The Pennsylvania State University

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College of Education

THE REINVENTION OF HONORS PROGRAMS IN
AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION, 1955-1965

A Dissertation in
Higher Education

by

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Abstract

A wave of interest in honors programs occurred at American colleges and universities in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although honors education emerged in the U.S. some thirty years earlier, its scope had been limited primarily to private institutions and allowed upper division students to undertake independent reading and research in their major field. In contrast, the period of revitalization and new program formation beginning in the late 1950s was characterized by expansion in several directions, including the introduction of programs for freshmen and sophomores, creation of honors options in general education, adoption of honors education by major public institutions, and collaboration between colleges and secondary schools to identify and encourage academically talented students. The Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), led by Joseph W. Cohen at the University of Colorado at Boulder, was a significant force behind the renewal of interest in honors work during that period. This dissertation traces the formation and activities of the ICSS, which operated from 1957 to 1965 with financial support from major foundations and was succeeded by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). The study also explores ideals and practices regarding the organization, content, and role of honors education during the ICSS period, through the words of honors advocates and with specific examples from institutions.
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List of Abbreviations

CCNY Records – Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library


RAC – Rockefeller Archive Center

UCBA – Archives of the University of Colorado at Boulder
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1 - Introduction

A wave of interest in honors programs arose in the late 1950s and introduced new principles in honors education that have continued to this day. At the forefront of the movement was the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), which operated from 1957 to 1965. The programs introduced during that period departed from earlier models to expand honors education both in curricular scope and the number of students involved. The purpose of this study is to explain why and how honors education expanded during the ICSS years.

The idea of honors education originated in the early 1800s at Oxford University, but it was not until the 1920s, after the advent of influential programs at Swarthmore College and Columbia University, that the idea of increased academic rigor for high-ability students had a conspicuous effect on American collegiate education. Frank Aydelotte, Swarthmore’s president and the architect of its honors program, documented the first period of honors program formation: in 1924 he counted forty-four American institutions with some form of collegiate honors education; by 1925, their number had more than doubled to ninety-three. Twenty years later Aydelotte (1944) described 116 honors programs in a new study and referred to the existence of additional programs. The phenomenon was limited to a few students mainly at private colleges, however, and most of the programs listed in the 1925 inventory did not survive into the 1940s.¹

The influence of the honors movement of the 1950s and early 1960s was much wider. Various facets of that movement are explained here by examining the formation and operations of the ICSS, including the educational principles it espoused. A second strand of this study traces the evolution of honors education itself, including its goals, content and form, each of which altered in significant ways. The result is a dual narrative on the history of honors education during the decade in which the ICSS operated, aimed at answering the following questions:

• What conditions prompted the formation of the ICSS and motivated colleges and universities to introduce or alter their honors programs during the ICSS period?
• How were the ICSS and other actors such as secondary education programs, private philanthropy, educational associations, and federal and state agencies involved in the development of honors education during this period?
• How did education for academically talented students, and undergraduate education more broadly, change as a result of the honors movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s?

Honors education is a relatively recent development in higher education, but its origins and evolution already seem remote due to a lack of scholarship about its history and the existence of more recent revivals and expansions. The ICSS period was a pivotal stage during which the meaning and utilization of honors programs were enlarged to such a great extent as to be considered a “reinvention” of honors education. This study goes beyond the existing literature by highlighting the changes that occurred as a result of the new movement and by featuring external actors who played key roles.

Some of the arguments for honors education have been quite consistent over the twentieth century, meaning that educators involved in honors programs today have motivations in common with their predecessors. The current climate of accountability in higher education and the budgetary pressures that most institutions face force them to examine their activities and find efficiencies, preferably without sacrificing quality. Honors programs are unlikely to enjoy immunity to these pressures and may find that remaining static is not an option. In fact, the leaders of the ICSS believed that honors programs must not remain static. Decisions about change and improvement today can be informed by the unfolding of past modifications.

An important source for many honors advocates’ enthusiasm was the added conviction that honors education could help improve undergraduate education for more than the top tier of students. Although remedial and honors education are typically separated from “regular” education, all three categories share a concern for answering essential questions in education: How can institutions best accomplish their educational missions? How does learning occur, and what can be done to improve it? One example
of common goals concerns attitudes about the intellectual stimulation of freshman students: honors programs in the late 1950s incorporated the lower division of college, with the idea that an earlier start would yield a greater benefit to students. This innovation was just one early effort to enliven students’ interest in academics as early as the freshman year. Numerous institutions have introduced freshman seminars, freshman lectures by leading faculty members, and living-learning environments, all meant to provide opportunities for active learning and challenges early in students’ college years—objectives that are shared by honors programs.

In fact, the mid-twentieth century honors movement directly addressed a number of major issues and tensions in higher education reaching well beyond the educational concerns of high-ability students, including: 1) the creation of favorable environments for learning; 2) the definition of excellence; 3) the connection of excellence to democracy and mass education; and 4) the perceived threat to general, liberal education by the popularity of specialized, professional education. These issues were present as a backdrop to the practical and philosophical deliberations of the honors movement.

The only major historical works on college honors programs were written over forty years ago. The chief sources are two studies by Frank Aydelotte (1925, 1944), a doctoral thesis by Claude Rickman (1957), and a book edited and partly written by Joseph W. Cohen (1966). More recent writings that touch on the history of honors simply restate what earlier sources have said without further examination. A much larger group of texts deal with practical and theoretical aspects of honors education and can be used as primary source material for the years when they were published. Gifted education—used here to denote elementary and secondary school programs—has an extensive body of literature, including works on the nature and identification of giftedness or talent, the presence or absence of programs for gifted students, and the related social, cultural, and policy environments. A number of these texts include historical information, and developments in college-level honors education occasionally appear in the practical studies as tangents to the main discussions of secondary and primary education for the gifted.

The lack of in-depth historical scholarship on this topic by no means reflects a general indifference to honors education. In fact it has been studied and discussed since
the first honors courses appeared. Aydelotte justified his 1944 book with the observation that no record of the honors movement had been written yet, although honors courses were “the subject of voluminous educational discussion.” Rickman (1957) used much of the early literature in his dissertation, and opinion pieces and articles on current honors initiatives appeared in the Journal of Higher Education starting in 1930, the first year the Journal was published. The book prepared by Cohen on behalf of the ICSS in 1965 (published in 1966), The Superior Student in American Higher Education, elaborated on some of the major developments and challenges in the honors movement. The April 1970 issue of the Journal of Higher Education was devoted to honors education in connection with the Fourth Annual Meeting of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). The Council, which replaced the ICSS in 1966, continues the work of publishing and disseminating studies and conference proceedings on honors education. The March 1986 issue of New Directions for Teaching and Learning focused on the theme, “Fostering Academic Excellence Through Honors Programs.”

The ICSS newsletter, The Superior Student, is worth mentioning here separately. Published from 1958 to 1965, The Superior Student contained articles on many aspects of honors education and updates on programs at numerous institutions. The sheer volume of articles on nascent and growing honors programs throughout the country makes the newsletter a key source of information. While the articles are often ambiguous regarding dates and numbers of students, they summarize the main points of each institution’s approach to honors education. As a whole they reflect a remarkable amount of activity in honors education during the ICSS period.

Sociological and cultural aspects of honors education

Honors programs may be viewed as an elite activity, given the selection process involved in the majority of cases—only a designated “top” tier of students are admitted—and the provision of special intellectual and material resources to participants. The selection process in American higher education is primarily meritocratic, and this principle is the focus of a debate that involves issues such as the definition of talent and ability, their measurability, and the consequences of those definitions and measures on the

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2 Aydelotte (1944), ix.
outcomes of the selection process. Educators have questioned the appropriateness of IQ tests and other measures of intelligence for many years, and it is now a long-standing opinion that intelligence tests should be used in combination with other forms of talent identification, requiring a broader definition of talent.3

Some critics have regarded the selection system as a means for the economic and political elite to maintain their status. Given vast differences in the quality of schooling and social circumstances, leading to lower performance in school by Latinos, African-Americans, and Native Americans, “it was logical to regard ability grouping for the gifted as de facto racial segregation.”4 The current criteria for selection (e.g., SAT, GPA) meet with criticism for the same reasons as during the past fifty years, and the extent to which gifted and honors programs rely mainly on these measures will factor into their vulnerability to attack.

The presence of special programs for selected students of high ability relates to cultural issues as well. Richard Hofstadter identifies anti-intellectualism as a recurrent theme in U.S. history, observing that intellect has been regarded as a challenge to egalitarianism. From this perspective, it comes as no surprise that honors programs have been decried periodically as anti-democratic. Hofstadter writes that a wave of anti-intellectual sentiment—a distrust of and disrespect for well-educated individuals, especially in positions of power—hit America during the early 1950s with McCarthyism and the administration of President Eisenhower. The launching of the sputniks by the Soviet Union in 1957 brought a turn-around, and education regained importance in the public eye. Abraham Tannenbaum (1979) explains that high academic achievers enjoyed a favorable climate during the “age of excellence” that corresponded with the Kennedy years. Intellectuals, such as the President’s group of advisors, the “Whiz Kids,” were seen as capable of solving national problems and deserving of public respect. By the end of the Vietnam conflict, the tide turned again. This time “the revolt was not only against institutions...and their leaders; it was also against a tradition of rationalism that sanctified

ivory-tower scholarship.” James Gallagher (1979) terms the attitude of Americans as “a love-hate relationship with giftedness and talent.”

Perhaps little has changed since the preceding set of observations were written. A more recent analysis, Out of Our Minds: Anti-Intellectualism and Talent Development in American Schooling (Howley, et al., 1995), examines the presence of an anti-intellectual disposition in American education and criticizes the neglect of gifted students, viewing it as a reflection of the failure to care for the intellect and talent of students in general. Carolyn Callahan and Evelyn Levsky Hiatt (1998) write that the greatest challenge facing education is the reconciliation of the goals of excellence and equity.

Proponents of honors education, acknowledging it as a form of special treatment, have framed honors education as a natural and necessary occurrence that can benefit a democratic society. Aydelotte, Cohen, and many others explained the importance of training individuals to their full potential as a service to the country, in addition to the individual benefits. Aydelotte (1944) argued that liberal education—the basis of the honors approach—is “a point of view” not limited to the humanities; the humanities may be taught technically, and technical or professional fields may be taught liberally. He connected a liberal training, regardless of a student’s vocational plans, ultimately to the betterment of American society: “Our best brains and our highest idealism, trained in freedom and working in freedom, can solve the appalling economic and political problems which we shall face [at the end of the war].” In his view, the very survival of democracy required the leadership of the ablest young people, trained at the highest level of their ability. Joseph Cohen and the ICSS, Aydelotte’s successors in advocating honors education, supported this view by encouraging honors programs in all disciplines, including professional fields such as teacher education, medicine and business.

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7 Aydelotte (1944), 7-9; Cohen, in SSAHE (1966), xiii.
The counter-arguments regarding access, however, are also defensible according to democratic values. At best, the unreconciled dichotomies between excellence and equity, democracy and elitism, yield the question: do the individual and social benefits of gifted and honors education outweigh the disadvantages of not including other individuals in such programs? As noted, some commentators are unwilling to consider this as an acceptable scenario and have offered different ways of viewing talent and special programs that would expand the definition of talent and open up the still-limited access to special programs (e.g., Passow, 1957; Holland & Astin, 1962; Callahan & Hiatt, 1998).

A third cultural aspect emerges in Aydelotte’s (1944) discussion, where he links liberal education—the heart of many honors programs—to individual development: “The essence of liberal education is the development of mental power and moral responsibility in each individual,” and the recognition that each individual is unique. Individualism is a complex theme in American history that, according to John Watt, has “egotistical” as well as “altruistic” forms, the latter indicated in Aydelotte’s reference to moral responsibility. Elements of both types are evident in American education. Self-directed studies and programs that allow students to build their own curricula are examples of an individualistic approach. Applying the idea of individualism to honors education, one may observe that honors programs require greater individual responsibility of their students than regular programs, while providing greater freedom as well, in the belief that honors students are capable of meeting the challenge and, in fact, thrive on it. This assumption and the way it is accommodated is based on American values. Other societies may choose not to educate their intellectual elite based on such a degree of individualism, or on any individualistic principle, depending on the values that guide their educational systems.

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9 For example, Chinese and Japanese elementary and junior high schools are organized on an egalitarian basis which emphasizes experience, rather than innate intelligence, as the means to success in school. Socialization with peers is also an important factor in keeping students of different abilities in mixed classrooms. Both countries have some form of tracking or special programs for gifted students; however, these occur to a lesser extent than in Western countries, and the focus by far is on commonalities rather than differences among students. Harold W. Stevenson, “Cultural Interpretations of Giftedness: The Case of East Asia,” Talent in Context: Historical and Social Perspectives on Giftedness, edited by Reva C. Friedman and Karen B. Rogers (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1998), 61-77.
The preceding examples of sociological and cultural viewpoints are a brief indication of the far-reaching implications of gifted and honors education. The negative side of special programs includes the problem of excluding students who might be deserving of access but do not meet the selection criteria. The positive features include educating the participating students closer to their full potential, and service to society through highly trained individuals with a “liberal” point of view (in the liberal arts sense). The widespread introduction of honors education during the mid-1900s involved some reflection on these issues as many public institutions sought to reconcile the potentially opposite forces of increased demand for education and improvement of academic quality.

Methodology

At the core of this study is the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), an organization that operated from 1957 to 1965 from its headquarters at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Its mission was to advocate college honors programs and provide assistance to institutions in implementing such programs. It was the first national organization concerned primarily with college-level honors programs, and it was the direct predecessor of the National Council on Honors Education, which has operated from 1966 to the present. The majority of institutions served by the ICSS were public, but private institutions also joined the honors movement, with some of their representatives attending ICSS meetings and contributing articles to its newsletter.

The ICSS and Joseph W. Cohen, its director for many years, were at the hub of nationwide developments in honors education. The ICSS papers are available to researchers at the University of Colorado Archives at Boulder, and the collection contains over fifty archival boxes of material which encompass the organization’s administration and activities. The collection is a source of abundant information about several aspects of the organization’s operations, including internal decisions, contacts and collaborations with other institutions and educational organizations, and correspondence with philanthropic foundations and the United States Office of Education. The collection also contains bibliographic information in the form of files on research about honors and gifted education during that period. The ICSS papers and its newsletter, *The Superior Student* (1958-1965), serve as the most extensive sources of information for this study.
The study evolved with two strands, one focusing on the development and meaning of honors education over time, the other recording the formation and activities of the ICSS. First, I provide a chapter on the early history of collegiate honors education as a backdrop for later developments. This background, along with a chapter on the educational context of the post-World War II period, is followed by a detailed account of the establishment and early years of the ICSS and demonstrates the interplay of individual effort, organizational backing, and foundation influence. Next I examine the main elements of the new honors approach and show how different institutional settings produced variations on the basic idea. Returning to the ICSS, I discuss the organization’s later years, highlighting new and ongoing issues that the more mature organization attempted to address. The chapter entitled “A New Landscape” provides a quantitative analysis that clearly indicates a rise in the formation of new programs and revitalization of older programs in the late 1950s. The concluding chapter includes summaries of the meaning and impact of honors education, the influence of various actors on the honors movement, and the emergence of the National Collegiate Honors Council.

The history of honors education is an absorbing topic partly because of its usefulness as a case study of large-scale change in higher education. It also serves as a window to a variety of questions ranging from choices about educational formats and curricular content, to debates about the direction that institutions should take. Its scope includes both the education of the most promising and academically talented students and the desire of many educators to keep “the flavor of tension upwards” in all of higher education.\(^{10}\) Honors programs, they felt, could both serve talented students who were overlooked in the current environment and invigorate undergraduate education for the wider campus community.

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\(^{10}\) Quotation attributed to McGeorge Bundy, Dean of Harvard College, by Cohen in SSAHE, 16. Cohen pointed out that Harvard was relentless in innovating and in reviewing past innovations, which Bundy had characterized as a search for “a flavor of tension upwards rather than of separation.”
2 - The Origins and Early Growth of Collegiate Honors Education

Honors programs were prominent in the 1950s among reforms in American higher education, but their history extends back to the early decades of the century. Characteristics that later were common in honors education, including greater flexibility in course work and increased responsibility for students, were evident at some institutions in the late 1800s. This chapter reviews the development of honors education from its origin as an opportunity for independent study in the upper division of liberal arts colleges—patterned on the honors system in Britain—to its gradual diversification during the 1930s and 1940s to include a mixture of classroom and out-of-class learning formats.

The authority on honors education in the first several decades of the century, Swarthmore College’s President Frank Aydelotte, noted two early examples of honors-type approaches in American collegiate education: an honors degree option had existed at Wesleyan since 1873, and the University of Michigan’s “University System,” begun in 1883, allowed the brightest students to follow an atypical course of study and take a special exam at the end of the senior year.1 Another early program was the University of Vermont’s honors thesis option, begun in 1888. Aydelotte traced honors work in the “current” sense, however, to about the turn of the century. Princeton’s preceptorial system, established in 1905, and courses for the study of western classics at Columbia University since 1920 were not designated as honors provisions, but the level and type of work required earned them a place in the chronology of honors education. Other forerunners included the University of Missouri, with an option of reading for honors that operated from 1912 to 1926 and resumed again in the early 1940s, and the Senior Scholars program at the University of Washington, which was established around 1912 but survived only a few years due to faculty opposition. In 1916, Lafayette College and

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1 The University System was an adaptation of German university education, conducted at a higher level than American collegiate education but without the high degree of specialization of graduate education. The lack of fit with prevailing practices in American higher education led to its demise in the late 1890s. For a detailed history see James Turner and Paul Bernard, “The German Model and the Graduate School,” in *The American College in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Roger L. Geiger (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 2000), 221-241.
Rice Institute began honors options, joined by Smith and Swarthmore Colleges in 1921 and 1922, respectively.²

A review of how honors work developed at Harvard before 1900 shows some of the challenges. The faculty introduced an option for Final Honors in 1867 (with a revision soon after, in 1870-71), although for a few years the full program would be delayed in some fields until Harvard’s curricular expansion progressed enough to bring about the advanced courses needed for honors work. The pace at which new courses could be added was a question of having adequate resources, and occasionally of overcoming opposition in the faculty, but President Charles Eliot was intent on moving the College well past the moderate relaxation of its classical curriculum that had occurred at mid-century. Eliot believed in providing courses on topics that were in demand, that students were the best judges of what they should study and the serious ones would put their freedom to good use. As new courses were phased in, candidates for honors were expected to take two courses in their field of specialization during the junior year and three during the senior year—some fields had additional requirements—and complete with distinction all their course work in that field. The faculty also reorganized the prescribed general curriculum to free up room for additional specialized work.³

Alongside the possibility of Final Honors, Harvard offered the less rigorous route of earning a degree with distinction based simply on strong performance in course work. Among twentieth-century advocates of honors education, this type of “honors” would have been considered inadequate, since it rewarded students who dutifully fulfilled course requirements but might not show any ability to integrate the information with other material. Harvard’s efforts along these lines are worth describing in conjunction with its more serious honors option, however, because both were concerned with motivating students to embrace academic challenges and because the criteria for degrees

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² Frank Aydelotte, *Breaking the Academic Lock-Step: The Development of Honors Work in American Colleges and Universities* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 47-48. The Princeton, Harvard and Columbia plans are described below. Missouri’s program did not survive its first attempt, according to Dean Tisdle, partly because of the dominance of professional courses and students’ desire to get their degrees as soon as possible. Most important, he said, was that the faculty was not prepared for it; they did not know how to plan honors provisions and set comprehensive exams: Gladys Palmer, “The Honors Courses Conference at the State University of Iowa,” *School and Society* 21 (June 20, 1925), 753.
³ Starting in 1971-72, students could earn Second-Year Honors in Classics and Mathematics, after the faculty realized that few students wanted to specialize in those fields during their last two years: Harvard University, *Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College, 1871-72*, 53-54.
with distinction overlapped with the idea of honors work as the faculty searched for the optimal version of each.

A baseline from which to trace these experiments is the version of degrees with distinction adopted in 1878-79. The faculty defined the awards of *cum laude, magna sum laude*, and *summa cum laude* (as opposed to just one degree with distinction earlier), aiming “first, to increase considerably the number of Commencement honors, and, secondly, to make them attainable either by excellence in a wide range of studies, none of which need be carried far, or by excellence in one subject pursued quite beyond the elements, and respectable attainments in a moderate range of less advanced studies.”

Previously, a student would either have to earn excellent marks throughout college or pursue honors work in a particular field to earn a distinction at graduation. The latter option had been unpopular: “The institution of ‘honors,’ obtained by severe special examinations, had, to be sure, supplied in the mean time a new and valuable incentive; but these ‘honors’ had not proved in practice to be accessible to any considerable number of persons.”

The new system of distinctions recognized excellence in specialized study even if the student did not show consistently high marks in his general studies. Part of the difficulty was to bring students along with the possibilities for advanced work opened up by rapidly evolving fields. The elective system had enabled students to complete college with elementary work scattered in many fields. As Samuel Eliot Morison recorded in his history of Harvard, Dean Smith wrote in 1886 that the faculty, after twenty years of watching over the evolution of the elective system, could now begin “to devise and apply such checks and regulations as experience has shown to be needed.”

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4 Harvard University, *Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College, 1878-79*, 9. The degrees were defined as follows: “The degree summa cum laude is for those who have attained ninety per cent on the general scale, or have received Highest Honors in any department, and carries with it the assignment of an oration on the list of Commencement parts; the degree magna cum laude is for those who have attained eighty per cent on the general scale, or have received Honors in any department, and carries with it the assignment of a dissertation; and the degree cum laude is to be given to those who attain seventy-five per cent on the general scale, and to those who receive Honorable Mention in any study together with sixty-five per cent on the general scale, or seventy per cent on the last three years, or seventy-five per cent on the last two.” Ibid., 73.

The faculty worked out stricter regulations regarding class attendance and probation and called for regular tests on course content, both aimed at reigning in the less academically inclined students. For more ambitious students, the amended regulations allowed attendance in extra courses beyond the required number, and the degrees with distinction now made further allowance for occasional low grades, taking into account a student’s performance in a certain number of courses rather than grades in all work. The option of Final Honors remained as the highest goal for the few ambitious and able students willing to complete extra work and an honors examination. In 1884-85, the College had published requirements for Honors and Highest Honors in a number of subjects, and the awards were based on high marks combined with the fulfillment of certain course requirements—departments specified which courses or at least how many courses in that field a student must complete to be eligible. The faculty also specified that students should complete a special examination near the end of their studies, as well as a thesis if required by the division in charge. Honors work was still unpopular, however, as the Annual Report of 1891-92 pointed out: “Honors are not sought with eagerness. In 1892, only fourteen men, of whom four were registered as graduates, took Final Honors; and only two of the fourteen took Highest Honors. Often our strongest candidates scatter their energies over so many parts of College life that they can give to no one study the time demanded for Highest Honors. Second-year Honors were awarded

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6 A slight revision in 1891 made the criteria for degrees with distinction fairer to students who entered as Sophomores due to high achievement in preparatory school, who would have had difficulty completing in three years the basic eligibility requirement of eighteen courses with a C or better. Under this revision, a student needed to earn a C or better grade in eighteen courses (the standard number required for the A. B.) or “in as many courses as he is required to pursue for the degree” in order to qualify. The full text states: “Any member of the graduating class who has attained Grade C or a higher grade in eighteen courses or their equivalent, or who has attained Grade C or a higher grade in as many courses as he is required to pursue for the degree, will be recommended for a degree with distinction on the following conditions: If he has attained Grade A in fifteen courses or their equivalent, or has received highest Honors in any department, he is recommended for a degree summa cum laude; If he has attained Grade A in nine courses or their equivalent, or Grade A or B in fifteen courses or their equivalent, or has received Honors in any department, he is recommended for a degree magna cum laude: If he has attained Grade A or B in nine courses or their equivalent, or has received Honorable Mention twice, he is recommended for a degree cum laude. The cases of members of the graduating class of very high rank who have not fulfilled the above requirements will be considered on their merits.” Harvard University, Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College, 1891-92, 87.

7 Harvard University, Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College, 1884-85, 185-187.
to seventeen men in Classics and to four in Mathematics; and the Faculty voted to establish Second-Year Honors in History.”

Starting in 1897-98, the Divisions of Ancient and Modern Languages jointly offered a new honors option that combined the study of literature in these areas, targeting “the kind of student who should always have been a candidate for Honors, but has seldom or never found the right Department in which to apply. Such a student may be better educated in literature than many of those who have specialized so minutely as to become suitable candidates for Honors in a single Department of linguistic and literary study.” While this broke new ground for interdivisional honors initiatives, it may have been more significant for its role in maintaining the classical curriculum alongside newer subjects. In fact, immediately after a description of Honors in Literature in that year’s *Annual Report* came this blunt assessment: “As has been frequently said, the condition of Honors in Harvard University is deplorable. The number of candidates is absurdly small in proportion to the number of earnest and able students; and the disproportion leads to the belief that there is something radically wrong in our present requirements. One of the most important problems before the Faculty of Arts and Sciences is the production of a scheme of requirements for Honors which is likely to interest every earnest and capable student.”

It took several more years for progress in this area. The 1902-03 President’s Report still declared that “The system of Final Honors at graduation, which was instituted by the Faculty in 1867-68, enlarged in 1870-71, and maintained ever since with slight modifications, has never been successful. Final Honors have never been sought by any significant portion of the graduating class, and have never really affected, in any large measure, the scholarship of the College….Final Honors were intended, first, to promote a reasonable degree of specialization by departments, and secondly, to promote scholarship by large subjects as distinguished from success in single courses.”

New rules for degrees with distinction were published in 1905, prefaced by the faculty’s opinion that “every undergraduate of superior ability should look to a considerable amount of advanced work in some subject or related subjects as a natural

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10 Harvard University, *Annual Reports..., 1902-03*, 10-11.
part of his undergraduate career.” The goal was not for undergraduates to pursue original research or complete exams like those required for advanced degrees; rather, a degree for distinction should be in the reach of every student of “good ability.” The degree *cum laude* would still be possible through general studies, although they could no longer be entirely elementary, and the degree *magna cum laude* could be earned either through excellence in general studies or in a subject or related subjects. Candidates for distinction in a subject or related subjects could obtain advising from the relevant academic unit to help develop a plan of study. Candidates who filed their intent to pursue a degree with distinction at the Dean’s office would also be given more freedom and responsibility in planning their course work, and would be excused from exams in their area of study during the senior year, except those exams that were required for the awarding of distinction.\(^{11}\)

The following year, another interdivisional option was added to the list of subjects available to strong students; the Degree with Distinction in History and Literature allowed students to read works beyond those required in their courses and focus on one of several countries or periods. Students also had to complete a thesis and pass a general examination. A good number of students applied for this option soon after it was advertised, and the faculty felt this was “a fresh indication of their willingness to work in what appeals to their ambition.”\(^{12}\) The ideas of special advising, privileges regarding course attendance and exams, and a thesis and exam in the final year were common to upper division honors programs over the next few decades, but Harvard was applying them to the degrees with distinction as well, in the hope of interesting more students in high-level work.

Professor Abbott Lawrence Lowell was a member of the faculty committee that proposed these changes, and Harvard’s historian, Samuel Eliot Morison, points out that aspects of Lowell’s later initiatives as President of Harvard were evident in the committee’s words: “There is in the College to-day too much teaching and too little studying,” and “Every serious man with health and ability should be encouraged to take honors in some subject.” Lowell, who assumed the Presidency in 1909, admired the

\(^{11}\) Harvard University, *Reports of the President and the Treasurer of Harvard College, 1904-05*, 120-121.

\(^{12}\) Harvard University, *Reports…, 1905-06*, 100-101.
traditions at Oxford and Cambridge that brought a “union of learning with the fine art of living” and applied these principles as remedies to Harvard’s weakest conditions. On one hand this meant bringing cohesiveness to the student body, which had become scattered in various on- and off campus housing arrangements which reflected the students’ social standings. Lowell oversaw the construction of freshman residence halls where rooms were available to students of almost any financial means, and where dining and social commons promoted further interaction. On the academic side, the College introduced rules for concentration and distribution around 1910 to balance out the looseness of the elective system, and under Lowell some courses known to be easy were made more challenging.13

The academic year 1914-1915 brought another innovation at Harvard that Frank Aydelotte felt was significant in the history of honors programs, presumably because it resembled the honors system of Oxford: the Division of History, Government, and Economics introduced a general examination as a condition of graduation for all of its students. The importance of the exams as the basis for awarding the A.B. degree produced a new tutorial system to help students prepare for their exams. The other Divisions of the College followed suit within the next few years, and eventually a reading period before examinations was created in 1927, allowing all students some time for independent work.14

In the meantime, Woodrow Wilson brought reforms based on the British model to Princeton University. The “preceptorial system” inaugurated in 1905 supplemented traditional lectures for upper division students, placing emphasis on independent reading

13 Morison discusses this period of Harvard’s curricular experiments in *Three Centuries of Harvard*, 439-449. “The union of learning with the fine art of living” was how Samuel Eliot Morison described Lowell’s view of an Oxbridge education and what he sought to establish at Harvard. Lowell also felt that every student, regardless of his family background, should have the opportunity to gain from that union: *Three Centuries*, 386, 443.

14 Aydelotte (1944), 70-71. For a time, the tutorial system had two options, Plan A and Plan B. Plan A was intended for abler students and involved meeting more frequently with professors than in Plan B. Both Plans carried eligibility for honors, but only Plan A students tended to attempt that option. As of 1944, honors at Harvard still required strong course records and results on the general exams—offered in twenty-seven fields—and an honors thesis. In 1945 the A/B distinction was eliminated: Aydelotte (1944), 70-71. Cohen noted that one-third of Harvard graduates took an honors degree in 1930, and by 1966 over 40 percent of students were taking honors. A strongly departmental approach to honors prevailed at Harvard, although special advising for high-ability freshmen and the Harvard Freshman Seminars showed that the institution was making some honors provisions for entering students: Joseph W. Cohen, in *The Superior Student in American Higher Education*, ed. Joseph W. Cohen (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 14 (hereafter cited as SSAHE).
in a field of concentration, with lectures being “no more than a means of directing, broadening, illuminating, or supplementing the student’s reading.” He hired a large staff of some fifty young academics who would meet with undergraduates individually or in small groups to discuss the readings in their field. Despite some initial changes, mostly related to the status and authority of the preceptors and later developments that tied precepts to specific courses rather than groups of courses, the system was accepted as an integral part of a Princeton education and has carried on until today. In the mid-1920s, a senior year independent study was added to the curriculum, culminating in a thesis, and honors degrees were awarded on the basis of outstanding work on the comprehensive exam and senior project.  

A few years after the introduction of general exams at Harvard, Swarthmore College began its ascent under its new president, Frank Aydelotte (1921-1940), who initiated an honors program there to counteract conditions that greatly troubled him. Aydelotte observed throughout American undergraduate education the “academic lockstep” that guided students from the freshman year to their Bachelor’s degrees, focused on fulfilling course and credit requirements in courses aimed at the median and leaving highly talented and motivated students unchallenged. Honors societies and the practice of awarding honors at graduation based on grade average simply rewarded students for docility and discouraged risk-taking, rather than cultivating independence and creativity. Aydelotte’s other concern was the fragmentation of learning as new areas of study were introduced into college teaching, while the elective system allowed students to take courses that were at worst unrelated or may have covered related topics but were never integrated. Finally, although Swarthmore was thriving financially, its culture of social clubs and athletics (evident at numerous East Coast colleges around that time) had overshadowed academic life since the late 1800s.

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Aydelotte had been hired to strengthen the educational mission of the college, and the educational views he brought were modeled on the system he experienced at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar sixteen years earlier. One part of Aydelotte’s solution was to de-emphasize non-intellectual forces, including big-time football and social organizations such as fraternities, sororities and other exclusive clubs—to the indignation of past and current Swarthmore students who cherished these traditions. Aydelotte recognized the roles that athletic and social activities could play in developing character and skills, but insisted that these aspects of Swarthmore life be brought into balance with scholarship. He adopted Oxford’s expectation that students engage in physical activity, rather than merely being spectators. This aspect of the Oxford culture had been a natural fit for him; he was a star athlete as a student at Indiana University and became an avid member of his Oxford college’s rowing team. Socializing was another important part of an Oxonian’s day and came naturally to the affable Aydelotte, but he eventually moved off-campus to avoid the distractions from his studies in English literature. Despite the emphasis on sports and leisure, Oxford (along with Cambridge) was considered the pinnacle of British education, and serious students had access to a faculty comprising eminent scholars and writers.

Since 1830, Oxford had recognized the reality of differing levels of academic commitment among students by making it possible to prepare for either “pass” or “honors” examinations. The latter process, known as reading for honors, carried the expectation of intensive independent work during terms as well as holidays, in preparation for difficult comprehensive examinations. Members of the faculty were assigned as tutors and guided their students in preparing for the exams. Aydelotte felt the pass course at Oxford was probably less demanding than a B.A. program in any approved American college or university, but the standards for the honors degree surpassed the typical requirements of the best American colleges in both quantity and quality.

17 Cecil Rhodes, a former student at Oxford and believer in the value of British civilization, had provided in his will for a scholarship fund to bring outstanding students from the U. S. and the British colonies to Oxford.
18 Aydelotte (1944), 21, 35. Aydelotte found that by 1944, most colleges at Oxford expected nearly all of their students to read for honors and that the pass degree was increasingly uncommon. He speculated that the trend in favor of honors degrees could lead to a lowering of academic standards if the weaker students no longer had the pass degree option.
While considering the presidency of Swarthmore, Aydelotte had approached the faculty of Swarthmore with the idea for an experiment in upper division independent study leading to an honors degree. The faculty’s favorable reaction convinced Aydelotte to accept the appointment. Several members of the faculty were eager to begin, and in 1921-22 committees began developing honors courses for Swarthmore. The Oxford honors school, Literae Humaniores (known as Greats), was their model, and each course was a cooperative effort between two or three related departments, allowing for concentration on a field without overly narrow specialization in one department. The faculty chose seminars over individual tutorials as the method of instruction; they also decided to abolish the course and hour system for honors students, make class attendance voluntary, and use comprehensive written and oral examinations with outside examiners to evaluate the students’ achievements. The two courses prepared in time for the Fall 1922 term were in English literature and the social sciences. They began with eleven students who were considered eligible for honors work.19

The reactions to his plan were mixed, and in fact, the honors program may be considered “at once Aydelotte’s greatest legacy and one of his most controversial initiatives.”20 A letter to the editor of the college paper had complained that the well-rounded, “red-blooded men and women” who graduated from Swarthmore would be replaced by “that vile species designated as ‘Greasy Grinds,’” all because of the attempt at “an alien and undesirable success in cultivating mental geniuses.”21 Aydelotte had launched the program despite criticism and responded to charges that the honors program was undemocratic and expensive. He pointed out that it stimulated the entire student body and faculty. To pay for the increased expenditures, he raised additional funds, including a five-year grant of $240,000 from the General Education Board and contributions from private donors, ensuring through an endowment that the new program would have a secure financial base for its first decade. The program was never submitted

19 Ibid., 32-34.
21 Burton Clark describes in detail how Aydelotte was able to move the honors program forward despite resistance among alumni and the local Quaker community. According to Clark’s narrative, “we encounter the charismatic leader, and we watch him and his growing band of supporters alter one major feature of the college after another to produce a unified character supporting a new set of values.” The Distinctive College, 7.
to the faculty or the Board for a formal vote, but the two pilot courses began a process of evolution. In time, adjustments were made to Swarthmore’s honors program as the faculty and students realized the strengths and weaknesses of the new approach. Junior year comprehensive exams, for example, developed after a class of junior honors students asked to take the senior exams as practice. Although these exams were never mandatory, it became customary for all the junior honors students to sit for them. On that basis, about 10 to 15 percent of honors candidates in their class were dropped from the program when the trial exams proved too difficult. Aydelotte recalled:

   In countless ways ours methods had to be altered from week to week and from term to term. Because the numbers were small, changes could be made with a minimum of confusion and by the time the enrollment in honors work had increased to something like half the Juniors and Seniors in college, we had gained a decade of useful experience.²²

The survival of the program was aided by Aydelotte’s leadership style, his sensitivity to the needs of a faculty involved in honors work, and his ability to win key supporters on the College’s Board of Managers.²³ Honors work evolved into a major feature of Swarthmore College, from eleven students in 1923, to 146 in 1939. Participation had grown to just over 40 percent of upperclassmen by the early 1930s and was still at that level in the 1960s. Aydelotte had, in Burton Clark’s words, gradually transformed the “organizational saga” of the college away from its prior emphasis on social activities and football, and Swarthmore became synonymous with honors education.²⁴

During his years at Swarthmore, enrollments throughout the country were increasing and college had become accessible to a greater proportion of the population. In contrast, Aydelotte maintained slow growth in enrollments, which in concert with a scholarship program and a growing reputation for high standards made admission to Swarthmore increasingly selective. Although this resulted in a higher quality student body at his college, Aydelotte realized that many institutions were not as selective or

²² Aydelotte (1944), 38-39, quotation: 34.
²³ Aydelotte favored the Quaker approach of discussing problems with all the affected parties and developing a consensus. His stand on the honors program and on reducing the status of athletics inevitably did alienate some students and alumni: West, “Frank Aydelotte: Architect of Distinction.”
²⁴ For honors enrollments, see Clark, 188. Clark discusses the reinforcement of Swarthmore’s new image (on pages 203-208), noting the many publications issued about its honors program and endorsements that contributed to the institution’s reputation for outstanding undergraduate education.
academically rigorous. Convinced of the need to nurture talented undergraduates beyond his own institution, Aydelotte also became an advocate for honors programs throughout American higher education.

His main partner in this endeavor was the National Research Council’s Division of Educational Relations. The Division grew in 1919 out of a network of research committees that had been established at universities during the war. Following the war, President Wilson gave his blessing for the Division to build on its existing network and promote research and the training of research workers. The Division began by examining current conditions related to research at higher education institutions, which in turn led to an interest in “the possibilities in connection with the discovery and special encouragement of upper-class students especially capable of development into research workers.” The NRC appointed Professor G. W. Stewart from the University of Iowa to visit colleges and universities in 1921. He visited sixty-six institutions in the Midwest of the country, speaking with faculty and some students to identify current practices and needs. Stewart suggested that standing committees be formed at each institution to provide continuity on issues regarding superior students and scholarship, and a number of institutions complied.25

The Division of Educational Relations convened an invitational conference in Washington, DC in December 1921 to discuss the issue of gifted students with a number of presidents, deans and professors. One outcome was the designation of a special committee, consisting of Frank Aydelotte and the Division’s chairman, Vernon Kellogg, to issue a report on the existing types of honors programs and extent to which they had been implemented throughout the country. The first edition of this report appeared in 1924, followed by a revised edition in 1925. The study revealed that honors options existed in the bulletins of ninety-three colleges and universities: seventy-five institutions offered honors work in addition to their regular requirements for graduation, while eighteen institutions allowed honors work to supersede the regular requirements. The

overwhelming majority of institutions in the first category, and all institutions in the second, were privately controlled. If an institution showed elements of both categories, he chose the stronger tendency as the basis for classification.26

Tables 1 and 2 (below) list these institutions according to the typology Aydelotte developed. Given the subjective basis for fitting programs into this typology, Aydelotte did not analyze the evidence numerically, other than mentioning a noticeable increase in honors plans since the first results were published in 1924: that edition listed just thirty-five institutions in the first category and nine in the second, or approximately half of the totals reported the following year in each category. Aydelotte observed that the increase from January 1924 to April 1925 was due to missed information in a few cases, but most of the 1925 additions were new programs developed in the interim.27 He did not explain the preponderance of private institutions or conversely, the relative lack of public institutions offering honors work. Perhaps he found the situation unremarkable at the time. In his 1944 study, however, he devoted a chapter to emerging honors programs at state universities.

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26 Aydelotte warned that placing some institutions into the appropriate category based on printed descriptions was “almost impossible.” The figures listed here are drawn from the 1925 edition: Honors Courses in American Colleges and Universities, 2nd ed., rev. [1st ed. 1924], Bulletin of the National Research Council, vol. 10, part 2, no. 52 (April 1925), 12.

27 Ibid., 8. In the Preface to the second (revised) edition, Vernon Kellogg noted that since the January 1924 publication, “certain institutions have ‘progressed’ from an enrollment in Part I to Part II [i.e., from additional work for honors, to honors work replacing all or most of the regular curriculum], and practically all are moving in that direction. Some of the new plans which are being adopted are of special interest and merit and show the effect of study of the experience of other institutions” (p. 4). Aydelotte also mentioned a trend toward allowing honors work to supersede more of the regular requirements (p. 12).
Table 1. Type A: Special work in addition to regular program (1925)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private institutions</th>
<th>Public institutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfred University</td>
<td>Lafayette College</td>
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<td>Amherst College</td>
<td>Lawrence College</td>
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<td>Antioch College</td>
<td>Lehigh University</td>
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<td>Bluffton College</td>
<td>Middlebury College</td>
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<td>Bowdoin College</td>
<td>Mills College</td>
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<td>Bradley Polytechnic Inst.</td>
<td>Mount Holyoke College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clark University</td>
<td>Mount Union College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coe College</td>
<td>Nebraska Wesleyan Univ.</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Puget Sound</td>
<td>New York University</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Wooster</td>
<td>Northwestern University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colorado College</td>
<td>Oberlin College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Columbia University</td>
<td>Occidental College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecticut College</td>
<td>Ohio Wesleyan University</td>
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<td>Cornell University</td>
<td>Pomona College</td>
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<td>Defiance College</td>
<td>Princeton University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denison University</td>
<td>Rockford University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dickinson College</td>
<td>Southwestern Presb. Univ.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duke University</td>
<td>Temple University</td>
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<td>Earlham College</td>
<td>Union College</td>
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<td>Emory University</td>
<td>Ursinus College</td>
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<td>Greenville College</td>
<td>Wellesley College</td>
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<td>Grinnell College</td>
<td>Wesleyan University</td>
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<td>Hamline University</td>
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<td>Hanover College</td>
<td>Williams College</td>
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<td>Hendrix College</td>
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<td>Illinois College</td>
<td>Yale University</td>
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<td>Johns Hopkins University</td>
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<td>Kalamazoo College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knox College</td>
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</table>

Source: Aydelotte (1925)  
Total Type A = 75  (Public = 18)

Table 2. Type B: Honors Courses Superceding Regular Requirements (1925)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Private Institutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnard College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown University</td>
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<td>Colgate University</td>
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<td>Converse College</td>
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<td>Elmira College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harvard University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hobart College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radcliffe College</td>
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Source: Aydelotte (1925)  
Total Type B = 18
The vitality of the programs listed above is not known—institutions recognized them officially, as demonstrated by their inclusion in the bulletins, but they did not indicate the number of students participating. At most institutions with active programs, honors enrollments tended to be small, with no more than 3 to 5 percent of students participating. W. S. Learned commented in 1927 that only Swarthmore, Harvard and the University of Toronto involved a noteworthy proportion of the student body in honors-level work.28

During the early 1920s the NRC’s Division of Educational Relations also issued a number of publications directed at students: both its “open letter to college seniors,” written by Carl Seashore, Dean of the Graduate School and head of philosophy and psychology at the University of Iowa, and a series of “career bulletins” prepared by experts in a variety of fields, encouraged students to consider careers related to research. The publications were well-received and went into repeated printings due to high demand. The Division also contributed some funds to a project conducted by Committee G of the American Association of University Professors. The committee, headed by Professor Ernest H. Wilkins of the University of Chicago, was compiling a bibliography of publications related to “methods of increasing the intellectual interest and raising the intellectual standards of undergraduates,” including a section addressing the issue of gifted students.29

In addition to writing his open letter to seniors and an AAUP-sponsored paper on “sectioning classes on the basis of ability,” Carl Seashore visited over one hundred institutions in 1923 through 1926 to discuss programs for gifted students and appointed a NRC liaison for this topic at each site. He was one of eleven NRC representatives who made a total of 320 visits (including repeated visits to some institutions), and he reported that “the shortage of science is not so much in material equipment for training in research as in shortage of students of the best quality” due to the post-war focus on educating in quantity rather than for quality.30

Seashore’s institution, the University of Iowa, hosted a conference in March 1925, sponsored by the National Research Council, with participants from about forty Midwestern colleges and universities. Among the conference attendees were several college deans and President Aydelotte, with Vernon Kellogg presiding. The presenters mainly discussed perceived problems in education: the range of academic ability found among college students, and the need to challenge superior students in institutions that had become focused on students of average ability and hemmed in students with the credit and hour system. Details on specific programs did not appear in the proceedings, with the exception of comments by a dean at the State University of Iowa, who discussed the method of selecting the top 10 percent of freshmen and sophomores: these students would participate in meetings with the dean and advising sessions with faculty, and would be placed in special course sections based on placement tests administered by the departments. He felt that honors work would fit well into the junior and senior years for such students—the comments suggest that such provisions were not in place yet, however.  

Dean Wilkins from the University of Chicago also described how his institution identified top students, although Chicago did not have a honors program, nor did it plan to introduce one.  

The University of Michigan’s representative, Dean John R. Effinger, discussed methods of honors instruction and the preparation students received in high school. He emphasized the central role of competent instructors with reduced teaching loads, the importance of library and lab facilities, and the desirability of not only providing special

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31 A four-year study of Iowa’s class of 1920-21 showed that 35 students out of the class of 992 freshmen ended their sophomore year with a grade average of B or higher. Twenty-eight of those students were in the liberal arts, distributed among nine departments, with at most seven students in one department. If the figures included students earning a B or higher average for the first time during their junior year, thirty additional students would be eligible. Dean Kay concluded that under the current criteria honors courses were not placing an unreasonable strain on departments: Palmer, 750-751.

32 Palmer, 753. Wilkins reported that students went through a competitive application system, and one of the characteristics the University looked for was leadership potential. Chicago’s one hundred most promising students spent their first two years surveying the entire field through “orientation courses.” Wilkins felt that this type of course would benefit all students and should be started during high school. Selection of the one hundred participants was based on an impressive list of qualifications compiled by joint committees from the faculty and student body: “intellectual—technical ability, comprising workmanship and dexterity at any given task, power of expression, accuracy of observation, perseverance, power of concentration, a sense of proportion including a sense of humor, intellectual curiosity, power of initiative, ability to reason; physical—health of body, appearance, manner of bearing, attractiveness; moral—ability to cooperate, moral cleanness, honesty, faith in knowledge, purposefulness, vision, social-mindedness.”
provisions for exceptional students but trying to increase the number of such students. His observations and those of Seashore seem to be the first instances of articulated recommendations for honors programs. Seashore, well-informed about recent developments through his visits, presented conferees with a list of twelve points (quoted or paraphrased here) that he considered important in regard to honors education:

1. Recognition of individual differences
2. “Favorable reaction upon the institution as a whole”
3. Adaptation to varying types of institutions, which are also changing.
4. Regard for democracy
5. “Motivation in every subject throughout the entire course”
6. Foundation courses and basic sequences in first two years
7. Concentration in last two years, with or without comprehensive exams
8. Balanced development of the whole person
9. “Extraordinary achievement both in quantity and quality for honors”
10. Reasonable cost
11. Comprehensive basis for assignment of honors
12. Rewards that count

The number of institutions and level of administrators present at the Iowa conference indicate that the education of high-ability students had arrived as a topic of concern in higher education. The meeting sparked an invitation by the Association of American Colleges to the NRC to help organize a session on honors work at the Association’s January 1926 conference. The momentum seems to have waned in the late 1920s as the Division of Educational Relations withdrew its leadership on gifted student issues, having determined that the topic extended beyond the scope of the NRC’s mission. It invited other higher education organizations to continue the discussion, and a meeting in October 1927 brought together representatives of the NRC, American Council of Learned Societies, the American Council on Education, and the Social Science

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33 Ibid., 751. Effinger criticized the prevailing educational theory in public schools, which favored the spirit of play rather than discipline and hard work. Students raised in that system, he said, “chafe at restrictions, call themselves intellectuals, and criticize the regulations which hinder them in their work of self-development.” He felt they would be better served by “the gospel of hard work under strict supervision.”

34 Seashore had been visiting colleges and universities on behalf of the NRC to gather information and publicize the need to encourage high-ability student toward research careers. About thirty years later, the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student formulated a list of guidelines for honors programs. Appendix A compares the 1925 points with the ICSS guidelines and those of the National Collegiate Honors Council, successor to the ICSS.

35 National Academy of Sciences, Report (1925), 68. The Division of Educational Relations had hoped to hold regional conferences during 1926 for institutions on the East and West coasts as well but “was unfortunately not able to make the necessary arrangements.” Ibid. (1926), 69.
Research Council. A second meeting of this group in April 1928 had no concrete outcome other than to entrust to the ACE the coordination of future activities, with the goal of expanding the focus on gifted students beyond the natural sciences. The group also concluded that “this problem is really only one of a number of matters arising in the advancement of scholarship and research which might be presented for discussion to the colleges and universities of the country.”

In the arena of undergraduate education, honors programs were just one of many innovations evident at the time. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, college administrators and faculty implemented a variety of experimental programs, and publications issued by institutions and national organizations chronicled the changes that were underway. One of these studies, *Changes and Experiments in Liberal Arts Education*, published in 1932, featured brief accounts of experiments and innovations at 128 institutions based on a survey by the American Association of University Women. A chapter called “The Major Phases of Experimental Change With Significant Illustrations” featured several of the most noteworthy cases. It described, for example, the elimination of the course credit system at the Universities of Chicago and Buffalo, which allowed students to complete graduation requirements at their own pace instead of being tied to the “four-year homogeneous unit.” Chicago’s entering class of 1931 could advance to the upper division upon completion of comprehensive examinations following the typical sophomore year and graduate after passing the senior comprehensive exams. Buffalo eliminated all subject requirements except hygiene and physical education, and instated a system of “cognate groups” made up of related departments, each of which determined a lower division curriculum that would prepare students for upper division work in any of the majors in the group. Entering students who knew what they wanted to study could focus earlier, however, and students who were very unsure of their interests could spend the first year exploring various fields. Upon completion of the junior college exams, students entered a tutorial-based system in the senior college that prepared them

36 National Academy of Sciences, *Report* (1928), 57. By 1930, the Division of Educational Relations had become inactive.
for the comprehensive exams required for graduation. Thus the University of Buffalo dispensed with the idea that every student should sample all of the major fields of learning through distribution requirements and based its reorganization on the principle “that the degree should be awarded for achievement, not for time served.”38

In contrast to Buffalo, the University of Wisconsin’s Experimental College approached the issue of acquainting students with many fields of knowledge by focusing on how to integrate that knowledge. “Our attempts to understand a civilization by studying ‘subjects’ have had the general success of attempts to make trees by nailing together planks or gluing together sawdust,” wrote Alexander Meiklejohn in the University Bulletin. The Experimental College gave students and faculty the opportunity “to take some striking and significant episode in human experience and study it as a whole.” The focus would be Athenian civilization in the freshman year and contemporary American civilization in the sophomore year.39

Pre-college advising was one innovation at the University of Minnesota, while Antioch and Whittier Colleges integrated experiential learning with regular academic work, and the University of Delaware’s junior year abroad program opened up international study for college students. The University of Chicago utilized achievement tests and comprehensive examinations, allowing students to progress at their own rate.40

The bibliography of Changes and Experiments in Higher Education contained a long list of works concerning new directions, especially impressive in that it mainly comprised publications issued between 1929 and 1931, with a few entries from the mid-1920s. The AAUW study made it clear that American higher education was alive with reform activities during this period.

In an address to the Association of American Colleges in 1935, Aydelotte praised the experiments that had taken place in the last decade. The increasing use of tutorials and comprehensive exams, organizational changes in the university structure, and the availability of honors options seemed to him “nothing less than a revolution in our academic methods, destined to produce a permanent improvement in our college and

38 Ibid., 158-62.
39 Ibid., 162-63. The quotation is part of an excerpt reprinted by the AAUW, from Alexander Meiklejohn, “The Experimental College,” Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin (March 1928), 11-12.
40 Ibid., various pages.
university work. In his 1944 study of honors programs, he continued to advocate these changes and credited the introduction of the Rhodes Scholarships in 1904 with creating a greater awareness of English university practices among American scholars. As of 1944, Aydelotte counted over 1000 ex-Rhodes Scholars in the U.S. and an additional 500 Americans who attended Oxford or Cambridge on their own. Approximately one-third of these scholars had become teachers and administrators in higher education, and some of them were actively adapting British educational ideas to their local circumstances—Aydelotte was perhaps the most famous of these innovators. Some institutions had introduced comprehensive examinations to supplement the existing, “fragmentary” course exams. The tutorial system had been adopted more widely, and Harvard, Yale, Claremont, and a few other universities had emulated the organization of the university into residential colleges, forming more intimate environments within a system of mass education. Finally, Aydelotte observed that nearly three-quarters of institutions approved by the American Association of Universities distinguished between honors and regular students, or at least provided the option of doing honors work (whether students were taking the challenge was another matter).

“So strong is the impulse throughout the country to break the tyranny of the rigid course and hour system,” he wrote in 1944, “that it affects many institutions which have so far been unwilling to provide any special facilities for their better students.” Bowdoin College and Johns Hopkins University did not distinguish between average and above average students, but both institutions encouraged students who wanted to go beyond their regular course work. At Bowdoin, departments could recommend students for graduation with honors, and high results on the comprehensive exam also brought honors. From 1931 to 1934, Colgate University allowed its most able students to follow a freer program of study, and in 1934 the program was opened up to all students. The institution provided preceptorials for its freshmen, sophomore tutorials, and upper class seminars, followed by a comprehensive examination for all students in their major field. As noted previously, the University of Buffalo admitted students to the upper division only if they demonstrated they could succeed in tutorial work, and graduation depended on the

42 Aydelotte, Breaking the Academic Lock-Step (1944), 27-28.
successful completion of written and oral comprehensive exams. Buffalo and Wabash College also used the exams to evaluate students at the end of their senior year and awarded honors to those with high results.  

For the most part, however, options such as independent study and tutorials were limited to top students, if such provisions existed at all, and into the 1950s these students usually could not participate in honors programs until at least the sophomore year, but more commonly not until they reached the upper division. The practice of excluding freshmen was not a criticism of the first-year students’ capabilities. The postponement reflected the type of honors work being offered: departmental independent study and special exams for graduation with honors. The freshman and sophomore years were devoted primarily to the study of basic subjects, and the student’s academic record during the first two years of college determined his or her eligibility for honors privileges in the junior and senior years.

**Upper division honors: the norm into the 1940s**

Aydelotte’s studies of honors education showed that between 1924 and 1944 many institutions began offering “honors plans,” and that those programs had shifted in favor of replacing some or all of the regular requirements, as opposed to requiring students and faculty to invest time and effort in addition to their regular loads. As described above, for the 1925 study Aydelotte developed a typology of honors provisions based on their relationship to the regular curriculum. Of ninety-three institutions that listed honors plans in their catalogs, seventy-five offered honors as additional work beyond the regular requirements for graduation; approximately 20 percent of these institutions were public, including several large state universities. Aydelotte found eighteen private institutions—mostly small colleges—that allowed honors work to supersede the regular requirements; no public institutions adopted this approach.

Aydelotte’s 1944 survey of honors programs was much larger in scope than his previous study, owing partly to the increase in numbers of institutions offering honors work and partly to his dissatisfaction with the catalogue-based data of the 1925 study. In

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43 Ibid., 49-50.
44 Some institutions also required recommendations from the faculty.
45 Aydelotte, *Honors Courses in American Colleges and Universities* (1925).
1940, members of the Swarthmore faculty assisted him in gathering more reliable information by visiting some 130 colleges and universities as well as a number of high schools that sent students to Swarthmore. The resulting monograph was not a directory like the 1925 study; instead, he presented details on about half of the institutions and organized his findings thematically, describing typical plans as well as highlighting exceptions that offered models worth emulating. Separate chapters discussed honors plans at state universities, provisions for freshmen and sophomores, and developments in high schools and in graduate education. Building on his earlier typology, Aydelotte classified the institutions according to the proportion of time honors work took from the regular curriculum.

By 1944 institutions allowing partial substitution of honors work for regular course work formed the largest category, as opposed to honors work offered in addition to regular requirements, which accounted for the majority of institutions in 1925. One likely factor in the shift was that honors plans conducted in addition to regular workloads were less attractive to students and faculty than those counting toward the regular load. Aydelotte would have liked to see more programs that completely replaced the regular requirements in the upper division, but observed that most faculties felt the substitution of independent study for two courses was the maximum justifiable quantity—any more would produce an excessive degree of specialization for undergraduates. Some institutions mitigated that risk by specifying that independent study by juniors and seniors should involve two or more related departments, thereby preserving some breadth of scope.

Another factor in the shift away from honors as extra work may have been simply that honors programs replacing part or all of the requirements for graduation had proven to be successful at enough institutions that tried them. These types of programs became increasingly familiar as faculty shared their experiences within and between institutions, by means that could range from casual interactions to the more formal exchange of information found in conferences devoted to honors education, journal articles, and larger studies like Aydelotte’s monographs and the AAUW’s *Changes and Experiments in Liberal-Arts Education*. The spread of honors to new institutions could be quite direct, 

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as at the University of Kansas. Its neighbor across the Missouri River, Park College, invited faculty members from the University to serve as outside examiners for Park honors students. Reportedly, the University faculty was impressed enough by the honors system at Park to authorize honors provisions for its own students.\textsuperscript{47} The results at the University were not stunning numerically: just fifteen students from three departments successfully completed honors work during the 1930s, and during the 1940s the total was forty-seven students from six departments.\textsuperscript{48} Nevertheless, honors education at the University survived and continued to grow.

Although new honors programs emerged at several public universities between 1925 and 1944, the net gain in the public sector was small or even zero. Numbers cannot be determined from Aydelotte’s 1944 publication, since it aimed at providing representative descriptions rather than comprehensiveness. Several institutions that were listed in 1925 did not appear in the 1944 results, but those universities may have had programs that Aydelotte chose not to describe in the latter publication. Furthermore, the AAUW’s 1932 survey of innovations at liberal arts colleges shows that some of the institutions not appearing in the 1944 study did have programs in 1932.

Table 3 lists the public institutions mentioned in the 1925 and 1944 studies (and indicates three institutions with programs in 1932, although their status by 1944 is unknown.) The final column shows the start dates that these institutions reported some twenty-five years later for a national survey of honors programs conducted by the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS). Most institutions did not count their earliest honors programs when describing their latest efforts to the ICSS, which implies that their activities in the early 1960s were seen as distinct efforts compared to the earlier honors plans. Only five institutions, shown in boldface, considered their earlier programs as part of an ongoing legacy of honors education.\textsuperscript{49}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Aydelotte, \textit{Breaking the Academic Lock-Step} (1944), 64. No date is given for this episode, but it seems to have occurred in the late 1920s.
  \item George R. Waggoner, “Departmental Honors at the University of Kansas: A Case History,” in \textit{SSAHE} (1966), 141-142. In the 1930s group, the English Department accounted for most of the students; two-thirds of honors students in the 1940s were in Political Science. See Chapter 9, Figure 2 of this dissertation regarding the growth of honors participation at the University of Kansas.
  \item The ICSS survey results list four other public institutions that reported early start dates: City College of New York (1931), Queens College, NY (1937; formerly a private institution), Douglass College of Rutgers University (1939), and Ohio University (1946).
\end{itemize}
Table 3. Public Institutions with evidence of honors activity, 1925 & 1944 (Aydelotte), and self-reported start date of most recent honors program (ICSS Inventory, 1960-63)\textsuperscript{50}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>Self-reported start date of most recent honors program as of 1960-63</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akron, Municipal Univ. of</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California, Univ. of</td>
<td>California, Univ. of</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati, Univ. of</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois, Univ. of</td>
<td>Illinois, Univ. of</td>
<td>1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana University</td>
<td>Indiana University</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky, Univ. of</td>
<td>?*</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami University</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan, Univ. of</td>
<td>Michigan, Univ. of</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota, Univ. of</td>
<td>Minnesota, Univ. of</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri, Univ. of</td>
<td>Missouri, Univ. of</td>
<td>1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina, Univ. of</td>
<td>North Carolina, Univ. of</td>
<td>No date reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota, Univ. of</td>
<td>North Dakota, Univ. of</td>
<td>1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma, Univ. of</td>
<td>Oklahoma, Univ. of</td>
<td>In committee 1962-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon, Univ. of</td>
<td>?*</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Agricultural College\textsuperscript{51}</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont, Univ. of</td>
<td>Vermont, Univ. of</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia, Univ. of</td>
<td>Virginia, Univ. of</td>
<td>1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State College of Washington\textsuperscript{52}</td>
<td>?*</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New since 1925:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado, Univ. of</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine, Univ. of</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska, Univ. of</td>
<td>No date reported</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico, Univ. of</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio State Univ.</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas – Austin, Univ. of</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, Univ. of</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin, Univ. of</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

? - not mentioned in Aydelotte (1944)   * - mentioned in AAUW (1932)

Based on these periodic snapshots, it remains an open question whether a particular institution offered honors work continuously or intermittently. An examination of administrative papers at each institution would be the only way to achieve that level of specificity. The departmental programs established in the interwar period were fragile;


\textsuperscript{51} Located in Logan, UT, it became Utah State University.

\textsuperscript{52} It was renamed Washington State University in 1959.
by one characterization: “These programs, inadequately financed, subsidized by eager professors who for short periods of time were willing to assume extra burdens of instruction, were scarcely legislated before they became moribund. The exceptions...provided the impetus for a new and flourishing honors movement.”

For his 1944 study, Aydelotte revised his earlier typology to differentiate three categories of honors work. Some institutions continued to view honors work as an option above and beyond the regular requirements (Type A in the 1925 study). These included: Emory University and Southern Methodist University, and Agnes Scott, Dickinson, Lafayette, Middlebury, Mount Union, and Wooster Colleges. In most cases these programs were available only to seniors and involved independent study and/or comprehensive exams. Some also required research and a thesis. Aydelotte felt that these programs were good beginnings but would be difficult to maintain in the form of extra work, given the burden on both students and faculty. Not surprisingly, these programs tended to have low involvement among both groups, although Aydelotte felt that the participation of a “considerable number” of students was testament to their intellectual interests and to the dedication of their professors.

At the other end of the spectrum were the full-time honors plans. Aydelotte called this the simplest and most effective form of honors, where the entire junior and senior years were devoted to individualized study and the course and credit system could be eliminated. Institutions in this category included Swarthmore College, MIT, University of Rochester, Smith College, University of Virginia, some programs at

33 Robert D. Clark, “Unsolved Problems in Honors,” The Superior Student, 7 (1): 5 (Nov.-Dec. 1964). The exceptions Clark noted were the University of Colorado’s “General Honors” colloquia and “a scattering of successful departmental honors programs.” Colorado’s honors students were required to spend at least 200 hours reading works from a bibliography the departments provided. The top 30 percent of all students in Arts & Sciences were allowed to participate. The program had a slow start: of the 60 members of the class of 1932 who chose to enter the program in 1930, only 20 had remained during their senior year. Faculty were not sold on the idea either, since they did not receive reduced teaching loads in exchange for tutorial supervision under the honors program: Frederick S. Allen, The University of Colorado, 1876-1976: A Centennial Publication of the University of Colorado (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 95-96.

54 Aydelotte, Breaking the Academic Lock-Step (1944), 53-57.
55 William N. Haarlow has described the “Virginia Plan,” which comprised a Great Books curriculum for lower division students and an honors program for the upper division. He argues that these innovations belong within the history of the “liberal arts movement” of the 1930s-50s, alongside more well-known efforts at Columbia University, University of Chicago, and St. John’s: see Haarlow, Great Books, Honors Programs, and Hidden Origins: The Virginia Plan and the University of Virginia in the Liberal Arts Movement (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003).
Princeton, and Mt. Holyoke College. He noted three other institutions, Rice Institute, Boston College, and Holy Cross, which allowed eligible students to devote all their time to honors work but did so within course systems designed for the honors student.56

The third category in the 1944 study comprised institutions that permitted a substitution of honors work for part of the regular requirements. These programs usually involved upper-division students, engaged them in independent study or laboratory work in their major subject, and culminated in some combination of a thesis and written and oral comprehensive examinations. At some institutions, faculty time counted toward the regular work load, while at others faculty undertook honors activities as an extra load. Aydelotte named twenty-five private institutions (e.g., Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Grinnell, and Goucher) and noted that “many more” had plans similar to those he described. Some twenty state universities also fell into this category, including Ohio State University and the Universities of Colorado, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, and Minnesota.57 Other state universities had programs somewhere between part-time and full-time. Aydelotte found that most of their programs were “strictly departmentalized” and provided honors students with personal supervision through seminars or tutorials. He noted that the programs had many weaknesses, but they signaled that the faculties of leading state universities were aware of the need for honors and willing to make some provisions.58

Aydelotte felt that part-time honors plans still did not allow enough time for students to concentrate on independent work. As noted above, however, faculty at institutions with part-time programs seemed to feel that independent study should only take the place of up to two courses, given the risk of overspecialization and the fact that upper division students spent only about one-half of their time on departmental (major) requirements.59 The allowable degree of focus on narrow fields was a matter for consideration in both the part-time and full-time formats of honors education, and different stances can be found among institutions in both categories. Among part-time

56 Aydelotte, Breaking the Academic Lock-Step (1944), 74-89.
57 Ibid., 59, 93-96.
58 Institutions in this category included the Universities of California, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin: ibid., 96-97.
59 Aydelotte likened the situation of students with part-time independent study to that of faculty members on partial leave or who combined research with light teaching loads, preventing them from conducting research as extensively as those on full leave: ibid., 68-69.
programs, for example, Brown University, Wellesley College, and Hunter College allowed students to involve more than one department in their honors work during the junior and senior years. Honors students in some fields at the City College of New York, however, produced very narrowly focused theses that were of publishable quality. At the same time, CCNY’s social sciences division encouraged interdepartmental study. Different approaches thus could exist within an institution, underlining the central role of individual departments and faculty attitudes in the organization of honors provisions.60

Among institutions offering full-time work, again there were examples of heavily departmental versus inter-departmental programs. At Rice Institute some departments offered full-time honors work, which was meant for students wanting to specialize on an area more deeply than the regular curriculum allowed. The full-time honors programs at MIT, University of Rochester, and Princeton, on the other hand, provided opportunities for research involving more than one department. Most Princeton students worked under a highly departmentalized system that required a senior thesis and departmental comprehensive examination. Honors were awarded based on the thesis and exam results, so every student was theoretically a candidate for honors. Princeton’s Division of Humanities, however, ran an interdepartmental program for selected students, and Princeton also offered integrated programs in Creative Arts and American Civilization. Moreover, students admitted to its School of Public and International Affairs had no departmental ties at all.61

Smith College offered both part-time and full-time honors options, but the faculty was not satisfied with either at the time of Aydelotte’s 1944 study. He had been involved in Smith’s original planning sessions for honors twenty years earlier, and again more recently in reviewing its programs for possible improvement. He felt one of the problems under the full-time plan was the excessive specialization permitted by an overly departmentalized approach. He noted, though, “there was nothing in the plan itself to make that inevitable.” In the American system, cooperation among departments was not easy, and Aydelotte even claimed that “the excessive departmentalization of our undergraduate colleges is one of their greatest evils.” Cooperation was not impossible,

60 Ibid., 59-61, 64-66.
61 Ibid., 75-87.
however, and he pointed to a simple solution found at Swarthmore and Harvard: a divisional approach whereby students could work on two or three subjects within one academic division. The result was a program of independent study that balanced between over-specialization versus comprehensiveness that sacrificed depth. Though full-time honors plans were Aydelotte’s ideal, full-time work in a single department was too much of a good thing.  

As of 1944, honors at Harvard required strong course records and results on the general exams—offered in twenty-seven fields—and an honors thesis. Cohen noted that one-third of Harvard graduates took an honors degree in 1930, and by 1966 over 40 percent of students were taking honors. A strongly departmental approach to honors prevailed at Harvard, although special advising for high-ability freshmen and the Harvard Freshman Seminars showed that the institution was making some honors provisions for entering students.

Columbia University’s contributions to the history of honors came as a series of experiments in both specialized and general studies, beginning in 1909 with the introduction of an honors system consisting of a three-year program of courses, supplemental reading assigned by the student’s department, and a final oral exam. The first degree with high honors was awarded in 1911, and the future of this option seemed promising except for the significant fact of irregular cooperation by departments. Within a few years, Frederick Woodbridge, John Erskine, and Cassius Keyser had developed the “Conference Program” for interested upper division students. The program featured a course taken throughout two years that would present “the principle divisions of knowledge” rather than focus on a single department; in addition, students would attend weekly conferences based on medieval disputations, and select a topic for in-depth study to be presented in the senior year.

Neither the honors system nor the Conference Program thrived, but elements of both were revived in 1920 with John Erskine’s new “Great Books” course, intended to acquaint students with important literature from the Greeks to contemporary authors. Erskine hoped that all students would be allowed to participate, but the College faculty

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62 Ibid., 74, 79-80.
limited the course to qualified upper division students, and it became known as General Honors. Students in General Honors were also required to pursue independent study on an approved topic and present “an extensive essay” on it. By 1925 eleven sections of the course were being offered, and according to Robert McCaughey, “though not formally required, General Honors became a must course for the brightest College students in the mid-1920s.” Nevertheless in 1929 General Honors was abolished, Lionel Trilling writes, “in part because its honorific title was felt to be invidious to the students who did not take the course.”

In 1932 the General Honors course reappeared as the Colloquium on Important Books, and this incarnation survived. Aydelotte described the course as placing emphasis “upon the importance of the books read, as documents in the history of Western culture, rather than upon scholarly minutae,” with Columbia faculty contributing background lectures as needed. The success of the Contemporary Civilization course in the meantime led to the introduction of two course for the lower division, starting in 1937 with Humanities A on masterpieces of literature and philosophy, followed in 1947 by Humanities B in music and fine arts. By 1944, Columbia was offering several options for independent study as well, departing from the earlier adherence to independent work in a single department—that was still an option, but students could involve two or more related departments, or even more than one division. Some departments, especially economics, also allowed the substitution of independent reading, seminars, and in some cases post-graduate courses in place of regular courses.

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65 McCaughey notes that it was Jacques Barzun who reorganized the course, and Lionel Trilling frequently co-taught it: ibid., 293.
66 Aydelotte, *Breaking the Academic Lock-Step* (1944), 69-70. Erskine’s “Great Books” approach, which was influenced by his own teacher, George Edward Woodberry, gained supporters in a variety of settings. With Mortimer Adler’s encouragement, a series of public lectures were offered by Cooper Union and spawned discussion groups throughout New York City. Erskine also helped introduce the important books concept to the University of Virginia, University of Chicago, and St. John’s College; the latter became the standard-bearer of this curriculum. For a discussion of the origin and spread of great books courses in college and adult education, see Katherine Chaddock Reynolds, “A Canon of Democratic Intent: Reinterpreting the Roots of the Great Books Movement,” *History of Higher Education Annual* 22 (2002), 5-32. See also Haarlow’s monograph on the University of Virginia, cited in fn. 38.
The beginnings of lower division honors

It is clear from Aydelotte’s 1944 compilation that upper division honors programs were the norm well into the 1940s. Alongside that emphasis, however, some educators and institutions were challenging the practice of waiting until the sophomore or junior years to offer honors work. Bright freshmen, they asserted, were at risk of losing their intellectual spark unless challenged and encouraged; the first year of college was a special opportunity to capture the interest of these students. By the 1950s, several options were being practiced widely to address the needs of gifted freshmen. Through special advising and orientation periods, students received personal attention to their academic plans and encouragement to take on more difficult work. Some institutions permitted students to skip introductory courses if they had mastered the material or to read independently instead of attending lectures. Finally, special sections of freshman courses provided a parallel education for first-year students. Rather than placing them in higher level courses, they attended freshman courses that had been rethought with the honors student in mind.

During the first half of the 1900s, a small number of institutions had made special provisions for high-ability students in the first or second year of college. The University of Chicago’s experiments with undergraduate education were noteworthy despite the lack of an honors designation. Aydelotte observed that no other institution had permitted as much freedom to students in the first and second years of college. The College Division exposed students to fundamental knowledge in the biological and physical sciences, humanities, and social sciences. Class attendance was optional, and students took as much time as needed to prepare for comprehensive exams in the knowledge areas. They could attend special courses designed to help prepare for the exams, and these courses were organized on the basis of student ability. All students took the same examinations, however. Success on the exams permitted them to pursue advanced study in one of four Divisions (Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities), which awarded baccalaureate and higher degrees. Aydelotte summarized the significance of the “New Plan” as providing “1) a common intellectual background for all students, and 2) variation in standard of work and rapidity of progress in accordance with
individual ability.” Able high school students could enter the College Division two years earlier, when they would have been starting the third year of high school.\(^{67}\)

While Chicago’s New Plan was not an honors program, Aydelotte did find several examples of lower division honors work in the 1940s. Boston College and Holy Cross both offered honors work on a full-time basis, but distinguished themselves from others in that category by admitting students to honors much earlier: Boston College admitted students at entrance, and Holy Cross at the end of the first year. Mt. Holyoke’s program, another full-time plan, began tutorials in the freshman year. Princeton’s Division of the Humanities had a four-year program leading to divisional and departmental honors. Students were admitted to the program during the summer before their freshman year and received special advising. Aydelotte noted that most departments at the University offered special sections of freshman and sophomore classes for high-ability students.\(^{68}\)

Yale freshmen were required to submit a plan of work in August before entering college, based on a booklet of course offerings. Yale’s freshman classes were sectioned by ability, and more than one-third of students selected the option of taking advanced classes. The benefit of early opportunities for challenging work, wrote Aydelotte, was that “they are relieved from the monotony of going over again subjects which they have already covered in preparatory school, and are kept stretching, which is the secret of educational advancement.” He observed that sectioned freshman and sophomore classes were becoming increasingly common, although at most institutions sectioned courses were the extent of accommodation to high-ability students in the lower division.\(^{69}\)

Stanford went further by offering independent study in the freshman year. The rationale was that freshmen may benefit even more than the advanced students from the freedom and individualized attention that independent study offered. Upper division independent study began in 1925 and allowed able students to substitute independent work for one-half to one-third of their regular course load in the junior and senior years. That program’s success sparked an innovative independent study option connected with

\(^{68}\) Aydelotte (1944), 82, 84, 86-88.
\(^{69}\) Ibid., 142-143.
fundamental lower division courses beginning in 1931. In 1934, Stanford’s academic departments were encouraged to offer directed reading for students in the junior year. The lower division and junior year options were meant to increase interest in and improve students’ readiness for the advanced independent study program in the last two years. In fact, the lower division program thrived with 100 to 200 participants per year, mainly in the “History of Western Civilization” course. Although departments became more involved in independent study, only 125 students had graduated under the upper division option as of 1944.70

Aydelotte (1944) advocated a model of lower division honors that included elements of the plans already in operation in the first two years. Basic courses would be sectioned by ability and supplemented with independent study opportunities, as at Stanford. He also suggested comprehensive examinations after the sophomore year as the basis for admission to honors in the upper division, as at the University of Chicago and University of Buffalo. Preparation time for the exams would vary from one to three years depending on the student’s circumstances and goals.71

While Aydelotte believed that honors work in the lower division was worthwhile, he felt conditions were not favorable for widespread implementation. In addition to the role of the freshman and sophomore years as a period of foundational work, the identification of entering students capable of honors work was a problem. The quality of preparation for college work varied greatly among high schools. Furthermore, high school performance was not always a reliable basis for selection: a student with a poor scholastic record might be more successful with the freedom of honors work than an excellent student who thrived under rigid requirements. Finally, most high school students were not prepared for independent study, never having been exposed to it during their schooling. As teaching methods at high schools changed, Aydelotte speculated, lower division honors work might become more feasible.72

Some conditions were changing even as Aydelotte wrote his two studies of honors programs. By the 1930s many colleges were devising means to help all freshmen prepare

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70 Ibid., 71-72, 144. For details on the rationale and organization of Stanford’s program, see Edgar Eugene Robinson, *Independent Study in the Lower Division at Stanford, 1931-1937* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1937).  
71 Aydelotte (1944), 144-145.  
72 Ibid., 146.
for college work and encourage them to think about their academic and vocational interests. The AAUW study of innovations in liberal arts colleges, completed in 1932, found pre-college testing programs at over 100 institutions, many of which also listed counseling for freshman among their services. Purdue, for example, had a “freshman orientation period” beginning in 1926. Student took tests in English, mathematics, and chemistry and were placed in the appropriate courses. The freshman chemistry course had a section for superior students; in the other two subjects, special non-credit sections existed for under-prepared students. Purdue planned in addition to create sections in English, mathematics and economics for students of superior ability; the courses would cover two semesters worth of work through a one-semester, four-hour course for which students would receive six credits.73 The Universities of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Arkansas also operated precollege testing and counseling programs. The roles of these programs were to encourage able students to enter college and less able students to consider their options, as well as to guide entering students in their choice of subjects based on test results, family background and vocational interests.74 Another form of academic encouragement for freshman was exemplified at Yale, where a separate freshman faculty instructed the students, each student was appointed a faculty advisor responsible for no more than twenty freshmen, and the students lived and dined apart from the older students. The Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin was another example of a living and learning arrangement where individual attention and close contact with faculty were emphasized.75

Reflecting on the characteristics of honors education during the mid-1900s, Joseph Cohen felt that Swarthmore’s program had been significant, but limited in effect. He acknowledged that Aydelotte and the Swarthmore faculty made an important contribution with their development of seminars and colloquia and the idea of divisional honors, and that Aydelotte had seen the future possibility of lower division honors work and a place for honors in state institutions. Despite wide publicity and Aydelotte’s

73 AAUW, Changes and Experiments in Liberal-Arts Education, 99-100.
74 Ibid., various pages. Aydelotte (1944) observed that orientation and placement periods and pre-college reading for students and their parents were common, and that freshman advising had become more serious than it was a few years earlier, 141-42.
75 AAUW, 72, 107-108. Cohen (1966) also discusses the Experimental College briefly as a notable, if short-lived (1928-1932), program that was not termed an honors program but was “self-selective—something like Reed College,” 20.
interest in improving undergraduate education beyond Swarthmore, however, the model’s adoption elsewhere was curtailed by what Cohen described as “the inescapably elitist nature of his British model, the restriction to the upper division, and the atypicality of Swarthmore itself.” In particular, public institutions did not have the conditions that would enable such programs to thrive on their campuses.⁷⁶

Although a foundation had been laid during the 1920s and 1930s for upper division, departmental honors work, honors-caliber work linked to lower division courses, as at Columbia and Stanford, marked a shift in emphasis that would gain momentum over the next few decades. Overall, the trend in the 1930s and 1940s was for institutions to pay closer attention to entering students’ intellectual and social development. Aydelotte described the tendency in these terms: “Many interesting experiments are being made with the purpose of eliminating lost motion in these first two years, saving students from confusion and floundering, and bringing them up to the Junior year better prepared for the tasks of the upper division.”⁷⁷ Institutions accomplished this through a range of new provisions that included testing and advising programs, freshman-only dormitories, and remedial and honors courses for students falling below or above the average in academic performance.

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⁷⁶ Cohen, in SSAHE, 10-11. Aydelotte’s biographer, Frances Blanshard, wrote that Aydelotte would have preferred many small institutions federated in Oxford style as the means to accommodate the high demand for college education in the U.S., rather than the development of large institutions: Blanshard, 151.

⁷⁷ Aydelotte, Breaking the Academic Lock-Step (1944), 141.
3 - A Favorable Climate for the Growth of Honors Education in the 1950s

The period of approximately 1945-1975 was characterized by growth in enrollments, funding, the number of institutions, and new programs within them, and by the end of the era, higher education “attained unprecedented size, resources, breadth, and depth of learning.”¹ The chief interruptions in this overall health were the Korean War beginning in 1950 and the student unrest of the late sixties, rooted in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. While initially a shock to the nation, the launching of the Russian sputniks in 1957 spurred innovations rather than being a setback. Even prior to the satellite launches, many educators in the 1950s worried about the quality of education and the preparation of students for their future roles.

The interest in providing “superior students” with a more rigorous education may be viewed as part of a broader concern for excellence that gained strength from the end of World War II through the early 1960s.² Americans increasingly felt that all levels of education needed to be improved not just for outstanding students, but the entire population of children and youth. The climate that created this general concern also encouraged the resurgence of honors programs; for this reason, many of the factors discussed in this chapter pertain to excellence throughout the educational system. These include:

- deficiencies at all levels of primary and secondary education that had gained wide recognition since the early 1950s;
- pressure on higher education from increasing enrollments, growing more serious as the baby boom generation entered college in the early 1960s;
- Cold War concerns that the U.S. lagged behind the U.S.S.R. in education, science, and technology; and
- curricular trends in higher education dating from before World War II.


² The term “superior student” was by no means universally accepted. Frank Copley, in a 1961 report on the talented high school student, writes: “Very nearly the first thing we discover is that he is almost never called ‘superior.’ School people view the term as invidious and undemocratic. They also complain of its inexactitude....” Terms such as gifted, talented, and “able and ambitious” were also used, but Copley points out that each of these alternatives had some weakness. The least problematic, in his view, was James Conant’s preferred term: “academically talented,” though Conant’s definition was too restrictive: Frank O. Copley, The American High School and the Talented Student (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1962), 3-4, and the corresponding endnote 5.
These factors were present simultaneously and in some respects converged. The rise of criticism about public education “coincided with rising public concern about national security and a growing fear about technological vulnerability because of the poor quality of instruction in the schools.”

Likewise, a report issued by the President’s Committee on Education Beyond the High School in July 1957 made it clear that the concerns surrounding America’s science and technology capacities and those resulting from the enrollment boom were intertwined, and that American higher education was not ready to accommodate the projected needs. A brief overview of each of the factors is useful in order to understand its particular demands.

**Reforms in secondary schools**

The 1950s were arguably a decade of “criticism of American education unequaled in modern times,” with prominent educators aiming much of their criticism at life-adjustment education, which had its peak from 1947 to 1953. Charles Prosser, the curriculum’s main promoter, felt that 60 percent of students were not well served by either college preparation or vocational training. Life-adjustment education was supposed to give them what they needed in their daily lives: “guidance and education in citizenship, home and family life, use of leisure, health, tools of learning, work experience and occupational adjustment…”

The life-adjustment movement was short-lived, and the extent of its implementation among high schools is unclear. Some schools did adopt the curriculum, but amid cold war concerns, the voices of concerned educators and a dissatisfied public soon urged schools to abandon life-adjustment in favor of traditional skills and subjects

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for all students. According to Dan Marshall et al., back-to-basics movements such as this are common following wars and other national emergencies “when the public is understandably more concerned with preservation than experimentation.” The Cold War setting created higher expectations among Americans concerning the quality of education in their schools, well before the first Russian *Sputnik* was launched.

As the overall content and quality of secondary education were being reevaluated, the situation of gifted students also received a great deal of attention. In response to the rigid progression through school and college linked to a student’s chronological age, the newly-established Ford Fund for the Advancement of Education (FAE) gave its support to five projects that challenged the current organization of education, aiming to offer more flexibility for students who excelled academically. One was a study of general education in the last two years of high school and first two years of college, by a committee comprising educators at Andover, Exeter, and Lawrenceville preparatory schools and at Harvard, Yale and Princeton. The resulting publication, *General Education in School and College*, identified weaknesses in the articulation between high school and college curricula at these institutions and suggested a way to compress eight years of general study into seven. The committee advocated better coordination not only as a means to reduce the length of study but also to improve the quality of college education in school and college curricula at these institutions and suggested a way to compress eight years of general study into seven. The committee advocated better coordination not only as a means to reduce the length of study but also to improve the quality of college

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8 Cameron Fincher (1986) lists the following commentators: Conant (1957), Gardner (1961), Mayer (1961), Rickover (1959), Bestor (1953), Goodman (1965) and Friedenberg (1953): Fincher, “Trends and Issues in Curricular Development,” *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, Vol. II. John C. Smart, ed. (New York: Agathon Press Inc., 1986), 279. Angus and Mirel (1999) describe the educational debate of the 1950s and early 1960s in terms of how the various factions viewed educational opportunity in the high school. In their view, the support for differentiated curricula in the comprehensive high school, regarded by Conant and others as a truly democratic approach to education, in fact prevented many students from taking courses that would adequately prepare them for college. They state that Arthur Bestor and his supporters had the only “revolutionary” proposal for American secondary education, advocating the same high quality education for everyone by allowing less academically talented students to take the same courses as the top students but at a slower pace. Angus and Mirel argued that the combination of a “carefully planned media blitz” and Conant’s breadth of appeal in the education community made it possible for Conant’s 1959 report, *The American High School Today*, to gain wide acceptance and affect educational policy in the next decade. See Angus and Mirel, Ch. 4 (“The Triumph of Curricular Differentiation, 1950-1964”), 102-121; quotations taken from pp. 113, 120. Two retrospectives of Bestor’s influential book, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools*, are included in the second edition of Bestor’s volume (1985).


10 The age-based progression through school and college was called the “lock step.” Frank Aydelotte’s use of the term was similar, but referred more to the rigid adherence of colleges to a credit-based system of courses leading to graduation. He advocated different paths within college depending on ability and motivation, while the FAE’s projects aimed at creating options for students who were held back by the existing school curriculum and norms governing the school-to-college transition.
preparatory education, thereby allowing colleges to provide more challenging work and keeping well-prepared and able students from “getting bogged down in an introductory college program necessarily designed for the average.”11 The project helped generate a second FAE project at four institutions in the Atlanta area, which reorganized their curricula for the eleventh through fourteenth grades as a continuous sequence and created more advanced courses for each grade level.12

A third FAE experiment, the early college admission scholarship program, started in 1951 as a pre-induction plan to let young men complete two years of general education before starting military service related to the Korean War.13 The program allowed students to commence full-time college studies at the age of sixteen, prior to completing high school. During the first four years 1,350 students took part, and evaluations showed that they were comparable to regular entering students in both academic and social measures and that a higher proportion of early admission students planned to continue to graduate school. By Fall 1957, thirty-four institutions of higher education were offering early admissions.14

The early admission program had a strong, well-publicized start but a mixed reception. Despite the evaluation results that showed no detrimental effects on the early admission group, Richard Pearson, Executive Vice President of the College Entrance Examination Board, highlighted the finding that academic talent and emotional maturity

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11 The project and the publication, General Education in School and College (Harvard University Press, 1952), are described in Chapter 2 of Bridging the Gap Between School and College: A Progress Report on Four Related Projects Supported by the Fund for the Advancement of Education, Evaluation Report Number 1 (New York: The Fund for the Advancement of Education, June 1953), 30-44. Quotations: p. 44.
13 The program began at Chicago, Columbia, Wisconsin and Yale (Chicago already had some ten years of experience with early admissions under the “Chicago Plan.”) On hearing of FAE support for the program in Spring 1951, many other institutions expressed an interest. The program was expanded to include Fisk, Goucher, Lafayette, Louisville, Oberlin, Shimer, and Utah in 1951, and Morehouse in 1952. Draft regulations, incidentally, were relaxed shortly thereafter, allowing students with good grades to complete college before commencing their military service. FAE, They Went to College Early, 5-6.
14 Alvin C. Eurich, “Ideas and the Superior Student,” Address given at a meeting of the ICSS, Louisville, KY, Nov. 20-23, 1958, Box 35, ICSS Papers, University of Colorado-Boulder Archives. According to the FAE evaluation report, They Went to College Early, as of April 1957 eleven of the twelve participating colleges had made early admissions a part of their regular policies. It also noted that the College Entrance Examination Board reported 29 of its 169 member institutions were operating early admission programs during the 1955-56 academic year: 89.
can develop at different rates, and named an additional problem, that the early admission program “misjudged the mood of the high schools. It failed to recognize that the schools were not willing to admit their inability to deal with able students, because they depended upon them to set the pace for the rest of the students.” Although some high schools were reluctant to lose their best students, many schools did welcome the program, and some of those that initially resisted were won over after a few years. Furthermore, as of April 1957 eleven of the twelve participating colleges had made early admissions a part of their regular admissions policies.

A fourth FAE experiment bypassed the controversy of removing gifted students from high school by improving curricula within the schools. The Advanced Placement Program was established in 1952 and transferred to the College Entrance Examination Board in 1955. It allowed students to take college-level courses at their high schools—usually in the twelfth grade—and subsequently “test out” of introductory courses in their freshman year of college if they successfully completed the A.P. exams in those subjects. As of 1958, A.P. tests were available in twelve fields of study, and more than 3,700 students from some 360 high schools took the exams in one or more subjects. Successful completion of the exams provided the opportunity for advanced standing in approximately 280 colleges that participated in the program at that time. Daniel Bell presented evidence of the program’s limited effect, however: the 21,769 students who took A.P. exams during the 1962-63 school year amounted to less than 2 percent of all students entering college.

16 FAE, *They Went to College Early*, 73-76, 89.
17 It was known originally as the Program for Admission to College with Advanced Standing. In 1951, the heads of twelve colleges, led by President Gordon Chalmers of Kenyon College, formed a committee on this topic and in 1952 invited twelve secondary school administrators to join them. The program’s further development is described in *Bridging the Gap...*, 56-66.
19 Daniel Bell, *The Reforming of General Education: The Columbia College Experience in Its National Setting*. Anchor edition (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1968), 128. The A.P. Program grew slowly, impeded by the cost to schools of operating it. Advanced standing had disadvantages that may have been additional factors in the slow adoption of the program. Harvard noted that its A.P. students skipped some of the usual general education courses and were forced to choose majors earlier than other students: Bell, 132. As of May, 1963 Harvard had the greatest number of A.P. candidates (635), followed by Yale (496), Cornell (472) and Univ. of Michigan (397). Other public institutions with a high number of candidates...
The national effect of the A.P. program was that of a widening circle of influence rather than an immediate, large-scale transformation. The program started off with a numerically modest impact and even after twenty years was characterized by Sidney Marland, former U.S. Assistant Secretary for Education, as “one of the most treasured, albeit relatively small-scale, activities of the College Board.” Nevertheless, it motivated high schools around the country to upgrade their curricula while higher education responded to the pressure to recognize pre-college achievement in college-level subjects.

In the fifth FAE project, the Portland (Oregon) Public Schools collaborated with Reed College to identify and encourage elementary and secondary school students showing outstanding “creative, intellectual, artistic and social capacities.” The FAE programs were not the only innovations in gifted education, however. Ability-based differentiation in schooling appeared in many forms during the 1950s, including tracking, acceleration, independent study, differentiated assignments within regular courses, elective curricula, extracurricular activities, independent schools, and special high schools (e.g., focusing on science and math, or the arts).

In his report on Columbia College’s General Education reforms, Bell identified four major developments that occurred in secondary education from about the mid-1950s: curricular reforms, Advanced Placement, improvements in teaching, and—in a small number of schools—interdisciplinary courses. He noted, however, that these develop-
ments affected only a minority of students. Most reforms in subject matter were aimed at the top 20 percent of high school students, and Advanced Placement testing involved only about 25,000 students. The most significant change overall, wrote Bell, was the willingness of many high schools to break the lock-step of the standard curriculum.23

Higher Education in the 1950s

Mirroring the experiences of the broader American society, higher education in the 1950s both prospered and endured severe strain. The history of that decade, which commonly encompasses the post-war 1940s, has three focal points in the literature: the entrance of war veterans into higher education through the GI Bill, the effects of McCarthyism, and the growth of research at universities. The post-Sputnik flurry of reform activity has received attention as well.24 One conclusion that appears in several works is the beneficial effect of the Cold War on the academy, regardless of how objectionable certain elements of it may have been. The “socialization of intellectual work” begun by the federal government during that time continues to this day.

Mobilization for the Korean War and the attendant uncertainty it caused for enrollment planning were problematic for a short period of time. Other effects related to military preparedness lasted much longer. Arthur Adams, president of the American

23 Bell, 111-112, 141. He added, “This move has also accentuated the tendency to break up the ‘comprehensive’ school and to sharpen the differences between the specialized and elite schools, public and private (probably no more than 500 in the country), from the large number of ordinary schools.” Regarding curricular reforms: Angus and Mirel (1999) agree that the late 1950s’ rhetoric of greater math and science literacy did not translate into actual gains; a large proportion of students were enrolling in watered-down math and science courses rather than pursuing more challenging curricula: 116-120.

Council on Education, characterized the mood as “a rather grudging acceptance of the inevitable,” that is, the necessity to counter any moves by the Soviets with appropriate counter-moves. A joint report of the Educational Policies Commission and the American Council on Education (1951) said that war was not certain, but partial mobilization would shape the American economy for “an indefinite period.”

The worries concerning foreign affairs certainly reached the world of education. Colleges and universities introduced non-Western courses in economics, history, and languages. New area studies programs, government sponsored research on international topics, and international educational and research opportunities opened up a curriculum that “was both an expression of government policy and an expression of academic perception of the need for making the course of study less parochial.” Private philanthropies also played a major role in this broadening world-view.

The challenges of rising enrollment

When enrollments in higher education increased greatly following World War I, college faculty feared a lowering of educational standards, which they felt were already aimed at the average. The entrance of over two-million war veterans into higher education through the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 sparked similar worries. James B. Conant and Robert Maynard Hutchins, among others, had serious reservations about the GI Bill, fearing that the quality of their educational programs would suffer with thousands of new students who otherwise would not have been college-bound. Nonetheless, new and existing higher education institutions were able to absorb the increase with a “relatively slight” weakening of the major and divisional requirements, although some of the practices adopted under pressure—crowded lecture halls, lower quality instruction—remained at some institutions even after the veterans graduated.

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25 Henry, 85-86.
27 Frank Aydelotte saw the problem in a different light, stating that the increase in enrollments was “the occasion for the crisis in educational standards, but that the cause should be attributed to the methods of [the] educational system.” He felt that regimentation in the college program held back students who had greater potential: Claude R. Rickman, “Trends in Provisions for Gifted Students in American Colleges and Universities, 1920-1955,” Ph.D. diss. (University of North Carolina, 1956), 17-18.
28 Rudolph, 282-283.
Beyond providing post-secondary educational opportunities to veterans, however, colleges and universities were called on to satisfy a broader need: *Higher Education for American Democracy* (1947) by the President’s Commission on Higher Education recommended opening higher education to a greater proportion of the population. The report estimated that at least 49 percent of Americans were capable of completing fourteen years of schooling, and 32 percent were capable of an advanced liberal or specialized professional education. The Commission set a national goal of creating an educational system in which individuals could study to the highest level of their ability, regardless of economic background. Subsequent studies in the 1950s found that a high number of high school students, up to one-half of those graduating in the top 20 percent of their high school class, were not entering higher education. The prevention of talent loss became a national priority and inspired assistance to students such as the National Merit Scholarship Program.

The college attendance of veterans and later their children, and the increased societal value of college attendance in general, made enrollment levels a constant source of concern for college administrators from the end of World War II into the 1960s. In 1951-52, over 300,000 students who entered college under the GI Bill were still in school. A downward trend in enrollment through 1952-53 was followed by an upswing that ended in the enrollment surge of the 1960s. Enrollments in 1956-57 broke the 1947 and 1948 records that returning veterans helped set. By this time, the enrollment projections of the baby boom were receiving widespread attention. Although the baby boomers had not yet reached college age—those children were still in primary school—colleges and universities were already being pushed to their limits: in 930 accredited institutions with four-year programs, enrollments had increased by 400,000 students

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31 As they finished their studies, planning became one of the greatest problems in higher education, with far-reaching consequences. According to David Henry (1975), “Everyone understood that enrolments scarcely could be projected for more than a year at a time and that stability in tenure, educational innovation, and all income-related activity would be seriously affected.” Henry, 88.
32 Garland Parker observed that the first increases in 1953-54 were due to career publicity and draft deferments rather than an increase in the birth rate. The Korean War factored in “first as a depressant and later as a stimulant.” Parker, *The Enrollment Explosion* (New York: School & Society Books, 1971), 43-46.
compared to five years earlier. In response to this pressure, some private institutions were able to increase enrollments while also raising selectivity.

By 1961, accommodating the surge in enrollments was a top priority. State-level actions included the expansion of regional universities and creation of more community and junior colleges. States established scholarship programs aimed at broadening educational opportunity and encouraging talented youth to continue their educations. State boards and other bodies to oversee planning for new and existing higher education programs increased in number, and multi-state compacts were created for sharing educational resources within regions.

While administrators and policy-makers were addressing the practical concerns of enrollment increases, many educators feared that the quality of American higher education would diminish during this period of growth. One viewpoint, articulated by Oliver Carmichael, was that the replacement of the search for truth by the search for knowledge left the curriculum lacking in the examination of meaning in favor of factual learning. The curricular shift also appeared in terms of specialized (or vocational) versus general education. The dilemma was not new: measures to counter the tendency toward specialization appeared in the 1920s. The Harvard Report (“Red Book”) of 1945 spurred further attempts to provide a foundation of common cultural knowledge, and in 1947 the President’s Commission on Higher Education for Democracy repeated the calls for unified general education: “Too often [today’s college graduate] is ‘educated’ in that he has acquired competence in some particular occupation, yet falls short of that human

33 In 1957-58, for the first time college enrollments surpassed 3,000,000: Parker, 46-48; U.S. Office of Education, Digest of Educational Statistics (1968), 68, cited in Parker, 48; Henry, 99. Henry believed the term “tidal wave,” widely used to describe the baby boom enrollment growth, “was unfortunate. The connotation of disaster was hardly appropriate.”
37 While acknowledging that individual goals and interests were legitimate considerations in a college education, the report called for a strengthening of general education “as a remedy to class divisiveness, as a thread throughout all the years of formal education, and as a common bonding device for high school students destined for different futures.” The report was intended for internal use but became nationally influential: Rudolph, 258.
wholeness and civic conscience which the cooperative activities of citizenship require.” The Commission counseled that higher education include “the transmission of a common cultural heritage toward a common citizenship….” It listed the characteristics and skills that general education should cultivate, noting that it was essentially a form of liberal education that focused on life’s problems, and argued for consistency of aims throughout all teaching and other campus activities, rather than a uniform system of courses.38

Despite the efforts of Harvard and other colleges to introduce carefully-planned general education requirements, according to Frederick Rudolph, by about 1955 “general education ran out of steam” in the face of faculty resistance. He observed that a few “eccentric” colleges—Sarah Lawrence, Bennington, Bard, St. John’s, and Chicago for a time—were willing to be identified primarily with general education. For most colleges, however, general education as envisioned in the Harvard report was unwelcome for practical and philosophical reasons. Rudolph concluded that general education schemes expected too much of faculty and were too prescriptive, forcing students into courses they didn’t want; according to one argument general education was too democratic, forcing everyone into courses tailored to the median student.39

The conundrum of balancing college education to serve both individual and societal needs became a common theme, but it was not the only concern. To many educators, higher education had reached a crossroads. Dean Rusk, President of the Rockefeller Foundation, imparted a sense of urgency in the opening address to the Association of Higher Education’s annual meeting in 1953: “…this does not appear to be a good year to enjoy the luxury of debating the marginal and frivolous; the issues I wish to mention are ancient and fundamental.” He described the need for intellectual freedom, for increased funding, and for higher education to play a role in “the examination and exposition of the problems of leadership in the free world.”40 While the Korean War and McCarthy hearings were reminders of the need to maintain the basic values of higher education, they were part of a broader set of conditions that compelled educators to

39 Rudolph, 161, 259-264.
reexamine higher education, persisting into the late 1950s. In 1957, the President’s Committee on Education Beyond the High School wrote:

Revolutionary changes are occurring in American education of which even yet we are only dimly aware. This Nation has been propelled into a challenging new educational era since World War II by the convergence of powerful forces—an explosion of knowledge and population, a burst of technological and economic advance, the outbreak of ideological conflict and the uprooting of old political and cultural patterns on a worldwide scale, and an unparalleled demand by Americans for more and better education…”  

This situation resulted in “enormously increased educational challenges…which our educational institutions as a whole are ill-prepared to meet.” The nation was experiencing a widening gap between its educational needs and capacities.  

Experimentation

In fact, curricular changes had been underway for a number of years. Speaking at the 1953 National Conference on Higher Education, Carmichael highlighted the “unprecedented ferment and concern for the improvement…which is discernible in every section of the country and in every type of institution…the chief concern is not to improve the technical aspects of their training but rather to provide a broader base, a more thorough general education, a more vital social outlook, and a better understanding of our highly complex society.” Liberal arts faculties were in the midst of a “silent revolution.” Graduate and professional schools were also examining basic educational assumptions.  

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41 President’s Committee on Education Beyond the High School, 16-17, cited in Henry, 102.
42 Ibid. The Committee (a.k.a. “Josephs Committee”) was formed in 1956 at the suggestion of the White House Conference on Education. According to Janet Kerr, although President Eisenhower recognized the link between higher education and an informed citizenry and national defense, the Committee initially had little chance of affecting federal policy due to Eisenhower’s skepticism regarding federal aid to education. He asked specifically for recommendations concerning manpower needs related to national defense, keeping pace with rapid technological advances, and scientific and humanistic studies as they relate to national security. The Committee was interested in other topics and adjusted the agenda to include discussion of educational opportunity, the physical implications of increasing access, financing higher education, the supply of college teachers, as well as the manpower needs of science, industry and government. The Committee’s recommendations did prove to have some influence as Eisenhower’s policy goals and the general climate shifted in late 1957: Janet C. Kerr, “From Truman to Johnson: Ad Hoc Policy Formulation in Higher Education,” Review of Higher Education, 8 (Fall 1984): 22-31.
Another speaker, Ernest Hollis of the U.S. Department of Education observed: “A review of the program of a single undergraduate college will discover courses and professors governed by the traditional, the modern, and the confused (muddling through) philosophy of liberal education.” His conclusion was that there is no single “right” way to balance general and specialized education. The theoretical question of the relationship of general and specialized education may never be solved, but in practice it was being resolved all the time, case by case. The American system of higher education could address the dilemma in a number of ways, differing between institutions, within institutions, and even among one professor’s various courses.44 Frederick Rudolph’s (1977) assessment of the state of the curriculum during this time is similar:

As colleges and universities learned to live with the consequences of curricular breakdown and with the inadequacies of prescriptive remedies, they were led through periods of at least small-scale reassessing, perfecting, improving, sometimes prodding either by foundation grants, models of innovation elsewhere, declining enrollments, or by the gnawing recognition that they simply could do better.45

In the late 1950s, the impending enrollment increase from the Baby Boom prompted institutions to reexamine assumptions about class time and years to completion. A number of institutions introduced experiments in independent study to test the idea that students could learn as well with less classroom hours and possibly economize on faculty time. A report of the Fund for the Advancement of Education (May 1959) listed sixteen institutions that tried new independent study programs since 1956. At these institutions, independent study was available not only to honors students but as part of the regular curriculum, since one of the practical aims of the innovation was to accommodate more students with existing resources. In fact, the experiments demonstrated that independent study required a great deal of the instructor’s time outside of class, although at Vanderbilt most of the faculty involved in the program reported they were accomplishing more in their other professional activities because of reduced classroom time.46 Regardless of the

44 Ernest V. Hollis (Chief of College Administration, U.S. Office of Ed.), “The Rights Relationship of Various Aspects of the Curriculum,” in Horn, Current Issues...1953, 48. The modern philosophy he refers to is the utilitarian approach.
45 Rudolph, 264.
efficiency outcomes, teaching effectiveness and student learning were emphasized above all else as reasons for the experimentation.

Some institutions went as far as revising their undergraduate programs on a larger scale. These plans included the reorganization of general education offerings, introduction of interdisciplinary courses, preparation of students for periods of independent study, and designation of inter-sessions as periods for special course work or independent study. The New College Plan, for example, proposed to pool course offerings at Amherst, Smith, Mount Holyoke, and the University of Massachusetts in addition to increasing the proportion of independent work, for which students would be prepared through freshman seminars. Wesleyan expected its reform plan to allow an enrollment increase of 40 to 50 percent over the next decade. Goddard hoped for a 20 percent potential increase through its reforms. 47

At the Association for Higher Education’s eleventh annual meeting in 1956, devoted to the enrollment crisis and problems of quality, Harold Taylor argued that the present system of instruction needed to be “scrapped” even if enrollments did not grow by a single student. He took issue with forcing students into general courses they do not want at a time when their budding interest in specific areas should be engaged. The main mode of presenting material—lectures that attempted to condense large amounts of information—did not invite students to discover the subjects for themselves. 48 Writing four years later Samuel Baskin noted that it was too soon to see the results of the recent innovations in curriculum and resource utilization. Nevertheless, he wrote: “What is significant about these movements…is that higher education is ‘on the dare’—and has really begun to shake itself loose from what Dr. Taylor and others have suggested have been too long established and too deeply ingrained patterns of behavior.” 49 The report

The FAE report Baskin referred to is: Better Utilization of College Teaching Resources. Baskin compiled examples of curricular innovation and offered them to his readers as illustrations of ideas that could impact higher education more widely in the future, rather than as formulas for success. 47 Baskin, 11, 14-15. As of 1960, the Wesleyan and Goddard plans had just begun, while the New College Plan was still being studied before implementation. 48 Harold Taylor, AHE annual meeting, 1956, quoted in Baskin, Quest for Quality, 9. The full text of Taylor’s address is published as “The World of the American Student,” in Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual National Conference on Higher Education, Chicago, Ill., March 5-7, 1956, G. Kerry Smith, ed. (Association for Higher Education (NEA): Washington, DC, 1956), 21-28. Taylor was President of Sarah Lawrence College. 49 Baskin, 17.
concluded that efficiency measures did not have to diminish quality and, in fact, might prove to strengthen education.

Excellence

Doubts about the adequacy of the contemporary college education to meet national needs were widespread during the 1950s, and a common complaint was that curricula were aimed too low. In 1952, C. DeWitt Hardy had observed that the educational pace was largely “set by the pedestrians, with the path marked out by sight rather than insight. This may assure some degree of competence, but it may do so at the expense of excellence.”50 Another critic at that time declared that state universities had become a “service station for the general public.”51 Defenders of the universities pointed out that non-academic and market-driven activities, which had become a common feature of state institutions, took place in addition to, not in place of, intellectual pursuits on campus. Nevertheless, Hofstadter concluded that “mass education, if it has done nothing else, has caused American higher education to lose sight of the superior student with genuine intellectual concerns and has tended to pitch the level of its work too close to the lowest common denominator.”52

When Russia launched its first satellite in October 1957, American higher education was already in a state of experimentation, having spent the past decade engaged in a variety of innovations and adaptations to the new environment. In the meantime, the federal government awakened to action as well. Congress and the executive branch began in 1956 to recognize the possible need for support in light of the enrollment surge, but it did not take concrete action until the Sputnik crisis. Without that impetus, writes David Henry, “the National Defense Education Act of 1958, inadequate as it was as an aid to institutions, might not have been adopted, or at least not at that time.”53

Following the Sputnik launches, the reform tendencies of the previous decade—including the honors movement—intensified. Excellence became the “watchword for education,” as demonstrated by numerous publications: *The Pursuit of Excellence*

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51 Logan Wilson, cited by Hofstadter in Hofstadter & Hardy, 115.
52 Hofstadter, ibid.
53 Henry, 120.
(Rockefeller Brothers, 1958), Jacques Barzun’s “The Place and the Price of Excellence” (1959), Recognition of Excellence (Edgar Stern Family Fund, 1960), Encouraging the Excellent (Fund for the Advancement of Education, 1960), and John Gardner’s Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too? (1961). Discussions about excellence in education assumed an urgent tone. A report published in 1959 by the Fund for the Advancement of Education declared: “At this time in history, it is not overstatement to say that our very survival depends on excellence in higher education.”

In “The Retreat from Excellence” (1960), Claude M. Fuess, headmaster emeritus of Phillips Academy, argued that the leveling tendency of American society was detrimental to the nation’s health. The competitive spirit suffered when mediocrity was rewarded over outstanding performance; people were less willing to take chances. “Desire for security and mediocrity belong together.” In 1961, Louis Benezet noted that although “the mere mention of the word [excellence] seldom fails to produce solemn nods,” closer examination revealed disagreement over its meaning, reminiscent of discussions of progressive education, general education, and basic education. Even more troublesome, he felt, was that excellence had not been discussed in terms of developing a “stronger national character, for which our times are crying out.” Many faculty were equating excellence with the production of academic scholars, which represented a “parochial definition” that did not serve all the goals that colleges aim to achieve. Instead, educators should ask themselves how to “produce more people who show a more

54 The characterization of excellence as the “watchword” of the early 1960s comes from Louis Benezet, 44. He contrasts it to the watchword of the 1920s, progressive education, which was and remained controversial. Excellence, on the other hand, “has so far escaped nearly all controversy.” Benezet, “The Trouble with Excellence,” Saturday Review, Oct. 21, 1961, 44. Nevertheless, it had many permutations, as a project of the Edgar Stern Family Fund showed. Its report, Recognition of Excellence, presented recent and ongoing research on excellence at all levels of schooling and phases of scholarly careers, as well as the current forms of recognizing excellence. The Fund’s goal was to identify ways to improve the climate for “excellence of mind and spirit.” The publication raised many questions and is a useful resource on how talent was being understood and rewarded: Recognition of Excellence (Edgar Stern Family Fund: The Free Press of Glencoe, IL, 1960).

55 Committee on Government and Higher Education, The Efficiency of Freedom (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), 8. The report was written because of concern over increasing state control over higher education. Thus, although higher education was recognized as a matter of national survival, institutions felt that greater governmental control was unnecessary and unwise.

56 He contrasted 1960 with the post-Revolutionary period, which had more “first-rate statesmen” although the population was much smaller. The reason for this reversal from a cult of genius to one of mediocrity, he speculated, was his generation’s “approval of conformity and orthodoxy and the kindred colorless virtues which keep a social organism static.” Charles M. Fuess, “The Retreat from Excellence,” Saturday Review, March 26, 1960, 22-23.
sympathetic awareness of society’s demands upon themselves.” A report from the President’s Commission on National Goals emphasized the potential social benefits of education and called for Americans to devote more of their time and energy to solving the nation’s problems. “Above all, Americans must demonstrate in every aspect of their lives the fallacy of a purely selfish attitude—the materialistic ethic…..” John Gardner’s supporting essay to the Commission’s report stated: “In some measure it is a problem of organizing ourselves to achieve our objectives. The somewhat blind evolutionary process of the educational past is no longer suited to the needs of our fast-changing society.”

Amid these concerns, throughout the 1950s the most talented students began receiving increased attention, through state and federal programs to identify them and encourage their studies, and through the new and renewed interest of higher education institutions in honors programs, early admission, and advanced placement. Acceleration and enrichment received “careful consideration” as academic options for superior students, who also enjoyed special attention concerning admissions and financial aid. At the same time, faculty and administrators were regarding remedial work unfavorably. For advocates of gifted and honors education, a great deal of work remained. In K-12 education, despite an awareness among educators of the needs of gifted children since the previous century and despite a wealth of research on giftedness that accumulated during the first half of the 1900s, programs for gifted students were not widespread. A study of Ohio schools illustrates this deficiency: In 1950, a survey of school districts in that state found that of the 258 schools responding, 2 percent reported having special classes for their gifted students and 9 percent reported enrichment programs. The remaining 89 percent reported no special provisions for high-ability children.

57 Benezet, 45-46. While Benezet acknowledged that the call for excellence had spurred some positive changes, he questioned whether all of the results of the trend were desirable. The “heavy-assignment binge” affecting junior high through college was one source of concern. He complained that data from educational psychology regarding the best environment for learning had not been consulted, the new assumption being that twice as much homework would be twice as beneficial. Benezet believed colleges needed to go beyond defining excellence as “obedience to the call for stronger conventional preparation and more diligent study.” He quoted President Butterfield of Wesleyan, who asked whether colleges were producing a “dutiful generation.” Both excerpts from President’s Commission are quoted in Benezet, 63.

58 Little, 196; quotation from Parker, 44.

59 A. Harry Passow, et al., “Planning for Talented Youth,” HMLI Pamphlets (Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute, Teachers College, 1955), 5. At the end of the decade, James Conant’s influential study, The American High School Today: A First Report to Interested Citizens (1959), made several recommendations on how the comprehensive high school could provide for and challenge academically talented students (the
Among colleges and universities, the situation was similar. Joseph Cohen, director of the University of Colorado’s honors program, undertook a survey in 1952 to determine the status of honors education throughout the U.S. He found very few programs that operated on a significant scale or in a form that engaged students early in their college years and provided appropriate opportunities in general as well as specialized coursework. A survey by the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, conducted in the early 1960s, likewise showed that few honors programs had existed a decade earlier, or were so weak as to be considered negligible. A study by the Association of Minnesota Colleges in 1955 found that faculties at Minnesota institutions readily recognized the need to provide high-ability students with challenging opportunities but admitted that they were not doing as much as they should.

At the national level, the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association drew attention to the needs of gifted children through its publications, *Education of the Gifted* (1950, 1955) and *Manpower and Education* (1956). In its 1957 policy paper, *Higher Education in a Decade of Decision*, which addressed the impending enrollment boom, the EPC advocated a differentiated higher education system in which each institution would “limit and clarify its role in the total enterprise,” a process that could be achieved through state and regional cooperation. It added, however, that talented students should always have access to higher education.

The NEA’s Invitational Conference on the Academically Talented Secondary School Pupil, held in February 1958 in Washington, DC, again sought to examine the educational needs of talented students and the challenges for teachers and school administrators. John Stalnaker, President of the National Merit Scholarship Corporation,
reminded participants: “As we consider how to identify the academically gifted student, let us recognize that he may be thrown into an anti-intellectual environment even in some of our colleges and certainly in most of our national life.” Stalnaker urged educators to “recognize individuals and appreciate differences,” allowing for talent in its many forms. Despite negative views of scientists and professors among some government and business leaders and the media, he saw signs of improvement. The weakening of the life-adjustment curriculum movement in schools, the drive to exceed Russia’s scientific successes, and local and national efforts to strengthen curricula all pointed to progress in K-12 and college education. He also noted that rising enrollments in higher education could be expected to force some admissions restrictions, potentially leading to higher academic standards.  

It appears that the challenge for honors advocates in the 1950s was not primarily to convince the educational community that honors programs were tenable. Although the charge that special programs for academically talented students were elitist did arise, such criticism was outweighed by the prevailing dissatisfaction with the quality of American education. Honors advocates had to put forth a compelling case for introducing or revitalizing programs on their campuses, but given the favorable climate, the success of honors initiatives at this time may have hinged less on philosophical arguments than on the resolution of practical problems such as funding, staffing, and other organizational issues.

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64 John Stalnaker, “Methods of Identification—The Complexity of the Problem,” NEA Invitational Conference on the Academically Talented Secondary School Pupil, Conference Report, February 1958, James B. Conant, Chairman (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1958), 21-26. Stalnaker also suggested that some students will have sharp edges and need not be well-rounded—this could have been a reference to life-adjustment education, which could force academically talented students into a curriculum designed around non-academic topics; however, the argument could be made that liberal education requires a rounding out of sharp edges and that talented students with a passion for a particular area of study should be excused from general (liberal education) requirements and be allowed to excel in one field. This might be especially true for the “genius” student.
4 - The Formation of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS)

By the mid-1900s, higher education institutions were paying increased attention to entering and lower division students of all levels of ability and responding in a number of ways to concerns about the lack of flexibility (the “lock-step”) in high school and college curricula. More broadly, American education was seen as incapable of meeting the technological needs of the country and preparing future leaders who would understand the complexities of contemporary times. Institutions furthermore grappled not only with the growing popularity of college-attendance but the additional challenge of enrollment spikes associated with returning war veterans, especially following World War II through the GI Bill. Somewhat later, the knowledge that a large wave of students would be reaching college age by the 1960s led many educators to worry that their institutions would become overburdened and instruction forced to cater to the average student, leading to further neglect of the academically talented.

This climate of pressure, and the widespread interest in improving the quality of post-secondary education while serving a growing population of students, resulted in a willingness to differentiate among students in terms of their academic abilities and motivation. Whereas in earlier decades honors education was tentative and limited in scope, by the 1950s the idea that the top tier of students was better served through special programs was no longer radical even in large public institutions. The earlier programs, regardless of their operational details or longevity, collectively had set a precedent for the suitability of honors education and provided models that could be adapted and improved.

The University of Colorado had been a forerunner among state universities in providing honors courses in its College of Arts and Sciences since 1930 and was one of the pioneers of honors work outside of the major department, known as general honors. Joseph W. Cohen, a professor of philosophy at the University, became director of the honors program in 1943. He began his involvement in 1928 as a member of a small committee interested in reforming the grade-based honors system and sat on the institution’s newly formed Honors Council starting in 1930. Cohen was drawn to honors education both out of anger with an educational system that allowed students to waste
years on routine and superficial education, and interest in the philosophical question of how true intellectuals could be produced, particularly in a democratic society. Finally, a more general concern with institutional change motivated Cohen to persevere despite the knowledge that uprooting long-standing principles would be a difficult and slow process. He believed it was possible to improve higher education for all students, using honors programs as “a nucleus of quality” which would influence the rest of the institution “to work to make as many students as possible into first-rate products.”¹

By the early 1950s, after ensuring the preservation of Colorado’s honors program through the war years,² Cohen could look to longer-term issues. His survey of 110 institutions revealed that about half of them had no honors course or honors based only on the calculation of grade average. About forty institutions went beyond grade average to offer some honors courses, but the overwhelming majority of those programs were departmental with “almost no attempt to cope with the problem of inter-departmental and interdivisional criteria for honors work.” Only about twenty institutions had honors programs that clearly extended beyond the departmental approach.³

Cohen hoped to expand his investigation to a scope that would benefit numerous institutions that, by their own admission, were frustrated with the poor quality of their honors programs or complete lack of honors education. At the urging of Glenwood Walker of the Graduate Record Examination, who had visited the University of Colorado, Cohen wrote to the Fund for the Advancement of Education in 1952 to propose a continuation of his survey for an additional semester or two, followed by the preparation

¹ Joseph W. Cohen, in The Superior Student in American Higher Education (hereafter SSAHE), ed. Joseph W. Cohen (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), vii.-x., 20-23 (quotations from page ix). See also a personal statement by Cohen quoted in Dudley Wynn, “Honors and the University,” in SSAHE, 98-99, from his address at a meeting of the Association for General and Liberal Studies in 1963: Cohen recalled examining student course records at the University of Colorado and observing a haphazardness in fulfilling basic and elective requirements and an overemphasis on the major field, with a general imbalance between the two. He concluded: “But I noted above all the absence of an adequate reigning concern with the quality of the total outcome—an absence due, I felt, to routine counseling, the dominating criteria of grades in separate courses, and strictly departmental competence.”

² Cohen noted that the war “was disastrous to many an honors program elsewhere.” In order to maintain the Colorado program’s momentum, the university established a series of “World Crisis Courses” and discontinued the requirement that students take both general and departmental honors—although about half of the honors students still chose both. Ibid., 22.

³ Joseph Cohen, letter to Clarence Faust, President of the Fund for the Advancement of Education, 11 December 1952, Box 4, ICSS Papers, Archives of the University of Colorado at Boulder (henceforth “UCBA”). Cohen’s survey data (1952-53) are in three folders in the ICSS archives (UCBA), Box 4.
of a report that would document successful practices among institutions. The University of Colorado’s honors program was already being scrutinized by faculty and administrators at other institutions, and in response to their requests, he wanted to provide information not only about the program he oversaw but compile descriptions of successful activities taking place elsewhere and possibly formulate models that various types of institutions could follow. Cohen listed the institutions he was most interested in visiting due to their strong programs for high-achieving students:

- Chicago: preceptorials
- Columbia: colloquia and contemporary civilization courses
- Stanford: humanities program and colloquia
- Harvard: general education and group tutorials
- Wesleyan U (Conn.): Russell House and Fred Millett
- Rutgers: interdisciplinary program
- Utah: Institute of Government Political Science honors program
- Oregon: sophomore honors
- Florida State-Gainesville: general education
- Ohio State and U Mississippi: freshman pilot groups

Cohen then named the following colleges with “strong established departmental programs”: Swarthmore, Amherst, Brown, Harvard, Oregon, “etc.” He also listed selected institutions with liberal arts colleges in the midst of revising their honors programs: Cornell, Michigan, Ohio State, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, USC, Kansas, Montana State.

It seems that the FAE did not respond affirmatively, and there is no record of further survey activity by Cohen at the time. Although his project was not funded, Cohen continued to observe the evolution of honors programs throughout the country and solidify his desire to provide assistance and encouragement for developing programs. In 1952 Cohen also wrote to Edward D’Arms, who was director of honors at the University of Colorado prior to Cohen and now served as an Associate Director of the Rockefeller

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4 Ibid.
5 Millett was director of the honors program at Wesleyan. The Samuel Wadsworth Russell House, a prominent Greek Revival mansion completed in 1830, housed the Honors College from 1937 to 1996 and served as a hub of academic and cultural activity for the University and Middletown community.
6 Cohen to Faust, 11 December 1952, op. cit.
7 A positive response would have produced a grant record, which I was unable to find in either the FAE or ICSS archives.
Foundation’s Humanities Division. Cohen urged the Foundation to promote non-
departmental honors programs at universities. 8

The opportunity for funding finally arrived in 1956, when Cohen sent D’Arms
reports on Colorado’s honors program from the past three years, acquainting him with
developments in that area since his tenure there. 9 In a subsequent memorandum to the
officers of the Foundation, D’Arms argued for providing financial support to the
program, noting that among state universities, Colorado had the longest and most
impressive history of honors education. “There is continual groping for new ways in
which to extend Honors work and to encourage capable students to enter it.” He noted
that the University administration “has never given proper recognition of support to the
accomplishments of the Honors systems there.” Cohen’s efforts and voluntary
contributions of time by faculty members made the honors program successful. The
surge in enrollments that could be expected at state universities made it especially
important to encourage those institutions to pay attention to the intellectual development
of their best students. A small sum of money could help strengthen Colorado’s program
and provide a model for other state institutions to follow. 10

In response to D’Arms’ memo, John Marshall, associate director of the
Rockefeller Foundation’s Division of Humanities, commented: “Perhaps even more
important than direct assistance to the U. of Col. is a means of planting this important
activity in a number of key places over the country.” He suggested that D’Arms revisit
the issue to identify “how RF aid might be most productive.” 11

D’Arms visited the Boulder campus for several days in late February 1956. He
spoke with President Ward Darley, Vice President W. F. Dyde, Dean Jacob Van Ek of

8 Joseph W. Cohen to Edward D’Arms, August 1952, Box 4, ICSS Papers, UCBA. D’Arms became the
first permanent, part-time director of the honors program after students and the Honors Council pressed for
the creation of that position. He left the University during World War II for a government military post.
During the few years he was director, writes Cohen, “Professor D’Arms made a valiant effort at critical
analysis of our first ten years. He left the University during World War II for a government military post.
He pointed up the shortcomings of our awkward program, its promise, its
dilemmas. He laid a firmer foundation for a series of honors offerings. Consultations with honors students
became far more systematic.” Cohen, in SSAHE (1966), 21.
9 Cohen to D’Arms, 12 January 1956, folder 3806, box 445, series 200R, Record Group 1.2, Rockefeller
Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (henceforth: “RF Archives-
RAC”).
10 Edward D’Arms, internal memo to RF staff, 1 February 1956, f. 3806, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF
Archives-RAC.
11 John Marshall, penciled comment on D’Arms memo to RF staff, 1 February 1956, f. 3806, box 445,
series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC.
the College of Arts and Sciences, and Joseph Cohen. They agreed that the honors program at Colorado needed greater financial support to maintain its high standards during the impending enrollment boom, and that other institutions could benefit by becoming familiar with the Colorado program. Cohen frequently received requests for information on honors at Colorado, and in some cases institutions invited him to visit their campuses. Between directing the Colorado program, teaching courses, and responding to the requests for information, Cohen had no time to compile the twenty-five years of experience with honors education at Colorado.  

The conversations D’Arms conducted resulted in a general plan of development, should the Rockefeller Foundation decide to provide financial support. The proposal included an Assistant Director of Honors who would help Cohen with the day-to-day tasks of administering the honors program and produce materials that would assist other universities. Additional secretarial help and funds for books and other materials were also needed. A key element would be a separate sum of $10,000 to make the Colorado experience known to other institutions. The fund would be used for three activities: travel to institutions, a conference on honors programs, and a program to bring representatives of other institutions to Colorado to study and work in the honors program, with the goal of establishing honors education at their home institutions. 

Shortly after D’Arms left Colorado, Cohen submitted a proposal that described the preceding plan in greater detail. By early April, D’Arms had gathered support for the project among his colleagues and asked President Darley to submit a formal request for $28,000. Darley’s letter to the Foundation reiterated an earlier statement that the University would try to make additional resources available to the honors program. 

Finally in late May, 1956, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded the University of Colorado a grant of $28,000 to expand its honors program, stipulating that UC help other institutions develop their programs. Accordingly, the grant included funds for travel by the program’s director, the organization of a national conference on honors education,

13 Ibid.
14 Cohen to D’Arms, proposal for funding, 29 February 1956; D’Arms, internal memo to RF colleagues, 6 April 1956; D’Arms to Cohen, 6 April, 1956; and Ward Darley to Charles B. Fahs, Director of Humanities Division, 18 April 1956. All documents located in f. 3806, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC.
and an internship program. The Foundation grant focused on the University’s role in terms of the effects on overall quality of education. The increase in students would require greater numbers of faculty, despite a “growing scarcity of fully qualified teaching personnel,” and this could lead to the “risk of serious decline in the quality of higher education.” The Foundation saw in Colorado a means to counter that grim future:

Among state universities, the University of Colorado is making a conspicuous effort to offset the decline through an honors program which recognizes the potentialities of superior students and which provides for the faculty incentives in teaching that often are lacking when instruction involves large numbers of students. If this program at the University of Colorado has the significance the officers attach to it, its success might well lead to similar efforts in other state universities.\(^\text{15}\)

In early December 1956 Cohen visited Ohio State, Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois. A second trip later that month covered UCLA (with representatives of Riverside and Santa Barbara in attendance), Oregon, UC-Berkeley, UC-Davis, Washington, and Montana State. A typical visit involved meetings between institutional representatives and Cohen regarding the institution’s honors efforts and the program at Colorado.\(^\text{16}\) The meetings allowed Cohen to assess where institutions were on the road to developing honors programs and identify issues that needed attention. This information-gathering also helped him prepare for the national conference on honors, scheduled for June 1957. He reported to D’Arms, “this travel is more important than I anticipated.”\(^\text{17}\)

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\(^{15}\) Rockefeller Foundation, grant resolution, 25 May 1956: $18,000 was designated for the “administration and study of” the honors program at the University of Colorado, and $10,000 for “relations with other state institutions.” f. 3806, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC. A brief account of the grant and the early activities it supported appears in *SSAHE* (1966), 25-27.

\(^{16}\) Cohen later wrote: “Without exception, there was intense listening and questioning at every institution – deans and associate deans, whole faculty committees, usually an Honors Committee and Educational Policies or Curriculum Committee, sometimes a General Education Committee, often all or some of the departmental heads, always specific selected individuals. I had to repeat the fundamental exposition frequently at the institution. I listened carefully to what they had to say about their own efforts.” Cohen to D’Arms, 28 January 1957, f. 3807, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC.

\(^{17}\) Cohen to D’Arms, 28 January 1957, f. 3807, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC. One of his visits even inspired developments at the University of Colorado. During his meetings at the University of Washington, Cohen found the potential for an all-university honors program (as opposed to a program limited to a single college within the University). Figuring that Colorado was in a better position than Washington to move to an all-university format, Cohen made a motion in Colorado’s University Senate to hold hearings on possibly expanding the honors program. The motion passed unanimously. Cohen wrote: “I’m not counting on any speedy results. This also, however, will give us important experience for the conference, if it makes any progress before then.” Ibid.
Cohen’s staff now included Walter Weir as Associate Director of Honors, whose duties included compiling historical data on the University of Colorado’s honors program, consulting in honors, and conducting his own honors group in “Concepts of Nature.” Despite the additional staff, the honors program and Rockefeller grant activities required a great deal of Cohen’s time. In view of the intense travel agenda and preparations for the June conference, Dean Van Ek and other colleagues encouraged Cohen to give up the two philosophy courses he was to teach in the spring semester. Cohen was reluctant to stop teaching but recognized the need to reduce his workload.18

The next set of site visits took Cohen to Texas, Oklahoma, Oklahoma A & M, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and Kansas State, and he met with an average of thirty or more people at each institution. Cohen observed: “My experiences during my travels have given me a tremendous respect for the new spirit I detect everywhere in responsible administrative people, to say nothing of the faculties. An atmosphere of far greater maturity seems to have invaded our culture for all the denigration of many Angst-ridden elites, and for all the other-direction obsessionists. Am I being a naïve optimist again?”19

He planned another trip in April 1957 that would include Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan State. After a stop in New York he would visit Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. Cohen was to meet there with Dean Everett Hunt, and later in the month they both participated in a conference in South Dakota. Swarthmore’s reputation for high academic standards had not diminished since the presidency of Frank Aydelotte, and South Dakota had asked Cohen and Hunt to discuss their respective programs at the conference.20

By this time, honors education was present at some public institutions but not widespread. According to a February 1956 internal memo that Edward D’Arms prepared for his Rockefeller Foundation colleagues, upon reviewing catalogs from a number of public institutions he found “nothing comparable to the Honors System at the University of Colorado.” Most institutions with honors provisions were upholding the long-standing focus on departmental work in the upper division years. The catalogs made no references

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18 Ibid.
19 Cohen to D’Arms, 22 March 1957, f. 3807, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC.
20 Ibid. The addresses Cohen and Hunt gave at South Dakota were published, and a copy is housed in the Swarthmore College library.
to senior colloquia, use of the Graduate Record Examination, or a mandatory combination of general and departmental honors exams except at Colorado. The closest approximations he found were the programs at City College of New York and at the University of Oregon.²¹

Cohen discovered great interest and enthusiasm on his visits, with many institutions preparing to revise or introduce honors provisions. Some of these initiatives began before the ICSS took form, e.g., Michigan State University’s new honors program was approved in 1956 after more than a year of study, and Ohio State University and the University Washington had reported progress with their honors plans.²² A committee of University of North Carolina faculty began in Fall 1953 to discuss what could be done for talented freshmen, and in 1954 successfully conducted an experimental general honors program with twenty-five students.²³ After visiting universities in the southwest in early 1957, Cohen commented: “It is curious, the way land-grant colleges are turning to the liberal arts everywhere, and in this connection seem to be bent on honors programs.”²⁴

In May 1957, D’Arms had predicted that the Rockefeller Foundation’s Division of Humanities was unlikely to provide further support, and he suggested that representatives of the Carnegie Corporation of New York be invited to the June conference.²⁵ Cohen visited the Corporation’s headquarters in April and made a favorable impression on Frederick Jackson, Program Officer, and Robert Wert, Executive Associate at the Carnegie Corporation. Wert found Cohen to be “a walking encyclopedia

²¹ D’Arms inter-office correspondence, 21 February 1956, f. 3806, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC.
²⁴ Cohen to D’Arms, 22 March 1957, f. 3807, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC.
²⁵ D’Arms to Cohen, 1957 May 20, Box 4, f. “Rockefeller Foundation,” ICSS Papers, UCBA. The Corporation had made a few grants related to honors and gifted education in the previous year. One was given to the University of Kansas for its honors program, one to the University of Louisville for a summer program for gifted high school students, and one in support of a conference on gifted education organized by the National Education Association: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Annual Report, (New York: The Corporation, 1957), 79-80.
and apparently an extraordinarily able missionary on behalf of honors work.” A follow-up letter from Cohen received an encouraging reply from Jackson.26

One month prior to the June meeting, Cohen wrote again to the Corporation and invited Wert and Jackson to attend the meeting and witness the enthusiasm of its participants. Cohen was optimistic about the future.

Personally I am confident that what has already transpired promises very rich developments and that the time is peculiarly ripe for these to be accelerated and expanded…I further expect that initiative along this line now in the universities will rapidly affect both the graduate schools above and the high schools below. The trend will fit in with at least three new developments, the Merit Scholarship Corporation, the Advanced Placement Tests, and the expanded Woodrow Wilson program. I think that our conference is something of a pioneering affair and that it will have genuine results. My direct visits to universities…make me feel confident that we are here dealing with no passing fashion…I am personally prepared to devote much time in the next year or two to increasing the momentum of this trend.27

A new approach to honors education

In preparation for the conference, Cohen wrote a form letter that described the terms of the Rockefeller grant and invited participation in the internee program and conference, the latter to be “organized around the problems of the superior student and of possible honors programs in state universities.”28 A list of possible topics for the conference included the rationale for honors programs, with specific reference to “fundamental theoretical justifications and implications” and the problems of large universities. Administrative issues for discussion included budget, organization, personnel, counseling, and publicity. The obstacles of “faculty conservatism, inertia, and departmentalism” were also listed on the preliminary agenda, along with pedagogical and

26 Jackson to Cohen, 1 May 1957, Box 4, f. “Carnegie Corporation,” ICSS Papers, UCBA: “You are in the middle of what seems to me to be one of the exciting developments in American public higher education today. We here at Carnegie Corporation will certainly want to keep in touch with you in the months ahead.” Wert quotation: Robert Wert, Record of Interview, 22 April 1957, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.”
27 Cohen to Wert, 22 May 1957, Box 4, ICSS Papers, UCBA.
procedural questions: the effect of the course credit system on honors, types of honors work, and the extent of separation between honors and regular programs.  

On June 24-28, 1957 forty-eight deans and faculty members from thirty colleges and universities met at Libby Hall on the University of Colorado campus at Boulder. The Conference on the Superior Student produced a ten-page statement explaining why state universities needed honors programs, how such programs could be started and maintained, and how to garner national attention for honors education. The attendees formulated several basic principles for honors education, including: starting programs in the freshman year if possible; accommodating the goals of liberal education as well as those of specific departments; ensuring that honors faculty and non-honors students would benefit from honors programs; and removing obstacles to “earlier, faster and more intensive studies” by gifted students. The conference also produced eleven specific suggestions for building a successful honors program. The first of these, however, noted that no single solution would apply to all institutions; rather, adjustments should be made according to local circumstances—“the problems and practicalities of each campus.” The remaining points briefly addressed: faculty involvement, integration with the overall goals of the college, adequate structural and budgetary conditions, the selection of honors students, special facilities, counseling, program evaluation, liaison with high schools, and publicizing programs within and outside the institution.

The June meeting was “the first step toward a systematic analysis of the need for new approaches to challenging the superior student.” It was felt that the expected, rapid increase in enrollments at state universities would endanger the quality of education. The appropriate institutional response would be to preserve and improve quality despite that increase. Programs for gifted students would promote academic excellence and would benefit not only their academic communities, but also prepare future college teachers and national leaders.

29 Council on Honors of the College of Arts and Sciences, Univ. of Colorado – Boulder, “Possible Topics for Discussion at Honors Conference,” November 1956, Box 1, blue binder, ICSS Papers, UCBA.
30 “Decisions in Boulder,” The Superior Student 1 (1): 10 (April 1958). Cohen wrote in SSAHE (1966), 25-26, that twenty-seven large public and private institutions were represented, with 43 attendees comprising both faculty and administrators.
32 Cohen, in SSAHE, 25.
33 “Decisions in Boulder,” op.cit.
Cohen was pleased with the proceedings, as evident in his report on the conference to D’Arms, who was unable to attend:

The level of interest and discussion was high and sustained throughout the week—very little of mere deanish talk…The variety of approaches within the membership of the conference was a genuine gain…All the sessions seemed decidedly relevant and the problems were explored at every level. Though the state universities, big and small, remained the central theme, the land grant college and the high school received good initial attention…The inclusion of private institutions…enriched and deepened the approach.”34

Although honors work had existed in some form since the late 1800s, the “relatively weak and ineffective form in which the honors idea has usually been put into practice” led Cohen and his colleagues to aspire to something better. Some programs in the past existed only on paper and others were confined to a tiny proportion of students or departments and lacked resources other than the commitment of a few faculty members who kept the honors idea alive. “When the honors scene of the last century is surveyed in terms of quality instead of number of programs, the need for a new effort is apparent.”35 A committee dedicated to honors education could encourage the needed changes, and the success of the conference boded well for the acceptance of such a body. Thus the June 1957 meeting was the beginning of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS) as an organization, although at that time it was called the Conference on the Superior Student in the State Universities. The plan of action included the creation of a clearinghouse for information on honors education, additional conferences, promotion of greater cooperation between high schools, colleges, and graduate schools, and more research on high talent and ability.36

Frederick Jackson had attended the June meeting and became the main point of contact at the Carnegie Corporation. His notes from Boulder touched on several key aspects, including the uniqueness of the conference, the enthusiasm of its participants, the potential for a long-term significance, and the lack of foundation support for honors education. Jackson then contacted the Rockefeller Foundation to verify the likely

34 Cohen to D’Arms, 1 July 1957, f. 3808, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC.
discontinuation of its financial support “in this general area.” John Marshall confirmed for him that “any further support of this sort of thinking was in the ‘public domain.’” 37

In mid-October, the Corporation awarded the University of Colorado $2000 for a meeting of the steering committee in Boulder on October 26, 1957, the purpose of which was to identify the various means through which the group could promote honors education. The eleven-member committee included one representative from each of the following universities: Ohio State, Iowa State, Cornell, Minnesota, Texas, Michigan, California, Kansas, and New Mexico. Cohen and Weir represented the University of Colorado. 38 Each of these institutions had maintained or experimented with honors programs since at least the 1940s, some a decade or two longer. Cornell (1951), Minnesota (1950), and Ohio State (1955) were the exceptions.

Frederick Jackson urged the committee to consider activities that could be accomplished with minimal or no outside funds, in addition to those activities that would require substantial funding. Jackson also conveyed the Carnegie Corporation’s reluctance to help establish a permanent or semi-permanent organization, and suggested exploring existing organizations as potential homes for the committee’s activities. The Corporation would “look sympathetically” on funding requests from the committee or individual institutions, but made no promises. 39

The steering committee synthesized its discussions in an eleven-page report to the Carnegie Corporation. The report reflected a refinement of ideas and recommendations from the June conference as well as deliberations that directly addressed Jackson’s suggestions. The steering committee reiterated the need for a central clearinghouse of information on honors education, citing “snowballing requests” for summaries of the

[37] John Marshall, Record of phone call from Frederick Jackson, 19 August 1957, f. 3808, box 445, series 200R, RG 1.2, RF Archives-RAC. “This general area” and “this sort of thinking” presumably refer to honors education.

[38] The steering committee members were: H. F. Harding, Ohio State University; Samuel P. Hays, Iowa State University; Robert B. MacLeod, Cornell University and Pennsylvania Educational Survey; Roger B. Page, University of Minnesota; Harry H. Ransom, University of Texas; James H. Robertson, University of Michigan; E. W. Strong, University of California (statewide); George R. Waggoner, University of Kansas; Dudley Wynn, University of New Mexico, and Joseph W. Cohen and Walter D. Weir, University of Colorado.

[39] Jackson suggested possible links to the Association of State and Land-Grant Universities or the American Council on Education. Record of phone conversation between Frederick Jackson and Joseph Cohen, 9 October 1957, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.” Cohen wrote a summary of the conversation: Cohen to steering committee members, 1957 October 9, Box 4, ICSS Papers, UCBA.
June conference and for general literature on honors programs. It noted, “the unofficial information service in operation at the University of Colorado has begun to strain its facilities seriously.”40

The committee recommended that it be converted into an “Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS),” and that its chief function be the operation of a formal information service.41 Its activities would include the publication of a newsletter. A second role of the ICSS would be to organize regional conferences, beginning with the South and Northeast. The June conference recommended a national conference on honors education for professional schools, as well as “all-state” conferences. The steering committee also envisioned increasing the presence of honors education by writing articles for publications and recommending speakers for national and regional meetings of administrators and academic professional associations. Finally, the committee outlined a two- to three-week internship program at Boulder that would allow honors administrators from other institutions to visit instructors and observe the operation of Colorado’s honors program.42

Despite indications by the Carnegie Corporation that it was reluctant to support the formation of an entirely new and separate organization, the ICSS steering committee made a strong case for organizational independence in the short term. Negotiations with existing associations would delay work that was already in demand and to some extent already being accomplished informally. Finding an appropriate home for the ICSS was also problematic, given that existing agencies had neither experience in honors nor could be expected to focus on it to the necessary degree. The steering committee argued that its “singleness of purpose enables it to concentrate its energies on this goal in a way not possible for existing established national organizations, most of which have multiple aims.” The limited constituencies of national associations were a further deterrent. Administrators—the chief members of the national groups—certainly needed to be involved in planning and operating an effective honors program, but the cooperation of teaching faculty was essential: “At the heart of all promotional effort for honors programs

41 The proposed name for that side of its operations was University Honors Information Service (UHIS).
42 “Report to Carnegie Corporation”, 26 October 1957, op. cit., 2-7. The internship program was originally envisioned as a semester-long experience. Due to budgetary constraints at interested institutions, however, this was reformulated as a two- to three-week seminar in order to make the financing less of a burden.
there must be a direct appeal to creative faculty minds.” Although the ICSS planned to work closely with national organizations, its status as an independent group would allow it to focus attention on faculty involvement.43

The steering committee decided to aim the activities of the ICSS primarily at large, publicly supported institutions. Such institutions faced problems that differed from those of small liberal arts colleges and required different approaches—a fact that “was clearly brought out at the June conference.” The committee estimated that the ICSS and its information service needed three years of financial support, after which time they would become self-sufficient or close down if their mission to serve as “catalytic agents” had been fulfilled. The committee originally estimated it would need $170,000 for its proposed three-year program.44

Cohen submitted the formal grant proposal in late November 1957, and in it the committee requested a more modest budget of $149,500 for three years. In early December, a handwritten note to Cohen from Jackson’s home address cautioned: “Don’t count on anything, Joe, for there are many snags a proposal can hit as it goes over the rapids.”45 Nevertheless, in January 1958 the Corporation awarded a grant of $125,000 for a 2 ½ year period to the University of Colorado for support of the ICSS.46

The University of Colorado at Boulder offered to be the permanent headquarters for the new organization. The University provided a suite of offices, which opened officially on February 1, 1958.47 Cohen became director of the ICSS—beyond the

43 Ibid., 8-9.
44 Ibid., 9-11.
45 Jackson to Cohen, 2 December 1957, Box 4, f. “Carnegie Corporation,” ICSS Papers, UCBA.
46 Jackson to Cohen, 2 January 1957 (sic.—the letter must have been written in January 1958), Box 3, f. “Jackson, Frederick (2),” ICSS Papers, UCBA. He informed Cohen that the officers of the Corporation recommended to the trustees that the ICSS receive $125,000 for two-and-a-half years. According to a letter from Florence Anderson (a colleague of Jackson’s) to President Quigg Newton, funds would be dispersed in three installments: $25,000 on 1 February 1958, $55,000 on 1 July 1958, and $45,000 on 1 July 1959: Anderson, Letter to Newton, 17 January 1958. The original budget request for $149,500 had included $16,000 in overhead for the University: Cohen, Letter to Jackson, 26 November 1957. Both the Anderson and Cohen letters are in CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.”
47 The office of the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences underwent remodeling that included a suite of five offices for the ICSS adjacent to the Dean’s office and near the existing Honors center. The ICSS received an area of about 700 square feet for the use of its “director, managing editor, secretarial staff and storing of materials that must be prepared in quantity for mailing over the country.” Cohen to Jackson, 26 November 1957. The construction project was given immediate priority starting in late November 1957, as reported by President Newton in a letter of support: Newton to Jackson, 29 November 1957. Both letters
significant role he played in gathering supporters for the ICSS, his past experience as
director of the honors program at Colorado and his active promotion of honors education
in general made him the clear candidate. Howard Quint, an assistant professor of
journalism, replaced Weir and became the full-time managing editor for the newsletter.48

During the 1950s, the University of Colorado underwent a period of expanding
enrollments, facilities, and programs in both teaching and research, and the institution
attained a leading position in its region. Nevertheless, in 1957 it was still struggling to
keep pace with the enrollment boom: “enrollments continued to climb and construction
continued to lag behind constantly rising demand. The goal of excellence, pursued until
then with little fanfare, remained an elusive dream.”49 The renewed focus on honors
education enabled the University to address at least one of its concerns: how to promote
high standards even as its classrooms overflowed with students. Honors courses
permitted at least part of the student body and professoriate to strive toward excellence.
The strengthening of the University’s longstanding honors program and its backing of the
ICSS may be viewed as one facet of the University’s new policy of increased visibility
and leadership. One historian of the University observed that the institution had changed
from a state of seclusion into “an arena for conflicting interests, subject to a sense of
urgency for solving contemporary problems.”50

are in CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-
University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.”

48 Quint’s credentials included a Neiman Fellowship at Harvard. Record of conversation between Jackson
and Cohen in Chicago, 3 March 1958, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado,
University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.” Appendix
B of this study lists the ICSS staff and Executive Committee members throughout the organization’s
existence.

49 Frederick S. Allen, The University of Colorado, 1876-1976 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,
1976), 166-68, 185. Enrollment reached a post-war low in 1951. From 1951 to 1963, the student body grew
from 8,059 to 12,538, a 56 percent increase.

50 Ibid., 204. An expansion of graduate education was part of this move toward greater visibility.
The ICSS’s practical needs—funding and a physical home—were satisfied for the time being. Within a few months the organization seemed to be running at full force. It announced two broad goals in the first issue of its newsletter, *The Superior Student* (April 1958): to promote the sharing of information and production of new ideas and techniques, and “to stimulate nationwide discussion of the fundamental honors questions.”51 The organization would develop a strategy that combined personal contact and printed materials to address its goals.

The terms of the Rockefeller grant stipulated that the University of Colorado would complete a publication on its experiences with its honors program, which began in 1930.¹ Joseph Cohen and Walter Weir prepared a detailed description to be shared with other institutions, and Weir also wrote a history of the program. Cohen’s involvement had begun in 1928, shortly after he arrived at the University of Colorado from the University of Toronto as a young instructor and was appointed to a committee charged with revising the system of honors at graduation based on course grades. After reviewing college catalogs and Aydelotte’s 1925 report, *Honors Courses in American Colleges and Universities,* “we persuaded ourselves at Colorado to inaugurate an honors program which once and for all would abandon the grade as the sole criterion for award of honors and would embrace a concern for honors achievement in general as well as departmental studies.” The committee and its supporters had to overcome opposition from “devoted grade addicts” and from departments that resisted giving up any control to an honors council. Cohen recalled:

> We won that fight in 1930 first with juniors and seniors; but, as time passed, the inner logic of experience gradually dictated the need to fight for the extension of the program, semester by semester, until we were beginning with entering freshmen. With hindsight, I would say that the basic good fortune of our program was that its proponents on the faculty—an ever-increasing number—had the wits not to let it die out.²

The program included mandatory general and departmental honors and aimed to cultivate an honors outlook rather than a concern for grades. Budgetary support increased gradually, although approval was slow to appear for even a partial reduction in the teaching load for honors faculty. Students’ suggestions were taken into account, and their calls for improvements resulted in the appointment of a permanent part-time director of honors in 1940. Professor E. F. D’Arms led the program until he accepted a wartime

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² Ibid., x. Cohen added: “It was a striking fact how many of the programs listed by Aydelotte in 1925 were practically nonexistent when I made my own first survey in 1952.”
government post, and Cohen took over the directorship. The honors faculty were able to
maintain the program through the war years by offering a series of “World Crisis
Courses,” and in 1946 the university’s Division of General Education was established
with four courses, developed in cooperation with the Honors Council, that strengthened
the general honors program. In 1947, Cohen visited Columbia and observed the
Colloquium on Important Books, and shortly after that Colorado ran an experimental
honors colloquium for seniors at Colorado. The colloquium format, after some practice
and improvement, proved to be so popular among the students that a junior colloquium
was added, and the students pressed the Honors Council to extend this technique to the
existing general honors theme groups, which were criticized for their resemblance to
regular classes. The Council members “found ourselves doing all we could by
exhortation and pleading with the honors faculty to follow the conference method. It was
no easy task.”

Cohen felt that the program weathered difficult times due to the Honors Council’s
willingness to make adjustments, such as eliminating the requirement that students take
both general and departmental honors during the war years. (Cohen noted that about half
of the students chose to do both, regardless of the relaxed requirements.) The University
of Colorado’s pioneering program of general honors and its ability to sustain its program
over the years made a valuable case study for other public institutions that were
considering new or revised honors programs. Cohen did not force the Colorado model on
anyone, however, as Frederick Jackson noted after the ICSS founding conference in June
1957. “Although Cohen's program at Colorado is by all odds the most mature one in any
state university, Cohen wisely kept both himself and his program in the background.
Nearly everyone at the conference sat on a panel at one of the sessions and thus had a
chance to say a few words about one of the aspects of honors programs which interested
him most.”

Cohen’s knowledge of other programs and interest in the wider

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3 Ibid., 22-23. Cohen remembered D’Arms describing the role of honors director as “a thankless struggle
with widespread noncompliance and consequent frustration.”
4 Frederick Jackson, 10 July 1957, Yellow memo sheet on June 24-28 conference at Boulder, CO, in
Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library
(henceforth: CCNY Records), Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, Univ. of, Support of Inter-
University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.”
implementation of general honors made him uniquely qualified to lead a national information center.

**Newsletter and Information Service**

The steering committee’s report to the Carnegie Corporation following its meeting in October 1957 refined the concept of sharing information among institutions. “Concrete and up-to-date” information on the practical aspects of implementing honors programs was not readily available, according to the steering committee’s report. To fill that gap, the committee envisioned a newsletter that could supply the “specific information that universities attempting to cope with the problems of honors desire and need.” It would be sent directly to the faculty—individuals and committees—and administrators who represented existing or planned honors activities on their campuses, rather than following the distributional patterns of many educational journals that “circulate primarily among administrators and simply do not reach teaching faculty.” The newsletter would also help publicize honors—the steering committee explicitly promoted the “continued spread and intensification of honors programs.”

The ICSS launched *The Superior Student* in April 1958. As of August that year, the monthly publication circulated to roughly 3,000 recipients: 1,000 names were compiled from the Education Directory of 1956-1957, while the remaining 2,000 were added on request. The ICSS office reported receiving new requests at a rate of about a dozen per week during the summer of 1958. The newsletter went primarily to tax-supported, four-year institutions, although the mailing list included some private institutions. It was addressed to presidents and deans of liberal arts, interested faculty members, college libraries, and chairmen of honors committees.

The newsletter’s length ranged from 16 to 24 pages (6 ½” by 9”) during the first year and grew in subsequent years. The regular format included an editorial article,

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7 “Notes and Comments,” *The Superior Student*, 1 (1): 16 (April 1958). The steering committee had suggested that all publicly supported four-year universities and private institutions with enrollments of 2,000 or more should receive the newsletter: “Report to Carnegie Corporation,” op cit., 4.
8 In 1960-1962 it averaged 30 pages in length, and in 1962 it became bimonthly. During the last years of publication, 1963-1965, several issues exceeded 40 pages and one reached 72 pages in length.
followed by several articles by ICSS staff members as well as outside contributors—these often focused on a particular theme (e.g., honors work in professional schools). Two- to three-page descriptions of honors programs at various colleges and universities were common, and a concluding section of “Notes and Comments” allowed for brief mention of other programs. Full-length articles as well as short notes enumerated the activities of the ICSS, including surveys, institutional visits by Cohen, and past and future conferences.

Occasionally the newsletter featured articles juxtaposed to reflect the range of opinions and solutions in honors education. The June 1958 issue, which emphasized the diversity of approaches among institutions, included a pair of articles discussed general and departmental honors; in the next issue a third author commented that the two approaches seem further apart in theory than in fact: he felt that few institutions would ultimately practice one to the exclusion of the other.9 Similarly, an essay on the need to “engage and liberate” the minds of superior students was followed by a response posing the question, to what ends should those students be educated? Was the author talking about education, or a community of scholars, or the preparation of an elite leadership—the latter being a political issue?10 The preceding examples, drawn from the first volume but representative of the full series, illustrate that the newsletter went beyond reporting events to serve as a forum that generated debate and discussion.

Despite Cohen’s reflection that “like the rest of the Committee’s work, the newsletter was an improvisation,” the format of the newsletter changed little over its seven-year run.11 It grew longer, but the types of articles remained the same: reports from various colleges and universities, conference summaries, and occasional special features such as an inventory of honors programs and cumulative indexes. A notable exception to this consistency was the appearance of research articles beginning in the

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11 “What to include or omit, what articles to solicit, and what to excerpt from various reports and programs was decided on the basis of the needs of the moment.” The ICSS was primarily an information service, wrote Cohen, aimed at keeping an increasingly broad audience apprised of developments in education relevant to honors. The newsletter therefore “had to be affirmative yet critical, current yet historical.” Cohen, SSAHE (1966), 33.
second year of publication, as opposed to the purely descriptive and anecdotal articles of the early issues.

Although the newsletter became the main vehicle of communication and documentation, the ICSS office disseminated other publications, as well. Some of these focused on the University of Colorado’s experiences, such as the honors manual of the University of Colorado, while others dealt with honors education more widely, for example, “Descriptions of Honors Programs in American Colleges and Universities” and a paper by Cohen, “Advantages and Disadvantages of Honors Programs.” The ICSS newsletter and other publications above all assisted institutions that were advancing or starting honors programs. They also served the broader purpose of informing the education community. According to a report on its first six months, the ICSS sent its material, including the newsletter, “to 23 leading educational journals and the education editors of a half a dozen major newspapers and magazines.” The Journal of Higher Education, New York Herald-Tribune, and Christian Science Quarterly were among the publications that reported the formation of the ICSS.12

Guidelines for Honors Programs

The ICSS did not propose that a single solution would work at all institutions; instead, it provided general recommendations and encouraged institutions to do as much as possible according to their local circumstances. The first formulation of guidelines for a successful honors program occurred at the June 1957 conference in Boulder. The eleven points, entitled “Building an Honors Program,” appeared in the inaugural issue of the ICSS newsletter the following spring:

1. Honors programs need to be adjusted to the problems and practicalities of each campus. There is no fool-proof program that will work everywhere.
2. Honors programs should develop with the understanding and support of the faculty. They should not be instituted by fiat.
3. Honors programs should not be separated from the total offering of the college. They should epitomize the aims of a true liberal arts education.
4. Honors programs require a structure and adequate budgeting in order to win a secure, recognized place within the university and in order to be effective.

5. Honors programs should start as early as possible, preferably in the freshman year.
6. Honors programs must involve thoughtful policies for identifying, selecting, retaining and advising students along with cumulative record-keeping.
7. Honors programs should have a central meeting place, like a lounge or library. They should provide honors students with library stack permits and other forms of special recognition.
8. Honors programs function more effectively when the honors counselor has authority in special cases to set aside, modify or substitute requirements in the best interest of the student.
9. Honors programs should include a built-in evaluation procedure so that errors can be detected and improvements devised.
10. Honors programs should involve liaison with the high schools, not only for recruitment purposes, but to encourage the creation of an honors attitude among the abler high school students.
11. Honors programs should be widely publicized to magnify their impact on the campus and elsewhere.¹³

Thirty years earlier, at the 1925 Conference on Honors Courses held at the State University of Iowa, Dean Carl E. Seashore had presented twelve points he felt were important for honors programs, based on his visits to institutions.¹⁴ Seashore’s list contained two points that were elemental: “recognition of individual differences” and “regard for democracy.” The latter idea may have been an acknowledgment that honors programs would have to tread lightly and respectfully around the issue of equality in education, although an honors advocate could argue that true democracy entails differentiating according to abilities and interests. Special educational opportunities for high-ability students, though never completely taken for granted, were more commonplace by the 1950s, and perhaps for this reason the ICSS founders did not emphasize democracy in their list of guidelines.

Seashore’s list contained several ideas that were repeated by the ICSS founders, however, such as adapting programs to local circumstances, moving beyond grade-based honors, regarding a program as an integral part of the institution, not in isolation, and providing incentives for participation. In addition, the basic idea of individual differences articulated by Seashore reached its next level of refinement in the 1957 list, which specified the need for flexibility to set aside or modify requirements for honors

¹⁴ Gladys Palmer, “The Honors Courses Conference at the State University of Iowa,” School and Society 21 (June 20, 1925), 753. See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for full list.
students (versus all honors students following a fixed honors curriculum.) According to Aydelotte’s 1925 typology, altering curricula to accommodate honors work was not yet a widely accepted practice in the 1920s, so although Seashore’s list called for the recognition of individual differences, institutions would not necessarily have interpreted that as grounds for reworking their regular course requirements.

The main characteristics of honors education in the 1920s and 1930s, according to Cohen, had been an interest primarily in recognizing and training future scholars (i.e., specialists), with honors work thus focusing on the major field of study. Features of this approach included admission to honors work in the junior year, based on the student’s grades in college (regarded as an accurate reflection of ability and motivation) and by recommendation of the department head or departmental committee; honors work outside of the regular curriculum through independent study and research, reflecting the independent nature of scholarship; and finally, the emphasis on “the student’s intellective, analytical, critical, and research prowess, not on his creative, intuitive, or symbolic powers.”15 In contrast, the ICSS adopted a much broader definition of honors education that encouraged lower division honors work in general education in addition to upper division and departmental honors, as well as a less restrictive view of talent and the means to identify it.

The ICSS continued to work on its guidelines after the initial formulation in 1957. In April 1959, Cohen presented a list of thirteen points at the Eastern Invitational Conference, referring to it as “an inventory of some of the very specific procedures which on analysis I find being most advocated throughout the country.” Although the list resembled the eleven points from 1957, it was more specific and added several new ideas, including:

- Building programs in general, departmental, and (pre)professional areas.
- Providing various formats for honors work (sections, seminars, colloquia, independent study), with AP and acceleration serving in “a contributory role.”
- Pedagogical recommendations such as limiting the size of seminars to 5-20 students, using primary sources versus textbooks, and discouraging passive note-taking.
- Selecting top faculty who are supportive of the program.
- Students as research assistants and apprentices.

• Students as counselors, orientation helpers, and other advisory functions on behalf of the general student body.

Cohen’s reference to the new list as an inventory of procedures “being most advocated throughout the country” and its modification during conferences highlights the consensual evolution of the guidelines. (Likewise, Seashore had compiled his list based on what he observed during visits to institutions.) Cohen felt some of the guidelines were solid while others were still being debated. It seems that the 1959 conferees objected to the omission of evaluation from the list, which then was amended accordingly, resulting in fourteen points.16

Conferences

Regional conferences were another significant element on the ICSS agenda. The steering committee, following the recommendation of the general conference in June 1957, designated the South and Northeast as the two regions that should have conferences early on, in order to achieve “national coverage.” The committee members from the University of Texas and University of Michigan offered to host the meetings. Both institutions had the desired characteristic of operating some type of honors program already.17 The June meeting participants had suggested that a conference on honors in professional schools be organized as well. The steering committee refined the idea to focus on land-grant institutions, since many of them were in a transitional stage of becoming “large universities with ever stronger colleges of arts and sciences.”18 Finally, the committee suggested that the ICSS encourage “all-state conferences” by both public

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16 Cohen, “The ICSS in 1959,” The Superior Student, 2 (6): 3-5 (October 1959). One of the original eleven points had addressed program evaluation, but it was not included in the 1959 version until conference participants raised the issue. In the published text of his address, one new point and one new sub-point were added to his original list of thirteen based on discussion at the conference, making a total of fourteen items. The new guideline stated: “Build in devices of evaluation to test both the means used and the ends sought by an Honors Program.” The new sub-point, under using “methods and materials appropriate to superior students” was: “Giving terminal examinations to test the honors results.”


18 Ibid., 6. Michigan State and Penn State were named as examples of very large institutions in the target population. The steering committee noted that Colorado State, Michigan State, and Montana State had started honors programs.
and private institutions within a region, the organization and financing of which would fall to the participating institutions. 19

The first regional conference took place in November 1958 in Louisville, Kentucky rather than in Texas. 20 Earlier that year, Cohen readied the region with two sets of visits to southern institutions. In April and May 1958, he targeted fourteen major Southern universities: Miami, West Virginia, Texas, Louisiana State, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisville, Howard, Duke, and Southern. In June and July, he visited Vanderbilt, Fisk, Peabody, University of Georgia, Emory, Morehouse, Florida State, Bowling Green, and the Universities of Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina. Brief trip reports appeared in The Superior Student and highlighted an “alertness everywhere” to the needs of high-ability students. 21

Representatives of thirty-six Southern colleges and universities attended the Louisville conference; the list included every state university in the South except the University of South Carolina. Several education associations also sent participants, some of whom were included in the program: Alvin Eurich of the Fund for the Advancement of Education gave the opening address; Charles Bish of the National Education Association, Frederick Jackson of the Carnegie Corporation, and Ned Bryan of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools were panelists. 22

Prior to the Eastern conference in June 1959, Cohen again prepared with visits to institutions in the region. In March, April and May, Cohen met with faculty and administrators at about thirty Northeastern and Midwestern institutions. 23 Of the institutions Cohen visited in Spring 1959, only eight did not send a representative to the conference at Ann Arbor, which attracted attendees from thirty-seven colleges and

19 An example of such a conference was the April 1957 meeting in South Dakota, where Cohen had been a speaker along with Everett Hunt of Swarthmore College: Ibid.
20 It was supposed to have taken place at the University of Texas – Austin, but the steering committee decided to look for another venue when conference arrangements became problematic due to segregation policies at UT: Joseph Cohen, Letter to Harry Ransom, 15 May 1958, Box 3, f. “Harry H. Ransom,” ICSS Papers-UCBA.
22 “ICSS Southern Invitation Conference,” The Superior Student, 1 (7): 1 (January 1959). This issue was devoted entirely to the Southern conference. Bish directed the NEA’s Talented Youth Project, and Bryan was head of the NCA’s Project on Guidance and Motivation of Superior and Talented Students.
universities representing a total enrollment of over 600,000 students. In 1960, the ICSS continued its series of major meetings with a conference on gifted black students (co-organized with Southern University) in Baton Rouge, and the Western Invitational Conference held at Berkeley.

The three regional conferences covered similar sets of topics: issues and problems in honors; identifying honors students, including the need for high-school/college liaison; teaching in honors programs; and future steps. Each event included a special session that featured a panel of honors students. At the first conference, the student panelists discussed their honors experiences; at the second and third conferences they engaged in colloquium-type discussions as they would in their honors classes.

Table 4. ICSS Conferences, 1957-1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Founding meeting of the ICSS (“The Superior Student in the State University”), Boulder, Colorado</td>
<td>June 24-28, 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Invitational Conference, Louisville, Kentucky</td>
<td>November 20-23, 1958</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Invitational Conference, Ann Arbor, Michigan</td>
<td>June 14-17, 1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Conference on the Gifted Negro Student,” Baton Rouge, Louisiana (co-organized with Southern University)</td>
<td>February 22-24, 1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Invitational Conference, Berkeley, California</td>
<td>April 10-13, 1960</td>
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The ICSS helped organize the Baton Rouge conference at the request of Felton Clark, President of Southern University. In a letter to Frederick Jackson seeking financial support from the Carnegie Corporation, Clark explained that he hoped to focus attention on the encouragement of talent through honors programs while compensating for “deterring cultural factors” that impeded the identification and development of talent among black youth. The conference participants came from primarily black colleges in the Southeast and Southwest.

The keynote speaker, John Hope Franklin, touched on several difficulties that black youth faced in the educational systems of the 1950s. Physical facilities in the South were improving, he noted, but this could be seen as a relatively easy way for authorities

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25 For conference reports, see The Superior Student, 1 (7) (January 1959) for Louisville report; 2 (6) (October 1959) for Ann Arbor; 3 (3) (April 1960) for Baton Rouge; and 3 (5) (September 1960) for Berkeley.
26 Felton G. Clark to Frederick Jackson, 5 February 1959, Box 3, f. “Jackson, Frederick (2),” ICSS Papers-UCBA.
to create the appearance of improvements for black communities without addressing the quality of educational programs. The task of identifying academically gifted students for honors work presented particular obstacles related to the suitability of standardized tests, developed with typical white high school students in mind, and the need for remediation, particularly in reading, even for many of those students who showed academic promise. Furthermore, the tension endured by talented black youth in a white-dominated society was enough to endanger their academic progress. Franklin felt that in the course of regular classroom lessons about American values and institutions, questions about one’s place in a society that was purported to be democratic and free could distract a student from his field of study as he sought answers or worse yet, could traumatize him.27 Participants in the conference discussed the need to counter these challenges, through special programs to identify talented black students and nurture them to the best of the institution’s ability, even if it fell short of ideal standards.

The Baton Rouge conference provided momentum and inspiration for that group of institutions, and several of them subsequently presented plans to their faculty for development or initial approval.28 In general, however, the success of the ICSS regional conferences varied. Institutions with honors programs in the formative stage would have found the general content of the conferences useful as a means to consider options and anticipate obstacles. Institutions with established programs would have benefited less, as expressed by the director of honors at Michigan State, Stanley Idzerda: he was dissatisfied with both the national conference at Boulder in 1957 and the Eastern Regional Conference at Ann Arbor. The agendas included too much about starting programs and not enough about how they should evolve once established—perhaps, he observed, because MSU already had experience with an all-university honors program. A letter from Ohio State University conveyed a similar sentiment that the regional conferences were not helpful, but for reasons of “the diversity of curricula, student personnel, and general educational aims among the colleges and universities

27 John Hope Franklin (Chairman, Dept. of History, Brooklyn College), “To Educate All the Jeffersonians” (Opening address at Baton Rouge conference), *The Superior Student*, 3 (3): 6-8 (April 1960).
represented.” The writer felt that a conference of large state universities—perhaps a Big 11 group similar to other Big 11 committees—would have served OSU’s needs better.29

Site visits

In addition to the pre-conference visits to specific regions, ICSS staff members traveled to colleges and universities throughout the U.S. to consult on potential and existing programs. Part of the funding for site visits came from the Rockefeller grant. The institutions visited are too numerous to list, but the following examples illustrate the types of meetings that occurred.

- Faculty members of Beloit College attended a two-day retreat that featured a series of discussions led by Cohen. Following the retreat, in September 1958 the faculty voted unanimously to establish a “Scholars Program,” to commence with a group of freshmen during the spring semester.30
- In November 1958, Cohen traveled to several sites where meetings with representatives of multiple institutions had been arranged by the host institution. At UCLA, Cohen spoke with representatives of ten institutions; at San Francisco State College, the group included six northern California State Colleges; and representatives of District of Columbia universities convened with Cohen at Georgetown University.31
- Cohen was the primary agent on behalf of the ICSS, but occasionally other members of the Executive Committee conducted site visits. One issue of the newsletter reported that Walter Weir visited five institutions on the West

29 Stanley J. Idzerda (Dir. of Honors College, Michigan State University) to Cohen, 17 November 1959, and G. Robert Holsinger (Assistant Dean, Ohio State University) to Cohen, 8 January 1960, both in Box 3, f. “Replies – Letter of Inquiry, First Set,” ICSS Papers-UCBA. The Dean of Arts and Science at Vanderbilt University reported that although it was helpful to meet other attendees, he had other means for doing that and knew some of them already, and the content of the conference did not add much to what he already knew. He felt the newsletter was very beneficial, however, and the ICSS should continue its function as an information clearinghouse: Ewing P. Shahan to Cohen, 22 December 1959, Box 4, f. “Carnegie Proposal 1959-60,” ICSS Papers-UCBA.
31 “Notes and Comments,” The Superior Student, 1 (6): 18 (December 1958). Institutions represented at UCLA included: UCLA, Long Beach State College, Los Angeles State College, Occidental College, San Diego State College, San Fernando College, University of Southern California, Redlands College, Riverside College, and Santa Barbara College. The San Francisco meeting involved the following State Colleges: San Francisco, Chico, Sacramento, Fresno, Humboldt, and San Jose. The participants of the Washington, DC meeting were not listed.
coast, Samuel Hays spoke to a group of faculty at Bradley University, and Howard Quint had discussed honors with representatives of three Arizona institutions and Fresno State College.\(^{32}\)

The site visits were an effective spur to developments at a number of campuses. Cohen received letters stating the benefit of his consultations. The director of freshman honors at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, for example, wrote that several members of the faculty were in favor of honors education for some time, but “the decision to begin this program was stimulated by your visit here in the spring of 1958.”\(^{33}\) The University of Georgia likewise reported that Cohen’s visit in Summer, 1958, along with the Southern Regional Conference, had “definitely influenced” its move toward starting an honors program.\(^{34}\) Frederick Jackson received similar remarks at the offices of the Carnegie Corporation. He wrote to Howard Quint, Assoc. Dir. of the ICSS: “I get a good deal of evidence that the work of the Inter-University Committee is paying off quite handsomely. People from universities, especially in the South, come in and tell us how much Joe’s visits meant in stimulating them to develop a program on their particular campuses.”\(^{35}\)

By summer 1959, Cohen’s demanding travel schedule was increasingly a matter for concern. The Executive Committee discussed a division of labor among committee members in order to lessen the strain on Cohen. They also discussed a reorganization of the Executive Committee to make it more nationally representative.\(^{36}\) In September 1959, Cohen reported on the status of honors education throughout the country. He noted that the following public institutions had strong programs or were “fully engaged” with honors education: Colorado, Howard, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kansas State,
Michigan, Michigan State, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Carolina State, South Dakota, Texas, Wichita, and Wisconsin. Many others were in the process of working out new programs and had sent representatives to an ICSS regional conference or hosted a visit by the ICSS. Two institutions, Illinois and Wisconsin, had approved full honors programs, meaning that honors work would be available to students in both the lower and upper divisions; Cohen believed this was “a most important development for the country as a whole.”37

July and August, 1959 were “transitional months” for the organization, marked by staff changes, the preparation of Eastern Conference report, and the evaluation of past activities. Norman Kurland replaced Quint as managing editor, and a new secretary joined the office.38 The ICSS was operating with a budget deficit of over $11,000 because of heavy demand for reprints of newsletters and travel costs that exceeded original estimates. Cohen asked Jackson: “Should I just stop traveling?; when this seems to be one of the most demanded functions of the I.C.S.S.”39

Questions about the organization’s future remained unresolved for many months. An initial discussion of plans had taken place when the Executive Committee met in Ann Arbor, in conjunction with the Eastern regional conference. That meeting turned out to be “too chaotic,” and the proceedings were “too inconclusive on the questions raised about the future.” In his September 1959 report to the Carnegie Corporation, Cohen proposed sending a letter to the twenty or more individuals who were most closely associated with the ICSS, asking them to share their opinions about past work and what future activities, if any, the organization should pursue.40 Jackson informed Cohen that the Carnegie Corporation “would prefer to handle the matter of the deficit together with any proposal for extending the life of ICSS which may be forthcoming.” He advised Cohen to send the letter of inquiry and to solve the question of the organization’s

37 Cohen, “Brief Survey of Results of ICSS to September 11, 1959,” Box 4, f. “ICSS Materials,” ICSS Papers-UCBA. Regarding Iowa, Cohen did not specify whether he was referring to the State University of Iowa (Iowa City) or Iowa State University (Ames). According to self-reported start dates from a survey the ICSS conducted in 1961, the State University of Iowa launched a program in 1958, while Iowa State University started its program in 1960.
39 Ibid., 2.
40 Ibid., 3.
financial future well before the upcoming regional conference in Berkeley, set for April 1960. The bulk of responses to Cohen’s letter indicated a consensus in favor of prolonging the ICSS for at least another year or two with some shifting of its focus, as well as continuing the publication of its successful newsletter. The newsletter, declared one dean, had clearly benefited his campus, and he received “many favorable and grateful comments” from faculty on the mailing list. “In higher education in the absence of such a periodical, there is simply no way of finding out just what is going on elsewhere except to travel extensively.” Another dean pointed out, “Certainly all of the conditions which brought ICSS into being are still present and prevail in amplified form.” Another respondent noted the importance of having some agency that promoted “the fundamental purpose of higher education, namely, to discover and to develop to the utmost the scholarly student,” as a counterbalance to the vocational tendencies and practical demands that were dominating campuses. The Dean of Arts and Sciences at Georgia concurred that the current ICSS activities should be continued, but proposed expanding its role to help institutions secure financial support from foundations: “This suggestion springs from our belief that a large number of institutions have been ‘sold’ on the honors program idea, but are experiencing some financial difficulties in starting their programs.”

Jackson summed up the situation after meeting with Cohen in November 1959: “There is also considerable feeling that the center of emphasis of the ICSS program should change from how to organize, operate and finance an honors program to what the academic content of honors programs are and should be.” The high demand for institutional visits by Cohen or other representatives of ICSS and the effectiveness of past

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41 Jackson, Letter to Cohen, 20 October 1959, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.”
42 Ewing P. Shahan, Dean, Vanderbilt University, to Cohen, 22 December 1959, ICSS Box 4, f. “Carnegie Proposal 1959-60,” ICSS Papers-UCBA.
43 R. Lee Hornbake (Dean of Faculty, University of Maryland—College Park) to Cohen, 22 January 1960, Box 3, f. “Replies-Letter of Inquiry, First Set,” ICSS Papers-UCBA.
45 John O. Edison (Dean, Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, University of Georgia, quoting a colleague, Dr. C. Jay Smith, Jr.) to Cohen, 22 December 1959, Box 4, f. “Carnegie Proposal 1959-60,” ICSS Papers-UCBA.
visits warranted the continuation of that activity. Jackson and others were not, however, in favor of adding a third professional staff member as Cohen hoped to do. In Cohen’s opinion, that individual was needed for conducting research on honors programs, including “examining carefully actual courses which are being taught and presenting the results of such analyses in the newsletter.”

Jackson continued to oppose the expansion of the ICSS and recommended limiting any grant renewal to a period of one year. He advocated a shift in emphasis from public to private institutions, which for the most part had been omitted from the organization’s activities. The transition during 1960-61 would entail finding a new director from the private sector. Jackson hinted at this change to Cohen and believed that “he has taken it rather well.”

Cohen submitted a draft proposal to Jackson in December, and they met to discuss the details. The previous budget of $50,000 per year had resulted in a deficit, so Cohen hoped to approximately double the level of funding. He proposed extending the organization’s life for two years, adding a third staff person as coordinator of information, as well as a full-time research associate with three assistants. Jackson was skeptical that the Carnegie Corporation would support all those activities.

Cohen’s wish for the addition of a staff member devoted to research prompted Jackson to solicit opinions on staffing the ICSS and the need for research activities. Howard Quint, former managing editor and associate director of the ICSS, felt that the ICSS files did not contain sufficient information to perform evaluations. He suggested as well that someone outside the organization would be better suited to that type of activity, since evaluations “had to involve certain value judgments. And these judgments, as you can readily appreciate, will mirror Joe’s own predilections and prejudices.” Quint agreed that the organization should continue to operate for at least a year and that its orientation should change somewhat, but that this “should not serve as a pretext for empire building.

46 Record of conversation between Jackson and Cohen in New York City, 20 and 23 November 1959, written by Jackson, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.”
47 Blue sheet on conversations between Jackson and Cohen at the Carnegie Corporation offices, held on 20 November and 23 November 1959, recorded by Jackson on 24 November 1959, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.”
48 Blue sheet on conversation between Jackson and Cohen at the Carnegie Corporation offices, 30 December 1959, recorded on 7 January 1960, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.”
albeit of a very minor league variety.” He also argued for reducing Cohen’s travel schedule so that Cohen would have time to begin writing some type of report or book on honors. “Joe's visits should be curtailed drastically. As long as he is ‘in demand’ and feels obliged to carry the gospel to an admiring public, he just isn't going to get down to writing the kind of a report on Honors work, or book if you will, that he talks about and which I think he could undoubtedly do and do quite well. To be sure, his continual presence in Boulder in the ICSS office might be distracting to those who have to get on with the work of the world, but maybe he could be persuaded to do most of his work down by the creek in his seduction center (he liked that description for his house).”

Norman Kurland, Associate Director of the ICSS, supported the continuation of institutional visits and expressed his own surprise at the high number of requests to be added to the ICSS mailing list (arriving “at a steady rate of 150 to 250 a month”). He noted the significance of the responses to Cohen’s letter of inquiry regarding the future: “Such a letter would, by its very nature, be expected to evoke a number of favorable responses. What is impressive if the relative consistency of the comments on the effect of ICSS from so many different sources.” Kurland felt that the pace of visits was too much for Cohen alone, and that the work should be divided up, possibly among regional representatives as proposed earlier (during the last Executive Committee meeting.) Cohen had suggested moving the organization to New York City; although Kurland felt there would be benefits in terms of proximity to other agencies and many institutions, the cost of such a move and of operating in the city made the idea less attractive.

Robert B. MacLeod, a member of the Executive Committee and faculty member at Cornell University, responded in favor of a research program, though he felt the ICSS could get along without one. “Nevertheless, we have now reached the stage at which we really ought to have facts and figures assembled and interpreted. We need them not only to convince the doubting Thomases but also to clarify the thinking of those who are enthusiastic about Honors Work but are still confused as to which methods work best under which circumstances, and why.” George Waggoner also spoke out in support of

49 Howard Quint, Letter to Jackson, 31 December 1959 (typed on 2 January 1960), CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1960.”
50 Norman Kurland to Jackson, 28 December 1959, Box 3, f. “F. Jackson (2),” ICSS Papers-UCBA.
maintaining the ICSS for at least two more years. Jackson was especially interested in Waggoner’s opinion, since he and Cohen had disagreed on some issues. Waggoner was very much in favor of continuing the ICSS but not sure that a staff increase was needed.\(^{51}\)

Jackson prepared his recommendation and overview of the grant proposal for the Corporation’s Board. He wrote of the effectiveness of the ICSS, noting, “FJ believes that dollar for dollar probably more has been accomplished through this grant than through any he has handled.” Institutional visits would be reduced, since the preparatory work that preceded the three regional conferences was no longer required; travel would be divided more among Executive Committee members. Although conferences would be organized, they would be smaller and focus on specific problems rather than discussing how to set up an honors program.\(^{52}\)

Jackson did not support the new research component in the proposal, based on conversations with Robert Angell (University of Michigan) and MacLeod. “What appears to be called for at this stage is some expert advice to colleges and universities which desire this regarding the establishment of an evaluation program in connection with honors programs. Both Angell and ML. believe this can be handled through visitations by social scientists. There is provision in the main proposal for such consultation.” Jackson concluded that the proposed budget of $63,000 per year was reasonable given the shortfalls in the previous grant.\(^{53}\) The Carnegie Corporation ultimately agreed to provide a second grant of $140,000 allowing the ICSS to operate until July 31, 1962. The ICSS staff would continue to arrange conferences and site visits for the time being but curtail activities during 1961-62, in accordance with the original plan of not creating a permanent organization.\(^{54}\)

\(^{51}\) R. B. MacLeod (Cornell University, Department of Psychology), Letter to Jackson, 8 January 1960, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959”; Blue sheet on meeting between George Waggoner (University of Kansas) and Jackson in Boston, 12 January 1960, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1960.”

\(^{52}\) Jackson, Agenda sheet, 25 February 1960, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1960.”

\(^{53}\) Jackson, Yellow memo sheet to CCNY staff, 26 February 1960, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1960.”

\(^{54}\) “Carnegie Grant to the ICSS,” \textit{The Superior Student}, 3 (3): 1 (April 1960).
6 - Main Issues in Honors Education: Substance and Structure

Many institutions created new programs based on trial and error, and as the ICSS readily acknowledged, a successful approach at one institution might not suit another one. Myriad solutions resulted from the intersection of local conditions, individual and organizational initiatives, and nationwide trends. Nevertheless, several basic concerns were common to all honors programs: whether to offer honors work in the major field versus general education, or both; whether to allow able students to complete their studies more quickly or require additional work to fill in the normal four-year period; how to organize courses for honors students, and how to find the right students to fill them.

**Departmental and general honors**

Upper division independent study was the earliest mode of honors work that gave way to freshman and sophomore offerings. Closely linked to that transition was the question of departmental versus general honors. Departmental provisions depended on each department’s interest in offering honors work, although the college administration might encourage all departments in that direction. Most often, departments would offer independent study, senior thesis work, comprehensive exams or some combination of these activities. General honors developed as colleges sought challenges for lower division students and measures to prevent over-specialization among juniors and seniors.

A pair of articles published in the ICSS newsletter in 1958 gave readers an occasion to weigh the merits of general and departmental honors. One author argued that general honors work could help students—many of whom would be leaders in their fields—to develop an awareness of issues that transcend disciplinary boundaries. This was particularly important as knowledge was becoming increasingly specialized and the regular course offerings were not likely to provide enough complexity and challenge. General work also increased contact between honors students in various fields and made honors work in the freshman year possible. A variety of formats were available for general honors work in the lower division: special sections of large courses and laboratories or special parallel courses; new interdisciplinary courses; summer reading for credit; and “honors groups” that met to discuss special topics. Upper division options could include
colloquia on current topics with students from any or related departments, senior year integrating courses, and extra-curricular contacts among students in different disciplines. Finally, the article’s author asserted that the availability of general honors work did not conflict with the provision of departmental honors—both had important roles.¹

Departmental honors, on the other hand, originally developed as a reaction to the “academic lock-step,” which had limited the possibility for in-depth study. Through the framework of independent study and tutorials or seminars, departments and entire colleges permitted their best students to undertake specialized reading or research projects during part of their junior and senior years, a pattern that changed little over the decades. The author of the second article cited the curricular requirements at his state university to illustrate that breadth was, in fact, receiving priority over depth: elementary and survey courses predominated in the first two years, and even in the junior year, a student in arts and sciences would face survey courses again in order to be exposed to basics ideas in the major field. For students in teacher education, the combination of institutional and state requirements left even less room to focus on a particular sub-field or topic.

In our state universities, at any rate, undergraduate students at present are often discouraged from or even denied perhaps the most important of all educational experiences, the experience of exploring a subject beyond the obvious and superficial generalities to the point where independent discovery can take place. The author warned against treating undergraduates like graduate students, however. The focus was not the preparation of specialists, but to let students experience “the satisfaction of sustained endeavor and the thrill of independent, creative thought” which should be part of a liberal arts education.²

In response to the articles on general and departmental approaches, a third contributor pointed out that the authors seemed to be saying substantially the same thing: one was arguing for “a broadly educated scholar with a special area of interest” while the other advocated “a specialist with a broad background.” Despite the rhetorical difference in emphasis, the programs of such students would be similar in practice.³ An editorial article in 1960 explained general honors as “a continuous, integrated four-year approach

outside the major,” not to be confused with the decade-old “general education” approach. Ideally, it should provide “depth in interdisciplinary study” and be complementary to departmental honors programs. The editorial argued that depth in general studies was as important and attainable as depth in the major. Thus, breadth through general honors was not the polar opposite of depth through departmental honors; it meant something more deliberate than a sampling of various fields. The challenge was to devise appropriate interdisciplinary courses or groups of courses.

Columbia’s General Honors (later the Colloquium on Important Books) and Contemporary Civilization courses were early examples of interdepartmental cooperation within the humanities and social sciences, respectively. Yale’s two Directed Studies Programs in the humanities and the natural sciences involved multiple departments within those divisions and provided “an integrated set of courses occupying the bulk of a student’s academic time during his first two years” before moving into one of the “orthodox major programs of study” in the upper division. Some of the courses were organized by a single department, while others brought together faculty from several departments. The University of Colorado introduced one-credit “honors groups,” each focused on a specific topic from a multi-disciplinary perspective.

Not everyone felt that interdisciplinary study was appropriate in the early years of college. In such courses, went the argument, students could not be expected to understand and utilize the interrelationships of disciplines before building a solid foundation of basic, discipline-based knowledge. Princeton’s Special Program in the Humanities illustrated this approach: students began work in their majors during the sophomore year, completed those requirements by the end of the junior year, and spent the senior year on


5 The Directed Studies Program did not begin as an honors option; initially any student in the top three-quarters of the entering class was eligible to participate. The Program evolved from a general education option into an honors general education option through the higher standards the faculty attached to the courses and the Program’s increasing popularity, which made it possible to fill available spots with the top students. Also, the addition of 50 Ford Foundation early-entrance freshmen in 1951 forced the expansion of the Program and ensured the participation of a group of top notch students. James C. Haden, “Directed Studies at Yale,” The Superior Student, 1 (6): 2-4 (Dec. 1958).

independent study and thesis writing that incorporated at least two departmental areas outside of the major field.\textsuperscript{7}

The tension between general education and specialization was a major factor in the weakening of Yale’s Directed Studies Program and Columbia’s Colloquium on Important Books, since many faculty members were loyal above all to their professional fields, and students to their majors. Columbia’s course attracted fewer students from varied fields as departments began offering their own seminars and colloquia. By 1961 students in the Important Books group tended to be focused on literature as their main field. Yale’s program was unable to maintain its purpose of integrating the disciplines in the face of increased enrollments and patchy faculty support. A revised program took its place, under the same name but lacking vital elements of the earlier plan. Even these institutions, with their long experience and traditions of undergraduate education, had difficulty sustaining certain curricular endeavors. Changing contexts could amplify a program’s existing weaknesses to the point where they were damaging or simply incongruent with the rest of the institution’s priorities and character; honors programs had to keep step. Nevertheless, the Colloquium on Important Books had been the inspiration for Colorado’s successful senior colloquia following a visit by Joseph Cohen to Columbia in 1947. Though hardly a consolation for the Important Books faculty who saw their program’s presence weakening, Colorado’s inheritance illustrates the potential for innovations at one institution to have a far-reaching influence.

Attempts to counter over-specialization preoccupied many honors advocates in the late 1950s. Walter Weir, acting director of honors at Colorado and a member of the ICSS executive committee, wrote in regard to general studies:

Educators are aware that “the great talent hunt” which gobbles up their students is primarily a hunt for specialists. Lest this talent hunt contribute to a further emasculation of the liberal arts curriculum and result in making our brightest students “uneducated” college graduates, many colleges are attempting to interest their better students in special general education type programs. If the problem of organizing general honors courses so that they achieve breadth yet avoid being

\textsuperscript{7}“Upperclass Programs at Princeton,” \textit{The Superior Student}, 2 (8): 21-24 (Dec. 1959). Other special programs were available in American Civilization, Creative Arts, and New Eastern Studies, all overseen by Princeton’s Council of the Humanities, established in 1953. Princeton did not have a separate honors program, but the characteristics of its undergraduate education—an emphasis on independent study and small group instruction—were essentially those of honors work, earning it a place in the ICSS newsletter.
survey courses is a persistent one, the major difficulty is that of finding broadly trained teachers to conduct them.

Discussing the tendency toward narrow specialization among college faculty, which was encouraged by the system of promotion and tenure, Weir commented, “this kind of specialized training does not nurture the widely read, widely curious teacher whom we need for general honors work.”8 In his discussion of the first honors course at Columbia, Justus Buchler observed: “General Honors could not have been taught by a man who was convinced of the primacy of his own special interests, or who had a false sense of what was ‘practical’ in college education.”9

Similar concerns were germane to departmental honors courses. Weir observed that departmental programs were oriented toward producing scholars for graduate schools rather than enlightened undergraduates. Another commentator felt that traditional departmental honors programs tended to overemphasize individual activity rather than encouraging group work.10 As with most other dilemmas in honors, institutional and departmental cultures set the tone. Some campuses, for example, had a higher proportion of students continuing on to graduate school than others. While some institutions focused their efforts on educating for breadth or combining general and specialized study in some way, others chose to maintain honors programs that were strongly rooted in academic departments and emphasized specialization. The University of Kansas was one such institution, although it introduced general freshman-sophomore programs in 1955. The University’s college of arts and sciences had started with honors programs in the English and political science departments in 1930. Departments determined the specific requirements, and these varied. Eligibility was based on a 2.0 overall grade point average and 2.2 departmental average (where a B was equal to 2.0 grade points and an A earned 3.0). Other than that, the sole college-wide requirement was that the student “give

10 Walter D. Weir, University of Colorado, and Edward A. Cameron, University of North Carolina, were both panelists at the ICSS Southern Invitational Conference in November 1958. Their remarks were paraphrased in the session report by John K. Bettersworth, “Instructing the Superior Student,” The Superior Student, 1 (7): 13-15 (Jan. 1959).
evidence of scholarly distinction” and that the department certify to the dean and registrar that the student had completed honors work to the department’s satisfaction.11

In the 1930s at Kansas, English and political science students followed a program of independent study during their junior and senior years. In political science, the independent reading was accompanied by weekly meetings with the professor, either individually or in a small group. Students received grades for their reading but ultimately had to pass a comprehensive oral examination given by three of the department’s faculty members. In 1966 the program was essentially the same, with the addition of a thesis requirement. The English department originally expected its honors students to enroll in a tutorial for three or four semesters, with each semester focusing on a specific topic and a major paper due by semester’s end. Before graduating, the student would take a comprehensive exam, administered by three faculty members. By the mid-1960s the English program had developed a more formal honors program with added requirements, including a higher GPA (2.5) for eligibility, enrollment in three honors seminars, and if receiving a grade of A for two of those semesters, a final semester of independent preparation for the comprehensive exam with both written and oral parts.12

Other departments’ requirements at Kansas also varied: in philosophy, honors students took additional regular courses beyond the normal number; in foreign languages, reading for honors was still prevalent; honors students in sociology, psychology, anthropology, and physical and biological sciences were required to complete a research project during the senior year; in economics, an honors dissertation and comprehensive exam were required; and the mathematics department offered an honors seminar but awarded honors based on a minimum 2.5 GPA in four core courses.13 Kansas did not establish a special administrative body or unit to coordinate honors provisions during the period under study.

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11 George R. Waggoner, “Departmental Honors at the University of Kansas: A Case History,” in The Superior Student in American Higher Education, ed. Joseph W. Cohen (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 138-139 (hereafter cited as SSAHE). Honors work at Kansas, from its inception into the early sixties, had been limited to the arts and sciences, although occasionally a student from education or journalism would undertake a departmental honors program in arts and sciences. Waggoner noted that the sciences were not active in honors education prior to the 1950s and felt that this was true of many state universities at the time.
12 Ibid., 139-140.
13 Ibid., 141.
The University of Michigan, on the other hand, left its strong departmental honors programs intact but placed them under the organizational umbrella of an Honors Council. Under the new system, all departments were required to admit only students with a minimum overall average of B and B+ average in the major field, provide a clear sequence of honors opportunities emphasizing original work, and abide by some general standards for graduation with honors. Otherwise, departments maintained their authority to make decisions about whom they admitted to upper division honors work as well as the substance and form of that work.14

The ICSS encouraged a balance between general and departmental programs when possible. As one of its steering committee members observed, “Concentration-distribution; specialization-general education—there’s nothing very new here except that we are rethinking the educational problem in terms of the unusually able and at the same time hoping for some new intellectual energy that might spill over to the whole process.”15 While the tradition of departmental honors programs continued at many institutions, general honors may be regarded as the more significant feature in the 1950s and 60s. Another ICSS participant reflected that general honors “constitute the most revolutionary dimensions of the new honors movement” and “represent a trend toward the strengthening of liberal arts education.”16

C. P. Snow’s Two Cultures

Added impetus for general studies in honors work came in 1959 when Charles P. Snow gave the annual Rede Lecture at Cambridge University and set off a wide-reaching debate. A scientist by training, Snow abandoned that path in favor of becoming a novelist and served for many years in the British governmental posts. Having experienced the worlds of both science and letters, Snow felt that a huge divide existed between them with neither side being able to understand or communicate with the other. He moreover berated the “literary intellectuals” for viewing science as an inferior vocation, even though it was science that could improve the future of humanity. Critics of Snow’s views (which have been greatly condensed here) pointed out numerous

16 Walter Weir, “Honors and the Liberal Arts College,” in SSAHE (1966), 82.
weaknesses of his argument as well as his possible lack of qualifications to speak on the subject, and some considered him second rate in both science and novel-writing. Nonetheless, his statements struck a chord with many people and inspired abundant discussion about the gap between the sciences and humanities and the role of education in promoting dialogue between the “two cultures.”\textsuperscript{17}

The ICSS newsletters contain numerous references to Snow’s argument, including the November 1959 editorial article, which described Snow’s views on the dilemma between the traditional culture of the humanists who opposed industrialization and mechanization, versus the future-oriented culture of scientists who saw no need to study art, literature or philosophy. Snow felt that education must be rethought to address the gap and produce intellectuals who are aware of the interrelationships of the two cultures and the broad implications of their own work. In Russia, he observed, the gap was not as apparent as in the West, indicating a better understanding of the scientific revolution. The ICSS article noted that John Dewey made a similar statement in 1939 in \textit{Freedom and Culture}, when he wrote: “A culture which permits science to destroy traditional values but which distrusts its power to create new ones is a culture which is destroying itself.”\textsuperscript{18}

The ICSS editorial argued that honors programs, by including both general and departmental work, could help change the educational approach that produced narrowly specialized graduates. Cohen reiterated this viewpoint three years later in another editorial, “Honors and Coherence in the Sciences,” that prefaced an issue of the newsletter devoted to sciences and mathematics.\textsuperscript{19} At the ICSS Western Invitational Conference in April 1960, a panel of students drew attention to the two cultures debate by presenting a discussion and sample colloquium based on the reading of Snow’s “The Two Culture and the Scientific Revolution” and R. Oppenheimer’s “Tradition and

\textsuperscript{17} The discussion has lasted far beyond the mid-1900s, most recently in: \textit{Overcoming The Two Cultures: Science Versus The Humanities In The Modern World-System}, (Fernand Braudel Center Series), Richard E. Lee and Immanuel Wallerstein, Paradigm Publishers, July 2005. Stefan Collini’s preface to a 1993 edition of Snow’s lecture (Cambridge University Press) provides a comprehensive analysis of the history and influence of Snow’s ideas.


Discovery” (the ACLS Annual Lecture in 1959). A summary of the discussion was published in a subsequent issue of the newsletter.20

The Dean of Columbia College, John Palfry, offered the pessimistic prognosis that the gap between the two cultures “is first created by neglect in primary schools, consolidated in high schools and made largely unbridgeable in college, and is unbridgeable thereafter.”21 Liberal arts curricula, he argued, rarely have room for requiring both foundational laboratory science work as well as general science courses that present historical, philosophical and social aspects. If students left high school with solid laboratory science experience, they would be better prepared for courses that examined the broader meaning and practice of science, and science faculties could develop higher level offerings for both non-science students and science majors.

The lack of that ideal scenario did not deter honors educators from attempting to close the gap. As Dudley Wynn pointed out, it would be impossible to achieve greater understanding between the two cultures without giving students of science and technology and students of the humanities opportunities to argue with each other.22 Whether students actually engaged in such debate is another question, but it is certain that many new courses were developed in an attempt to meaningfully expose students to multiple disciplines.

Wesleyan University, for example, introduced an interdisciplinary science course for first-year students in 1959 to enable non-science students to examine scientific problems in depth, rather than providing a superficial survey of several fields. Members of a team of faculty provided lectures and served as supervisors for the students’ projects. Every three weeks, students were given a choice of several broad questions such as “How serious is the Strontium-90 hazard?” and “On what basis can the reality of flying saucers be investigated?” Using recommended readings along with scientific observation and experimentation, students worked in groups to answer the questions and wrote individual responses in essay form. The course was not limited to honors students but incorporated honors practices, such as a high proportion of independent work, use of original sources,

22 Wynn, in SSAHE (1966), 108.
and publication of the best essays at the end of the term. The course, which enrolled over 125 students in its first year, was a success and sparked the development of a sophomore course on life, man, and society involving the departments of biology, psychology, philosophy and mathematics.23

The University of Michigan’s solution to science for non-science majors was a four-credit sophomore honors course on “Evolutionary Processes.” As in the case of Wesleyan, the faculty ruled out a survey course in favor of more focused study of fewer topics. Their goal was to impart an understanding of scientific developments, so that students would be able to anticipate next steps in the process of scientific discovery. Each member of the team held a series of lectures; the team comprised a physicist, astronomer, geologist, and biologist, and the topics were covered in that order, starting with basic principles of physics, transitioning to the evolution of stars and the solar system, geological processes, and finally the evolution of life on earth. Each portion of the course examined basic concepts in that discipline; however, the faculty arranged the material to emphasize the connections between each area. Students were encouraged to ask questions, and questions that would have led the class too far off the current topic were set aside for evening discussions held every few weeks in one of the dormitory lounges. Although attendance at the evening sessions was voluntary, at least 80 percent of the class participated. An evaluation after two semesters found that students who completed the course demonstrated an understanding of and competence in the use of basic scientific principles. The price of this success was high, however, at approximately four times the cost of conventional courses at the University. In view of this fact, the faculty team outlined possible modifications that would be more economical for institutions considering similar measures.24

Good intentions and careful planning did not guarantee that interdisciplinary awareness would be achieved, and it is still an elusive goal—not shared by all—in undergraduate education today. Alongside the successes reported in the ICSS newsletter, at least one institution declared a change of heart. Yale College’s Directed Studies

Program, established in 1946, had aimed at integrating the disciplines and linking the sciences and humanities.²⁵ Although successful in its early years, by 1960 the program came under scrutiny for failing to serve either of these functions. Three of the faculty expressed their concern in a report that called for significant changes, including a smaller, more selective program, with creativity as a primary criterion for admission, and separate rooms dedicated to the program to help regain the “esprit de corps” that characterized the program in its early years. In 1963, after a dissatisfying experience with Directed Studies as freshmen, a large number of students asked to be excused from the sophomore year of the program. The result of this unrest was a revised program that no longer attempted to provide an interdisciplinary experience. An article in the student newspaper quoted the Dean of the College as saying: “we have given up the notion that teachers really can do the work of integrating the disciplines. This is something that the student must ultimately do for himself.” The new program kept humanities, sciences and mathematics as separate courses. Integration of sorts was reserved for an experimental “intensive” section open to twelve students, who attended the same science and mathematics courses as other Directed Studies participants, but met separately for the humanities component.²⁶

Andrew De Rocco of the ICSS staff articulated the need for interdisciplinary efforts in terms of a danger that lies “less in the reality of specialization than in a canonization of the fragmented intellect.” The goal would be to arrive at a stage “in which specialization is an attribute of knowledge rather than its definition.” De Rocco cited undergraduate- and graduate-level courses that brought the perspectives of several disciplines together, and observed that successful interdisciplinary efforts often centered on an “instrument” (either physical, such as the electron microscope, or intellectual, such

²⁵ Daniel Catlin, Jr. describes the diminution of departmental strength in favor of interdisciplinary cooperation under William C. Devane, whose tenure as Dean of Yale College began in the late 1930s. The Directed Studies program grew out of his leadership combined with a reaction among faculty to revive liberal education following its de-emphasis during WWII: Catlin, Liberal Education at Yale (Washington, DC: University Press of American, Inc., 1982), 21-24.

²⁶ Alan Hooker, “A New Directed Studies Program at Yale” (reprinted from the Yale Daily News), The Superior Student, 4 (6): 14-16. Catlin notes that students began to leave the program as early 1949, due more to its overall approach than the quality of individual courses, which was generally good. The program was intended as a four-year sequence with its own majors, but was implemented as a two-year program feeding into existing majors—that decision “eventually fragmented the Directed Studies curriculum beyond recognition and altered the original conception beyond salvage.” Catlin, op cit., 65-66, quotation: 54.
as a theory to be tested) that required interdisciplinary collaboration rather than cooperation instituted by fiat around a contrived theme. ²⁷

**Teaching Methods: Acceleration, Enrichment, and Special Class Formats**

Along with a shift away from solely departmental honors programs to general honors, institutions moved away from independent study as the primary mode for honors work. Seminars and colloquia became favored formats, but conducting them successfully was a challenge even to experienced instructors. Honors faculty struggled to strike the right balance between providing information through readings and lectures, and allowing their students to discuss the material freely. Too much involvement by the faculty member could be inhibiting; too little could result in discussions that lacked focus and depth. Managing a range of personalities within a group and engaging all its members, not just the most vocal, added to the difficulty. The ICSS newsletter allowed faculty who were running seminars and colloquia to share their reflections on common pitfalls and ideal scenarios. The consensus was that these formats were educationally very powerful when all the elements were in place, and were worthwhile endeavors even if some sessions turned out poorly. Other formats did not provide the same degree of opportunity for students to develop skills in group interaction, articulate and defend positions, recognize errors, and learn from peers.

Small seminars, such as those developed at Swarthmore in the 1920s, were a means to approximate individual instruction in the American college context where the tutorial system of Britain was not as suitable. The seminar format proved successful at Swarthmore and at other institutions that tried it, and it was adopted widely throughout American higher education. (The tutorial system was revived at some colleges in the early 1900s, but it never became as integral or seriously-regarded as its counterpart in the British system.) ²⁸ In contrast to the specialized content of seminars, colloquia dealt with general topics, and process was at least as important as content. Many colleges used their colloquia to loosely organize a set of economic, political, historical and philosophical issues, in some cases with complementary material from literature and the arts. More

²⁸ Aydelotte (1944), 109, 113.
than enough suitable material was available for representing the evolution of Western
culture and its attendant dilemmas, providing a starting point for discussion.

A faculty member at Reed explained that the aim was to give students a context
for movement between the ideal and the actual and between their own experiences and
values and the common readings.29 Reed College opened its Symposium to the entire
senior class and found that 30 to 40 percent of students elected to participate. Judging
from accounts in the newsletter, however, the majority of institutions limited their
colloquia to a more select group of their students, as determined through faculty
recommendations and personal interviews.

Another concern was whether to allow students to complete college in less time.
Some institutions allowed freshmen to skip courses and essentially gain sophomore or
second-semester freshman status, and for a time a number of experiments were
undertaken to test the effects of acceleration. Despite the continued use of A.P. credits
and other means of “testing out” of basic courses, the principle of enrichment (i.e., the
use of extra time to study additional subjects or the basic subjects in more depth)
appeared to remain the preferred option among honors educators.30 An editorial article in
the ICSS newsletter discussed the limitations of acceleration at the college level, arguing
that “at some stages of the student’s development and in some disciplines acceleration is
more proper than in others,” while in other cases, advancing students to higher level
courses would not be in their best interests. A superior freshman student placed in a
sophomore course, for example, would be studying a higher level of content, but this
learning would take place among average sophomores. The problem lies in the fact that
this freshman “functions at intellectual levels that an average sophomore or even senior
may never reach.” The student would fare better in courses that offer “more intensive,
sophisticated, and challenging work at every level.” Secondly, quoting David Riesman,
since students arrived to college better prepared than previously, “the demands put on the
colleges today for superlative quality are ever so much greater than most of us realize.”

30 With improvements in secondary school preparation, Yale’s revised Directed Studies Program made sure
that students could use their advanced work from high school, giving participants the option to skip their
sophomore year if they completed the freshman year “with distinction.” Hooker, op cit. (fn 23), 15.
The article noted that acceleration had a role in preparatory instruction—the mastery of basic skills found in the lower years of schooling through high school—but most college level work carried “the need for penetration in depth, for syntheses needed for the matured insight, and for the realization of the interdependence of knowledge and values.” Acceleration at the college level could benefit students by giving them more time to explore their major fields and an area of specialization, after a solid foundation had been laid and the interrelationships of the disciplines realized. That route was only effective, however, if the college environment emphasized the intellectual rather than vocational aims of education. The editorial concluded that acceleration was the preferred method for gifted education at institutions where a vocational outlook, rather than a concern for the climate and equality of education, was prevalent.31

Dean Palfry of Columbia College suggested that liberal arts colleges were in danger of being squeezed out by acceleration at both ends: advanced placement made high school students ready for work beyond the freshman year of college, and the availability of graduate level courses meant some seniors were shortening the end of their college careers. Yet the liberal arts college had an important role to play in a student’s development. He felt that colleges could raise their educational standards to keep ahead of the better preparation high school students were receiving.32

Collaboration Between Secondary and Higher Education

The raising of standards that Palfry alluded to was in fact a process of mutual adjustment requiring consideration of goals and options by both high school and college educators. An editorial article in the ICSS’s February 1960 newsletter on high school-college collaboration reported, “in most cases there are only beginnings, but they are

31 “Acceleration Is Not Enough,” The Superior Student, 3 (7): 1-2 (Nov. 1960). The article quotes Riesman, “Student Culture and Faculty Values,” in Margaret L. Habein, ed., Spotlight on the College Student (Washington, DC.: American Council on Education, 1959), 25. Robert C. Angell, Director of the Honors Council at the University of Michigan, gave a similar assessment of the limitations of acceleration, writing that the choice was one of emphasis, rather than an either-or situation. He explained that Michigan emphasized enrichment, but some acceleration was inevitable due to A. P. credits, a summer reading program equivalent to one course, and higher course loads during the year. He also noted that Michigan’s mathematicians seemed to believe acceleration was better suited to their field than an enrichment approach. “Issues in Honors,” The Superior Student, 3 (4): 20-21 (May-June 1960). Washington State University’s faculty, conversely, took an enrichment view of mathematics for honors work: “Notes and Comments,” Ibid., 25.
beginnings suggesting major changes which will affect the curriculum content, the facility with which students move from one school level to the other and the hitherto prevailing types of communication between college and high school teachers.” A curricular transition to higher level material in preparation for college would produce a better education for all students, it noted, but also lead to competition for the brightest students and the development of programs for the gifted in high schools. The College Entrance Examination Board had recently predicted that “quality” colleges would soon require entering freshmen to have already completed the equivalent of the first-year of college by current curricular standards, forcing high schools, and lower schools in turn, to upgrade their programs in order to keep their students competitive.

The trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching devoted one day of their annual meeting in 1959 to discussing the status of education for the academically talented, resulting in a call for colleges and high schools to be more proactive. In its Annual Report, the Foundation cited the finding that the failure of many talented students to attended college was due as much to motivational factors as financial ones. “All high performance takes place in a framework of expectation—particularly in youth,” and educators must create a framework of high expectations at every level of schooling. Within schools, some teachers naturally motivate students through a love of their subjects combined with a regard for intellectual achievement. Rather than leaving it to chance, however, (and despite recent improvements in teacher training), teachers must make an effort to challenge the best students rather than holding them back from their potential. Parents and counselors must also encourage talented students in this direction. The report emphasized that colleges and universities also needed to pay more attention to talented students. Those who were admitted in the past were neglected, and institutions “have learned from bitter experience that this is not a sensible omission.” Colleges could also affect the level of student who applied for admission by permitting early admission and advanced placement. Again, previous practice in this regard was inadequate: “The

34 “Some Relevant Predictions from the CEEB” (excerpts from Educator’s Dispatch, Jan. 27, 1960), The Superior Student, 3 (1): 5-6 (Feb. 1960).
reluctance of many colleges and universities to do this in the past has been a significant
deterrent to the stimulation of bright students in the high schools.”35

Although the Carnegie Foundation trustees acknowledged that high schools and
colleges were separate realms and should remain so, they concluded that educational
improvement required closer communication between them and that universities must
accept their share of leadership in promoting productive discussion. “Except for the
establishment of formal entrance requirements, most have acted as though the prior
intellectual experience of the students who reached their doors was strictly none of their
business.” Likewise, school educators had to face the issue of education for the
academically talented, despite the great number of “plausible arguments” they could find
for avoiding it. “Schools guilty of such evasion of responsibility are finding that the
temper of the times will not condone their complacency.”36

The February 1960 issue of The Superior Student, while directing attention to the
deficiencies in high school–college collaboration, focused primarily on what some
institutions had already accomplished by providing examples of curricular cooperation,
enrichment, acceleration, and geographic liaisons. A number of these projects did not
target only the most academically talented students, while others, such as a new physics
curriculum, benefited primarily the top students even if they were not designated as
projects in gifted education.

One example of collaboration described in the ICSS newsletter was the Portland
(Ore.) Public Schools invitation to nine colleges and universities in the state to participate
in a detailed study of the high school curriculum for college-bound students. The higher
education institutions welcomed the project as a means to upgrade curricula and reduce
duplication. Committees in six major subject areas were formed, with representatives
from both sectors. Portland had set a precedent for cooperation with higher education
institutions in an earlier program, begun in 1947, that allowed high school juniors and
seniors to enroll in special courses at Reed College. Furthermore in 1952, Reed and the
Public Schools organized a project called “Educational Enrichment,” supported by the

35 “Education of the Academically Talented” (excerpts from Fifty-fourth Annual Report of the Carnegie
36 Ibid.
FAE, to identify and encourage gifted students. The city engaged in other experimental curriculum projects during the 1950s as well.

A major boost to curriculum improvement came through the National Science Foundation’s Course Content Improvement Section, which supported curriculum projects in physics, math, chemistry and biology, involving major universities in cooperation with high school teachers and experts in education, communications and other relevant fields. The Physical Science Study Committee, for example, was sponsored originally by M.I.T. (later becoming part of Educational Services, Inc.) and yielded a textbook and related manuals, a film series, and even new laboratory equipment.

The humanities received attention through the American Historical Association’s Service Center for Teachers of History. The project published pamphlets and organized summer institutes aimed at familiarizing history teachers with new historical work or reinterpretations of past work. The Center also organized an experimental seminar for some eighty-five seniors from ten high schools in Prince George’s County, Maryland. The seminars were extra-curricular and not for credit, met for one evening a month, and consisted of a lecture by a professional historian followed by discussion, with pertinent reading lists provided in advance of each session.

While the preceding examples of curricular experiments served many more students than just the top quintile in academic achievement, projects aimed specifically at improving the education of intellectually gifted pupils were also quite evident in the 1950s. One route was the enrichment approach. These opportunities usually were extra-curricular and did not count toward high school graduation, although some carried college credit or recognition. Some examples: the FAE’s Catskill Area Project in Small School Design, consisting of Saturday morning seminars for students from small, rural schools that could not otherwise afford to offer extra academic opportunities; monthly lectures and discussions for students on Long Island, organized by St. John’s University; Indiana University’s pre-college summer program, which helped student become acclimated to college life and get a head start on their course work; and reading enrichment programs for high school students through the University of California at
Davis and at Boston College, whereby professors familiarized students with the kind of reading and discussion they could expect in literature courses at the college level.\textsuperscript{37}

Another way that high schools and colleges sought to encourage gifted students was through advanced placement, which included all opportunities for credit by examination or credit for college-level work completed during high school. This approach combined enrichment with acceleration, with its most widespread form being the Advanced Placement Program. Acceleration was the less significant effect, however, since at that time most students pursued A.P. credit in just one subject. Breaking with this general trend, however, fifty-four students entered Harvard as sophomores in 1958; at Yale this effect was smaller, with twenty-seven freshmen being eligible to skip their sophomore year but only six electing to do so.\textsuperscript{38}

For the A.P. Program to work, of course, high schools had to provide suitable instruction. Higher education institutions could play a direct role here, as did the Carnegie Institute of Technology: members of its faculty and teachers at several Pittsburgh high schools collaborated to introduce A.P. courses in history and English. In Ohio, slow adoption of A.P. (with only seven of 1200 high schools participating) spurred the Ohio Inter-University Council to initiate a state-wide project. An advisory committee with representatives of twenty colleges and universities formed to organize regional conferences for school administrators and subject area conferences for teachers, while a group of college faculty would serve as consultants for individuals schools.\textsuperscript{39}

The idea of acceleration enjoyed a surge of approval among higher education institutions at this time, but the key to its success may have been that it focused on bringing qualified students into appropriate college-level work as early as possible, versus the less popular idea of allowing students to graduate from college in less time. According to the ICSS newsletter, “no nationally accepted policy has yet evolved but most colleges seem willing to grant advanced placement, either with or without credit, to those who satisfactorily complete college-level work in high school.” Where A.P. courses were unavailable or limited, students might attend one or two courses at a local college instead of spending the entire day at school. This option had existed earlier but,

\textsuperscript{38} Brief article under the heading, “College Credit for High School Students,” Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 21-22.
according to the ICSS, was being adopted more widely and with greater numbers of students. Examples of targeted effort in this category included the University of Akron’s General College, which began a program with FAE support for seventy-five seniors from area schools to attend an English class on campus. In California, a study of thirty-nine junior colleges found that twenty-eight of them were operating programs for a total of 389 high school students.40

The various options could be combined. Students could, for example, apply for early admission to the University of Minnesota (approximately ten students had done this in each of the past several fall semesters), earn college credit or advanced placement through departmental or A.P. examinations (the latter operated at only two high schools as yet), and register at the University on a part-time basis while completing high school. The University also offered high school students admission to summer courses. These means of facilitating the transition from high school to college for academically talented and motivated students are familiar by now, but were relatively novel in the 1950s.

Such opportunities often resulted from several actors working together. Educators in public education and higher education combined their expertise to work out content and modes of delivery, while financial support and other resources came from foundations and a variety of professional and educational organizations. These national, regional, and state organizations included:

- NEA Project on the Academically Talented Student
- North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools Project on the Guidance and Motivation of Superior and Talented Students
- Minnesota Committee on High School–College Relations
- University of California Office of Relations with Schools
- University of Colorado Bureau of Educational Research and Service
- Regional Commission on Education Coordination (serving eight universities, twenty-five colleges, and numerous school districts in the Upper Ohio Valley, including parts of Western Pennsylvania, Eastern Ohio, and Northern West Virginia.)41

High schools, education organizations, and colleges and universities also collaborated in the identification of potential honors students. Efforts related to the content and format of honors education had to be supported by effective methods of finding candi-

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40 Ibid., 22-26.
41 These organizations’ activities are briefly described in The Superior Student, 3 (1): 32-34 (Feb. 1960).
dates. The typical measures provided by national tests and high school GPA overlooked key traits and could result in the selection of students who were bright but not motivated or creative, or students who did not score well on traditional measures but would excel if given the opportunity to study subjects they were passionate about. An ICSS editorial in 1965 called for “multi-faceted selection program,” including “tests which identify creativity and other personality characteristics… because these instruments provide data bearing heavily on motivation.” It warned that honors programs should be built with the students’ capabilities in mind. “Yet the important fact that we often devise programs for students we do not have is frequently lost from sight when we attempt to arrive at answers for the number of dropouts from honors programs.”42

Various selection strategies had been tried and adjusted by that time. During the introductory phase of a new honors program around 1957-58, Michigan State’s faculty set the honors admission criteria at a minimum 3.5 grade average (on a 4.0 scale) during freshman year or comparable performance in the case of transfer students. Applicants were not required to submit a detailed honors plan; the only requirement was to graduate with 180 quarter credits, while adhering to departmental requirements. These early criteria resulted in a high number of honors students, totaling more than 1,000 over a short period. The grade cutoff had been based on a 1955 estimate that only 200 students would finish their first year with a 3.5 average. Since then, however, increased class sizes had coupled with grade inflation to increase the number of eligible students. A faculty committee addressed this issue and several others as the MSU honors program evolved.43

At the University of Michigan, with the rapid introduction of an honors program in 1957 the first honors class of freshmen “was somewhat hastily selected from the roster of National Merit Finalists, Semi-Finalists, and Commended Students.” A large number of these students failed to maintain the required “B” average during their first year, and the original pool of 201 students was reduced by 25% due to attrition. The selection criteria were expanded for the next group of entering freshmen and included measures of performance in high school and on national standardized tests, and on quality of high

43 Paul L. Dressel, College to University: The Hannah Years at Michigan State, 1935-1969 (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University, 1987), 142-143. Freshmen were not invited to join the Honors College until 1974, although honors sections had been open to them for some time.
school. The attrition rate for that group fell to 17%. In the mid-1960s, extensive recruitment efforts were developed that included meetings with alumni groups in Michigan and nearby states to help identify prospects. Alumni also helped advertise a summer visitation program which brought 200 outstanding eleventh-graders to the campus for two weeks of seminars in English Literature, Creative Writing, Classics, German Social Studies, and Mathematics. The University instituted more rigorous selection and retention criteria for its honors program, and the number of administrative staff and honors faculty increased to accommodate growing enrollment.44

The National Merit Scholarship Program, established by the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1956, gave institutions a new way to identify academically talented students and bring them to their campuses. After administering tests to an initial pool of about 58,000 students at over 10,000 secondary schools, the Program named 556 Merit Scholars who would attend 160 colleges and universities. The amount of each scholarship depended on the student’s financial need, ranging from $100 to full tuition and expenses (later capped at $1500), and covered four-years of college study. Changes in both content and timing were implemented after the third year of operation. The new version tested both aptitude and proficiency in five sub-areas (versus aptitude only), making it a better indicator of readiness for college. Testing was moved to the end of the junior year, versus the beginning of the senior year, allowing students to know their results when planning their final year of high school courses—a key change for students who had not planned to attend college but scored well enough to reconsider their options. Secondary schools also asked that the restriction on who could take the exam be lifted; rather than limiting testing to the top 5 percent of students in the class, under the new system almost any student could take the exam. These changes were credited with almost doubling participation compared to the previous year, with nearly 479,000 students from 14,464 secondary schools. By 1960, 3,937 Merit Scholars were attending over 400 colleges and universities. About half of the scholarships were financed through the NMSC’s founding grants and half through sponsored scholarships.45

45 National Merit Scholarship Corporation, Reports, 1956, 1; 1958, 5; and 1960, 5.
Beyond the direct benefits to students in the form of aid and encouragement, the Merit Program was a boon to colleges as well as scholarship providers. Every college in the country and many scholarship providers (around seventy as of 1960) received the annual list of Semifinalists. Colleges received separate notifications when Semifinalists or Commended students listed them as their first or second choice. Use of the semifinalist lists by honors program staff could range from simply contacting semifinalists in the region to encourage their continuing education and enrollment in honors work, to inviting all semifinalists to join the institution’s freshman honors program.46

Michigan State University was especially successful in recruitment. The Honors College at MSU attracted National Merit Scholars, wrote Paul Dressel, “which renewed the desirability of scholarship funds to attract able students. In 1962, funds were set aside to make awards to 150 National Merit Scholars who indicated intention to attend Michigan State. This immediately expanded the number of outstanding students at MSU and in the Honors Colleges.” In 1962, MSU had more freshman Merit Scholars than any other institution. The situation

attracted national attention and much criticism (and envy) from other universities. MSU was not the first institution to use money to attract able students, but the magnitude of the program spawned accusations that the university was “purchasing” students and that the reputation and quality of the National Merit program was being diminished. Other institutions were, of course, free to do the same, and others did.47

MSU emerged as a force to be reckoned with in the competition for high-ability students. The recent development of a national market, as opposed to the regional orientation that characterized admissions prior to World War II, made forceful recruitment necessary if an institution wished to improve its relative position or even keep pace with similar institutions. State universities found a winning combination in the convergence of new honors programs with student aid in the form of National Merit and other scholarships.

47 Dressel, College to University, 142-143.
7 - Organizational Variations

In its earliest form, a departmental honors program could exist (and many did) through the will and effort of one or two faculty members. As programs grew more complex and centralized, the ad hoc approach was no longer sufficient. Longer term faculty commitment was needed, rather than year-by-year participation, and that necessity had budgetary implications. Some of the administrative aspects that originally fell on the departments, in consultation with the central administration, were later accomplished by a central honors director with secretarial support; in time, however, the larger programs required larger staffs to handle all the work. Lastly, honors students and administrative personnel could be accommodated in existing facilities, but dedicated lounges, administrative suites, and eventually buildings were seen as parts of an ideal arrangement.

Several organizational variations evolved in the honors arena. Although honors education originated in liberal arts colleges (as distinct institutions and as units within universities) and remained primarily within that realm until the honors trend of the 1950s, the wave of program birth and renewal during that decade and into the 1960s brought other areas of the university into play. This chapter describes the expansion into the professional schools, which in turn yielded “all-university” honors programs. Another nascent organizational solution, the honors college, is also discussed.

Honors in Professional Schools

In the 1940s over-specialization was already a concern, but few institutions had attempted to counteract it through honors work outside of their colleges of liberal arts. It took until the 1950s for widespread initiation of honors programs in the professional schools.¹ By 1960, a number of colleges and universities reported some type of honors

¹ Claude R. Rickman noted that accelerated professional studies had been in place “for many years” by the mid-1950s. An example of this type was the University of North Carolina Medical School, which admitted qualified students after three years of college education and awarded a Bachelor’s degree after the first year of medical school, reducing the total time of study to seven years instead of eight. North Carolina’s Law School operated a similar program: Rickman, "Trends in Provisions for Gifted Students in American Colleges and Universities, 1920-1955." (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1956), 237-238. These
work available to students in agriculture, business, engineering, education, home
economics, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine. Dudley Wynn, a
member of the ICSS Steering Committee, conducted a survey in 1964 to determine the
extent that the “honors philosophy” had been adopted at institutions where honors work
extended beyond the liberal arts college. (His definition of the honors philosophy
included going beyond course grades to evaluate students, and the entire faculty taking
responsibility to ensure a high quality education regardless of a student’s enrollment
division.) He concluded: “There is, as yet, among institutions in general no consistent
dedication to the idea that honors must serve to improve a student’s general as well as his
specialized education. However, as many institutions (approximately) respect both aims
as respect only one or the other, and this, no doubt, represents a tremendous gain in
recent years.”

At the same time, enrollment in honors work among professional school students
was still low in comparison to liberal arts colleges. Of eighteen universities that gave
complete replies to survey questions on the involvement of liberal arts versus
professional students in honors work, 5.8% of liberal arts students, but only 1.6% of
students in all other undergraduate colleges, were enrolled in honors programs of some
kind. Thirteen of the eighteen institutions in Wynn’s sample were listed as having an
All-University program in the 1960-61 ICSS Inventory, and three of the remaining
universities reported honors work in one professional college. Institutions with no or few
professional schools offering students some type of honors work therefore accounted for
a small portion of the total sample in Wynn’s study and would not have unduly weighed
down the 1.6% aggregate figure.

programs were not “honors education” from the enrichment (versus acceleration) perspective, but certainly
it was the highly able and motivated students who benefited.
Joseph W. Cohen (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 110, 113 (hereafter cited as SSAHE). Of the thirty-
eight institutions included in the survey, nine reported specialized honors work, eight focused on general
honors, and nine said they had both kinds.
3 The survey asked for total enrollment and did not distinguish between general and departmental honors
work, e.g., whether students in professional programs had access only to general honors courses, and
whether some professional schools offered upper-division honors while others did not. The eighteen
institutions were: Arkansas, Brigham Young, Colorado, Denver, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Kent State,
Kentucky, Massachusetts, Miami, Michigan, Michigan State, Ohio (Athens), Oregon, Texas Christian,
Utah, and Wichita. Ibid., 116-18.
Why were professional schools resistant to honors work? In a February 1959 article in *The Superior Student*, the academic vice president of the University of Wisconsin, Fred Harvey Harrington, offered his views: His premise that “honors programs are least often found where they are most needed” was based partly on observable fact—honors programs were indeed much more numerous in the liberal arts. Whether professional schools needed honors education most, he wrote, was open to debate. Some educators felt that the primary job of professional education was to train specialists, a difficult enough task given the pre-professional requirements students had to meet and the desire of faculties to teach both basic theory and practical skills. From this perspective, there was no room left for honors work of the interdisciplinary type. Some educators in the liberal arts also felt that honors education was unsuited to professional education and should be limited to its original home.

Countering these objections, however, Harrington noted that professional schools were attracting some of the most academically talented youth, and that graduates of those schools were in great demand in business, industry and government. Regardless of which side one took in the training debate—that American higher education should prepare more highly-specialized graduates or that higher education had become over-specialized—the fundamental issue was that the country’s best minds should not be underutilized. He felt research-oriented honors work would be most beneficial in professional curricula, in order to balance out the practical training, and suggested that some students be encouraged to make broader connections with other fields, learning to “bring together the specialized contributions into meaningful over-all patterns.”

The editorial article in the same issue of the newsletter warned: “Unless something is done to widen the intellectual perspectives of these professional schools, they stand in danger of producing a breed of faceless technicians rather than the perceptive men and women whom we should like to think are the end products of our academic institutions.”

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4 Fred Harvey Harrington, “What About the Professional Schools? Where Honors Programs Are Most Needed,” *The Superior Student* 2 (1): 2-4 (Feb. 1959). He felt that research-oriented honors work would also match a trend he had observed toward a greater emphasis on fundamental theory among professional school faculties. Regarding the view that Americans were overspecializing, Harrington referred to William Whyte, Jr. (author of *Organization Man*) and Arthur Bestor, who criticized schools of business and education, respectively.

The argument for broadly educated professional school graduates that many educators espoused appeared in the honors literature and at conferences and other discussions. This ideal of combined liberal and professional education did not gain universal acceptance, however. Some institutions used that standard as their guide, but others preferred to intensify the specialized training of their students.

Pre-medical and medical education may be used to illustrate some of the considerations in providing more challenging work for high-ability students in the professions. Undergraduates in pre-medical programs have both general education and pre-professional requirements to fulfill in order to make progress toward a bachelor’s degree and subsequent admission to medical school. By the 1950s, some educators felt that the training period for medicine and other professions had become too long due to the increase in specialized knowledge in both the professional field and its related basic sciences. They began to examine what was being taught, what was essential versus less valuable, and how some efficiencies could be achieved. In the case of students with high academic ability and motivation, they realized that a combination of acceleration and special courses might achieve the desired result of subject knowledge in the crucial areas of pre-medicine and medicine, along with a humanistic outlook.

In order to reduce the length of medical studies somewhat, Northwestern University developed a six-year combination program for selected students beginning with two years of liberal education—half in the sciences, with courses specially redesigned with the pre-medical student in mind, and half in arts, humanities, and behavioral sciences—followed by four years of medical education. Students who eventually decided not to pursue the medical degree could, after the first two years, continue in a bachelor’s degree program, or after four years pursue a graduate degree in the basic sciences. (An article in the ICSS newsletter emphasized the important role that improved high school preparation had played in making this program feasible.) One of the expected benefits of seamless progress through the undergraduate and professional program was that the students selected for the program were virtually guaranteed

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6 “Medicine and the Talented Student,” The Superior Student, 3 (7): 12-13 (Nov. 1960). It is also worth noting that the design of Northwestern’s program in liberal arts and medicine “was influenced by the progress which has been made in many good high schools in providing college-level courses and honors programs for talented students.” J. Cooper and M. Prior, “A New Program in Medical Education at Northwestern University,” Ibid., 15-16.
admission to the medical school; thus, the stress and competition associated with seeking admission after college would be diminished, and students could concentrate more on the course content and less on their grades.\(^7\)

The University of Arkansas similarly developed a combined program between the arts and sciences and the medical school. Graduate level honors programs were introduced at Stanford and at Indiana University and encouraged connections between the social/behavioral sciences and medicine.\(^8\) At the University of Kansas, the School of Medicine offered honors students options for individualized work throughout the degree program, thereby hoping “to destroy the high value that has been put in medical school on conformity and anonymity.”\(^9\)

The faculty of the University of Washington’s School of Medicine decided to develop an honors program that emphasized the improvement of research skills by incorporating disciplines such as the physical sciences, mathematics, psychology, social sciences and languages. Its pilot phase, launched in Summer 1959 with eleven students, began with an orientation period consisting of visits to the basic science departments, followed by nine days of talks and demonstrations by faculty from those fields. For the remainder of the summer, three study groups—Physical Sciences, Behavioral Sciences, and “Philosophy of Research and Experimental Method”—pursued intensive study of selected topics (versus attempting a superficial overview of each area.) The physical sciences group focused on modern concepts of molecular and atomic structure, basic principles of instrumentation, and applications of mathematics to medical research. The second study group sought to explore the relationships of the behavioral sciences to medicine and how knowledge of these connections could help physicians in their work. The third studied the history of science and the cultural and scientific implications of major advances from Greece to Isaac Newton. The pilot phase proved successful, and an expanded program was planned.\(^10\)

\(^7\) Ibid., 14-17.
\(^8\) “Premedical and Medical School Honors Programs at the University of Arkansas (from University of Arkansas Announcements),” Ibid., 18-19; and “Two Additional Medical Program,” Ibid., 19.
\(^9\) “Honors in the Medical School: A Newly Adopted Honors Program at the University of Kansas School of Medicine,” [originally issued on June 25, 1958, as a Report to Dean by the Honors Committee (ad hoc)], reprinted in *The Superior Student*, 2 (3): 10 (April 1959).
The American Medical Association expressed its concern about the supply of qualified applicants to medical schools by forming an Honors, Scholarship, and Loan Program. Its director visited the ICSS office to learn about the range and scope of honors programs available. The October 1961 issue of *The Superior Student* invited honors directors and faculty to send the AMA information on formal and informal provisions for talented students in medical or pre-medical programs and ideas for future programs.\(^{11}\)

Similar considerations can be found in solutions adopted by pre-professional programs in other fields, as illustrated by a session at the ICSS Eastern Regional Conference in 1959 that was devoted to honors in professional education. One of the panelists, representing the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Purdue University, observed that accreditation requirements had forced Purdue to stress acceleration for its high-ability students. According to the conference report, other conferees agreed that acceleration could provide greater theoretical knowledge in engineering and basic science, but it usually did not provide the opportunity to explore humanistic values. On the other hand, they saw evidence of “a trend toward stronger humanistic and social requirements and elective opportunities in them, not only at Purdue, but also at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Carnegie Institute of Technology.”\(^{12}\)

Despite evidence of honors activity at many professional schools, in 1964 the new director of the ICSS, Philip Mitterling, commented that participation was very limited and honors programs remained primarily in liberal arts colleges. Rather than pursuing the expansion of honors into other fields simply for the sake of involving more faculty and students, however, Mitterling suggested that the most important justification was the renewing effect that honors programs could have on undergraduate education. Medicine, engineering and business curricula had become obsolete or ineffective in the face of rapid changes in these fields. The experimentation that honors education encouraged could invigorate professional curricula and help them be more in step with the times.\(^{13}\)

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All-University Programs

All-University honors programs may be considered the pinnacle of honors education from the perspective of institutional approval. These programs involved all or most colleges or schools of a university, not just the arts and sciences. By Fall 1960, the ICSS newsletter had communicated reports from Michigan State University, University of Illinois, University of New Mexico, Washington State University, and University of Kentucky, describing all-university programs that were in place or had been initiated. Typically, a faculty committee or council was responsible for setting policies, and the day to day operations were overseen by a director: at MSU this was a full-time position, while Washington State University and Kentucky had part-time coordinators. The council’s powers might be defined by the faculty senate, but in practice could extend further: according to one discussion among honors administrators, the council’s “effective power seems to be assumed as need arises and is exercised until it conflicts with the other interests of the university.”

The determinants of an honors program’s evolution could be concrete, such as existing curricula and honors programs, available funding, and the competition for those funds, or less tangible factors involving institutional culture, such as the existing degree of isolationism among departments versus precedents—or at least philosophical support—for interdepartmental cooperation. Universities adopted various solutions

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14 The April 1961 issue of *The Superior Student* announced the formation of an All-University Honors Committee at Indiana University. The Committee was actively working out plans for programs in each of the four undergraduate professional schools, in addition to coordinating with the existing honors offerings in Arts and Sciences and expanding opportunities to areas where none had existed. It had prepared a proposal for an All-University Honors Program, incorporating “nearly every feature in the ICSS recommendations for a full Honors program.” “Notes and Comments,” *The Superior Student*, 4 (3): 30 (April 1961). The following newsletter articles describe the All-University programs discussed in this section: S. J. Idzerda, “The Honors College at Michigan State University,” 1 (2): 13-14 (May 1958); “New Honors Program at the University of Illinois,” 2 (2): 10 (March 1959); “University of Illinois All-University Honors Program,” 2 (9): 9 (Jan. 1960); “An All-University Honors Program: University of New Mexico,” 2 (9): 7-9 (Jan. 1960); S. G. Hacker, “Prospectus: The University-Wide Honors Program at Washington State University,” 3 (8): 12-14 (Dec. 1960); Stephen Diachun, “University of Kentucky,” 6 (4): 22-27 (May-June 1964).

concerning the selection of students for honors work, timing of their programs, emphasis on depth and breadth, and degree of freedom in the curriculum.\textsuperscript{16}

Illinois, Washington State, and Kentucky admitted students to their honors programs prior to the start of the freshman year. They used high school transcripts, national test scores, recommendations by teachers and principals, and personal interviews to identify qualified students. Illinois had a “vigorous recruitment program,” and Kentucky sent letters to National Merit Scholars. (Michigan State, on the other hand, started its program in the sophomore year.) The cut-offs for eligibility varied: Washington State University invited the top 10% of incoming freshmen (of which 65-70 percent enrolled in the program), Oregon’s pool was the top 20% of freshman, and MSU required a cumulative B+ average at the end of the freshman year. Kentucky started with a pilot program of twenty-five students per year but expanded the pool of eligible students after the program proved successful.

All-university programs represented a range of possibilities, with examples of general, departmental, and mixed emphases and curricula that could be highly prescribed, individualized, or combine requirements with some flexibility. The University of New Mexico had an all-university “General Honors Program,” while Kentucky, MSU, Oregon, and WSU combined general and departmental honors, where departments decided the detailed requirements for upper division work although some general university guidelines might apply. WSU, for example, stipulated that juniors and seniors have departmental seminars and a senior comprehensive exam; Kentucky expected upper division students to engage in some kind of research or independent work.

The University of Kansas began with a strong tradition of departmental honors programs, followed by the development of general honors and a number of activities that could be classified as honors-level, including undergraduate research, publications, and study abroad opportunities for selected students. These options were not organized formally, and the term, honors student, was applied broadly to students in the general and departmental programs and on the honors roll. George Waggoner explained, “This loose coordination of a flexibly defined group through the usual departmental and college

\textsuperscript{16} These different approaches also appeared at other institutions where the programs were not university-wide. Single-college programs, however, were not subject to tension between the interests of different types of schools and colleges—liberal arts versus professional
administrative channels has sometimes been called an “antiprogram” or a “nonprogram” in honors, designations meant to indicate a general flexibility that aims at offering outstanding students a constant variety of intellectual challenges.”

On the spectrum of flexibility versus rigidity in general honors, MSU (with a “philosophy of no regimentation” in honors work) had very few specific requirements. Oregon defined a set of common core subjects for its honors students, including literature, history, philosophy, social sciences, math, science, and composition. Students could test out of them if they could demonstrate proficiency, through A.P. credits for example. WSU’s program emphasized sequential requirements that included a set of lower division distribution requirements similar to Oregon’s, three summers of reading in the major or other field, followed by comprehensive exams, and three upper division courses: Development of Western Civilization, Development of Eastern Civilization, and Domain of the Arts, all taught from the viewpoint of a given instructor’s field rather than as historical surveys. Finally, the program at Illinois was heavily departmentalized, with an admitted lack of interdisciplinary courses or colloquia, and may have had “the most comprehensive and complete slate [of departmental honors programs] in the whole country.” Due to this high degree of departmental autonomy, the university’s honors program might be considered flexible (in the sense of variety) from a university-wide perspective.

In terms of scope, all-university honors often denoted that the students as well as departments of most or all schools and colleges were involved. (The all-university label is not necessarily connected to greater honors enrollment; it is an organizational designation.) At the University of Houston, however, the Honors Committee included faculty from four colleges and although students from those colleges could opt for honors work, only Arts and Sciences courses were included in the program. At the University of Tennessee, the all-university program was limited to the freshman year, and for subsequent years only the College of Arts and Sciences offered honors work. Dudley Wynn’s 1964 survey of all-university programs included institutions that met one or more of the following criteria: a) the involvement of colleges and schools outside of the liberal

arts, though not necessarily all other colleges and schools; b) direction or advisement over the program by a director or faculty committee that represented the university as a whole; c) the existence of an integrated program in which students from any college could participate; and/or d) the establishment of a distinct “Honors College” that served the entire university.19

By the end of 1962, a total of 32 public and 21 private institutions reported having all-university (or all-campus) honors programs:

Table 5. All-University Programs listed in the ICSS Honors Inventory.20

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Universities</th>
<th>Private Universities</th>
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<td>U Arizona</td>
<td>American International College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bowling Green State U</td>
<td>Baylor U</td>
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<td>U California, Santa Barbara</td>
<td>U Bridgeport</td>
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<td>U Delaware</td>
<td>Brigham Young U</td>
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<td>Florida State U</td>
<td>Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn</td>
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<td>U Hawaii</td>
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<td>Idaho State College</td>
<td>U Denver</td>
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<td>U Illinois</td>
<td>De Pauw U</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa State U</td>
<td>Farleigh-Dickinson U, Florham-Madison Campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>U Kansas</td>
<td>Gonzaga U</td>
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<td>Kent State U</td>
<td>Hamline U</td>
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<td>U Kentucky</td>
<td>U Houston</td>
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<td>Louisiana State U, New Orleans</td>
<td>Loyola U of Los Angeles</td>
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<td>U Massachusetts</td>
<td>Oklahoma Baptist U</td>
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<td>Miami U (Ohio)</td>
<td>U of the Pacific</td>
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<td>Michigan State U</td>
<td>U Redlands</td>
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<td>U Nevada</td>
<td>Roosevelt U</td>
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<td>U New Mexico</td>
<td>Saint John’s U</td>
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<td>Ohio U</td>
<td>Texas Christian U</td>
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<td>U Omaha</td>
<td>Wesleyan U</td>
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<td>U Oregon</td>
<td>Willamette U</td>
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<td>Pennsylvania State U</td>
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<td>San Diego State College</td>
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<td>Southern Illinois U</td>
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<td>Southern U</td>
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<tr>
<td>U Tennessee (for freshmen)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Texas Southern U</td>
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<tr>
<td>U Utah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington State U</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wayne State U (planned for 1961)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Michigan U</td>
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<td>U Wichita</td>
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Wynn’s formulation of these minimum criteria for all-university honors programs reflects the spread of honors education as a philosophy with diverse applications. The all-university concept could accommodate substantial differences in commitment, ranging from the “involvement” of several academic units to the creation of an integrated, multi-college program or a formal honors college. The ICSS did not invent the idea of flexibility in honors education, but its leaders were wise enough to recognize and embrace it, and they encouraged honors work to flourish in its many permutations.

Honors Colleges

Institutions could formalize their honors programs through the creation of a separate college, whether honors work was limited to the arts and sciences or involved other colleges of the university. Honors colleges served as an administrative and intellectual center for all honors students and had jurisdiction regarding general course and graduation requirements, while departments retained their authority for the operation of any departmental honors programs that were offered. At some institutions, the honors college evolved out of a “core” program that all honors students were required to take.\(^{21}\) The practice of creating a separate unit was in its infancy during the ICSS period: in the 1960-61 Inventory, only Michigan State University, University of Missouri, University of Oregon, and Wesleyan University are listed as having honors colleges.\(^{22}\)

The director of Michigan State University’s Honors College expressed the symbolic strength of a separate administrative entity with a full-time director: “In itself, this is evidence to those on campus that an attempt is being made to institutionalize a value proper to the university.”\(^{23}\) At the University of Oregon, the stated objective of establishing an Honors College was to create “a partially separate community in which intellectual values and interests can become more easily established than in the other

\(^{21}\) Weir, in \textit{SSAHE} (1966), 80.
\(^{22}\) Cohen wrote that in 1903, Abbott Lawrence Lowell advocated establishing an honors college at Harvard, but his suggestion was not implemented: Cohen, in \textit{SSAHE} (1966), 14. This occurred prior to Lowell’s presidency at Harvard (1909-1933) while he was a full professor of Government. Samuel Eliot Morison describes the reforms Lowell implemented during the early years of his tenure as president, including honors work but without a separate honors college: \textit{Three Centuries of Harvard} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 439-449.
sections of the campus…Fundamentally this community is built on both a higher ‘native intellectual ability’ and a deeper initial commitment to intellectual values.”

Wynn wrote that the MSU and Oregon programs were “all-university in the truest sense of the word: They get their authority from the entire university faculty; they enroll students whose major or specialized work may be done in any undergraduate college of the university; they strongly emphasize either a specific common core or at least a minimum quantity of work in general education for all honors students.” Furthermore, MSU and Oregon illustrated that honors colleges allowed students in professional schools greater curricular freedom than would have been possible otherwise. On the other hand, the contrast between curricular philosophies at MSU and Oregon again shows that the elements of honors education—in this case a separate college—could be used with wide variation.

MSU’s college relied heavily on individual advising with a minimum of set requirements. This approach allowed a great deal of freedom for an advisor (representing both the honors college and the college of the student’s major field) and student to devise an individualized program of honors work. The only inflexible requirement was the total number of hours needed for graduation, although honors students were strongly encouraged to take more general education than non-honors students, for whom the minimum was one-fourth of their total course work. Beyond that, advisors could waive requirements and make substitutions as needed, with the approval of the honors college committee and the honors committee of the relevant college. This authority to depart from the norms was especially beneficial to students in the professional schools, where rigid curricula would inhibit the breadth that honors work was meant to attain. Advisors helped students pick from existing courses to supplement their studies (versus the interdisciplinary honors colloquia that some institutions offered.)

The disadvantage of this system, in Wynn’s view, was that honors students from various professional and liberal fields were not forced to take courses together; students

24 The Superior Student, 3 (2): 7 (March 1960).
25 Wynn, in SSAHE (1966), 129, 134.
26 As of June 1959, the Honors College at MSU enrolled 490 students from eight of the campus colleges and 72 departments. Fifty honors sections were available for multi-section courses, and all general education courses had special sections: “Honors Programs in the Undergraduate Professional Schools,” Report on a panel at the ICSS Eastern Invitational Conference, The Superior Student, 2 (6): 10 (Oct. 1959).
could take part in voluntary colloquia in addition to their normal course loads. His assessment of the MSU program was that it might be too free, leading to less visibility for the honors college, and less identification of the student with the college and among each other than at institutions where the honors college had more centralized activities and courses. Nevertheless, it seemed that the MSU was able to provide “an excellent opportunity for students in an amazing variety of subjects to find their way individually to some kind of self-fulfillment without prescription or coercion.”

Oregon’s program, on the other hand, was an exemplar of honors education through centralized decision-making and a pre-determined set of courses. The Honors College was established in September 1960 and provided its students with an integrated four-year program, with honors courses accounting for one-third to one-half of their work. Participants were chosen from the upper 20 percent of freshmen, and students from both liberal arts and professional programs were eligible. The college emerged out of the University’s existing departmental honors programs and sophomore honors program, the latter of which had evolved to include some freshman courses.

Students were reported to have generally positive views of the College after its first year, but some problems had arisen: the able but “dull” student who did not contribute much in class, instructors with overly high expectations, the dual role of some honors core courses as both general education for many students and introductory courses to the major for some of them, students trying to take too many courses, resulting in fragmented time, and too few students taking independent study. The University established a committee to evaluate the Honors College, with particular attention to “the reaction that would be accorded this effort to establish within the confines of a public university a program providing special education opportunities for a highly selected minority.” The results were encouraging, with low percentages of negative impressions among honors students prior to and during enrollment, as well as a general acceptance and positive view of the College among non-honors students.

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28 The Superior Student, 3 (2): 7 (March 1960).
The University of Missouri’s Honors College, announced in the May 1961 volume of the ICSS newsletter, was part of the College of Arts and Sciences and provided opportunities for study in both general and departmental honors. The general honors program was open to students from the professional schools. According to the 1960-61 Inventory by ICSS staff, approximately 9-10% of students in Arts and Sciences were involved in honors work of some kind, and the University offered special honors sections, departmental and interdepartmental courses, two seminars of twelve students each, and one colloquium of ten students, as well as independent study options. Students had special privileges at the library and had access to graduate courses and an honors center. Upper division students could pursue one of two honors degrees: a two-year program leading to a B.A. with Honors, or a three-year program leading to an M.A. with Honors through the Ford Foundation’s MA-3 Program.31

Wesleyan University in Connecticut reported that it had established an Honors College and had an all-university honors program. Its program was primarily for juniors and seniors, with both general and departmental opportunities, although the Inventory states that “many departments offer research seminars for Sophs.” The Inventory also shows that a four-year honors college was proposed at Indiana University. A subsequent issue of The Superior Student discussed the new all-university program that was being developed during 1961, but the newsletters contain no further mention of a separate college being established.32

The preceding issues regarding the content and organization of honors work were typical of the 1950s and early 60s. Until then, the most common type of honors program had focused on upper division students and provided opportunities for in-depth work within the major field of study. Few or no provisions existed for lower division students entering the Honors College in Fall 1961 “reported the early information they had received presented the Honors College in a favorable light.” Only 4 percent reported an unfavorable impression prior to arrival on campus. Seventy percent of freshmen in the College said they thought the general student body had a favorable view of the College; 7 percent indicated they had encountered “an unfavorable reaction from other undergraduates.” A poll of freshmen in the program, selected student opinion leaders, and influential adults on campus found that in the latter two groups the majority of respondents approved of expanding the Honors College to include more students; the most opposition to the idea came from students already in the program: half of them felt it was not a good idea due to potential harmful effects on the quality of the program.

31 ICSS, “Honors Inventory, 1960-61,” The Superior Student, 3 (9): 23 (Jan. 1961). The MA-3 Program was designed to accelerate the studies of future college instructors.
32 Ibid., (Wesleyan University) 35, (Indiana University) 18.
of honors caliber. A number of institutions had been experimenting, however, with departures from that norm. Lower division work was being rethought, becoming a topic of greater interest instead of being viewed merely as a continuation of secondary school and a step toward the more important work of the upper division. During the 1950s, general education became a valid arena for honors work that complemented upper division, departmental honors programs and allowed students to begin in the freshman year. The concept of challenging high-ability students with special provision spread to professional schools and colleges and resulted in some “all-university” programs. Honors participation among professional school students, however, was still low compared to students in arts and sciences. Finally, a distinct administrative unit, the honors college, emerged at a few institutions. Table 6 summarizes the common organizational forms for honors education.

Table 6. Glossary of program types in honors education.

- **Departmental honors** - controlled by individual academic departments, typically offered to juniors and seniors in their major field of study; could involve individual tutorials with a faculty advisor, honors seminars, senior thesis, and oral and/or written comprehensive examinations.

- **General honors** - honors work completed outside the student’s major field of study, occurring any time during the four years of college; could refer to freshman/sophomore provisions, upper-class interdepartmental honors courses, and/or departmental provisions for non-major honors students.

- **Divisional program** - honors work in departments outside the student’s major field, but within a larger academic grouping such as humanities, sciences, social sciences; a solution implemented by some colleges to prevent over-specialization in the last two years.

- **Full honors program** - honors work available for all four years of college, consisting of general, or both general and departmental offerings.

- **All-University program** - honors work also available in a university’s professional schools such as business, education, and engineering, rather than being limited to the college of arts and sciences (or its equivalent).

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33 Ray Cuzzort, ICSS research associate, remarked that gaining approval for honors education nationally had been easier in some respects than trying to achieve the expansion of honors programs within institutions: “Contrasting Commitments...,” *The Superior Student*, 6 (4): 3 (May-June 1964).

8 - ICSS Second and Third Terms

The renewal of its Carnegie Corporation grant in Spring 1960 brought new areas into the portfolio of ICSS activities. The proceedings of the Western Invitational Conference in April 1960 reflected a shift in the organization’s focus to more advanced issues, including research on honors education and the promotion of honors programs in professional fields. At the same time, the staff continued to monitor the development of new programs, provided assistance to institutions that requested it, and participated in regional and national conferences.

A new regional network for honors education, the Western States Committee, was formed at the Western Invitational Conference. Taking a cue from that group, the Executive Committee recommended that subcommittees be formed for the various regions or institutional types.1 Budding regional cooperation was evident in a variety of smaller conferences that emerged beginning in 1960. The ICSS was not an official organizer in these cases, but Joseph Cohen or other members of the Executive Committee did give key addresses and consult with attendees:

- September 1960 Conference of Virginia and North Carolina colleges
- October 1960 Florida Council of Teachers of English Annual Meeting, devoted to Honors in Freshman English
- March 1961 College Committee on Outstanding Students conference (private colleges)
- March 1961 Conference of Michigan junior colleges
- May 1961 All-Ohio conference
- December 1961 New York area conference (NY, NJ and CT institutions)

By Fall 1961, the ICSS mailing list comprised 9,000 names. Staff and Executive Committee members had visited 230 institutions since the organization’s inception.2 The major ICSS event in 1961 was its invitational Conference of Honors Directors, held on June 20-23, 1961 in Boulder, with participants from twenty-two state colleges. Part of

the agenda was devoted to issues that honors administrators were facing as their programs were implemented and matured, including faculty participation, goals of honors programs, selection and retention, departmental and interdepartmental content and organization, all-University honors programs, and women in honors education. A major part of the meeting focused, however, on research and evaluation and featured panels and discussions with social scientists interested in educational research.

**Research and Evaluation**

The evaluation of honors programs was a concern of the ICSS from the beginning, but it logically took lower priority than the establishment and operation of those programs—they had to function before they could be evaluated. Eventually the issue evolved from a desired, albeit neglected activity to one that was vigorously pursued. The agendas of the second and third regional conferences included panels on evaluation, and in Fall 1959 relevant articles began appearing in *The Superior Student*. Among the earliest was a survey of University of Michigan honors faculty, which was part of a three-year study of the University’s honors program supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Elsewhere, a report on seminar discussions at Boston College noted, “there are no existent techniques readily serviceable for making an evaluation of discussion classes of the sort under study,” so the first step would be to develop categories of analysis. Another article reported on three separate studies aimed at discovering the differences between achieving and non-achieving students. Research articles were still a minor element in the newsletter, however.

Beginning in summer 1960, the research and evaluation agenda evolved with increasing momentum. In June, Frederick Jackson met at the Carnegie Corporation’s offices with Walter Weir (ICSS) and a representative of the Social Science Research Council. According to Jackson’s notes, they discussed the need for more research on students at large universities and better use of the data available through university

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offices, but no formal project proposal was being considered. In July 1960, Cohen contacted Ralph W. Tyler, director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, to indicate the interest of the ICSS in promoting research on honors education. The result was an extended collaboration between the ICSS and Tyler and other members of the SSRC’s Committee on Personality Development in Youth.

The editorial article in the October 1960 newsletter highlighted the importance of program evaluation as well as research on topics closely related to honors education, including creativity, learning and motivation, and institutional characteristics such as campus sub-cultures. Although the ICSS itself was not in a position to undertake major research, or even coordinate it, the organization would continue to publicize current research in its newsletter and bring the needs of honors programs to the attention of social science researchers working in related areas. The October newsletter also contained a research proposal by Robert MacLeod, member of the ICSS Executive Committee and of the psychology faculty at Cornell. He had been asked by the Executive Committee earlier in the year to prepare a memorandum that could be used by social scientists as a starting point for studies at individual campuses. MacLeod listed possible topics for study (e.g., student motivation, institutional resources, curricular content and modes of instruction, the student’s experiences during and after college), followed by suggested procedures for conducting such studies. Paul Heist, a consultant with the Center for the Study of Higher Education, Berkeley, provided a companion article to MacLeod’s proposal. He described existing instruments and elaborated on several points in the proposal, concluding that “an experimental approach from the very inception of an honors program should be a basic consideration. Why give a lot of time and attention to

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4 Record of interview at Carnegie Corporation of New York offices, between Frederick Jackson, Walter Weir, and Dr. Saunders [?] – listed as “Dir. of the Social Science Research Council” but no corroborating record found in SSRC sources], 2 June 1960, in Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library (henceforth: CCNY Records), Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f: “Colorado, University of, 1956-1965.”

5 The Committee had been formed in 1957 to discuss common problems in research and compile instruments or modes of inquiry that would aid in studying college-aged youth. Ralph W. Tyler, “The Social Sciences and Honors Programs, Possibilities for Research,” *The Superior Student*, 4 (5): 15-21 (Oct. 1961), and “Proposal for Research on Honors,” ibid., 25. Summaries of comments by MacLeod, Newcomb and Heist also appeared in the October newsletter. An addendum was published in the November issue, containing Tyler’s responses to a variety of questions posed by conferees: *The Superior Student*, 4 (6): 11-14 (Nov. 1961).

a program unless we also progressively try to study the validity of selection procedures and the gains from such a program?"  

MacLeod traveled to California in December to meet with Tyler and other members of the Committee on Personality Development in Youth. In early January, Frederick Jackson called both Tyler and MacLeod to discuss the Carnegie Corporation’s position; his notes indicate that both men were in agreement that Tyler’s Committee should identify topics and encourage other social scientists to conduct the research, rather than carrying out its own studies. That stance echoed the sentiments among Tyler’s group; the ICSS project came to be viewed as an activity that could contribute to educational and social science research generally.  

In February 1961, Ralph Tyler, Francis H. Palmer (SSRC staff), Theodore Newcomb (University of Michigan), and Paul Heist visited the ICSS staff at Boulder. To facilitate discussion, the ICSS staff presented a survey of twenty-five selected institutions that had either well-developed programs or were in the midst of substantial developments. These cases aided in exploring a number of questions and factors that could be turned into testable hypotheses. The result of this meeting was a consensus that honors education was ripe for research by social scientists, and plans were made for further exploration of the possibilities at the Conference of Honors Directors in June 1961. The ICSS would invite about forty honors directors from institutions with important programs. Tyler’s group would participate during the last two days, with the goal of ascertaining what research questions were of the greatest concern for honors

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7 Robert MacLeod, “Research Proposals: Memorandum from Robert MacLeod,” Ibid., 3-4; and Paul Heist, “Comment by Paul Heist,” Ibid., 4-7.
8 Frederick Jackson, Records of separate phone calls with Ralph Tyler and Robert MacLeod, 7 January 1961, CCNY Records, Series IIIA (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1961-1963.”
9 Robert MacLeod, excerpts of letter written on 23 January 1961, re-typed in the document, “Relevant Recent Communications from Robert MacLeod and Robert Angell.” This document was attached to the transcript of a meeting with Ralph Tyler’s Committee: “Memorandum to ICSS Executive Committee on Meeting With Ralph Tyler’s Committee,” Boulder, Colorado, 7 February 1961, Box 3, f. “Frederick Jackson (2),” ICSS Papers, UCBA.
10 The following institutions were discussed: Arkansas, Boston College, Bowling Green, Brooklyn, Colorado, Cornell, Georgetown, Howard, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kent State, Louisiana State, Massachusetts, Miami, Michigan, Michigan State, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Stanford, Texas, Wesleyan, Wisconsin, and Yale. The meeting transcript noted that some of these institutions “were included here for reasons other than their programs.” “Memorandum to ICSS Executive Committee on Meeting With Ralph Tyler’s Committee,” Boulder, CO, 7 February 1961, Box 3, f. “Frederick Jackson (2),” ICSS Papers, UCBA, 2.
directors, and how studies might be designed to help answer those questions. In the meantime, Tyler would begin contacting members of the SSRC committee to help identify social scientists at each of the invited institutions, with the hope of engaging some of them in honors research at their campuses.

The Conference of Honors Directors in June 1961 proceeded as planned, with Tyler, MacLeod, Newcomb and Heist each speaking on aspects of social science research in relation to honors programs. The October 1961 issue of The Superior Student reported on these presentations and included Tyler’s formal proposal regarding SSRC assistance to researchers at individual campuses. Once interested social scientists were identified, the SSRC and ICSS would organize a conference on honors research to help those researchers and the campus honors directors plan their investigations. The Honors Research Conference took place in late November, 1962 at Allerton House, University of Illinois, with forty-seven invited participants from twenty-three institutions. One year later, an entire issue of the ICSS newsletter was devoted to evaluation and featured a report on a study of evaluation practices among honors programs: the conclusion was that most evaluations were still informal, seeking subjective opinions rather than empirical evidence about program effectiveness.11

Paul Heist and Lois Langland reached largely the same conclusion some two years later as they summed up honors program evaluation for the book that Cohen was editing. They wrote that “attitudes, values, interests, and basic personality characteristics of students and faculty remain largely unexplored,” judging from the articles that had appeared in the ICSS newsletter, and that “formal comprehensive appraisals of honors programs are still rare.” Three exceptions were the Universities of Michigan and Illinois, and Oregon State University, where significant evaluation projects had taken place.12 Research on giftedness and creativity had been part of the literature for some time, but work had just begun on relating these characteristics to undergraduate honors education in ways that administrators and faculty could utilize.

11 The study, published in the January-February 1964 newsletter, was undertaken by ICSS research associate, Ray Cuzzort. His conclusions were based on the responses of 117 institutions to a questionnaire about their evaluation practices: see Cuzzort, “Evaluating Honors Programs,” The Superior Student 6 (2): 3-13 (Jan.-Feb. 1964). Cuzzort’s article is followed by comments and critiques from MacLeod, Heist, Tyler, and Benno Fricke (University of Michigan).
Graduate and Professional Education

Like evaluation and research, honors work in professional education had been discussed since the beginning of the ICSS, but in this case relevant activities were evident earlier and with greater frequency: the lead article in the February 1959 newsletter raised the issue, the three regional conferences included panels on professional education, and numerous articles reported the details of experimental honors programs throughout the nation in agriculture, business, engineering, and medicine. The Western conference recommended the formation of a standing committee on honors in professional education, with representatives of the professional associations. Another suggestion was that faculty organize sessions on honors education for the annual meetings of their professional and scholarly associations.

The relative visibility of professional honors indicated that it was regarded as an essential element of the pursuit of excellence in colleges, rather than a luxury (whereas evaluation and research, in many cases, seemed to be more the latter). The main differences between introducing honors work in the arts and sciences versus professional fields were the difficulty of finding room in professional curricula for the general honors work that the ICSS encouraged, and of altering cultures of pragmatic study to include broader and more humanistic perspectives. Enough faculty were believers, however, to experiment with honors sections or special courses, and this helped build momentum for what the ICSS hoped would be a trend toward all-university honors programs.

With the drive to improve all levels of American education during the 1950s, the preparation of K-12 and college teachers came under scrutiny. The ICSS was keenly interested in bringing honors work into schools of education and began directing attention to that topic as early as 1959. The Associate Dean of Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, Judson Shaplin, gave the keynote address at the Eastern Invitational Conference, highlighting some of the concerns and challenges of organizing honors in the field of education. So far, it had been difficult to attract top students to a profession that tended to be seen as a last resort. Possible strategies to counteract that included increasing the quality of work in both the students’ chosen subject areas and in their

13 Medical and premedical education was the focus of the November 1960 issue of the newsletter (Vol. 3, No. 7).
professional training, recognizing research on education as a legitimate field of study in various disciplines and encouraging honors students to conduct such research, and incorporating research findings into the education curriculum in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice.\textsuperscript{14}

As the idea for a conference on honors in teacher preparation evolved, Cohen wrote to Jackson in March 1961: “I feel, indeed, that we can have more impact through a conference with educational institutions than in any other professional field. We are more knowledgeable here than in engineering, business, medicine, etc., though all of these are affected by us to some extent.”\textsuperscript{15} Another consideration was that discussions of teacher education would necessarily involve secondary school educators, and improvements in that area would improve the quality of entering students. Teacher education was, in this way, a keystone topic. The proposed conference, entitled “Honors in Education,” took place in April 1962 at the University of Wisconsin, with financial support from the Edgar Stern Family Fund. The U. S. Office of Education published the conference report, “Talent and Tomorrow’s Teachers—The Honors Approach,” as part of the New Dimensions series, and upon high demand for copies of the report, printed a second edition.\textsuperscript{16}

ICSS activities in this area coincided with the early years of two Ford Foundation projects that encouraged colleges and universities to prepare secondary- and college teachers of a high caliber. Its Master of Arts in Teaching program (MAT) and Three-Year Master’s Degree program (MA-3) were similar in their use of honors approaches and in the resulting coordination of their activities with existing honors resources on participating campuses. The MA-3 Program addressed a projected shortage of PhD’s who could teach in the nation’s colleges and the desire to provide better preparation for college teachers than the usual Master’s program could be expected to accomplish. The program began preparing students in the junior and senior years with rigorous

\textsuperscript{14} “Education and the Superior Student: Report of an Address by Judson T. Shaplin.” \textit{The Superior Student} 2 (6): 6-7 (Oct. 1959). In a later panel discussion, Shaplin also discussed the need for “value orientation” in education programs regarding questions of social importance. (He cited school segregation as one topic about which many students were naïve): “Honors Programs in the Undergraduate Professional Schools,” Summary of Panel Discussion, Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{15} Cohen, Letter to Jackson, 14 March 1961, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the ICSS, 1961-1963.”

requirements of independent study and writing. Students could thus begin their fifth year, the first year of graduate school, well-prepared for the type of work required at that level. Furthermore, the program was intended to accelerate progress toward the Ph.D. for those students who chose to continue as well as reduce attrition in graduate school. The secondary teacher training program, the MAT, was targeted toward high-ability students who had chosen teaching as a profession. It encouraged a broader and more thoughtful view of education than the strict curriculum of the teachers college would allow. This was accomplished in various ways, but many institutions required participants to engage in independent study, seminars, written projects, and meetings with a faculty adviser. The ICSS carried news of both the MAT and MA-3 programs, including a lengthy insert on the MA-3 in one of its newsletters, detailing the approach and progress of the thirty-six institutions involved in that experiment. Fifty-nine institutions were involved in the MAT program as of Spring 1963. At that time it was too soon to evaluate these programs, but early impressions were favorable.

The majority of participating institutions considered both the MAT and MA-3 to be honors programs, or at least related to honors. This was advantageous because they utilized features of existing honors programs: independent study was often organized through the departments in the same way that it would be for honors students. In addition, many of the students recruited for the MA-3 program had taken honors courses in their first and second years of college. Another noteworthy feature was the regional collaboration that the Ford Foundation promoted between smaller institutions and large institutions with strong graduate schools; thirteen institutions cooperate with the

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17 George Waggoner suggested that delaying the MA-3 program until the start of the junior year might make it unattractive to institutions that finally had shifted the emphasis of their honors programs to the full four-years of college, rather than maintaining the older upper-division focus. Such institutions might argue that that the goals of the MA-3 program could be achieved in four years rather than five, by starting earlier: Waggoner, “Departmental Honors at the University of Kansas: A Case History,” in The Superior Student in American Higher Education, ed. Joseph W. Cohen (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 162 (hereafter cited as SSAHE).

University of Washington and thirty-seven with the University of Chicago.\textsuperscript{20} As the ICSS pointed out, this was a promising development for honors education generally:

We call attention here to a trend which brings about a congregation of representative public and private foundations, undergraduate colleges and universities, as well as graduate schools, in a conjoint educational discussion, and which also relates itself to honors programs. This is becoming an increasingly frequent occurrence, and we consider the trend highly significant, a partial augury for the future of the ICSS effort.\textsuperscript{21}

That honors students would be prime candidates for graduate study is not surprising. Some observers could comment only anecdotally on the increase in graduate school participation related to honors programs at their institutions. George Waggoner offered some data, though, when he wrote of a considerable increase in students from the University of Kansas pursuing graduate study following the introduction of the general freshman and sophomore honors programs. By 1962, 62 percent of arts and sciences graduates at Kansas planned to continue their studies immediately after college; 31 percent of these students planned to enter graduate school, 27 percent to enter professional schools, and 4 percent planned to study abroad. Waggoner also cited Woodrow Wilson awards for seniors planning careers in college or university teaching as an indicator of the honors program’s effectiveness: the University of Kansas had seventeen to twenty recipients each year between 1960 and 1964, placing it within the top ten institutions in number of fellowships and being the only institution in the top ten to have non-selective admissions.\textsuperscript{22} Elsewhere, at the University of Michigan most of the one thousand plus students in its honors program during the mid-60s went on to study for advanced degrees.\textsuperscript{23}

What may be equally interesting about the relationship of honors work to graduate study is that a considerable number of honors students may have been disenchanted by their graduate school experiences in the 1960s. An ICSS study undertaken by Raymond Cuzzort found that one quarter of the 101 former honors students surveyed in the first

\textsuperscript{20} "Augurs…", 2.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Waggoner, in SSAHE, 158.
Some of these students had discovered a gap between their experiences in honors courses and the requirements of their graduate programs. Cuzzort observed that the dissatisfied students viewed graduate school as more dogmatic than their undergraduate studies, giving “greater emphasis to form than to creativity,” and with “cold and impersonal” faculty contacts. The humanistic outlook and excitement of learning that they experienced as undergraduates appear to have set them up for disappointment if they were seeking a continuation of these aspects of the honors spirit. Some of them persisted because that was the only way to become college professors themselves. In a highly critical article in the ICSS newsletter, James R. Anderson decried graduate education as focusing too much on perpetuating disciplinary orthodoxies and not allowing students to seek answers to larger questions that cross disciplinary lines. “[T]he graduate experience as presently constituted is not aimed at preparing us for lives as Doctors of Philosophy or even Masters of Arts. Expertise, and not truth, is the present goal of graduate education.” He concluded that “a total reconstruction of the nature of graduate education” would be needed if graduate studies were to be “a meaningful fulfillment of the ideal of higher education embodied in the concept of honors work.”

Perhaps the honors graduates who went on to become university professors, including Anderson, could affect some of these changes with their own graduate students.

The Education of Academically Talented Women

The decade of the 1950s saw tension between traditional roles for women as homemakers and as members of the workforce with limited vocational opportunities, versus the evolving recognition that women could be successful in careers that men typically held. The gateway to a professional life in engineering, science and academia was college and graduate school, and here the gate seemed to be closed to many talented female students for reasons that educators were just beginning to explore in depth. An

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24 R. P. Cuzzort, “The Superior Student in Graduate School,” The Superior Student 7 (3): 4. Those in the natural sciences seemed to be less likely to experience dissatisfaction than those in the humanities and social sciences; Cuzzort speculated that undergraduate science students might have experienced more of the work and standards that would await them in graduate school.

apparent fear of being considered unfeminine prevented some girls from excelling, as did the importance of marriage and childbearing and the timing of those life events. A recent trend of earlier marriages had some faculty remarking that their talented female students were more interested in finding a husband than in intellectual pursuits. Margaret Mead, the eminent anthropologist and member of the ICSS Executive Committee for several years, observed that talented females used to have at least a few years of freedom to pursue their academic and professional interests after college before starting a family. Social norms had shifted in favor of earlier marriage, eliminating the intermission that women had before establishing a family—to some extent this affected male students as well, who might no longer pursue some type of post-college activity (e.g., a fellowship abroad), instead feeling pressure to immediately find a stable job and settle down. This situation made the timing and format of education for women even more important in discussions about curtailing loss of female talent during and after college. As another commentator pointed out, the traditional four-year college model would likely persist, while another tradition, that of “giving lip-service to the principle of continuing education” had been largely ignored in practice until recently, with institutions neither preparing students for lifelong learning nor providing them the means to engage in it. Talented women, the argument continued, should be offered alternative paths for college and post-baccalaureate studies.

Radcliffe College did this in 1961 when it introduced a year-long independent study program for gifted women (named “Associate Scholars”) who had interrupted their careers, giving them a way to reenter the scholarly or professional life. Barnard College decided to allow its alumna to enroll in its classes without charge, with the only condition

26 One university did not admit females to its MA program because it found that women dropped out in high numbers, leaving the institution with too few MA graduates. Joseph Cohen, “Problems of Honors Programs: Some Dilemmas and Failures,” The Superior Student, 4 (5): 10 (October 1961). On the other hand, following World War II the University of Kansas established the Watkins Scholarship program for female students, as a parallel to its Summerfield Scholarship program for men, which began in the 1930s: Waggoner, in SSAHE, 143.

27 Margaret Mead (Associate Curator of Ethnology, American Museum of Natural History), “Gender in the Honors Program,” The Superior Student 4 (4): 3. In addition to her focus on women in higher education, Mead argued that faculty also discounted bright male students who happened to enjoy physical activity (recreational sports)—such students, she wrote, seemed as suspect as female students who were concerned with marriage and child-bearing, with neither fitting the ideal of “monastic intellectualism” where the body is subordinated to the mind.

28 Virginia L. Senders, The Superior Student 4 (8): 20
being regular attendance and completion of course work.\textsuperscript{29} The University of Minnesota introduced the “Minnesota Plan” for high-ability female students, providing counseling about the special challenges they faced and assistance in planning realistic programs, as well as a special honors seminar on women’s issues in the current social context. The University extended its reach to include graduate students, housewives and career women who could benefit from its resources, and the counselor’s experiences with these women helped the institution plan new courses.\textsuperscript{30}

On the other hand, many institutions were not addressing the particular needs of their female students. The problem was not simply the prevalence of domesticity among young women, which in itself should not have been an obstacle to professional accomplishment in the longer term. Rather the academic culture and its accompanying demands made it risky to stray from a path beaten by male students and faculty over many decades. The issue of interrupted studies was the most obvious and practical concern. Beyond that, however, Margaret Mead and others argued that women were discouraged from female ways of using language and ordering information, for example, by tying their studies into the practical side of their lives. This assertion was not universally accepted, but it promoted the examination of how female students approached their academic work and raised awareness of the extent to which college studies were a male-governed activity with few female role models.\textsuperscript{31}

In 1961, the National Opinion Research Center conducted a survey of graduating college seniors and found that women, even those in honors programs, “tended to be more conventional, conforming, and cautious than their male counterparts; though better grade-getters, women honors students felt less adequate in their field than the male honors students.” Sixty-five percent of the women had no vocational or psychological

\textsuperscript{29} “Opportunities for Gifted Women,” \textit{The Superior Student}, 3 (8): 22 (December 1960). Radcliffe launched a second program, the Resident Fellowships, for “distinguished women who have already done notable work [to] be in residence for one to five years,” aimed at encouraging long-term research or artistic endeavors that the recipient might not pursue without this support.


guidance during college.\textsuperscript{32} A session at the ICSS Conference of Honors Directors in June 1961 explored the dilemma that three times as many men were attending graduate school although women outscored men on academic measures. The participants raised questions about the adequacy of current counseling for women, whether sex-segregated or unsegregated classrooms are better, and whether “we seek to turn superior women into superior men.”\textsuperscript{33}

The ICSS had attempted to bring some clarity and leadership to these issues, starting with occasional items in its newsletter, including publication of Mead’s article and readers’ responses, and discussions at its conferences. Its culminating activity was a conference on women in honors education held in 1964. Other conferences on women had taken place and research had been conducted, but the organizers felt it was time to synthesize previous work and develop a systematic plan for future research. In addition, the concerns of high-ability women had not been examined in great enough depth. The conference was expected to give specialists and honors directors a chance to review existing knowledge and plan future activities, in turn promoting “shared understanding that there is in fact a problem—that talented women in the United States are, in a real sense, the victims of social definitions that are becoming archaic.”\textsuperscript{34}

The conference took place at Columbia University on May 20-23 1964, organized in cooperation with the U. S. Office of Education. Counseling was emphasized as an important facet of services for honors women, in order to make them aware of the different educational pattern they might face, encourage creativity and rigorous course selections, plan their educations around their other commitments, and help them “live with the frustration which accompanies being the member of a minority.” Participants rejected the suggestion to establish a different curriculum for women in favor of Paul

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[34] “Developmental Activities Program. Project Title: Talented Women and the American College: Needed Research on Able Women in Honors Programs, College and Society,” Project proposal submitted to the U.S. Commissioner of Education Under the Provisions of Public Law 53 (ca. February 1964), Box 4, UCBA, 2. By this time, a number of important publications had highlighted the unique issues of women. The project proposal cited Margaret Mead’s Male and Female (1949), Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (1953), Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1962), relevant chapters in Nevitt Sanford’s The American College (1962), and Mabel Newcomer’s A Century of Higher Education for American Women (1959). Other sources mentioned were Theodore Newcomb’s studies of Bennington College, Katherine McBride’s study of Bryn Mawr, U.S. Government publications, and the “literally hundreds of articles in both learned journals and popular magazines.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Heist’s suggestion of creating “a protective environment in honors for women” particularly in the male-dominated fields. Some institutions introduced new options for flexibility in course scheduling and residency requirements, and reported that their talented female students were taking advantage of these opportunities.\(^{35}\)

Notes filed by two female members of the Carnegie Corporation staff who attended the conference indicate that the discussions were not productive, they felt, beyond exposing honors directors to some of the issues that women students faced. Florence Anderson concluded that “although most of them were in the position of running honors programs, many had a shockingly unrealistic image of the girls they were dealing with.” Her colleague, Margaret Mahoney, noted that talented female students and professionals were all but missing from the conference roster.\(^{36}\)

**Third term: 1962-1965**

Alongside implementation of the foregoing projects, the ICSS staff and Executive Committee continued to assess whether the organization’s life should be extended, and if so, how to go about funding its operations. The Carnegie Corporation was unwilling to continue its funding, and in discussions during Spring 1960, the Executive Committee had anticipated curtailing activities in 1961-62 in preparation for the Corporation grant’s conclusion in late July 1962; however, when that time came the Executive Committee decided the organization should carry on. In 1962, after polling newsletter recipients to find out if they would be willing to pay a membership fee, the staff found that many institutions were interested enough to bear some cost. As of October that year, 160 institutions had joined and others were still considering membership. The membership list included 73 state, 35 independent, non-denominational, and 52 denominational institutions (26 Protestant, 26 Catholic). Income from membership fees, determined


according to size of institution and ranging from $5 to $400, amounted to $24,325 in paid memberships and $900 still expected, for a total of $25,225.\textsuperscript{37}

Membership fees alone would not sustain the organization, however, so the ICSS staff pursued other forms of support as well. One successful proposal led to an National Science Foundation grant of $89,100 for one year, to be used for “an extended study of the impact of Honors programs on the improvement of both learning and teaching in the sciences, social sciences and allied professional fields. It provides specifically for additional staff to direct studies and publications on 1) the value for the intellectual development of the student of research participation and independent study; 2) the teaching of science to non-science majors; 3) the meaning of ‘Honors approaches’ in laboratory exercises, sections, courses and situations; and 4) interdisciplinary approaches in the natural and social sciences.”\textsuperscript{38}

The NSF had established an Undergraduate Research Participation Program aimed at a small group of highly able students in the sciences, as well as studies in other fields (incl. social sciences and humanities) as long as they conformed “to accepted standards of scientific inquiry by fulfilling the requirements of objectivity, verifiability, and generality.” Grants for the following year involved students and scientists at over two hundred fifty colleges and universities, and totaled almost $3.25 million.\textsuperscript{39} Lewis N.

\textsuperscript{37} In a survey of nonmembers on the mailing list, of 1837 replies, 924 expressed the willingness to pay a subscription fee: \textit{The Superior Student} 5 (1): 1-2 (Sept.-Oct. 1962). A list of members was published in the May-June 1962 issue, and additional members were listed in subsequent volumes, including the Jan.-Feb. 1964 issue which reported that 219 institutions and 19 associations had joined the ICSS: 6 (2): 46-47.

\textsuperscript{38} “A Continuing ICSS!” \textit{The Superior Student} 4 (9): 1-2 (May-June 1962). NSF support for science and math education had begun earlier, however. Through NSF grant support, for example, Carleton College began an experimental program in undergraduate math education in 1956. Selected students took honors math in their first two years and were encouraged to pursue original investigations; the program also featured weekly colloquia with faculty and research assistantships in the upper division years: Notes and Comments,” \textit{The Superior Student} 4 (8): 31 (March-April 1962). The NSF’s relationship with the ICSS might have sprung from a contact at a regional meeting of The American Assembly in October 1960. In response to a question from Cohen during a session, Alan Waterman, director of the NSF, indicated that his organization would be very interested in grant proposals for honors activities in the sciences, both for science majors and non-majors. In 1961, the NSF requested the names of scientists working in honors programs and “an indication of the dollar needs to further Honors efforts in the sciences.” ICSS asked honors directors to provide this information, and also invited readers to send suggestions, budgetary recommendations, and names of “appropriate scientists:” Joseph Cohen, “ICSS Visits: Observations and Comments,” \textit{The Superior Student} 3 (7): 21 (Nov. 1960), and “An N.S.F. Request,” 4 (5): 32 (Oct. 1961).

\textsuperscript{39} “Grants,” \textit{The Superior Student} 4 (3): 31 (April 1961). A letter from Frederick Jackson to Cohen in June 1960 mentioned a conference being organized in Lawrence, KS, the purpose of which appeared to be “to find out what the sentiment of a representative group of science professors in large public universities is towards the development of honors programs for science students.” Jackson indicated that Arthur Kenney
Pino, Program Director for Undergraduate Science Education at the NSF, articulated the NSF’s interest in encouraging more opportunities for high-ability students to work with research scholars and cultivating “learning situations” that involved independence for students (either through individual or group work) rather than “teaching situations.” He noted that in mathematics the more independent approach was especially new.40

Although the NSF funds were devoted to a specific project, the grant helped the ICSS through its first year without Carnegie funds. When the Executive Committee met in Boulder on February 23-24, 1963, it decided that the ICSS “could be safely and definitely terminated as of June 30, 1965.” Its activities would include continuing the clearinghouse function and newsletter publication, with six issues per year, assisting with publications related to the NSF sponsored projects, and publishing a book on honors education with Carnegie Corporation assistance. Campus visits would continue, as well as the encouragement of regional institutes and conferences. The ICSS would also carry on its collaboration with national agencies concerned with improving the quality of higher education and encouraging the development of evaluation techniques to measure the results and impacts of honors education. A possible extension of support from the NSF, as well as the funding from the U.S. Office of Education, would be pursued, and the committee expected that existing national agencies would take over the main functions of the ICSS.41

Cohen had visited the Rockefeller Foundation in December 1961 and, although no additional Rockefeller funds were forthcoming, he came away with valuable advice on how to approach other foundations. The resulting “Proposal for Federated Support” targeted a number of family and corporate foundations, asking each to consider a grant of $10,000 to $25,000 per year for three years, beginning in July 1962. The strategy paid off, and the organization found the means to operate for three more years, up to mid-1965 when the ICSS closed its offices. Supporters included The Edgar Stern Family Fund of the NSF staff was interested in putting support for honors education on the NSF’s agenda: Jackson to Cohen, 20 June 1960, f. “Jackson, Frederick (2),” ICSS Papers, University of Colorado-Boulder Archives. The NSF’s existing undergrad research program was essentially concerned with honors-type activity, whether or not it was called honors education.

41 “Committee Sets Goals for Final Two Years of ICSS,” The Superior Student 5 (3): 1, 40 (Jan.-Feb. 1963). Howard Quint expressed his doubt, however, that any educational organizations would want to take over the ICSS functions: HQ letter to Cohen, 16 Feb. 1963, Box 4, ICSS Papers, UCBA.
(contributing $10,000 per year for the last two years), United States Steel Foundation, Ford Foundation Fund for the Advancement of Education, National Science Foundation, Laurel Foundation, Pittsburgh Forgings Company Foundation, and U.S. Office of Education, in addition to 338 institutions and educational organizations.42

The ICSS guidelines for honors programs continued to evolve. The most recent version, published in February, 1961 under the title “Major Features of a Full Honors Program: ICSS Recommendations,” had added the suggestion of establishing “a committee of Honors students to serve as liaison with the Honors Committee or Council. Keep them fully informed on the program and elicit their cooperation in evaluation and development.” In addition, the 1961 version included a change in wording for guideline #9: Whereas the October 1959 text read, “reduce regular requirements where possible in order to give abler students greater freedom of choice among alternative facets of the Honors Program,” the 1961 version stated, “set aside, where possible, such requirements as are restrictive of a good student’s progress, thus increasing his freedom among the alternative facets of the Honors and regular curriculum.” The newer version appeared to acknowledge that the regular curriculum could have worthwhile offerings for honors students.43

The final revision of the ICSS guidelines for honors programs appeared in the March–April, 1963 issue of the newsletter. Additions to existing points emphasized providing credits for honors courses but diminishing the importance of grades through an approach such as pass/fail evaluations; offering summer institutes and study abroad opportunities; having professional counseling staff who specialize in honors; providing differentiated counseling for male and female honors students, due to the higher proportion of talent loss in the latter group after graduation; recognition of the creative (intuitive) versus “formally cognitive” approach; and greater utilization of institutional and outside resources for undergraduate research. A new point (#15) stated: “Work towards closer liaison between the undergraduate Honors program and the Graduate

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School.” The list of guidelines now comprised sixteen points. Appendix A lists the final guidelines and compares them to a similar set of recommendations that the ICSS’s successor, the National Collegiate Honors Council, approved as recently as 1994. The NCHC has maintained certain elements of the ICSS guidelines nearly word for word.

The ICSS had been understaffed during the previous fall and by the beginning of 1963, Cohen had worked himself to exhaustion. Frederick Jackson suggested that Cohen resign from the directorship in the summer and begin work on a book on honors education. Cohen’s resignation went into effect on September 15, 1963. The ICSS had set aside $9,600 from its previous Carnegie Corporation grant and the Corporation augmented that sum with $12,500 to help cover Cohen’s salary while he prepared the book.

Dr. Philip I. Mitterling replaced Cohen as Director and Editor-in-Chief and continued in that role until the ICSS officially ended its operations in 1965. Mitterling was closely involved in honors education at Thiel College, where he served as Dean and Professor of History until his move to Colorado, and prior to that had been associated with honors programs at the University of Pittsburgh and at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Mitterling’s appointment reflected a shift in attention to the private higher education sector, in accordance with the Carnegie Corporation’s wishes. Mitterling and the new associate director, Walter Weir, worked on finishing projects and finding a way to keep information flowing after the ICSS closed. Weir visited with education staff members at the U.S. Office of Education in June 1963, and found support for the idea that the agency could take over some of the functions the ICSS had performed. The success of this proposal depended on getting Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel’s approval and making sure that adequate staffing and budgetary support were available. The group worked out a plan for approaching Keppel, to consist of an ICSS letter addressed to Orin Cornett, Acting Assistant Commissioner for Higher Education (and a participant at the ICSS meeting) asking for exploration of a possible take-over of

45 Record of supplemental grant, 15 April 1963, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, 1961-1966.”
46 Appendix B provides a cumulative roster of ICSS office holders from the organization’s inception.
the ICSS functions by the USOE. This would be reinforced with a set of recommendations to be formulated by a committee of the agency’s higher education staff.48

The USOE ultimately agreed to catalog and distribute ICSS and other honors documents through the Educational Research Information Center (ERIC). The ICSS also searched for a successor to take over publication of the newsletter in the form of a quarterly journal, but was unable to find one. Mitterling had hoped that the higher education research center at the University of Michigan would agree to that role; a number of faculty supportive of honors education were associated with the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, including James Robertson, Otto Graf (head of the Honors Program), and Robert McLeod. The Center’s director, Stanford Ericksen, regretfully declined Mitterling’s request, since these key men were all unavailable for the work of editing the newsletter and overseeing its publication. The Center, he wrote, needed to concentrate on the substantive side of higher education research rather than the reporting side. He believed, however, there existed a “significant publication gap between the liberal arts college teacher and his supporting resources [such as research, teaching colleagues, program directors].” Educators associated with honors programs were open to new ideas, he felt, and could be mobilized to implement innovative approaches. Thus, although the idea of continuing the ICSS newsletter at Michigan had merit, he was unable to commit the Center’s resources to that activity.49

With the ongoing development of honors programs in mind, the ICSS worked on several publications aimed at sharing the experiences of the past decade and more with institutions needing guidance or inspiration. Foremost among these was The Superior Student in American Higher Education, edited by Cohen (who also contributed two chapters) and published in 1966. A second planned publication, “Honors Programs: A Description and an Assessment,” would serve as a practical manual “detailing and evaluating validated honors methods and approaches.” The staff also intended to undertake a new inventory of provisions for talented students, more broadly conceived

49 Stanford C. Ericksen, Letter to Philip I. Mitterling, 13 July 1965, Box 4, ICSS Papers, UCBA.
than the inventories of 1961 and 1963 in that it would include all accredited four-year institutions and junior colleges and not be limited to honors programs.\(^{50}\)

A final conference took place in Denver in April 1965, where attendees formed a successor organization to the ICSS. Still based at Boulder and with Walter Weir as its director, the new group differed from the old in that individuals, rather than institutions, formed the membership (although later institutions were also members). The National Collegiate Honors Council, as it became known, held national conferences and eventually began its own newsletter.\(^{51}\) The ICSS issued its final newsletter, an index issue, in mid-summer, 1965, and documents the ICSS produced or collected were housed permanently in the Western Historical Collection of the University of Colorado Libraries at Boulder.\(^{52}\)


\(^{51}\) For an overview of the NCHC’s evolution and recent activities, see: “Postscript: The National Collegiate Honors Council” in Chapter 10.

\(^{52}\) The ICSS papers are now part of the University of Colorado records at the Archives, rather than the Western Americana Collection. Appendix C lists the contents of the entire series of ICSS newsletters.
According to an article in *The Superior Student*, as of June 1957 only a “handful” of full honors programs and some more or less active departmental programs were operating, indicating that many of the programs described by Aydelotte in 1944 had faded before the ICSS was established. Joseph Cohen later wrote that although some large universities started honors programs earlier in the century, 1957 (the founding year of the ICSS) marked the first time “that a systematic, coordinated effort has been made to extend honors programs to the large private and state universities.”¹

By 1960 the ICSS could report that 171 institutions (87 public, 84 private) had active honors programs for all or part of the four years of college, and an additional 40 institutions were exploring the possibility of establishing programs. Among the 171 institutions, the ICSS staff counted 93 full four-year programs, 57 upper division only, and 21 with some upper and lower division provisions; of these, 14 were all-university programs. As a sign that honors education was spreading beyond liberal arts units: programs were being offered at 4 business schools, 7 schools or colleges of education, 9 schools of engineering, 3 medical schools, and 1 music school. Some 150 liberal arts honors programs accounted for most of the remaining programs.²

The ICSS had collected these data through a survey in 1960 and compiled the information in a directory that listed each institution and the characteristics of its honors program(s). This “Inventory,” published in January 1961, was not intended as a comprehensive listing but did include any four-year institution known by the ICSS to have honors activity. A supplement was published in the November-December 1961 issue of the newsletter, and a second supplement appeared in the January-February 1963 issue. Each addendum provided data on some thirty additional institutions that were not included in the original Inventory, as well as updates from many institutions that were listed previously.

The editors were quick to point out that some institutions reported available programs that were not active, while other listed only active provisions. They suggested that the scope of each program could “best be judged by considering together the number of academic years in which the provisions are available, the range of offerings, and the proportion of Honors enrollment to the number of students in the college.”\(^3\) Data that are so individualized, and in some cases unreliable, have highly limited value if one seeks to draw precise conclusions. On the other hand, the self-reported start dates do help establish the general progression of honors education, even if some institutions misreported by a year or two and some programs were small or inactive.

First, the ICSS Inventory data verified the anecdotal observations that most pre-World War II programs did not survive into the 1950s. Table 7 (below) shows both public and private institutions that reported programs established prior to 1950. Only four institutions maintained that their current (1950s/60s) honors programs originated in the 1920s, in sharp contrast to the ninety-three colleges Aydelotte listed in 1925. The primary explanation for this discrepancy is that most programs were not continuous since the twenties or were weak or inactive in their earlier form. In these cases, institutions might prefer to report the more recent date when honors work was reintroduced. Alternatively, over the decades a small, departmental honors experiment from the twenties could simply have been forgotten in the overall institutional history. Programs begun in the 1930s and 1940s appear to have had greater staying power. The data show a fairly steady but low rate of new program formation in the 1930s and 1940s, with an interruption during the war years. Sixteen institutions began programs in the 1930s, and eleven in the 1940s. Of the thirty-one institutions that established new programs during the three decades shown in Table 7, twenty-two were in the private sector.

Table 7. Honors Provisions Established Prior to 1950 (Self-Reported in 1960-63)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Vermont, U of Yale</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Colorado, U of Yale</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Tufts U Oklahoma Baptist U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Wellesley</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>CCNY Boston U Wheaton</td>
<td>1944</td>
<td>St. Bonaventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>NYU</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Maine, U of Loyola U</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Swarthmore</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Texas, U of</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Ohio U Brown U Hobart &amp; Wm Smith C’s Amherst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Virginia, U of Wesleyan U</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Stanford U Xavier U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Queens (NY)</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Washington &amp; Lee U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>U of Rochester Kenyon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Maryville C of Sacred Hrt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rutgers U – Douglass C Saint Louis U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICSS Inventory, 1960-63.4

Some of these institutions reported a later expansion of their provisions during the ICSS period. In 1960, Colorado began offering honors in engineering, Vermont added agriculture, and CCNY added a freshman-sophomore program to accompany its existing upper division program. As of 1961, the University of Maine anticipated new honors provisions in agriculture, and Queens College (Flushing, NY) was considering revisions in an unspecified area. CCNY added honors work to its school of business in 1962. Thus, some established programs were expanding honors work into professional fields around 1960.

The ICSS data show that 1950 was a relatively popular year for launching new honors programs, with eight institutions introducing provisions, but overall the early 1950s were unfruitful in this regard. Two prominent political factors may have

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4 Data are drawn from institutional self-reports, compiled and published by the ICSS in its newsletter as: “Honors Inventory – 1960-61,” The Superior Student, 3 (9): 4-38 (Jan. 1961); “Honors Inventory 1960-61, Supplement,” 4 (6): 22-25 (Nov.-Dec. 1961); and “Honors Inventory 1962-63 Supplement,” 5 (3): 32-39 (Jan.-Feb. 1963). Further reference to these three installments will appear as “ICSS Inventory, 1960-63.” Queens College in Flushing, NY (1937 start) was private at the time of its first honors program, and later became a public institution. I have placed it in that category when discussing data for the 1950s and 1960s. St. Bonaventure (1944 start) did not have a formally designated honors program but appeared in the ICSS Inventory, as did a number of other private institutions that did not officially use an honors designation.
dampened academic innovation during that time: the Korean War, lasting from 1950 to 1953, and Senator Joseph McCarthy’s investigations that targeted higher education most directly from late 1952. These events may have consumed institutional resources, including the time and energy of administrators and faculty, enough to stall innovations in undergraduate education. By 1954 campuses could re-focus on their normal activities.

Tables 8 and 9 list self-reported start dates from 1950 to 1956 (the year before the ICSS was formed); institutions are divided according to public and private sector control, and are further grouped according to the unit in which the primary honors program operated. The two public institutions shown in boldface, the Universities of Minnesota and North Dakota, appeared in Aydelotte’s 1925 monograph but did not maintain the 1920s as the start of their current honors programs. Other major state universities that began programs between 1950 and 1956 included: Arkansas, UCLA and UC-Santa Barbara, Connecticut, Kansas State, Maryland, Michigan State, Mississippi, and Ohio State. In Table 9, the four private institutions printed in boldface likewise appeared in Aydelotte’s 1925 study but did not consider their current honors program to be a direct continuation of their earlier efforts.

Table 8. Honors Programs at Public Institutions – Self-reported start dates, 1950-1956

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Arts &amp; Sciences</th>
<th>All-University</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Not Specified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>UCLA</td>
<td>UC-Santa Barbara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maryland, U of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minnesota, U of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Hampshire, U of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Rutgers U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Troy SC</td>
<td>Troy SC (Educ.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Mississippi, U of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>San Jose SC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Central SC, Ohio Harpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Arkansas, U of N.</td>
<td>Bowling Green SU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dakota, U of Ohio</td>
<td>Kansas, U of</td>
<td>N. Carolina SC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State U</td>
<td>(Engr.)</td>
<td>(Engr.)</td>
<td>Ft. Hays Kansas SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Kansas State U</td>
<td>Michigan State U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>San Diego SC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICSS Inventory, 1960-63.

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Table 9. Honors Programs at Private Institutions – Self-reported start dates, 1950-1956

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arts &amp; Sciences</th>
<th>All-University</th>
<th>Not Specified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Fordham U</td>
<td></td>
<td>St. Thomas*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Brandeis U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cornell U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td></td>
<td>San Francisco College for Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td></td>
<td>Colgate U</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lebanon Valley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Lehigh U</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hollins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tulane U</td>
<td></td>
<td>C of Idaho</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Macalaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Duke U</td>
<td>American Int’l</td>
<td>Gordon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stetson U</td>
<td>De Pauw U</td>
<td>Hofstra</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>U Redlands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICSS Inventory, 1960-63. * No formally designated honors program

The slight increase in program formation beginning in 1955 marked the beginning of a wave of honors activity that tapered off in the early sixties. Table 10 and its accompanying graph (Figure 1) comprise 232 institutions that began new honors programs between 1950 and 1963, according to the self-reports collected by the ICSS. A further thirty-four institutions did not list a start date. Institutions reporting that honors programs were under deliberation are indicated with the row heading, “in committee.” Thirteen of the institutions listed in the Inventory and the first supplement as having programs “in committee” officially adopted their programs by the time the second supplement was published. Table 10 reflects the status of programs based on all available reports from the Inventory and its supplements. Figure 1 excludes programs started before 1950, in-committee, or with no start date.6

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6 Among those with no start date, the following private institutions were listed as having “no formally designated honors program” but offering honors-type options, thus warranting their inclusion in the Inventory: University of Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, Princeton, Reed College, and Scripps College. Two other institutions, Saint Bonaventure University and the College of Saint Thomas, did not have formal honors programs but did provide starting dates, and therefore are represented in Figure 2.
Table 10. Inaugural Year of Current (1960s) Honors Programs at Public and Private Four-Year Colleges and Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pub. (orig)</th>
<th>Pub. (s)</th>
<th>Pub. (s2)</th>
<th>Public (total)</th>
<th>Priv. (orig)</th>
<th>Priv. (s)</th>
<th>Priv. (s2)</th>
<th>Private (total)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In comm. 60-61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>In comm. 62-63</td>
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<td>117</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>232</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-1950</th>
<th>No date</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>110</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICSS Inventory, 1960-63. orig=original inventory, s=1st supplement, s2=2nd supplement

Figure 1. Inaugural Year of Current (1960s) Honors Program, 1950-1963

Source: ICSS Inventory, 1960-63.
The data reveal increasing activity in the late 1950s until the start of the 1960s among both private and public institutions. Cumulative totals for the institutions surveyed in the two sectors were nearly equal for the period 1950 to 1963, with 117 public and 115 private institutions reporting that new honors programs had begun or were being considered. The near-even distribution between public and private institutions is in marked contrast to the findings of Aydelotte’s 1925 study, which identified honors provisions at 75 private institutions and only 18 public. Private programs also featured heavily in Aydelotte’s 1944 monograph. He noted new programs in the public sector (at least eight more public universities started honors programs since 1925), but the fact that he devoted a separate chapter to public institutions, combined with the predominance of private institutions in the other chapters, suggests that honors education was still found mostly at private institutions. The ICSS data support the predominance of private institutions in the honors arena prior to 1950: twenty-two private institutions reported that their programs originated between 1920 and 1949, compared to only nine institutions in the public sector.

The peak years for new program formation in both sectors were 1957-1961. The Russian satellites, the sputniks, launched in the autumn of 1957 are generally considered to have been a catalyst for dramatic changes in American education, and undoubtedly they spurred developments in the honors scene. Yet the momentum for change had been building in prior years. The slight increase in new honors programs in 1955-56 included a number of prominent public institutions. Cohen estimated that most of the large state universities he visited had required nearly four years to launch programs in the current sense of honors (i.e., with lower division and general honors work). While Figure 1 does not indicate how long each institution’s planning stage lasted, one may assume at least a year of deliberations preceded the official inauguration of a new or revised program.

Cohen and others observed that the expansion of honors education was not a consistent upward trend from the 1920s to the 1960s. The quantitative evidence presented here and in Chapter 2 validate the claim that programs faltered or disappeared for years before being revitalized or replaced by new provisions. In terms of their utility

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7 Joseph W. Cohen, “Brief Survey of Results of ICSS to September 11, 1959,” Box 4, ICSS Papers, University of Colorado-Boulder Archives.
for making detailed comparisons, however, the data were based on different methods of collection and therefore yield a patchy chronology. Aydelotte’s 1925 study relied on catalog descriptions, and although the National Research Council staff asked institutions to verify or correct the information prior to its publication, there was no direct inspection by either the NRC or Aydelotte to confirm that students were making use of the declared provisions. Aydelotte’s 1944 study was more thorough, using institutional visits, but the final product contained descriptions of only half of the institutions; its purpose was to illustrate, rather than catalog, honors programs. The 1960 ICSS data came from self-reports, and the editorial remarks clearly state that some differences in how institutions reported their data could not be reflected (e.g., different definitions of a “seminar” and various criteria for counting students.)

A further complicating factor is that a quantitative analysis of the honors trend may be conducted from a number of angles, including:

- interest in honors education – measured by any formal activity, such as the appointment of a faculty committee to examine possible honors work;
- institutional commitment – such as institution-wide recommendations or requirements concerning honors work;
- actual honors activity – measured by the numbers of programs of various types (general, departmental, lower- vs. upper division), students enrolled, and faculty who teach honors courses or supervise work.

In the latter case, the participation of a few departments at one institution might be considered less significant than an institution-wide program elsewhere. On the other hand, a vital program in a few departments of a university, involving 5-10% of their students, might be judged stronger than a college-wide program at a smaller institution, where only 3% of the student body participates.

These types of comparisons are feasible but difficult to make; moreover, they are not essential for determining the existence and direction of a trend. Evidence of growing interest and some degree of institutional commitment indicate that honors education was becoming more common throughout American higher education in the second half of the 1950s. Local conditions determined whether implementation was speedy or protracted, whether a few departments or an entire college or university would be involved, and
whether the programs would be lasting or short-lived. In all of those scenarios, however, honors education was on the institutional agenda.

**Programs for the lower division**

Another major change in the landscape, beyond a sheer increase in the number of institutions with honors work, was increased attention to academically talented students in the first two years of college and to general honors, versus the older emphasis on specialized work in academic departments. According to data from the ICSS Inventory and supplements, by 1963, seventy-three out of 110 public institutions that supplied complete data offered some type of honors provision for all four years of college. Four of these reported that they offered only departmental work; twenty-one reported they offered only general work. The remaining forty-eight indicated they had both general and departmental opportunities. Most respondents did not specify whether general honors work was available for all four years, making it difficult to assess how widespread general honors had become within these institutions; however, it is clear that the idea of general honors had been accepted. An emphasis on first-year students is also evident among public institutions in the ICSS Inventory. Eighty-four of the 110 institutions reported having provisions for freshmen, compared to just four institutions that began honors work in the sophomore year, nineteen that operated programs for junior and senior students only, and three that limited their programs to the senior year.8

While well over half of the public institutions reported having four-year programs and/or beginning honors opportunities in the freshman year, it appears that a somewhat lower proportion of private institutions adopted these formats. Of 141 private institutions that provided usable data, sixty-five (46%) reported having honors provisions for all four years of college. Fifteen of these institutions reported offering only general honors work, five had only departmental work, and forty-five reported both general and departmental

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8 The eighty-four institutions with freshmen provisions include the seventy-three that had four-year programs. Appendix D supplies the following details for public institutions: the class(es) affected by honors provisions (freshman through senior), whether the honors work was general, departmental or both, and how many departments offered departmental honors work. The number of academic departments involved varied widely, ranging from two to twenty-eight departments; the four-year programs with the highest number of departments offering honors for their majors were at University of Wisconsin-Madison (28 departments), University of Michigan (25), University of Arkansas (22), Iowa State University (21), and Oklahoma State University (21).
honors provisions. (As in the public sector data, the institutions with both general and departmental provisions did not necessarily indicate whether general honors work was available for all four years.) Sixty-six of the 141 private institutions reported having some kind of honors provision for freshmen; in all but one case, if a private institution adopted freshman honors provisions, it also implemented provisions for all four years of college. Among the remaining institutions, twelve private institutions commenced honors work in the sophomore year, forty-nine provided honors work only for upper division students, and thirteen limited their provisions to seniors.9 These figures indicate a continuing tradition of upper division honors work in the private sector alongside the adoption (to a lesser extent than in the public sector) of general and lower division honors work. Table 11 consolidates some of the preceding data.

Table 11. General, Departmental, and Mixed Provisions in Four-Year and Non-Four-Year Honors Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public Institutions</th>
<th>Private Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 year</td>
<td>Non-4 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General only</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept’l only</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. &amp; Dept.</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=73</td>
<td>N=37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICSS Inventory, 1960-63.

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9 Appendix E supplies the full data for private institutions.
Participation at individual institutions

The programs of the 1920s through 1940s tended to have low enrollments and often involved just a few departments. The percentage of students in honors programs grew over the decades, although in many cases numbers were still small in absolute terms even during the 1960s. The ICSS asked institutions to provide enrollment data as part of the 1960-61 Inventory, and most complied. The results of the original installment (without supplements) were presented in tabular form, reproduced here in Table 12:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Honors Enrollment</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Private</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Large (5000+)</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Large (5000+)</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-49</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-199</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-299</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300+</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No indication</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>98</strong></td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td><strong>98</strong></td>
<td><strong>196</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The ICSS staff emphasized the limitations of these data: since institutions counted their honors students in various ways, the data had no more than “indicative value” and were of interest because of the wide range of numbers represented. It is worth adding that some programs introduced in the 1950s or 1960s began with a pilot phase in which the new curricula or requirements were tested on a small group of students before enrollment was expanded. Another form of incremental implementation was to begin

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10 Regarding low enrollments, Cohen cited a 1927 observation by W. S. Learned that only Swarthmore, Harvard and the University of Toronto had a significant number of students engaged in honors work: Cohen, in SSAHE, 11-12, referring to Learned’s *The Quality of the Educational Process in the United States and Europe*, Bulletin No. 20 (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1927), 116-117.

11 “Some count only those students formally admitted to the Honors program, others include all students enrolled in any Honors course, while still others give total enrollment in the Honors courses.” *The Superior Student*, 3 (9): 38 (Jan. 1961).
honors work for one class (often freshmen or sophomores) and introduce provisions for the other classes in each successive year, with a complete program in place after three or four years. Thus, the numbers in Table 12 are a cross-section from a time when many programs were in a state of flux.

The category with the highest total number of cases comprised institutions that had honors enrollment of zero to forty-nine students. This observation also holds true when viewing each institutional category separately, except in the case of large public institutions, which were most numerous in the 100-199 category. Both small and large institutions are concentrated at the lower end of the enrollment scale, although large public institutions again present an exception: a relatively high number of them had honors enrollments of 300+ students.

Looking at the full data set from the ICSS Inventory and supplements, a list of the ten public institutions with the highest honors enrollments (head counts) does not match a top-ten ranking based on the percentage of the student body active in honor works (compare Tables 13 and 14):

Table 13. Ten public institutions with the highest honors head counts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Honors Enrlmt (H-E)</th>
<th>Total Enrlmt (T-E)</th>
<th>H-E as % of T-E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kansas (U of)</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>9435</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan (U of)</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>28117</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado (U of)</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>10317</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose SC</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>14168</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan State U</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>17000</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas (U of)</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>5945</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa (State U of)</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>10789</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas (U of)</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>20261</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri (U of)</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>15184</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin (U of)-Mad.</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>28034</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICSS Inventory, 1960-63.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Honors Enrlmt (H-E)</th>
<th>Total Enrlmt (T-E)</th>
<th>H-E as % of T-E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kansas (U of)</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>9435</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winthrop C</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>1640</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas (U of)</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>5945</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian State TC</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>2586</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado (U of)</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>10317</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas State TC</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harpur C</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newark C of Engr</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calif. (U of)-Sta. B.</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose SC</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>14168</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ICSS Inventory, 1960-63. TC=Teachers College

Although the Universities of Kansas, Colorado, and Arkansas, and San Jose State College did rank in the top ten on both measures, high head counts frequently did not correspond to high percentages at large institutions, due to the sheer size of their student bodies. Kansas, Colorado and Arkansas are, in fact, the three smallest institutions on the head count table. Conversely, no university with over 15,000 students appears on the second, percentage-based ranking.12

Fifty institutions reported their honors- and total enrollment figures for both the Arts and Sciences (A&S) and the whole institution, making it possible to calculate the percentage of A&S students in honors as well as the percentage of all students (institution-wide) in honors. At most institutions, A&S honors enrollments accounted for all honors work. Only seven of the fifty institutions in this sub-sample reported that A&S was not the only source of its honors enrollments—honors work had barely begun to spread beyond its original home, despite ICSS efforts to extend the honors outlook to other units. Two counter-examples were Boston College, where 206 A&S, 110 Business Administration, and 35 Education students were enrolled in honors work, and the University of Michigan, where the School of Music had 57 students doing honors work in addition to the 788 honors students in A&S.

12 The two private institutions in the 300+ category were Oklahoma City University and Boston College.
Honors enrollment in A&S rarely surpassed 10% of the A&S study body, and the total percentage of students in honors work typically was below 5% of an institution’s total enrollment. The institutions with unusually high A&S percentages—Brandeis University (24.8%), University of Arkansas (23.8%), University of Akron (18.8%), and Washington University (18.5%)—invite closer examination. These cases reveal some of the inconsistency and ambiguity in reporting that the Inventory editors had noted, underlining the difficulty of depicting the overall status of honors education in more than general terms:

• Brandeis reported having a senior, departmental program, with 61 of its 246 seniors in the A&S college participating. This may account for the high percentage figure, since other institutions would have reported total enrollment for A&S, not just the number of seniors. If the Brandeis total A&S figure is adjusted—multiplying by 4 to approximate the total number of freshmen through seniors—the percentage of honors students would drop to 6.2%.

• The University of Arkansas reported 342 students in sections and colloquia, and 61 junior and senior candidates for honors, for a total of 403 honors students out of 1695 students in A&S. Given that it offered four-year general and departmental programs, if some of the 61 upper division honors candidates were enrolled in general sections or colloquia, they may have been counted twice. Nevertheless, even the 342 students alone would account for 20% of the A&S student body; therefore, it appears that Arkansas placed a high value on its honors program and made it less exclusive than was the norm at other institutions.

• The University of Akron (a public institution with day and evening students) reported having junior-senior honors programs in just three departments, and listed 60 of its 320 A&S students as participating as of late 1962, just one year after its program was officially adopted. (It was listed as “in committee” in the first edition of the Inventory.) No further information is available in the ICSS newsletter to verify or challenge these numbers.
According to the Inventory, Washington University operated a four-year, departmental program that involved 348 out of 1878 students enrolled in its A&S college. A brief report in the ICSS newsletter verified this number and explained that 286 students were enrolled in 11 freshman-sophomore honors courses, while the remaining students (62) were engaged in junior-senior honors work in a variety of departments. The Inventory entry was incomplete (or outdated) in that it indicated only departmental honors, when in fact sophomores were being awarded general honors based on their honors work in the first two years. The 18.5% figure for A&S honors enrollment, however, appears to be correct.\textsuperscript{13}

Year-to-year data on participation at individual institutions are not available in the ICSS archives and publications. George Waggoner, director of honors at the University of Kansas, provided data on his institution when he described the growth of honors enrollment there in his chapter in \textit{The Superior Student} (1966). In 1950, honors work involved a small group of faculty and students at Kansas, but by the mid-1960s it had become a more popular option. The institution saw a distinct increase in the number of students graduating with honors: from 9 students in 1950 to 58 in 1964. During that time, the number of departments offering honors work grew from four to eighteen. Figure 2 illustrates this growth of student and departmental involvement.

\textsuperscript{13} “Notes and Comments: Washington University (St. Louis),” \textit{The Superior Student}, 5 (2): 27 (Nov.-Dec. 1962). The starting date of its honors program is not available.
If Kansas was typical, enrollment growth in established programs mirrored the overall national trend of growth in honors education during the late 1950s. At these institutions the foundations of existing honors programs could be built upon when the educational climate turned in favor of strengthening undergraduate academic programs. The growth at Kansas can be attributed partly to a decision to improve advising for incoming freshmen of high academic ability starting in 1955, with a resulting increase in the number of honors graduates four years later. Around the same time, departments were being encouraged to create honors sections for multi-sectioned freshman and sophomore courses. The advent of the National Merit Scholarship Program brought another boost as Kansas made all National Merit Scholars and finalists in the College of Arts and Sciences eligible for the freshman honors program.¹⁴

Waggoner’s data appear to be inconsistent with the ICSS Inventory data that indicate 1000 students were involved in honors work at Kansas. The emphasis on lower division provisions could account for the difference, since students in freshman and

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¹⁴ George R. Waggoner, “Departmental Honors at the University of Kansas: A Case History,” in SSAHE (1966), 150-152.
sophomore honors sections would not necessarily continue honors work and graduate with departmental honors.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

- The ICSS Inventory data support Cohen’s assertion that the majority of programs established in the 1920s through 1940s did not survive. The institutions that appeared in Aydelotte’s 1925 and 1944 studies may have maintained honors programs on paper, but these programs probably had few or no students or academic units participating, and were not strong enough to be considered direct antecedents of the most recent honors initiatives in the 1950s and 1960s.

- Following a slight peak of eight new programs in 1950, few institutions introduced honors provisions until mid-decade. A wave of new program formation began in 1955 and crested in 1960, with forty-seven institutions inaugurating new honors programs that year. By 1962, new program formation had returned to the 1955 level. In contrast to the earlier prevalence of private institutions, nearly equal numbers of public and private institutions formed programs during the period of 1955 to 1962.15

- In contrast to the emphasis on upper division, departmental honors during the 1920s and 1930s, over half of the public institutions in the 1960-63 ICSS Inventory reported that they offered honors work for freshmen, and well over half of the institutions had general honors provisions. freshman and general honors provisions were also adopted at private institutions, but these institutions were in lower proportions than in the public sector. The tradition of departmental honors without general honors options (i.e., departmental-only) was still strong in the private sector (approx. 40% of respondents), while about one-fifth of public institutions reported offering only departmental programs.

15 This study did not examine program formation after 1962. A study of program formation from 1950 to 2000 by David P. Baker, Sean Reardon, and Kate Riordan found that the probability that institutions without honors programs would form a new program did not reach the 1960 level again until the late 1970s, at which point the probability increased rapidly and well beyond the 1960 level: “Creating the Upper Track in American Higher Education: An Organizational Ecology of the Rise and Spread of Honors Education” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Sacramento, CA, November 2000).
• Honors programs still tended to have low enrollment. Almost 40 percent of institutions (public and private) in the original installment of the ICSS Inventory reported that their honors programs enrolled less than fifty students; at the large institutions (5000+ students total) in that group, honors enrollments would have been at most 1 percent of total institutional enrollment. Only twenty-two institutions enrolled two hundred or more students in honors work.

• A number of institutions whose honors programs began prior to 1950 expanded their programs during the late fifties and early sixties. Several institutions began offering honors work in professional fields, while another avenue of expansion was to increase general honors enrollments, as the University of Kansas did through direct recruitment and additional course offerings.
10 - The Spirit and Scope of Honors Education

As the final term of the ICSS was coming to an end, the ICSS staff and Executive Committee reflected on what had been accomplished and explored some overarching issues through newsletter articles on the effects of programs on campuses, unsolved problems, program assessment, selection processes at various campuses, and the influence of honors education on future graduate study. In addition, an ongoing project to compile the past decade of experience into a book came to fruition during the final year: *The Superior Student in American Higher Education* was published in 1966 with financial support from the Carnegie Corporation. Joseph Cohen wrote the background chapters on the early history of honors education and evolution of the ICSS, and solicited and edited chapters from Executive Committee members on topics such as the characteristics of honors students, program evaluation, and programs at state universities, private colleges and secondary schools. The contributing authors, as active participants at their respective institutions and in the activities of the ICSS, would naturally extol the strengths and successes of their honors programs, but a good deal of the text tackled the weaknesses. The book also laid out the primary messages that the ICSS had been broadcasting over the years, but with more detail and context than had been possible in the newsletter. The resulting volume was an engaging mix of handbook, position paper and case studies.

Two points in the book sum up the spirit of the ICSS approach: first, that it was better to start with a partial program than wait until a full program could be implemented, as long as progress was made toward distinguishing “between the merely academic and the genuinely intellectual.” Second, once a program was successful, it must remain dynamic and “resist constantly its own tendency to formalize and blandly institutionalize itself.”¹ This merging of practical considerations with philosophical passion was typical of ICSS language and may have contributed to the organization’s wide appeal.

The ever-evolving nature of honors programs was a key principle. As part of this dynamism, the ICSS encouraged institutions to regard their honors programs as an “experimental arm” of the college: Philip Mitterling, the new ICSS director, observed that “some honors directors have expressed the feeling that their programs would be a failure if the necessity for them did not disappear in time—if they did not end their existence as separate entities in the curriculum.”

Dudley Wynn, director of the University of New Mexico’s General Honors Program, explained that honors education should be about “experimentation and excitement and new expectations” rather than merely for prestige or to improve a little the current way of doing things. A good program is about intellectual climate, not about devising a “beautiful synthetic scheme,” and the goal should be “to shift emphasis from grades to intellectual curiosity, from accumulation of facts to the use of knowledge in judging and evaluating.”

Keeping with the educational reform discourse of the late 1950s and early 1960s, honors advocates used the idea of excellence in describing their overarching goal. Despite numerous publications and discussions on excellence, wrote Cohen, “the question of quality has not been met head on by American educational institutions.” As a result, many students were not working to their ability, because they were not challenged to work at that level. Furthermore, some highly talented students were not even identified as such, and teaching was undervalued in higher education. He felt that excellence had become equated more with specialization than breadth, but argued that excellence and breadth are mutually compatible, because “all fields of learning, even the most technical, involve a consideration of values.”

Many honors advocates believed programs could have a positive influence beyond just the students and faculty who were involved in them. Known as the spillover effect, at times this was simply a faith that the high standards both driving and emanating from honors programs would uplift the campus community in general. Drawing on the observations of Burton Clark and Martin Trow that the academic subculture at colleges tends to be overwhelmed by “the collegiate, the nonconformist, and the vocational”

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4 Cohen, in *SSAHE*, 2-3, 7. A corollary of this was that honors should not be regarded as a means of training specialists: 30.
subcultures, Francis Heller wrote that honors programs could give the academic subculture “the continuity and cohesive element that any culture requires. Whether a bright student is challenged is no longer a matter of luck or of finding a sympathetic faculty member who is willing to mentor the student.” However, he continued, the program should not have a defensive stance: “Like any social force, the academic subculture must move outward, must seek to extend itself, if it is to remain viable.” It should permeate other aspects of the campus; Heller noted, for example, that at the University of Kansas fraternities were increasingly interested in having honors students among their members.5

Another case of spillover occurred at Notre Dame, where a permanent committee was established to address the needs of superior students, leading in turn to a major curricular revision for sophomore courses in English, history, theology, and philosophy. The institution also introduced Directed Readings (independent reading) in almost all departments for eligible students. Other effects that were less directly related to the committee work included “increased contacts and better relations between students and faculty, greater interest in graduate programs and a large measure of success in competitions for national fellowships.”6 At the University of Colorado, engineering students had been taking their first college physics course during the sophomore year. For its new class of honors students in 1960-61, however, the Engineering College tried moving physics to the second semester of freshmen year, which also involved a revision of the usual math sequence. The experiment proved so successful that the faculty soon adopted the new sequence for the entire College.7

An article on effects at Winthrop College looked at both sides of the issue. Negative reactions had included resistance among faculty who were not involved with


7 “Two Freshman Engineering Programs,” The Superior Student 4 (4), 15 (May 1961). In addition to affecting curricular reforms, the new honors programs was credited with contributing to an increase in the size and quality of the freshmen class in the College of Engineering: “Notes and Comments,” The Superior Student, 4 (7): 30 (January-February 1962).
honors, were not asked to teach honors sections, or felt they were taking up slack by having extra students in their classes in order to keep honors sections small. The honors program seemed to have made little progress toward breaking down the grading system; on the other hand, the program seemed to have improved the reputation of the college as a place of learning. “The forces of anti-intellectualism, once so potent, are beginning to decline and fall; and we therefore emerge in blessed contrast to those of our sister institutions who remain a weird blend of country club and marriage bureau.” Winthrop students seemed more eager to discuss ideas and accept that there is uncertainty, and to learn to teach themselves. The author also observed higher instructional morale among honors faculty, which had carried over to non-honors courses. Summing up, he conceded that examining the effects of honors programs was not like running a controlled experiment. Other factors played a role in the improving reputation and quality at Winthrop during the four years that the honors program existed: the faculty was greatly strengthened, the quality of entering students had been increasing, and the A.P. program had helped prevent repetition of content.\(^8\)

Experiments in lower division honors had the potential to revitalize the general curriculum, but another type of spillover was the effect these innovations had on the strength of honors education itself. After the introduction of honors options for freshmen at the University of Kansas, enrollment in departmental honors programs increased and more departments became involved. The departmental honors system alone had not been thriving at Kansas and at many other institutions. Attention to lower division students and to departmental offerings for non-majors (i.e., general honors work) attracted many students who might not have considered participating in honors programs under the previous system.

The attractiveness of these new approaches tied into the movement’s pragmatic, organizational motives. Aside from its pedagogical goals, the honors movement benefited institutions in ways that the core ICSS members acknowledged but generally did not emphasize in their public documents: honors programs could be used to attract

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outstanding students and improve an institution’s academic reputation.⁹ According to Paul Dressel, during its planning stage in 1957, Michigan State’s Honors College “was viewed solely as a vehicle to attract outstanding students in sufficient quantity to create a new image for the university,” and not as a way to accelerate the period of study once these students were enrolled at the university.¹⁰ This rejection of accelerating the overall time spent in college could be interpreted as the university’s concern for enriching students’ college years, a desire for four years of tuition fees, or simply an adherence to the traditional notion of what is adequate time spent in college. Dressel indicated that image improvement was the paramount goal of the university. He does not remark on how the program evolved after the initial committee work, but it is hard to imagine that a concern for institutional reputation alone would have inspired faculty to become involved with the Honors College, committing to hours of preparing and conducting honors courses, holding tutorials, and counseling students. If that assumption is correct, the new College may be viewed as the offspring of an opportune marriage between strategy and pedagogy.

The ICSS newsletter articles do not leave the impression that many institutions began honors experiments with such narrowly strategic goals as Dressel reported. On the other hand, Robert Clark believed there was reason to question some institutions’ intentions: “The rapid spread of the movement—the eagerness of institutions to get ‘honors’ into their public relations brochures—suggests an element of fadism, the presence of an educational gimmick to attract better students. The new flowering may be as evanescent as the first [in the interwar period]. But I do not think so.” Clark felt that two events made the current interest in honors programs especially well-timed. The successful launching of the Russian satellites dramatically pointed to the importance of high-quality science programs, and with that the need for American education to be improved (though this assertion was already familiar due to earlier published opinions of some high-profile critics). At the same time, rising enrollments in higher education made it possible for private institutions to become increasingly selective. Clark linked that

⁹ At the Eastern Invitational Conference, Cohen cautioned that “the best high school seniors will become more and more discriminating in their choice of college or university…[Institutions] which lag in establishing programs will be by-passed by the abler students whom they profess to seek.” Opening address, “The ICSS in 1959,” *The Superior Student* 2 (6): 4 (October 1959).
¹⁰ Paul Dressel, *College to University*, 140.
trend to improvements in secondary schools, and noted that public post-secondary institutions had taken action as well by introducing more selective admissions, stronger academic requirements, a focus in departments on quality rather than numbers, and honors programs.\(^\text{11}\)

This advantageous climate, however, would not sustain indefinitely the new and revitalized programs of mid-century. Likewise, programs run by one or two zealous faculty members would not survive, nor would the financial support of philanthropies be renewed over the longer term—they made possible the establishment of many programs, but such funds were not intended to last beyond the experimental stages. The ICSS was adamant that proper institutional commitment was necessary, in the form of budgetary support, recognition of honors faculty, careful selection of both the faculty and students involved in honors courses, and provisions for at least a half-time honors director.\(^\text{12}\)

Cohen observed that the single most powerful factor in the success of honors programs was “the existence of top academic administrators who understand their meaning and potential impact and who are convinced of their claims to priority in the drive for quality. They know how to enlist dedicated participation by the best of the faculty.”\(^\text{13}\) Without these conditions, it would be difficult to maintain the gains made through initial efforts to establish honors education at a campus, much less expand a program.

**Major actors in the honors movement**

Favorable national climate aside, without the efforts of certain actors the honors trend of the 1950s-60s may not have occurred as quickly or on such a large scale as it did. The most obvious contributors were Joseph Cohen and the rest of the ICSS staff and Executive Committee. Given the preexistence of honors education and the general atmosphere of concern for excellence, however, the ICSS was not the sole impetus for increased interest in honors. Cohen said as much, and the feedback he received from universities reflected the same hesitation to give the ICSS all of the credit. Jerome Bruner wrote of Harvard’s situation: “In a very real sense, the existence of this

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organization has helped create a cultural atmosphere in which bold plans could be more easily…put forth. The Harvard plan of freshman seminars, for example, was easier to propose in the context of American universities [in] 1959 than it would have been five years earlier, and your group helped make that context possible.”14 The Dean of Arts and Sciences at Emory University wrote: “Whether or not the ICSS is responsible for lifting this idea [of concern for the superior student] into the air, I do not know. I do know that there has been real compatibility between the idea of ICSS and the fact that there has been wide-spread concern about the superior student….ICSS has made a fine contribution toward keeping this idea before the educational public.”15

In January 1960, Cohen wrote: “…it would be presumptuous to assert that ICSS was the only or even a major factor in these developments, being, as it is, but one of many forces working to focus attention on excellence.”16 Cohen was a bit too modest in that judgment; the ICSS did play a major role, as a report issued by the Edgar Stern Family Fund observed: “A good deal of the impetus for the organization of honors work outside the older Eastern colleges seems to come from the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student.” It noted that the organization, “through the personality of its Director, generally exudes energy.”17 Frederick Jackson of the Carnegie Corporation reported to his colleagues as the ICSS completed its first term of operation: “From all accounts this program has gone extraordinarily well. Coming as it did when there was a groundswell in the country for paying more attention to superior students, the program has made itself felt from coast to coast.”18 Testimonials on the positive effects of campus visits by Cohen and his associates give further evidence that the ICSS was more than an

15 William C. Archie, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Emory University, to Cohen, 16 November 1959, ICSS Box 3, f. “Replies – Letter of Inquiry, First Set.”
18 Frederick Jackson, Yellow memo sheet to CCNY staff, 26 February 1960, in Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library (henceforth: CCNY Records), Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.”
information clearinghouse; the organization generated tangible progress at numerous institutions contemplating new or revised honors programs.

The ICSS developed out of Joseph Cohen’s conviction that academically able students should be challenged through honors programs, and much of the organization’s work in the beginning fell to him. Jackson had conveyed to his Carnegie Corporation colleagues that Cohen was “a dynamic, imaginative man, … ideally suited to spark this program nationally during the next few years.”  His assessment proved to be correct, and other participants in the honors movement had similar views on Cohen. While Frank Aydelotte might be considered the chief architect and scholar of honors education earlier in the century, Cohen’s roles were wider-ranging during the ten or so years that he helped create and manage the ICSS. First, he was the driving force in the organization’s creation—without Cohen, there may not have been an ICSS or similar group at that time. Secondly, he acted as chief ambassador (or as one colleague put it, Cohen advocated with a “missionary zeal.”) His campus visits both helped him form a picture of undergraduate education and honors programs around the country, as well as carry the message of the ICSS and collaborate with key individuals on campuses.  His willingness to travel could account for a degree of success that may not have been achieved through a more impersonal approach. Finally, his long involvement as ICSS director and editor-chief of the newsletter ensured continuity in the organization’s activities and message.

The extent of Cohen’s personal influence, due partly to budgetary constraints and partly to his enthusiasm, could have become a point of weakness. Howard Quint wrote: “Every movement needs its zealot and Joe has served admirably—nobody else could, or would have done what he has. But I should question the wisdom of allowing the entire

19 Frederick Jackson, “Agenda Sheet,” undated [probably late December 1957 or early January 1958], CCNY Records, Series III A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959.” A few years later, Jackson wrote that “Joe Cohen is an unusually vigorous and energetic individual, and as one dean put it, ‘His travels would make Eleanor Roosevelt look like Whistler’s mother.’” Jackson, Yellow memo sheet to Corporation staff, 26 February 1960, op. cit. (see previous note).

superior student movement to become a one-man show.”

In fact, Cohen’s fervor apparently overwhelmed his colleagues at times and led to some unrealistic ideas, as suggested by Quint in communications with Frederick Jackson. The problem was diminished, though, through the increased role of Executive Committee members in visiting institutions, hastened by the realization that Cohen had become overworked and his health was in jeopardy, as well as pressure from Jackson to shift the ICSS toward the private sector, resulting in Philip Mitterling’s appointment to the directorship.

The ICSS Executive Committee was composed of administrators and faculty who were key actors in honors programs at their campuses and also were willing to promote their ideas more widely. They visited other institutions, contributed newsletter articles and in some cases hosted or helped organize regional conferences. Beyond the ICSS, innumerable other administrators and faculty helped establish and encourage programs at their campuses. Some of these individuals can be named from the ICSS newsletter articles and conference proceedings, while others may have been invisible on the national scene but made great strides locally. Cohen mentioned that honors alumni, as new faculty, were also involved in bringing honors work to their new academic homes.

Philanthropic foundations, educational associations, and state and national policy makers were crucial in the campaign to create programs for talented students. While the influence of their conferences and publications would be difficult to gauge, funding spurred major projects in some areas. Foundation support for honors education began with the General Education Board’s grant of $240,000 to Swarthmore College, helping launch Frank Aydelotte’s plan of seminars and comprehensive exams for exceptional upper division students. The grant not only served the practical purpose of covering the new expenditures related to the honors plan but had strategic importance, in that Aydelotte’s critics could not complain that the institution’s regular operating funds were being diverted to the honors experiment. The symbolic weight of a major foundation’s support for the Swarthmore plan might have quelled some critics as well. Adding to the visibility of honors education were the National Research Council’s activities during the

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21 Jackson, Notes on conversation with Howard Quint, 29 December 1959, CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1957-1959”; and Quint, Letter to Jackson, 31 December 1959 (typed and re-dated 2 January 1960), CCNY Records, Series III.A (Grant files), Box 503, f. “Colorado, University of, Support of the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, 1960.”
1920s, including conferences, publications, and Carl Seashore’s visits to institutions, aimed at encouraging talented students and promoting graduate study.

Support for the 1950s honors efforts came from several foundations. An initial grant from the Rockefeller Foundation helped to establish the ICSS in 1956, after which the Carnegie Corporation of New York financed the ICSS and honors programs at several universities. The Corporation awarded its first set of grants related to honors and gifted programs in fiscal year 1956-57 (ending September 30). These grants totaled $171,500, of which $36,500 went to the University of Kansas over three years for an undergraduate program for gifted students and $80,000 went over five years to the University of Louisville for a summer scholarship program encouraging gifted high school students to attend college. The third grant of $55,000 went to the National Education Association for a conference on the identification and education of gifted students. (In 1959, Kansas received $45,000 for an additional three years of program support.)

FY 1957-58 was the peak year for Corporation commitments to honors and gifted education, with new grants totaling $840,300, including $501,300 to university-level programs. The University of Arkansas, Boston College, University of Michigan, and University of North Carolina were developing their honors programs at this time and received Corporation support for those activities, while the University of Colorado received its first grant ($125,000 for a 2 ½ year period) for the emerging ICSS. Two secondary education programs also received Corporation support: the National Education Association established a consultation service on the education of academically talented secondary school students with a grant of $165,000, and the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools received $174,000 for the “guidance and motivation of superior high school students.”

In 1958-59 all ten of the Corporation’s previous grants were ongoing and it made no new commitments, but in 1959-60 it awarded six new grants totaling $466,600. The NCA received an additional $150,000 for its program to encourage gifted secondary school students, and the Southern Regional Education Board received $75,000 for a training program in the education of gifted children. The remaining $241,600 in grants

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focused on college-level programs; however, a shift in the Corporation’s interest was evident. Although two grants at this time (grant renewals for the ICSS-University of Colorado—$140,000 for two years—and the University of Kansas) continued the previous emphasis on general support for the development of honors programs, three new grants focused specifically on summer school programs abroad for honors students (University of Arizona/Guadalajara, Mexico; and French Summer Schools through Laval and McGill Universities). A grant of $26,500 to Haverford College supported a conference on honors work in liberal arts colleges.

Alongside its grants to honors and gifted programs and the ICSS, the Carnegie Corporation supported research projects on creativity (University of California and University of Chicago), curricular experiments, and conferences on women in education and on the American high school. The Corporation, together with the Ford Foundation, helped establish the National Merit Scholarship Corporation in the mid-1950s and later supported its research on academically talented students.

The Ford Foundation, though reluctant to fund ICSS activities, was supportive of the organization’s work—Alvin Eurich, Vice-President of the Fund for the Advancement of Education, gave the opening address at the ICSS Southern Regional Conference in November 1958. Cohen’s persistent inquiries about possible funding and the connections between honors programs and the Ford MAT and MA-3 programs earned the ICSS a modest grant of $15,000 near the end of its operations, with the understanding that other sources would also provide funding—Cohen was circulating a proposal for “federated funding”—and that the ICSS would publish a special section about the Ford teacher training programs in the newsletter.23 The Edgar Stern Family Fund was another supporter of honors education in the early 1960s, publishing “Recognition of Excellence” in 1960, which discussed the cultivation of talent in school, college and work, covering practices in the U.S., Soviet Union and Western Europe, and how talent and excellence were and could be recognized. In 1962, the Fund contributed funds for the ICSS conference on honors work in the field of teacher education, held at the University of Wisconsin. In its final two years, the ICSS received Fund grants of $10,000 per year, in

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23 Alvin C. Eurich, letter to Joseph Cohen, 5 July 1962, Box 35, ICSS Papers, UCBA.
addition to support from a number of other family foundations and the United States Steel Foundation.

U.S. Office of Education, National Science Foundation and state boards of education also lent their financial and logistical backing to projects, conferences and publications concerning gifted and honors education, including some ICSS activities. Educational organizations formed the other important sector in the honors movement. The National Education Association may have been the leader when, “[i]n 1950, at a time when virtually no one else was interested in the subject, [it] issued an important bulletin entitled ‘Education of the Gifted.’”24 Representatives of regional accreditation associations such as the North Central Association participated in the ICSS conferences and were working on their own projects to promote opportunities for talented school- and college students.

This loose ensemble of cooperating individuals and organizations presumably was not unique to the honors movement, but the history of honors education illustrates the connections these actors had with each other, and their limits. As Clark Kerr pointed out in *The Uses of the University*, the interactions between individuals in higher education and external organizations could bring results that might not be possible otherwise:

…there is a kind of senatorial courtesy within the collective faculty about changes desired by a single member, or a few. Changes initiated from the outside, as in the development of a federal grant university, which also have their internal supporters, are especially easy to accomplish. The individual faculty member seeking something new has, in turn, often found his greatest encouragement and leverage coming from the outside; the individual scholar is the inventor, the outside agency the force for innovation. The inventing faculty member almost instinctively knows that internal change will come more easily if he obtains the external support of a foundation or a federal agency. These outside-to-inside and inside-to-outside alliances have been great sources of progress.”25

Cohen the inventor—or rather, the re-inventor and reviver—and his colleagues on the ICSS Executive Committee found allies in influential philanthropies that backed the establishment and operations of the ICSS, and the circle of collaboration grew to include other organizations concerned with education. A national inside-outside alliance generated momentum for changes to take place at individual campuses that were already

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experimenting with honors programs or were receptive to the idea, and that core of acceptance in turn influenced other institutions to join the movement.

**Summary of main findings**

A wave of interest in honors education arose in the late 1950s and introduced new principles in honors education that have continued to this day. At the forefront of the movement was the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), which operated from 1957 to 1965. The programs introduced during this period departed from earlier models to expand honors education both in curricular scope and the number of students involved. They did this by serving students in all four years as opposed to only the upper division, increasing the number of honors sections available to students, and extending the idea of honors to a growing number of academic departments and professional schools. According to Joseph Cohen, director of the ICSS, the number of honors programs at American colleges and universities tripled between 1957 and 1965. He noted, moreover, that “numbers alone give no idea of the spread of influence. The main purpose of the ICSS was to serve as an instigator of cross-fertilization,”26 which it achieved through its regional conferences, newsletter, and consultation visits to campuses, and through the participation of its staff and Executive Committee members in meetings and conferences held by other educational organizations and associations.

The honors movement tapered off in 1961-1962 to the pre-1955 level of new program formation. According to the ICSS Inventory of programs, all but a few state universities (including land-grant state universities) reported the existence of an honors program on their campuses by 1961; about 80 percent of these institutions had introduced general honors work, and the remainder offered only departmental honors. A number of large public universities had been experimenting with programs for a decade or more prior to the sputnik launches, although the ICSS helped broaden their efforts to include more than the older, departmental model. Established programs, as at the University of Colorado, became stronger during the ICSS years. Other public universities introduced honors programs for the first time, now able to overcome obstacles that had prevented moves in this direction during earlier decades, including “their inability to select students

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26 Cohen, in *SSAHE* (1966), xii-xiii.
or limit their number, the pressures of public and legislative controls, and the struggle to establish an intellectual tradition.”

Honors education also expanded beyond Arts and Science s units into professional fields, although these areas still accounted for a small portion of total honors enrollment in the mid-1960s. The format of honors education turned away from the older, exclusive focus on departmental work as freshman and sophomore courses were introduced, primarily in the new realm of “general honors” (i.e., intended for any student, not just those majoring in that subject.) Dudley Wynn found that most of the strongest honors programs included general honors work, despite the primacy that departmental honors programs might be expected to have, given the departmental emphasis at public institutions. General honors had been welcomed by students and faculty. Furthermore, Frank Aydelotte’s earlier typology of Type I versus Type II programs—used to describe the relationship of honors provisions to the regular curriculum—was no longer relevant, since honors work was widely regarded now as a substitute for regular work rather than an add-on.

The launching of the Russian satellites was a catalyst for progress, but a reform attitude had been in place since early in decade. As Abraham Tannenbaum suggests: “the reaction to Sputnik might not have been so swift and strong if the critics’ cries for change in our schools had not had a cumulative effect.” Institutions had embraced honors work primarily because of an ongoing dissatisfaction with educational standards (the lockstep), a recognition that talented students were needed in crucial fields, and concern for excellence in the face of increasing enrollments. Although the manpower perspective was influential in higher education, a humanistic perspective was behind many honors programs (both general and departmental), and democracy now meant a willingness to differentiate between students in order to tailor education more closely to individual needs (i.e., individual fulfillment) and encourage students to reach their

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27 Ibid., 9.
28 Wynn, in SSAHE, 135.
29 Janet Kerr reached a similar conclusion regarding another major trend, the development of federal higher education policy during the 1950s: “From Truman to Johnson: Ad Hoc Policy Formulation in Higher Education,” Review of Higher Education, 8 (Fall 1984): 54.
highest potential. Honors advocates also argued for the cultivation of liberally educated individuals who could see beyond their specific disciplines and vocations to the broader needs of society. Peter Dow points out that the potential benefits to society of academic training had become more widely acknowledged by this time as a result of post-World War II academic involvement in the realms of defense, industry and government.31

The reform climate brought pressure on secondary schools to become better at identifying and nurturing academically talented students, and to improve the coordination of high school curricula and pre-college advising with higher education institutions. The National Merit Scholarship Program and Advanced Placement Program, along with state and local initiatives, encouraged higher standards in secondary education. Honors programs benefited as incoming freshmen were better prepared for college courses, and the connections that colleges and universities were building with local secondary schools facilitated recruitment of honors students. National testing and scholarship programs also tied in with the expansion of the higher education market away from primarily local and regional enrollment to national recruitment, which encouraged some academically talented students to enter post-secondary institutions further from home. Honors education is credited with increasing graduate school attendance and the share of national fellowship awards at public universities, and some opportunities, such as the Ford Foundation’s MA-3 Program and certain pre-medicine honors programs, reduced the time needed to complete a post-baccalaureate degree.

Anecdotal evidence supported Cohen’s belief that honors programs could serve as “a nucleus of quality” that would improve standards throughout an institution.32 Articles in the ICSS newsletter reported that conditions had improved within the authors’ institutions. The purported effects within institutions naturally included the improvement of education for the students participating in honors options—or at least the perception of improvement, since concrete measures of learning were not tracked in most programs. Faculty members involved with honors programs had the opportunity to depart from conventional approaches to their subject matter in classrooms dedicated to students who did not shy away from intellectual challenges. Honors programs could yield a general

climate of increased respect for academic excellence among students and a spillover of honors methods into regular courses. Wynn found that students and faculty involved in honors work generally believed there was a spillover effect to the whole university, but acknowledged that more research was needed to prove this assertion. As could be true of any major divergence from the status quo, there was some opposition. Critics felt that honors programs were elitist, detracted from the regular curriculum, and placed an unreasonable strain on institutional resources. Gaining faculty and administrative approval and participation could be a difficult process in the development of successful honors programs.

A number of changes the ICSS advocated had not been achieved by the time the organization closed its offices. Although the widespread adoption of lower division and general honors offerings could be counted as a major success, less progress had been made in extending honors education beyond the liberal arts units of universities. After surveying thirty-eight institutions with “all-university” honors programs, Dudley Wynn concluded that undergraduate professional schools in large public universities had not developed their departmental honors programs sufficiently, and that undergraduate professional college students were not participating in general honors in sufficient numbers, despite the all-university honors designation.

Furthermore, despite the longer tradition of departmental honors options, such opportunities were underdeveloped even within the liberal arts unit at many institutions. One institution facing this problem was the University of Southern California, which set up two programs for high school juniors and seniors as well as honors courses for eligible freshmen and sophomores at the University. In the area of departmental honors, though, only the Political Science department had organized the special classes, seminars and research that the University hoped would replace its previous honors system, in place for two decades, that gave honors students 50 percent release time from major classes.

The identification and recruitment of potential honors students continued to evolve during the 1960s. Although National Merit Scholarship lists helped institutions

33 Wynn, in SSAHE, 135.
34 Dudley Wynn, “Honors and the University,” in SSAHE, 135.
target finalists and semi-finalists and improvements had been made in the design and utilization of testing, the recruitment and retention of honors students was an ongoing concern. According to Otto Graf, recruitment of the best students to the University of Michigan was not something his institution could take for granted. “…[T]he College was not totally successful in meeting competition for bright students from sister institutions within Michigan and from private and state-supported institutions elsewhere. Public and private universities and colleges were investing substantial sums for ‘academic tender,’ and a disappointingly large number of applicants admitted to our Honors Program chose to go elsewhere on generous scholarships and subsidies.”

Having successfully recruited students, institutions might soon find that some of them were not meeting expectations. Among the eleven Midwestern universities that formed the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (C.I.C), those that admitted students into honors programs as freshmen reported an attrition rate of 15 to 40 percent. A lower attrition rate of 5 to 10 percent was reported when students entered honors programs after completing some college work first, leading to a potential dilemma for institutions offering freshman honors programs unless they could find a way to decrease the attrition rate in that population.

Honors education has grown in surges since the mid-1920s. Regarding the first period of development, George Waggoner noted that programs did not flourish from the 1930s to the early 1950s due to small participation rates and their failure to “take root” in Arts and Sciences departments. “About 1954, however,” he continued, “a new period of growth and development of honors programs began. The traditional departmental program continued, but it intersected with a whole series of new kinds of honors activities stimulated by a growing national concern for special treatment of gifted students in large public universities with ever-increasing enrollments.” According to Baker et al. a much larger growth period began around 1975, leveling off by the late 1980s, after which the rate of new program formation decreased slightly and leveled off.

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38 George Waggoner, in SSAHE, 150. Waggoner did not indicate whether he chose 1954 as an approximate date or had a particular event(s) in mind.
That study found that by 2000, honors programs had become a nearly universal feature at large four-year institutions.39

Despite progress during the ICSS period, Cohen and his colleagues did not feel that the honors movement had gone as far as it should. He wrote in 1965:

Indeed, the honors movement is still in the explosive stage, as the final director of the ICSS, Dr. Philip I. Mitterling, avows. Some institutions are just coming to view honors programs as a possibility, others still have their doors closed to the idea. And many institutions with programs formally labeled honors have far to go before they create programs of the type discussed in this book. Meanwhile, the older programs encounter new problems calling for new solutions. There will be plenty to do in honors work for a long time to come.40

In both the interwar and mid-century honors movements, honors educators were leaders in experimentation and reform, challenging notions about appropriate curricula, instructional formats, and the timing of course work, and more broadly about the nature of a democratic educational system. The claim made by leaders of the mid-century honors movement of a “spillover effect” was more than a strategy to gain acceptance for their programs. Certainly, the immediate goal was to provide high-achieving students with appropriate intellectual challenges, and many organizers may have been content with that goal. The community benefit of improved institutional reputation that a strong honors program brings, and the resulting gains in recruiting and retaining high-caliber students and faculty, appear to have been explicit goals on some campuses. Numerous educators and administrators affiliated with the ICSS nonetheless viewed honors education as a source of innovation that could benefit more than the top 5 or 10 percent of students and their professors. The ICSS staff noted cases of honors approaches transferring into the regular curriculum and the honors spirit altering the campus climate, and such examples were not uncommon (though difficult to substantiate). A number of innovations in teaching and student life that honors programs brought have become commonplace in undergraduate education, including seminars, special first-year experiences, independent study, self-designed programs, and special interest housing. The current honors association, the National Collegiate Honors Council, similarly

40 Cohen, in SSAHE, xiv.
maintains that “the honors curriculum should serve as a prototype for educational practices that can work campus-wide in the future.”

Postscript: The National Collegiate Honors Council

The ICSS closed its offices in 1965 due to a combination of financial necessity and the feeling that it had succeeded in spreading the honors idea and helped create momentum for continued growth in honors education. The story did not end there, however, as some of its members decided to carry on the work by forming a new organization. On October 22-24, 1966, the first annual meeting of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) was held at the University of Kansas. For the first several years, the annual conference was the NCHC’s main activity, and it served as an information clearinghouse much like the ICSS. It differed from the ICSS in that it operated from membership fees and, in the beginning, had no newsletter or other type of publication. In 1970, however, the organization established a newsletter, *Forum for Honors*, which appeared five times per year. A second, less formal publication was added in 1979: the *NCHC Newsletter* (later known as *National Honors Report*). The NCHC has published practical manuals concerning program formation and assessment and recently added a new journal, *Honors in Practice*.

A system of committees developed over time, starting with the Executive and Planning Committee in 1966, and by 1994 over twenty committees were established, focusing on topics such as accreditation, women and minorities, and study abroad. In 1985, an NCHC committee began exploring the possibility of an endowment to support programs related to honors education. Approved by the Executive Committee in 1986, the National Collegiate Honors Endowment grew to give the NCHC the steady source of financial support that was missing for the ICSS. Another major project, originating in the Committee on Inter-Institutional Cooperation, was the Bicentennial Honors Semester in

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41 NCHC, thirteenth point from “Basic Characteristics of a Fully-Developed Honors Program,” handout approved by the NCHC Executive Committee, 3 March 1994.
43 *Forum for Honors* was discontinued in 1995 and revived in 2000 as the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*. 

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Washington, DC in Fall 1976. Honors Semesters provided seminars, field experiences and other forms of learning centered around a specific site and intellectual theme. The concept flourished, spawning its own committee which has organized Honors Semesters each year at a variety of locations.

The NCHC has carried on the consulting role by maintaining a list of members who are willing to serve as consultants to institutions interested in beginning an honors program or undertaking a program evaluation. It also adopted a set of guidelines that was based heavily on the ICSS guidelines, carrying over several of the ICSS points verbatim or with slight modification. (For a comparison of the two sets of guidelines, see Appendix A.) Unique statements introduced by the NCHC addressed the need for clearly articulated admission and retention criteria, and the recommendation that no less than 15 percent, but ideally 20 to 25 percent of total course work be devoted to honors requirements. In contrast, the ICSS was not specific about the proportion of honors work in a student’s curriculum—perhaps the idea of replacing regular work with honors options was new enough that the ICSS suggestion to “set aside, where possible, any requirements that restrict a good student’s progress…” was enough of a challenge at the time. Another new element in the NCHC guidelines was the promotion of mission statements, both to establish the program’s place in an institution and to articulate program goals. In 2005, reflecting the widespread move toward the creation of separate colleges for honors, the NCHC approved a separate set of guidelines on the suggested “basic characteristics of a fully developed honors college.” An ad hoc task force was also established to survey existing honors colleges, compare the resources and opportunities at honors colleges with those of honors programs at similar institutions, determining whether the difference is “nominal or substantive,” and ultimately consider whether the formulation of guidelines for moving from honors program to honors college would be appropriate.44

Annual conferences each fall have continued to play an important role in the exchange of information and ideas for honors educators and students. The NCHC’s

44 A recent version of the NCHC website had provided the complete list of purposes of the Ad Hoc Task Force on Honors Colleges: http://www.nchchonors.org/Committees/committee_charges.htm#taskforce . This content is no longer web accessible.
membership structure gave students, faculty and administrators equal status, and they have enjoyed equal opportunity to participate in the annual conference. The conferences outgrew university facilities by the late 1980s, moving instead to hotel and conference centers, and the 1988 conference included almost one hundred sessions in various formats. Pre-conference workshops are tailored to new or veteran honors administrators, faculty and students. The six regional councils of the NCHC also organize their own, smaller-scale conferences each spring, giving students and administrators another opportunity to share ideas.
## Appendix A. Comparison of ICSS and NCHC guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICSS “Sixteen major features of a full honors program”¹</th>
<th>NCHC “Basic characteristics of a fully-developed honors program”² -- Similarities to ICSS features</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“1. Identify and select students of higher ability as early as possible. This involves far closer cooperation than has hitherto been the case with high schools and preparatory schools. It also involves making full use of the new experience that has accumulated on the proper uses of predictive techniques, past records, entrance tests and interviews, as well as studies of aptitude, motivation, readiness, and achievement.”</td>
<td>No comparable statement. The desired conditions listed in the ISCS guideline are now well-established. The NCHC guideline on identification of students emphasizes the development of well-articulated standards for program admission and, in the case of open admission, clear expectations for retention and completion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“2. Start programs for these students immediately upon admission to the college or university, and admit other superior students into these programs whenever they are later identified by their teachers.”</td>
<td>No comparable statement, suggesting that freshman honors options might be considered the norm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“3. Make such programs continuous and cumulative through all four years, with honors counseling especially organized and equally continuous.”</td>
<td>No statement on continuity; however, regarding advising NCHC guideline 12 reads: “There should be provisions for special academic counseling of Honors students by uniquely qualified faculty and/or staff personnel.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“4. Formulate such programs so that they will relate effectively both to all the college work for the degree and to the area of concentration, departmental specialization, or preprofessional or professional training.”</td>
<td>(6) “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.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“5. Make the programs varied and flexible by establishing special courses, ability sections, honors seminars, colloquia, and independent study, all with courses credit. AP and acceleration will serve in a contributory role.”</td>
<td>(4) “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.”</td>
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</table>

² “Basic Characteristics of a Fully-Developed Honors Program,” NCHC handout approved by the NCHC Executive Committee, 3 March 1994, and amended by the NCHC Board of Directors on November 23, 2007. The NCHC list is not numbered; I have added numbers to make identification easier.
| 6. Program should be increasingly visible throughout the institution, providing “standards and models of excellence for all students and faculty.” It should promote an honors outlook rather than grade outlook. |
| 7. Employ methods and materials appropriate to superior students, including [list of examples]. |
| 8. Select faculty qualified to give the best intellectual leadership to able students and fully identified with the aims of the program. |
| 9. Set aside, where possible, any requirements that restrict a good student’s progress, thus increasing his freedom among the alternative facets of the honors and regular curriculum. |
| 10. Build in devices of evaluation to test both the means used and the end sought by an honors program. |
| 11. Establish a committee of honors students to serve as a liaison with the honors committee or council… |
| 12. Provide opportunities as teaching assistants to the best men on the faculty, and as lab and research assistants. |

<p>| 7. “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.” |
| Guideline 4, quoted above, touches on harmonizing pedagogical methods with the needs of the program/students. |
| “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.” |
| No comparable statement; waiving of some regular requirements may be presumed. |
| “A 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.” |
| “The program should have in place a committee of Honors students who serve as liaison with the Honors faculty committee or council…” [continues with details about status and roles of student committee]. |
| NCHC statement 15 seems to have the same intent, but reflects the more recently developed array of options for students to develop their academic and professional skills: “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.” |</p>
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<th>13. Employ honors students for counseling, orientation, etc. within the general student body.</th>
<th>No comparable statement.</th>
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<tr>
<td>“14. Establish, where possible, an honors center with honors library, lounge, reading rooms, and other appropriate décor.”</td>
<td>(9) “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 decor.”</td>
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<td>“15. Work toward closer liaison between the undergraduate honors program and the graduate school.”</td>
<td>No comparable statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“16. Ensure that such programs will be permanent features of the curriculum and not dependent on temporary or spasmodic dedication of particular faculty members or administrators—in other words, institutionalize such programs, budget for them, and build thereby a tradition of excellence.”</td>
<td>(2) “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 institutions. This mandate or mission statement should be such as to assure the permanence and stability of the program by guaranteeing and 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.”</td>
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</table>

**Unique statements in the NCHC guidelines (not found in ICSS guidelines):**

(1) “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.”

(3) “The Honors director should report directly to the chief academic officer of the institution.”
(5) “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%.”

(10) “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.”

(12) “There should be provisions for special academic counseling of Honors students by uniquely qualified faculty and/or staff personnel.”

(13) “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 things that can work campus-wide in the future.”

(16) “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.”

(17) “A fully developed program will provide priority enrollment for honors students who are active in the program in recognition of their unique class scheduling needs.”
Appendix B. Cumulative Roster of ICSS Office Holders

Director of the ICSS and Editor-in-Chief of *The Superior Student*
Joseph W. Cohen, Prof. of Philosophy, U Colorado (Fall 1957 – Fall 1963)
Philip I. Mitterling, former Dean and Prof. of History, Thiel College (Fall 1963 – Summer 1965)

Associate Director and Managing Editor
L. G. Weiss, Managing Editor (Fall 1957 – Fall 1958)
Howard H. Quint, Assoc. Director and Managing Editor (Fall 1958 – Fall 1959)
Norman D. Kurland, Assoc. Director and Editor (Fall 1959 – Summer 1962)
Walter Weir, Assoc. Director (Fall 1963 – Summer 1964)

Other staff positions
Joanne Clark Garland, Coordinator of Information (Fall 1960 – Fall 1961)
Andrew De Rocco, Assoc. Director for Science (Fall 1962 – Fall 1963)
Walter B. Lovelace, Editorial Assistant (Fall 1962 – Summer 1965)
Ray P. Cuzzort, Research Assoc. for Science (Fall 1963 – Summer 1965)

Executive Committee, with terms of office (* founding members*)
E. A. Cameron, Prof. of Mathematics, UNC (Fall 1959 – Summer 1965)
Robert D. Clark, President, San Jose State College, former Dean of Faculties, U Oregon (Spring 1963 – Summer 1965)
John H. Franklin, Prof. of History and Dept. Head, Brooklyn College (Fall 1960 – Summer 1965)
*H. F. Harding, Director, National Security Policy Seminar, Ohio State U
*Samuel P. Hays, Assoc. Prof of History, Iowa State (Fall 1957 – Fall 1960)
*Robert B. MacLeod, Cornell University and Pennsylvania Educational Survey (Fall 1957 – Summer 1965)
Sterling M. McMurrin, Prof. of Philosophy, U Utah, former Commissioner of Education (Spring 1963 – Summer 1965)
Margaret Mead, Anthropologist, Assoc. Curator of Ethnology, American Museum of Natural History, NYC (Fall 1960 – Summer 1965)
*Roger B. Page, U Minnesota
H. H. Quint, U Mass (Fall 1960 – Summer 1965)
*Harry H. Ransom, U Texas (Fall 1957 – Spring 1958)
*James H. Robertson, Assistant Dean of Arts and Sciences, U Michigan (Fall 1957 – Summer 1965)
*E. W. Strong, Vice-Chancellor, UC-Berkeley, for U California (statewide) (Fall 1957 – Summer 1965)
Cecil G. Taylor, Dean of A&S, Louisiana State U (Fall 1958 – Summer 1965)
*George R. Waggoner, Dean of LA&S, U Kansas (Fall 1957 – Summer 1965)
*Dudley Wynn, Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, U New Mexico (Fall 1957 – Summer 1965)
*Joseph W. Cohen, Prof. of Philosophy, U Colorado (Fall 1963 – Summer 1965)
*Walter D. Weir, Director of Honors, U Colorado (Fall 1957 – Fall 1963)

Appendix C. The Superior Student Table of Contents, Vols. 1-7 (April 1958-July/August 1965)\(^1\)

**Vol. 1, No. 1 (April, 1958)**
- A New Beginning (Editorial)
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- Visit to the South
- Notes and Comments

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- Our First Six Months, Facts and Figures and the ICSS
- Notes and Comments

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\(^1\) In the interest of space, authors are not listed. Most contributors were faculty and administrators in higher education. Representatives of philanthropic foundations and educational organizations also contributed articles.
Vol. 1, No. 5 (November, 1958)
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  - Discovering the Talented Student, Liaison with High Schools
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- Type 4: No formally designated honors program
- Type 5: Some depts admit 2nd sem. Fr
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Some provisions exist:
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No formally designated honors program:
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- Seton Hill
- Shaw U
- Smith
- South'n Calif. (U of)
- Stetson U

Deptl and divisional:
- Swarthmore
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Education


Professional experience

Pennsylvania State University – University Park

Academic Adviser – Foreign Languages and International Studies, College of the Liberal Arts Undergraduate Studies, October 2006 to present.

Interim Coordinator of Tutoring and First-Year Programs – University Learning Centers (ULC), part-time, August 2005 to June 2006.

Interim Director of Supplemental Instruction (SI) – University Learning Centers (ULC), August 2004 to July 2005, during director’s leave of absence.

Administrative Intern – University Learning Centers (ULC), March 2004 to June 2004.

Academic Adviser – First-Year Testing, Counseling and Advising Program (FTCAP), Summers 2002 and 2003; Division of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), Summers 2003 and 2004.


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Publications/Presentations


Honors

Martorana Family Award (2002), Drexel Award (1997 and 2000), and Graduate Student Recognition Award (2002), Pennsylvania State University, College of Education.