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The Honors College at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, has as its motto: "Learning for living, not merely for making a living." With an interdisciplinary curriculum rich in the liberal arts, the college serves a diverse student body and takes frequent advantage of the cultural resources of the Baltimore metropolitan area.

Learning for Living through Metropolitan Honors

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) styles itself a mid-sized urban research university that emphasizes its programs in science and technology but also recognizes the necessary, invigorating contribution that a full complement of liberal arts disciplines makes to any institution worthy of the title "university." A largely commuter campus, UMBC boasts a student body of ethnic and geographic diversity in an urban area equally diverse; its Honors College provides an enriched liberal arts experience for specially talented members of the student body and challenges them to an intellectual exercise well beyond the immediately utilitarian one with which the campus' science/technology emphasis and mission are very often associated.

Background

Since its opening, UMBC has worked to gain a sense of identity, has become quite selective in its admissions, has acquired a physical plant consisting of ten times the number of its original new buildings, and has installed an up-to-date cybercapability.

UMBC was established in 1966 to answer the perceived need for a state-supported, teaching and research-oriented university to serve the Baltimore metropolitan area that was then undergoing revitalization. Also significant were the development of the planned community of Columbia, ten minutes from the campus, and the location of Baltimore-Washington International Airport five minutes away. At the beginning of the 1980s,

UMBC felt that it was time to look beyond the immediate Baltimore metropolitan area for its student constituency; this could be seen as an attempt to enrich intellectually and culturally the urban area for the benefit of which UMBC was established, i.e., to bring the world to Baltimore, to match academically a similar goal to be realized economically and socially at this stage in the city's revitalization. UMBC also made a special effort to attract the many very talented Maryland residents who were pursuing their higher education goals out of state, an effort that could mollify the "them-us" relationship between the Baltimore metropolitan area and the rest of Maryland by providing an in-state academic/intellectual haven in Maryland's sole metropolis.

In 1981, an honors program was initiated at UMBC. Participants were required merely to take a number of courses labeled "honors"—either honors versions of regular courses, many of which satisfied campus-wide general education requirements, or specially commissioned interdisciplinary honors seminars, no more than two of which were offered in any given semester. Although the program did attract highly intelligent, highly motivated students, it lacked a coherent honors atmosphere, a regimen of both curricular and noncurricular elements, and a significant location on the campus.

In 1987, a task force was assigned to examine the existing honors offerings, to solicit observations on them both from UMBC's faculty and administration and from outside sources, and to recommend changes necessary to imbue the program with a distinctive coherence and identity. Recommendations included the establishment of an Honors College to create and foster the atmosphere of a small college within the context of the advantages of scale at what had by then become a midsized urban university. It also was determined that all of the campus' graduates should have considerable exposure to liberal arts learning. The clear intention of the task force's recommendations was that the honors college should serve in this regard as a model for the campus as a whole.

In particular, the position of dean or director was to be established with the sole noncurricular responsibility of being the administration of the college's affairs. A coherent set of academic requirements was to be established for members of the college. A formal program of noncurricular activities was to be sponsored by the college not only for its membership but for as many of the campus' broader student constituency that cared to participate and/or as resources would allow. Special scholarship funds were to be made available for members of the college, which was to have a geographical focus on the campus consonant with the intellectual focus it was providing for its students. There was also to be a formal recognition for students who completed the general honors studies required by the college. The administration of the campus provided resources and leadership in realizing all these recommendations.

Currently, the college sponsors 40-50 offerings each semester; most are still honors versions of regular courses, but these are now accompanied by as many as six specially-commissioned interdisciplinary honors seminars. Among the topics of these seminars have been "Knowledge and Responsibility," "Leadership and Responsibility," "Professional Ethics and Decision-Making," "The Sixteenth Century," and "The Immigrant Experience in Literature and Film." Such courses were created to address

the fondness of the human intellect for making connections. As interdisciplinary offerings, they demonstrate the connections among subjects and disciplines; such connections account for the unity of a true liberal studies curriculum that honors at UMBC feels duty-bound to advocate and maintain. A number of these seminars are team-taught by faculty from various disciplines, e.g., philosophy/history/political science or geography/photography, who engage in dialogue with each other in front of the class; the aim here is to demonstrate that a thinking, liberally-educated person who specializes in one discipline can deal intelligently and meaningfully with other subjects. In addition, each semester a number of faculty create honors components for regular courses they are teaching; a small number of college members—usually one to five—in each of these courses are awarded honors credit on completion of the honors component.

The semester honors course rosters are so planned that members of the college must take some honors work outside their areas of interest or concentration in order to maintain their good standing. As a general honors program, the college emphasizes breadth of intellectual pursuit and fosters curiosity and intellectual experimentation in its membership.

How the College Works

The college emphasizes that what distinguishes an honors course is its demand for a sophisticated approach to learning, its provision of an opportunity for more intimate dialogue between instructor and student, its emphasis on the exercise of rhetorical ability (both oral and written), and its affirmation of the priority of the systematic pursuit of knowledge. Current requirements for the award of a Certificate of General Honors include good standing in the college and the completion of six honors courses with a minimum grade of “B” in each.

Prospective members must make a separate application to the honors college, which can be considered only after the student has been admitted to UMBC, although both applications may be submitted at the same time. The honors college application requires three submissions: an essay on one of four specified topics; answers in essay form to four interest/background questions; and a letter of recommendation.

No minimum Scholastic Aptitude Test score nor grade point average is required for membership in the honors college. The initiative and commitment to liberal learning shown by a student’s completing the separate admission application demonstrate a certain curiosity and vivacity of intellect that is worthy of consideration, and the college is reluctant to do anything to discourage such demonstration. This policy has resulted in the last few years in a profile for incoming freshmen (of whom approximately 130 matriculated in the fall of 1997) of an average combined SAT score between 1300 and 1320 and an average high school GPA in the 3.8 to 3.85 range.

The separate application to the college makes membership something distinctive and indicates that we are interested in our members personally and as individuals, something, it is felt, that cannot be conveyed adequately by a check-off system in which the student indicates on the school’s general application an interest in honors and is then automatically considered for that school’s honors program. It also requires

an initiative and expenditure of effort thought to be more indicative of the student's special intellectual commitment than of a casual attitude that having honors on one's record looks good on graduate school and job applications. Also, the reluctance to advertise a minimum grade point average or SAT score emanates from the feeling that it would fail to convey the individual interest the college takes in each of its members by categorizing unduly the curiosity and intellectual liveliness for which the college looks in its members and would send an inappropriate message that such qualities are subject to some rigid quantification on which we find all too many bright and talented students depend for reassurance. We are committed to showing our members that they should be equally as proud to be able to think critically and to express themselves accurately as they are to produce some specific number, since so many of the major issues in life do not lend themselves to quantification.

While the college does not require a personal interview for admission, all applicants are encouraged to visit the campus to speak with the director or associate director; and the application of a student whose statistics do not meet the current college profile is never rejected without an interview. As does every honors program, UMBC's honors college has its Cinderella success stories—the cases in which the student with a 1000 combined SAT produces an extremely literate and thoughtful essay, proves to be very eloquent in personal conversation, and, once admitted to honors studies, at least proves to be successful if (s)he does not, indeed, set the intellectual pace for his/her fellows. Also familiar are the stories of the 1560-SAT students who, quickly admitted to honors study on the basis of past performance or promise of future success, equally quickly drop from the program because they decline to pursue the disciplinary breadth required for maintaining good standing in the college.

Transfer students and those UMBC students who wish to join the college after matriculation on the campus complete the same application as freshmen do. Such applications provide the college with a number of nontraditional students. A 3.25 college grade point average is generally required for admission in these cases.

Older and Wiser Students

UMBC has always had a considerable number of nontraditional-aged students; among such students are participants in the University's Golden ID Program under which retired persons can attend classes and acquire credit without paying tuition. The honors college has made every effort to involve this contingent in all facets of its program. Indeed, such students' maturity, curiosity, experience, and eagerness to learn lend an invaluable dimension to the honors experience in the classroom, as well as in less formal situations. This has been particularly evident in recent versions of the college's foreign study activities. The college extends special invitations to a number of adult, nontraditional students to join younger members in attending a seminar and dinner with the Visiting Scholar whom it invites to campus each semester. Indeed, these more mature segments of the campus and college population are themselves valued by the college as exemplifying its motto, "Learning for living, not just for making a living." As a mature, sophisticated approach to learning for its own sake is a hall-

mark of honors, these older, more experienced members of the honors community, since they certainly have not returned to formal studies to pursue ulterior professional/vocational goals, provide role models for the college advocacy of intellectual culture as an end in itself. Their intellectual desire is that for which the college has designed its program; their presence in that program will bring them into proximity with younger, less experienced students for whom that desire, it is hoped, will be contagious.

At whatever age, with whatever academic credentials, students who show promise for honors are marked by one or more of a number of characteristics: they are curious; they are willing at least to try learning or learning about something new on the suggestion of someone more experienced, even if they are not initially curious about it; they are less dependent on the security arising out of quantification; they enjoy discussing questions that have no immediately apparent answers; they enjoy the process of finding the answer as much as or more than the satisfaction of possessing the answer; they read for pleasure as well as for necessity; and they can conceive of two sides to almost any question.

The College as a Good Citizen

The honors college considers its location in the metropolitan Baltimore area to be a major asset to its program. Indeed, the city is a great teaching resource, a kind of permanent "City As Text," which the college can use to pursue another of its collaborative learning goals, experiential and service learning, e.g., through its annual "Project Discover" seminar. Having begun as a volunteer activity of the Honors Students Association, "Project Discover" provides an opportunity to engage in a multifaceted service/learning activity from working with fourth and fifth-grade students in two inner-city elementary schools to compose grant applications and devise assessment instruments to support and evaluate such activities. Project Discover both brings UMBC to the city, as college members work each week of the semester in the schools with the youngsters, and the city to the campus, as a number of segments of the program bring the youngsters to the campus. This activity affords the university and the honors college an opportunity to teach social responsibility by the very powerful pedagogical device of example.

UMBC's location in a southwestern suburb of Baltimore provides the best of two worlds. The campus is close to the city and its cultural attractions, e.g., the Walters Art Gallery and the Baltimore Museum of Art, to which access is provided by excellent highways, a public bus line, and a campus shuttle. Yet, the school's setting is country-like, separate enough from the city to inspire that camaraderie fostered in a self-contained community. A major effort constantly has to be made, however, to engage the commuting majority of the student population in spending sufficient time on campus to benefit from that camaraderie. The Honors Students Association, which is responsible for much of the noncurricular activity associated with the honors college, spearheads efforts to schedule activities that draw commuting students to campus.

Membership in the college has grown from 274 in 1990-91 to almost 500 currently; an enrollment of 500 is likely the upper limit consistent both with the college's resources and with its philosophy of personal interaction in a community of learning.

In fact, it is felt that quantity most definitely has an effect on quality, i.e., that, once an honors program or college exceeds a certain size, whatever may be the number of its staff or the amount of its resources, it loses a crucial collegial atmosphere. In this atmosphere, it is possible, at least theoretically, for all members of a community of learning to become familiar and to interact with each other on a person-to-person basis. When this atmosphere of collaboration and familiarity is lost, also lost is the excitement of sharing with a kindred spirit the joy of learning or understanding something neither previously known nor understood. This excitement can be held out to students as a major reward for undertaking honors studies and, historically, has been associated with no less eminent master teachers and learners than Socrates and Aristotle.

As members of the college reach their senior year, they are encouraged to maintain their good standing in the college by pursuing their bachelor's degree in the honors track of their chosen major; currently, more than 20 major programs at UMBC have honors options.

A Place of their Own

To reinforce the intellectual with a geographical focus, an area in the library has been set aside as an honors college suite, part of which is a lounge and study area, equipped with computer facilities, where students can congregate socially and/or can study. An area of academic emphasis in the residence halls is reserved for preferential assignment to college members, and the college encourages all its members to have the experience of residing on campus. There are a number of other perquisites for membership in the college, e.g., extended borrowing privileges at the library and free or reduced-price participation in excursions such as theater parties in New York. The Honors Students Association holds regular meetings and organizes social, cultural, and service activities for members of the college.

All of these facets of the honors college program are designed to foster a spirit of distinctiveness and of intellectual community and to provide means for the college members to identify with each other as an integral group. The effort seems to have been successful in that members of the college readily organize study groups, have formed their own informal reading and discussion group, and have taken the lead in organizing on their own such activities as a Spring Prom. In short, they seem to find it very easy to work with each other within the scope of the college's program, realizing another of the college's goals, i.e., an appreciation of community values and altruism.

Honors as a Tool for Democratization

There is a basic and important element in the philosophy of honors education at UMBC that makes an urban setting particularly appropriate and informs much of what the Honors College is and does. Specifically, the college sees one of its responsibilities to be the democratization of the liberal arts; it takes its cue from sentiments expressed in an admittedly dated, but still quite valid statement of the principles of liberal arts education, the famous 1945 *General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee*:

Democracy is the view that not only the few but that all are free, in that everyone governs his own life and shares in the responsibility for the management of the community. This being the case, it follows that all human beings stand in need of an ampler and rounded education. The task of modern democracy is to preserve the ancient ideal of liberal education and to extend it as far as possible to all members of the community...To believe in the equality of human beings is to believe that the good life, and the education which trains the citizen for the good life, are equally the privilege of all (pp. 52-53).

...democracy, by broadening the basis of government to include all the people, ideally demands of all the education formerly reserved for a privileged class. The distinction has ceased between inferiors trained only for practical tasks and superiors broadly trained for government (p. 244).

Holding such a view and acting towards the Baltimore area in every way calculated to realize the ideal embodied therein, the college preempts the charge of elitism, not infrequently leveled at honors education; honors at UMBC reflects the campus' sense of responsibility to the community, e.g., the Albin O. Kuhn Library is open to the public, who have access both to the book stacks and to the building's state-of-the-art electronic facilities.

Among its other goals, honors education is, or should be, dedicated to accomplishing two ends: nurturing a hunger to know simply for the sake of knowing in those who already bring to that education an avid curiosity. Curiosity is a much better indicator of success, at least in completing the requirements for the Certificate of General Honors at UMBC, than is a stellar SAT score or a GPA of valedictory or salutatory quality; and instilling and fostering such a curiosity in those who come to honors education without such previous disposition. The latter are those who approach honors for the utility of how good it will look on their records.

Some goals of honing the basic human faculties of analysis and exposition may be especially appropriate to a metropolitan setting—understanding the difference between “need” and “want;” distinguishing between appearance and reality; appreciating that the world is culturally diverse and that technology has made daily contact unavoidable along with the need to deal with this diversity; perceiving the nature of altruism and the necessity for practicing a certain amount of it if humans are to realize successfully their natural potential for being “political animals,” as Aristotle represents them, i.e., as living together in communities (*poleis*) marked by sophisticated interaction among their members.

The pursuit of the perfection of these faculties is open to everybody, no matter what may be his/her native talent, socioeconomic status, or educational advantage and preparation; one simply needs a normally functioning cerebrobiological apparatus—Hercule Poirot's “lectl grey cells”—which afford us the designation “sapiens” in our

biological classification. This is particularly the case in an urban setting with a considerable population of the materially disadvantaged.

The honors curriculum addresses these issues of analysis and exposition in a variety of ways. Classes are small (15 students on average), which facilitates dialogue and the collaborative learning of which it is an integral part. More writing is done than in regular courses. Thus, rhetoric, both in its oral and in its written manifestation, is addressed across the curriculum. Even in honors versions of regular, single-discipline courses, instructors are expected to introduce material from beyond the normal scope of the discipline, e.g., ethical, economic, and sociological matters are investigated in the project-based honors version of introduction to engineering science. Instructors expect and seek in students' responses evidence of an independent intellect that, on its own initiative, pursues study of a subject beyond what is specified in a syllabus.

A Metropolitan Image for Honors

This democratic ideal quickly runs afoul of the issue of critical mass for honors programs, i.e., that point at which an increase in the size of a program may ipso facto adversely affect the program's quality. What is to be done?

In this country today, of course, we cannot afford the naivete of thinking that the paradigm of multiple small honors operations can ever be realized at a large metropolitan university. We can only limit within reason the size of a single honors program or college and compensate by such devices as opening untaken seats in honors courses to honors college nonmembers with the approval of the courses' instructors, as inviting the whole campus student body to join us in attending the public presentations of our Visiting Scholars, and as encouraging nonmembers to join us for our field excursions and study-abroad programs. In short, availability of honors education should depend not merely upon ability, achievement, and favorable circumstance, but also upon a commitment to the life of the mind that is so strong that the one who has that commitment is not bothered because the use of that phrase, "the life of the mind," may not be "cool" in his/her everyday milieu. In a metropolitan area, we have a magnificent opportunity to encourage a large audience in this way of thinking.

The Role of Mission

It is obvious from the foregoing that UMBC's honors college believes in and practices a new paradigm of honors education at a sizable metropolitan university. Whereas honors programs at such institutions have traditionally been viewed mainly, if not solely, as catering to students of extraordinary talent, two issues that pertain to university student bodies as wholes have, in our view, imposed upon such programs major added responsibilities: (a) the generally poor preparation in and respect for liberal arts learning with which students, honors and nonhonors alike, come to their higher education; and (b) the almost exclusively preprofessional or prevocational mission that higher education has adopted whether by design or by default. The responsibility which these two conditions impose upon general honors programs is that of keeping alive the humane tradition of liberal arts education, i.e., the culture of the uniquely human facul-

ties of analysis and exposition that are worthy of culture for their own sake and not merely incidental to their contribution to some ulterior goal such as “making money,” more euphemistically styled “making a living.” Honors college members are often reminded that after leaving UMBC they have upwards of 175,000 hours—the equivalent of 7291 days or 20 full years—of their lives to look forward to as purely discretionary leisure time. They are reminded that the responsibility for disposing wisely of this time is an imposing one and that the catchy saying “A mind is a terrible thing to waste” applies well beyond the commercial venue for which it was composed.

While perhaps somewhat exaggerated, Jeremy Rifkin’s book, *The End of Work*, pictures a future almost as bizarre and frightening in its abundance of leisure as one that the most fertile imagination of a science-fiction writer could conjure up:

... the question of utilization of idle time is going to loom large over the political landscape. The transition from a society based on mass employment in the private sector to one based on non-market criteria for organizing social life will require a rethinking of the current world view. Redefining the role of the individual in a society absent of mass formal work is, perhaps, the seminal issue of the coming age (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 1995), 235.

Some compensation would have to be supplied both for the loss to the individual of self-identification and self-pride and for the loss to the community of the socially organizing influence that work supplies. Part of a general honors program’s contribution to the metropolitan milieu is to bring the world at large to the city and thereby provide two opportunities: the intellectual occupation of those attracted to the campus; and by emphasizing breadth of exposure to many disciplines and ideas (to the same extent that universities in general seem to focus on expertise and mastery in one “major” area), the acquisition of an intellectual versatility and adaptability that can be taken away from the campus.

The Challenge of Commuting Students

By setting an intellectual tone for their campuses and by offering opportunities that encourage all, not just the talented, to refine their basic humanness to the limits of their respective potentials, honors programs with large metropolitan audiences address this responsibility to that other facet of human existence not related to work nor to physical sustenance.

A major challenge is the fact that at such institutions a sizable portion of the student population tend to be commuters; at UMBC, approximately 70% of the student body fall within this category. Since honors education traditionally is marked by close collegiality among those pursuing it—the development of a camaraderie born of geographical proximity and of common curiosity to learn and a common striving to assuage that curiosity—the act of commuting interferes with honors education both physically and spiritually. Physically, the commuter’s bond with his/her fellows and with

the common locus of the activity they share is continually interrupted. Spiritually, the problem for honors education is more serious.

Commuting functions commonly in our consciousness as an aspect of working to earn a living, i.e., as that which caters to our physical needs. We go to work that extends over chronologically finite chunks of our lives; there are strict temporal bounds to our involvement with work from which we come back after a specifically determined length of time. Our working selves then automatically turn off by force of a change of location. However, learning is both involuntary and voluntary and by human nature knows no geographical nor chronological bounds; we have to make an effort not to learn, i.e., we must deliberately turn off our tendency to learn. When we impose the commuting paradigm of our working lives on our learning lives, we are as much as telling both ourselves and the world (a) that our natural tendency to learn can be ignored, that is, we can still be responsible *homines sapientes* if we learn only when we are sitting in class; and (b) that learning is work, a necessary evil good only for some ulterior end and of little or dubious value in itself.

The honors college often reminds its constituency that "school" originates in the Greek term *schol*, ("leisure") and that the concept of school derives from the freedom from work. The learning that is supposed to take place in school should as far as possible be conceptually dissociated from the onerous effort involved in work that keeps body and soul together. This is all summed up in the UMBC honors college motto "Learning for living, not merely for making a living."

Honors programs at heavily commuter institutions must counteract these inhibiting physical and spiritual effects. One way to do this is to create opportunities both on and off campus for commuters to have the spiritual experience of enjoying learning and the emotional lift of associating with similarly curious colleagues in realizing that joy. On campus, UMBC's honors college sponsors small classes with their increased opportunity for dialogue among participants; and it also arranges informal gatherings for lunchtime discussions, opportunities to meet with the semester's Visiting Scholars in a relatively intimate setting, and regular meetings of the Honors Students Association. Off campus, as already noted, opportunities include theater excursions in Baltimore, Washington, or New York, museum excursions in these three cities and elsewhere, a "history crawl" of downtown Baltimore, attendance at state, regional, and national honors conferences, and study/travel programs abroad. Service projects can function both on and off campus to establish and strengthen the bonds typical of the honors community of learning atmosphere.

Work itself, also, can interfere with the intense devotion to learning usually associated with honors education; it does so by imposing restrictions on time that can be devoted to studies and on scheduling of courses. The interesting thing is that honors students at UMBC are frequently found to be working not to support their education nor basic living expenses. Honors students are more likely than others to receive financial support for their years in college, but to support a lifestyle to which they have become accustomed and/or which our society's materialism advertises as admirable. Here is another job for honors education—to convince its constituency that there is a

worthwhile side to life beyond the material. There are many opportunities for physical culture, such as health and fitness spas. Honors programs should see themselves as proponents of a very different but equally significant industry—mind spas!

In the Last Analysis

The UMBC honors college sees it as its duty to make intellectual exercise for its own sake available to as wide an audience as possible; in a metropolitan setting that would seem to be a prime one for pursuing this goal. With the heavy devotion of colleges and universities to emphasize the professional or vocational side of higher education, honors programs and colleges may be the last bastion of preserving that original ideal of higher, liberal education: to perfect oneself as a human being.

Suggested Readings

Harvard University, "General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee," with an introduction by James Bryant Conant. (Cambridge, MA:

Harvard University Press, 1945.)

Rifkin, Jeremy, *The End of Work* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1995).

Metropolitan Universities: Who Are We?

We are located in or near the urban center of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) with a population of at least 250,000.

We are universities, public and private, whose mission includes teaching, research, and professional service. We offer both graduate and undergraduate education in the liberal arts and two or more professional fields. The latter programs are strongly practice-oriented and make extensive use of clinical sites in the metropolitan area.

The majority of our students come from our metropolitan regions. Our students are highly diverse in age, ethnic and racial identity, and socioeconomic background, reflecting the demographic characteristics of their region. Many come to us by transfer from community colleges and other baccalaureate institutions, many are place-bound employees and commuters, and many require substantially longer than the traditional time to graduate, for financial and other personal reasons.

We are oriented toward and identify with our regions, proudly and by deliberate design. Our programs respond to regional needs while striving for national excellence.

We are strongly interactive. We are dedicated to serving as intellectual and creative resources to our metropolitan regions in order to contribute to their economic development, social health, and cultural vitality, through education, research, and professional outreach. We are committed to collaboration and cooperation with the many communities and clienteles in our metropolitan regions and to helping to bridge the socioeconomic, cultural, and political barriers among them.

We are shaping and adapting our own structures, policies, and practices to enhance our effectiveness as key institutions in the lives of our metropolitan regions and their citizens.

