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A Note from the Honors Director

by Dr. Brian Austin

The 2012-2013 year has been an eventful for the Carson-Newman University Honors program. For starters, we’re part of University now. And with that change, our progress toward becoming an Honors College within the university continues. Thanks to the support of our President, Dr. Randall O’Brien, Executive Vice-President and Provost, Dr. Kina Mallard, and faculty from literally every unit across campus, we continue to add features and improve on existing ones. This annual report will highlight many of these features, as well as provide updates on various elements of the program.

Here are just a few of the advances/improvements that the program has seen in the last year:

- The stipend for Honors Thesis advisors has been increased from $325 to $500;
- Budget has been made available for two students annually to join the Honors Director in traveling to the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) national meeting;
- Luncheon meetings will now be held at the beginning of the academic year for Thesis Advisors as well as Honors faculty members;
- The Honors House has new furniture, television, sound system, sidewalk, and trimmed trees;
- Two students have enjoyed semesters in Glasgow, Scotland as part of the Principia Consortium of Honors Programs that we joined last year;
- Plans are underway for a self-study and site visit for program assessment under the aegis of the NCHC (including a grant application to NCHC to defray the costs of the visit);
- Seniors graduating with Honors are now required to make a public presentation of their thesis research (several presented at the regional Alpha Chi meeting in Nashville earlier this month and most also presented at our own Student Research, Creativity, and Performance Day);
- First-semester Honors freshman all participated in “Lunch with the Director” in the fall;
- On May 10, a record 17 students will graduate with Honors (making 18 for the year, as one student finished early and graduated in December).

So one can see how our many-faceted and mature program continues to grow and to improve. We could not do this without significant support from persons on and off campus. So on behalf of the students, faculty, and staff privileged to be nurtured and challenged by this stimulating and enriching program, I offer enthusiastic gratitude for that essential support.
In less than forty years, the honors program at Carson-Newman has grown from a proposal offered during a routine faculty meeting into a valued component of the broader academic curriculum. While most colleges and universities make some effort to provide an enriched experience for their more intellectually gifted students, Carson-Newman remains distinctive in its efforts. Team taught classes, linked classes, cultural excursions, and the Honors House are supplements to a program of study which culminates in the production of rigorous honors projects, completed by individual students with assistance of the Council and an adviser from their major. This complex and engaging agenda of study is the result of a slow evolution over the course of nearly four decades.

When Dr. Paul Brewer moved that an Honors Council be established by President Fite at the November 1962 faculty meeting, he was being consistent with larger trends in American higher education. Following the end of the Second World War, colleges and universities were rapidly expanding due to the unprecedented opportunity afforded to returning veterans by the G.I. Bill of Rights. College and university access, heretofore denied to all but the lucky and affluent, became more universal.

Adding still more fuel to the fire of American anxiety was the successful launching of Sputnik by the Soviets in the late fifties. This brought forth a renewed call for a return to academic stringency by those who decried what they considered to be the precipitous decline in the educational quality since the end of the war. A vanguard of intellectually skilled citizens was needed to respond to the frightening speed with which the Soviets had annulled America’s technological advantage. It was in this atmosphere that schools across the United States instituted honors programs. Carson-Newman’s move in 1962 can easily be situated against this backdrop. In fact, it is this backdrop which perhaps explains why

1963 – 1965
Paul Brewer
founded the program

1970
Philbeck becomes director

1974
Gerald Wood
becomes director

1963-1965
Philbeck becomes director

1974
Henderson Hall
burns down

First Honors Class
1963 on Henderson Lawn
the move by Dr. Brewer was overwhelmingly approved by the faculty. By December of the same year, the very next faculty meeting, the Council, with Brewer as chair, presented their proposal for a “pre-honors” program.

The new program was accepted by the faculty and the full Council was then formed. The following year, 1963, the first students entered the program. There were nineteen inductees enrolled in the College’s new pre-honors curriculum. To encourage participation in the program, and to add prestige to the distinction of being an honors student, pre-honors freshmen were accorded various privileges. Among the advantages was access to early registration. This was indeed something of a cherished perk. Registration was often a cumbersome process, with students occasionally waiting in line for the better part of the day only to be sent scurrying for signatures from the professors of closed classes. In addition, pre-honors freshmen were informed that they would be given privileges to the closed stacks in the library. Finally, students were provided with a reading list to be completed before actually commencing their formal studies.

The first honors classes were taught out of the departments of English, Philosophy, and French. Students were required to enroll in these classes during the first two years of their study at the college. The final two years of the students’ college career were reserved for the completion of a significant research project. The classes served then as they have subsequently—the formation of an exceptional academic environment which allows for the bonding together as a group of the brightest students on campus.

By the mid-1960s, the honors curriculum was expanded to include American History, Bible, and first year German. By the 1970s, however, the curriculum began to standardize and become more focused on a smaller number of team-taught classes. Because competition between private colleges and public universities has become more fierce, there is an increasing need for programs that add distinction to the small liberal arts college experience. The honors program is just such a distinction.

In some respects, the early Honors program boasted of more diversity than subsequently. A component added to the program in the second year was the common reading list. Students were provided a list of classic and challenging works that they were to read as individuals. They then would reunite to discuss the themes of the books in the company of a professor. This aspect of the program was discontinued in 1979.

In the fall of 1989 the college purchased the home of Dr. Herbert Miles and transformed it into the Honors House. The house served as the location of classes and informal gatherings for honors students. In 1992 a computer lab was established so that current honors students would not have to wait for availability at the general labs. In the fall of 1997 an honors program office was completed in the annex just off from the house. The director and student secretaries used the office as the locus for the program. One of the more popular features of the house continues to be the selection of three students per year to serve as residents. Residents pay a much-reduced boarding fee and are expected merely to keep the house in good working order and to pick up after various activities and meetings.
At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the program boasts of an average of twenty-five new students every year. Students planning to continue their participation in the program through to the completion of the project are awarded special honors scholarships. The Honors House was well used and there has been some renewed interest in attending cultural events subsidized by the honors budget. In addition, the program continues to serve as the primary sponsor of the student honors day and banquet.

On the other hand, the country is experiencing at the end of the twentieth century a renewed interest in hierarchy and “meritocracy.” This counter-egalitarian trend speaks in defense of excellence and often dismisses the postmodern criticism of merit as stemming from resentment. The Honors program must function in an environment marked by both the suspicion and celebration of academic hierarchy. Efforts to accommodate these two trends are further complicated by the pressures of being market worthy. Small colleges by their nature are tuition driven. Special programs like the Honors program are marketed as signs of distinctiveness and so become part of the college’s larger marketing strategy.

The fact that the program continues to attract a large number of superlative students is indicative that the marketing strategy has had some effect. The presence of the multi-paradigmatic approach is a sign that the postmodern criticism of rigid form has been heeded. In addition, the Council has become much more accepting of project proposals that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries. Creative works and non-traditional topics are being more openly accepted as legitimate academic efforts.

Historians tend to cringe at the artificial time boundaries placed like book ends to signal the opening and closing of epochs. The temptation to look at the dawn of the twenty-first century as a time of cross-roads for the honors program is strong but the fact that the approach to honors education at Carson-Newman is becoming increasingly flexible indicates that a crossroads was reached some time in the past and a path towards inclusiveness and diversity has been chosen and is being followed.
This year’s Honors Weekend Scholarship Competition was a great success, hosting a record number of 74 competitors, coming to us from as far away as south Florida and California. There were among these also a record number of students who scored 32 or higher on the ACT. The atmosphere for the weekend was upbeat, hopeful, tense (of course), and full of incredible positive energy. We are hoping that this issues into a record class this fall, and we are working toward that end. On the numerical survey completed by the prospective students regarding multiple aspects of the weekend, the average score reported was 4.5 out of a possible 5.

This weekend was a wonderful experience! It tells me even more that CN is right for me.

The mixer helped me meet honors students and talk casually with them.

I really enjoyed staying with current students. That was the most informative/enjoyable part of the weekend.

Being able to see the friendliness and openness of the students at the mixer and panel discussion emphasizes the community of the campus as did the students’ reviews on the professors.”
Statistics

Concentration of Majors

Tennessee Students

Out-of-State Students

CA  FL  GA  KY  MI  NC

OH  SC  VA  Wash. D.C.  Korea
The honors social events are pretty fun, with some good ideas for the nights—holiday parties, movie nights, etc. It’s nice to have a reason to hang out with other Honors kids that I like but rarely see outside of class without having to plan it.

-Etta Long

I always look forward to the movie nights because we get to watch them on the big tv and eat lots of snacks!

-Sydney Chandley

Quiz Bowl - March 11
Meet the Residents - September 10
Social Event Blurbs

It's always a lot of fun to hang out at the honors house no matter what the event!

- Niki Green

There is always something unique and exciting to do at the Monday night socials. You never know what movie you'll watch, what game you'll play, or what snack you'll eat, but it's always worth while. Having Monday night socials is such a wonderful opportunity to build a tight knit community among the honors students. The honors workers are so hard working and sweet in putting these events together. For example, Mary made some delicious punch and cookies while watching the current UT game on tv.

- Kacie Hoyle

Halloween Party - October 29
Louisville Fall Trip - September 22
I look forward to the major social events every semester. There's always some really neat event that I wouldn't be able to attend without the planning and financial help from the Honors program.

- Keith Baker
Senior Profiles

Callie Booher

Hometown
Cleveland, TN

Majors
Biology and Spanish

Honors Project
¿HAY UN MÉDICO EN LA CASA?: Bridging the American/Latino Cultural Divide of Health Professionals

Favorite Honors Memory
My favorite Honors memory was going to see the play “Charlie’s Aunt” for a major event.

Plans After Graduation
After graduation, I will be attending medical school at Virginia Tech’s Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM).

Jennifer Bowman

Hometown
Cleveland, TN

Major
Biology/Pre-med

Minor
Spanish

Honors Project
Evaluation of a Mass Spectrometry-Based Comparison of Structures Using Methylene Footprinting of a Protein-Ligand Complex: The Calmodulin-Peptide Model

Favorite Honors Memory
I enjoyed having a Lord of the Rings marathon in the honors house. But for a more serious favorite memory, I’ve always enjoyed listening to the seniors present their honors projects. Some people come up with awesome projects, and I know a lot of it was possible because of the honors program.

Plans After Graduation
I am attending Quillen College of Medicine in Johnson City, TN.
Joshua Denny

Hometown
Tullahoma, TN

Major
Biochemistry and Biology

Honors Project
LESD as a Practical Tool for Protein Structure Determination

Favorite Honors Memory
I really enjoyed visiting the CDC with the Honors Program; it was nice to see everything they had there. It was just a fun trip to go on.

Plans After Graduation
I will be going to the UT Microbiology department where I’ve been accepted into their PhD program

Kalianna Freels

Hometown
Clinton, TN

Major
Religion with an Emphasis in Ministry Studies

Honors Project
The Reception History of the Use of Dance in Christian Worship from the Late Medieval Era through the Reformation

Favorite Honors Memory
English 101 Honors with Dr. Lee. The people in that class and the way that Dr. Lee taught it made it so wonderful. Most of my favorite college experiences came from that class.

Plans After Graduation
I am going to go to South Africa with the Religion department. Then, I will be moving to Atlanta to attend the McAfee School of Theology.
Senior Profiles

Faith Long

Hometown
Morristown, TN

Major
Communications with an Emphasis in Journalism

Minor
Business Administration

Honors Project
The Creation of a Christian-Oriented Magazine for College-Age Young Women

Favorite Honors Memory
When there were about 40 of us in the living room watching Princess Bride; “The Chronicles of Blue and Grey” at the Tennessee Theater; all of my Honors classes.

Plans After Graduation
I will be getting married! I will then try to find a job writing, editing, or doing PR work (or all three). Eventually I would like to start/continue my own magazine (which was my Honors Project) and get relevant Masters degrees to return to teach at the college level.

Chance Lewis

Hometown
Dandridge, TN

Majors
Biology and Biochemistry

Honors Project
Synthesis, Characterization, and Evaluation of a New Covalent Labeling Reagent for the Structural Study of Biomolecules within an Electrospray Stream

Favorite Honors Memory
Post-symphony gelatto time

Plans After Graduation
Medical School at UT Health Science Center in Memphis
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Dr. Christine Dalton - Advisor

Faith E. Long
The Creation of a Christian-Oriented Magazine for College-Age Young Women
Dr. Sheridan Barker & Dr. Christine Jones - Advisors

Michael R. Lugo
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Abigail R. Parker
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Dr. Ray Dalton - Advisor

Kendra N. Payne
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Dr. Angie Wood - Advisor

Rachel F. Ramsey
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Dr. Chad Airhart - Advisor

Thomas R. Waldrup
Blood Will Have Blood: Film Script and Treatment
Dr. Mark Borchert - Advisor

Kathryn R. Walker
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Dr. Michael Shipe - Advisor