

**Presentation on Collegiate Honors Education to the Joint Meeting  
Of the Education Committees, Arkansas State Legislature  
Dr. Rick Scott, Dean, Norbert O. Schedler Honors College  
University of Central Arkansas (February 3, 2014)**

Good morning. I am Dr. Rick Scott, Dean of the Norbert O. Schedler Honors College at the University of Central Arkansas. On behalf of President Tom Courtway, Executive Assistant Gilbert Baker, Provost Steve Runge, our colleagues at UCA, and Martin Eggenesperger, Vice-Chancellor for Academics at Arkansas State-Mt. Home, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak about collegiate honors education. I am Immediate Past President of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), the organization of honors programs and colleges representing nearly 900 institutions in the United States and around the world. As an executive officer of NCHC I led an effort to build a database of institutional characteristics and practices to better understand honors education. I have important information to share with you, but my remarks will be brief so that we may have time after for a question-and-answer session.

We are about 90 years beyond the start of collegiate honors education, beginning at Swarthmore. It grew slowly for decades but began spreading rapidly in the early 1980s. UCA's honors college was part of this baby boom thirty years ago. Since then we have witnessed a four-fold increase, with perhaps 1400 honors programs and colleges now in existence. In Arkansas, there are honors programs at the following four-year schools: University of Arkansas, Arkansas State University, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Southern Arkansas University, Henderson State University, Harding University, Arkansas Tech University, John Brown University, and the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith.

What is honors education? NCHC defines a university-wide honors college or program as the "academic unit...responsible for devising and delivering in-class and extracurricular academic experiences that provide a distinctive learning environment for selected students," consisting of "measurably broader, deeper, and more complex learner-centered and learner-directed experiences for its students than are available elsewhere in the institution." "In most cases, the honors community is composed of carefully selected teachers and students who form a cross- or multi-disciplinary cohort dedicated to achieving exceptional learning and personal standards. NCHC also defines departmental honors "as educational experiences that are similar but restricted to cohorts of students pursuing the same field of academic study."

Collegiate honors education differs from high school courses for advanced students. High school honors and advanced placement courses often feature accelerated learning. In college, moving quickly through material is not a central goal. Collegiate honors educators led a move away from lecture and discussion to reliance instead on *more complex learner-centered and learner-directed experiences for their students*. No longer the "sage on the stage" but now the "guide at the side," honors faculty members put highly able and motivated students in charge of

their education. How? By having them delve more deeply and think more broadly than elsewhere in the institution. These two features are the hallmarks of honors education at the college-level—delving more deeply and thinking more broadly.

Students *deepen* their education through research and creative scholarship. Nearly three-quarters of honors programs and colleges have research-intensive courses and half require a thesis. NCHC names the goal as “specialized, in-depth learning in addition to self-reflective, analytical, and creative activity.” They go on to say that “the products are often documented scholarship that leads to new integrations, new knowledge, or new understandings of creative products; students pursue a track into post-graduate study, technical careers, or professional careers outside academe.” I can think of nothing that better develops undergraduates or prepares them more for the real world than doing real work in their aspired-to profession.

Students *broaden* their thinking through interdisciplinary study. About 75% of honors programs feature interdisciplinary study. NCHC describes it in these terms: “Programs confront students with alternative modes of inquiry, exploration, discovery, tolerance of ambiguity, and enduring questions. Coursework often requires integrative learning: both local and global learning with connections across time, genre, and disciplines, not always in classroom situations. The products often involve creative integrations of evidence from several disciplines.”

Honors students are not merely being challenged to say “how much they know” or “how fast they can learn it” but are being presented with far more basic questions: “What do you mean?” and “How do you know?” The first question must be answered before the second. All of us must be clear and precise in framing a question (“what do we mean?”) before exploring which method is appropriate to establish its answer (“how do we know?”).

This form of learning not only makes education real but it pushes students and faculty alike *out* of their comfort zones, *out* of the classroom into experiential and service learning, *out* of the campus into internships and hands-on experiences in labs and offices and studios, and *out* of the country into global study and international understanding. George Kuh of the American Association of Colleges and Universities refers to these as “High Impact Educational Practices,” and these practices transform students’ lives and open their horizons.

We are not simply talking about getting into better graduate schools or law schools or gaining acceptance to medical school or into the fast track for corporate success. Of course, that happens all the time for honors graduates—at UCA over 80% of our honors graduates go on to post-baccalaureate training, and business leaders tell us that they want to hire college graduates who can think creatively, work in teams and communicate effectively. But we are also talking about something more fundamental—happiness and human flourishing. Collegiate honors education can produce citizen-scholars, capable of exquisite leadership. To articulate our values and see how they direct our choices for research and creative expression and move us to make the world a better place are the central objectives for many of us in honors education.

It is the mission of the Schedler Honors College at UCA. Who better to lead the next generation than its brightest members? Research in positive psychology has shown that human happiness is directly related to service, self-understanding, and the ability to tolerate ambiguity.

From a dean's point of view, helping students become happy, healthy humans is an important, practical and measurable outcome. From a state legislator's point of view, another important and practical question might be asked, namely, "What are we getting for our money?" When you add up the cost of smaller class sizes, one-on-one faculty mentoring of undergraduates in research and creative expression, honors scholarships, living-and-learning communities that require honors residence halls, and financial support for study abroad, it is evident that honors education is not cheap. What is the value added by honors programs and colleges?

For public institutions there are two critical answers. NCHC data show that 70% of honors institutions conduct program assessment, and what assessment demonstrates is that student development moves faster and the degree to which they learn skill-sets is higher than for the typical undergraduate population. This produces considerably greater rates of retention and graduation. For example, nearly 98% of honors students at UCA are retained into the sophomore class each year, and about 70% graduate in four years, which is significantly higher. Deepening and broadening their education improves skill-sets for honors students, and that translates into greater success as undergraduates as well as a higher likelihood of entering professional and managerial careers. You don't need me to tell you how important it is for our long-term well-being to increase the college-educated labor force in Arkansas.

Moreover, survey results from students recruited to the Schedler Honors College at UCA show that honors programs prevent brain-drain. Each year about 80% of honors students admitted chose UCA because of the Honors College and the resources it provides. Over two-thirds of that group were looking at attend college in another state. That means that half of honors students admitted each year at UCA are not being lost to places outside of Arkansas. This factor is a strong predictor that they will settle here once they finish school and contribute their skills and smarts and service to our state. As a "senior citizen" I am thrilled to have honors graduates taking care of my teeth, planning my estate, and tending to my health care. Smart, caring people are great to work with, are they not?

I want to end by posing a challenge we face. A key strategic task across the nation for honors programs is to build articulation pathways from two-year to four-year schools. This is no less important in Arkansas. Honors educators need to think beyond institution-to-institution transfers and develop honors program-to-honors program articulation agreements. This will not be easy, but four-year schools with established honors curricula can assist two-year schools in developing new programs and enhancing existing ones to ensure that graduates of two-year colleges are ready for a seamless transition to the baccalaureate program. This is practical and important. It contributes to higher graduation rates, and arguably, a more effective allocation of state revenues in higher education in terms of growing the college-educated work force.

Thank you for your attention, and we are now open to any questions you might have.