, in whatever way you consider most appropriate.

1. Perhaps the most essential component of any democratic system is an informed citizen. How does the recent exponential increase in scientific knowledge and technological innovation impact our ability to be informed citizens?

2. Discuss this quotation from the British historian R. H. Tawney: “The certainties of one age are the problems of the next.”

Section 2: Answer one of these questions, in whatever way you consider most appropriate. Please place a check before the question you choose. Be sure to read the Note and Instructions above.

1. Tell us about a work or object that you consider to be a masterpiece. What separates it from other works or objects in its category?
2. Besides the country you've grown up in (which we'll assume is the U.S. unless you tell us otherwise), which country interests you the most, and why?

Section 3: Optional Additional Essay.

Please tell us something about yourself that you think we should know—something that is not already apparent from the rest of your application.

5B: Educational Data.

On a separate sheet with your full name and date of birth, please provide the following information:

1. Any college courses which you have taken for credits (not including AP or other college-in-high-school courses). Please include a transcript or grade report, if available.
2. The books (outside of those assigned for courses) that you have read in the past year, and brief comments on the book that has made the greatest impression on you and why.
3. The most important scholastic distinctions or honors you have received, including any special programs in which you have participated, such as international study, summer enrichment programs, internships or research experiences, etc.
4. Your principal extracurricular, community, and family activities, work experiences, voluntary service, and hobbies, in the order of their interest to you. For each, be sure to include any major accomplishments (such as leadership positions, varsity letters, awards, etc.), and approximately how many hours you devoted to the activity per week and per year. Also, please indicate those you would like to continue while in college.
5. A brief paragraph about your most significant activity out of those listed above, and its importance to you.

Academic integrity is central to the mission of Parkland Honors College. Therefore, we expect prospective scholars to act in the same spirit, by demonstrating integrity in the application process. Please review and sign the following statement: “My signature below confirms that all information contained in my application is complete, accurate, and honestly presented, that the essays are my own work, and that no commercial services were used in the preparation or editing of my essays.

**APPENDIX D:
A SAMPLE OF SIGNATURE (S), INNOVATIVE (I),
AND INTERNATIONAL CONTENT (INT) COURSES
AT PARKLAND HONORS COLLEGE**

- **Global Trends and World Issues (S):** Students evaluate local, national and international trends in policymaking, and their work culminates in a two or three-day intensive seminar at a major think-tank in policy-making in Washington, D.C. During the seminar, the students engage in simulated international crisis situations, come up with policy solutions and participate in discussions with the think-tank senior personnel.
- **Leadership Jumpstart & Leadership Forum (S):** Students develop the skills, perspective and background to participate in different communities in a variety of leadership roles. The second course compares and contrasts leadership styles and strategies in the corporate, not-for-profit, and political sectors both in the U.S. and abroad.
- **Rethinking Urban Poverty (S & I)** is a service-learning geography course, in which the students' research work focuses on different policies aimed at improving inner city life (e.g., housing, transportation, etc.). After the semester they spend a month in big city neighborhood, where they work and conduct research in response to the specific community needs.
- **Sustainable American Indian Housing Solutions (S & I)** explores the past and present conditions of American Indian shelter. The expertise generated in the course then results in the design of a sustainable housing program for American Indians, focusing on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in particular.
- **Struggle for Freedom: A Journey South through the Black Civil Rights Movement (S & I):** Two courses that represent an integrated experiential introduction to the 1960s civil rights movement. This experience includes a seven-day journey to several important sites between Washington D.C. and Atlanta, GA, including Greensboro, NC, and Birmingham, AL.
- **The London Study Tour (Int.)** is the oldest study abroad program offered by PHC. It has been offered for 19 years now during winter break. This is an intensive theatre program in which students attend a number of plays, visit important places such as the newly rebuilt Globe theatre, keep a daily journal and prepare a research paper.
- **The HOINA (Homes of the Indian Nation) India Service Trip (Int. & S)** is a service project at homes for boys and girls in Southern India that have been established by a university Distinguished Alumna. Honors students conduct different activities to support these homes throughout the year, and in summer they visit and work in them.
- **Juarez Field Project (S, I & Int.)** is a part of an honors course, Experiences in International Service Learning. The students build a house and conduct field research in a poor neighborhood of a Mexican border city.

APPENDIX E:
COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMS AT PHC*

- **SPEAK** is a tutoring program for international adults in the local community. The program helps non-native speakers work on their conversational English. Students may contribute by tutoring or by providing child care.
- **Volunteers in Public Schools** provide students in the local area school district with no-cost tutoring/mentoring assistance. Volunteers fill requests that have been received from teachers in the district for tutors and/or classroom aides.
- **Free Music Lessons Project**
Honors students who love music and have the necessary skills may provide free private music lessons for elementary, middle, and high school students for whom paid private lessons aren't feasible.
- **International Journeys Story Hour**
Cultural knowledge as well as an appreciation for reading are shared with pre-schoolers through the International Journeys Story hour which highlights a particular country each month with stories, crafts, and traditional presentations. The "Story Hour" usually comprises the reading of one or two stories, a puppet show or other demonstration, and a craft project.
- **Nutrition Service Project**
This project was created by a PHC student. Its goal is to understand and research the problems of the health and nutrition of children, create an awareness of existing problems, and to collaboratively design and implement effective health education and nutrition projects. This is a year-long project that includes a Spring Break Alternative trip.
- **CHIP** (The Computer Hardware Initiative Project) works to refurbish donated computers in order to place them with educational groups that may not have funds to purchase equipment of their own.
- **Conversation Partners** : PHC students meet with international students and families for one-on-one practice with conversational language skills and to share cultural experiences.

*While PHC has no formal requirement for community service, ALL PHC students are encouraged to demonstrate habits of leadership and civic and social responsibility through community service. Most of the service experiences offered in PHC are initiated by and managed by students. In fact, PHC students are encouraged to develop new projects.

**APPENDIX F:
APPLICATION TO SPRINGFIELD HONORS PROGRAM
(UNIVERSITY HONORS)**

Background Information: name, address, semester, and year of entry.

Email the following information as attachments:

1. List any accelerated (ACC), advanced placement (AP), gifted (G), or honors (H) courses you have taken.
2. Identify your significant activities, leadership positions and work experience during grades 10-12. For each activity indicate year(s) of participation. (if there are intervening years between your high school graduation and college matriculation, briefly describe your activities).
3. Provide the names and phone numbers of two high school teachers (one from the English department) from whom you will request letters of reference.
Arrange for letters of reference from the two teachers identified above.
4. Indicate how you first heard about the Springfield Honors Program.
5. Write an essay of up to 500 words discussing some creative work of art that has been crucial to the way you see the world and the way you see yourself in the world. Identify the work and how it has influenced you. This creative work could be a novel, non-fiction literature, essay, film, poem, scientific theory, biography, piece of music, play or another art form.

**APPENDIX G:
APPLICATION TO GREENVILLE SCHOLARS PROGRAM**

In addition to this application form, the following documents must be submitted:

- Official high school transcript—required
- Official college entrance exam scores: either the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Testing Program (ACT) scores—required
- Two letters of recommendation—required
- Essay submitted with application—required
- Official Advanced Placement, SAT II or TOEFL scores—optional

Students who complete the Greenville Scholars application do not need to complete a regular application for admission. In the event that a student is not accepted into the Greenville Scholars program, information submitted on the Scholars application will be used to offer students regular admission to Greenville College. Priority for the Greenville Scholars program and Greenville Scholars scholarships will be given to residents of Greenville County. Applications for fall (of respective year) will only be considered for students who are currently enrolled in their final year of high school and who will be completing high school graduation requirements by June (during the same year). Applications will not be considered for students who graduated from high school prior to May/June (of the respective year).

First Semester Grades: Submission of first semester senior year grades is optional but strongly recommended.

Scholarships : Students selected for the Greenville Scholars program will be offered two-year (four academic semesters), full-tuition (15 credit hours per semester at the in-county rate), merit scholarships. These merit scholarships will include expenses associated with attending the University of Cambridge summer program, which would entail the cost of round-trip airfare with the group, room & board, and tuition.

Greenville College offers several scholarship programs. Applicants not selected for the Greenville Scholars program may be considered for other merit-based scholarships at Greenville College (such as the Board of Trustees Academic Specialty scholarship).

1. Background: student name; address; high school; graduation date; cumulative GPA; weighted GPA; class rank (optional).

Please submit your official high school transcript.

2. Academic Honors

Please briefly describe any academic distinctions, honors or awards you have received, starting from the ninth grade:

3. Standardized test Information

Applicants are required to submit either the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT). Please indicate below any Advanced Placement Exams which you have taken or plan to take and the scores of the exams you took in your junior year. Submission of SAT II test results is optional but recommended, if applicable.

4. Extracurricular and Community Service Activities

Please list your primary extracurricular, community service, athletic or artistic activities. In addition, you may wish to submit a more detailed resume of activities.

5. Work Experience

List any employment (including summer jobs) you have held in the past three years.

6. Additional Information

Please provide any additional information regarding your background and experiences that may assist the committee in the review of your application. You may enclose attachments if necessary.

7. Essays

Your responses to the following essay questions are an important component in the review of your Greenville Scholars application. The essay provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate the clarity, originality and organization of your writing. Your essays should be submitted on separate sheets of paper (typed). Please include your name and social security number on each page.

Part One: Please provide short essay responses to both of the following questions (approximately 150-200 words for each response).

- 1) What is your favorite color, word, style of music or style of architecture and why?
- 2) Why are you interested in participating in the Greenville Scholars program, and what can you contribute to the Scholars community?

Part Two: Select one of the following essay questions (approximately 500 words.)

- 1) Choose your favorite poet, or author, artist, musician or philosopher. If you could meet him/her, what five questions would you ask, and how do you think he/she might answer. You may answer this question in interview style if you wish.
- 2) You have reached the age of 40, and you have just published your first book. What is its title, what is its subject matter, and what does the book jacket say about you, the author?

8. Counselor/Teacher Recommendations

This recommendation form must be completed by a high school counselor or teacher who can attest to your academic performance and personal character. Please complete the top portion and provide a Greenville Scholars business reply envelope for the teacher or counselor to use to return this recommendation form.

Please provide insight on the academic abilities, special talents, and personal character of this student. We are interested in the applicant's strength in the following areas: intellectual purpose, motivation, maturity, integrity, initiative, creativity, and leadership potential. We welcome any information you can provide that will assist the committee in distinguishing this applicant from others. Please feel free to attach additional pages. Please give an overall ranking: from "Below average" to "One of the most outstanding students I have encountered".

APPENDIX H:
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to understand the organizational structure of the Honors College/Program at this university/college and the different mechanisms through which honors programs operate and provide enriched education for their students.
2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to be observed while conducting a meeting or to be interviewed about your perceptions and experiences related to your functions at the Honors College/Program (or your relations with the Honors College/Program). The interview (and in some cases the observation) will be recorded. The tapes will be stored in a filed locked cabinet, and will be transcribed and coded by the researcher herself and destroyed immediately after that. All the data will be stored in a filed locked cabinet and the researcher will be the only person with an access to that cabinet. All transcribed data will be destroyed by May 2005.
3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.
4. Benefits:
 - a. The benefits to participants include a better understanding of the role and significance of honors programs in contemporary American higher education and their effect on students' lives.
 - b. The benefits to society include a better appreciation of the multiplicity of channels through which the American system of mass higher education responds to an immensely diverse range of students' needs and goals.
5. Duration/Time: Approximately one hour for an interview, and as long as a meeting lasts for an observation.
6. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation is confidential. Only the person in charge will have access to your identity and to information that can be associated with your identity. In the event of publication of this research, no personally identifying information will be disclosed.
7. Right to Ask Questions: You may ask questions about the research procedures during the study, and the researcher will answer these questions. Questions before or after the study may also be directed to the researcher by electronic mail.
8. Compensation: There will be no compensation given for participation in this study.
9. Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the principal investigator, or to decline to answer any specific questions.

**APPENDIX I:
CODES FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

Code*	Interview Participant
PD	Dean of Parkland Honors College
PAD	Associate Dean of Parkland Honors College
PCS	Coordinator of Student Selection at PHC
PCA	Coordinator of Student Programs and Alumni Relations at PHC
PASM	Alumni Society Board Member at PHC
PF	Faculty Member Teaching Honors Courses at PHC
PS	Parkland Honors Students
SD	Director of Springfield Honors Program
SS	Springfield Honors Students
GHD	Director of Greenville General Honors Program
GHF	A Faculty Member Teaching Honors Courses in Greenville General Honors Program
GHS	Greenville General Honors Program Students
GSD	Director of Greenville Scholars Program
GAO	Recruiting and Admissions Officer at Greenville Scholars Program
GSS	Students from Greenville Scholars Program
GSF	A Faculty Member Teaching in the Greenville Scholars Program

* Numbers after codes in the text denote interview number (e.g., PCS2 should read “Interview #2 with the Coordinator of Student Selection at Parkland Honors College”).

VITA

Elena V. Galinova

Elena Galinova was born in Bulgaria, and holds two M.A. degrees in English and Russian from the University of Sofia, Bulgaria. She has worked as a teacher of English and English and American literature at an English language high school, a lecturer of English at the University of Sofia, and a director of a private foreign language school in Sofia, Bulgaria.

In 1996 Elena was awarded a Hubert Humphrey Fellowship and spent an academic year at Penn State University, where she was involved in postgraduate and professional development activities in educational planning and management. In 1999 she returned to Penn State for advanced academic work in Educational Theory and Policy and Comparative and International Education. While engaged in graduate studies, she worked as a teaching and research assistant in the Department of Education Policy Studies and the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Penn State University, and during the fall semester of 2002 she was a visiting scholar in the Department of Social Policy at the University of York, England. Her major research interests are in the areas of social stratification and mobility, policy analysis, equal educational opportunity policies, meritocracy and selective college admissions, access to higher education, and the civic development of young people.