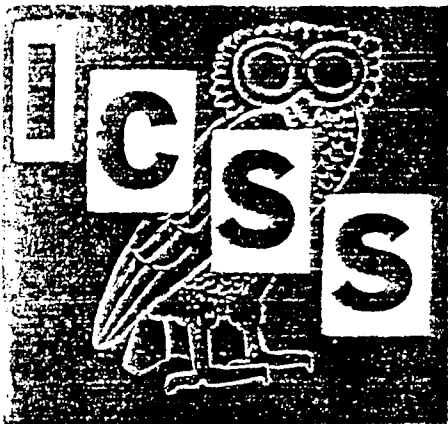


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# the superior student

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INTER-UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON THE SUPERIOR STUDENT

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## ON INDEPENDENT STUDY

An undergraduate program of independent study is not an Honors program. It is a single device. In itself, without the power of a continuous and varied Honors program, it cannot provide the needed climate for motivation, the required range and flexibility. In our large public institutions it has been meager indeed in the number of good students attracted and engaged. Equally meager has been its impact upon other students and faculty.

The practice of independent study has traditionally been confined to the upperclass years. It has been followed chiefly in some small liberal arts colleges. In its least casual form, it has placed the student under a semi-or full tutorial relationship to a faculty member. It has been in the nature of books assigned, papers handed in or read, a laboratory or other project. There is little or no dialogue; the procedure is invisible to others for it is usually a private transaction between a student and a teacher. Being a solitary approach to the abler student, it denies the communal aspects of learning, teaching and scholarship. The students do not learn from each other, as they do in the mutuality and cooperation, the sustained challenge and stimulation of a joint group venture. Nor does independent study imply the modifications of curricula, the

# Growth of the Honors Program at **Stetson University**

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In some sense every Honors program represents a search for a more meaningful approach to the educational process. For this reason Honors programs will continue to evolve and develop as long as educators are sensitive to the needs of inquiring students. The objectives of such programs, however, remain constant. Briefly stated they amount to this: American college education must be worthy of its best students; or, to put it another way, a good Honors program will so challenge and motivate the superior student that he will feel compelled to put forth his best efforts in meeting the demands of his intellectual experiences.

The premise of any Honors program must necessarily be that good students will respond to good teaching, and that if given an opportunity they will set a faster and more demanding pace for themselves than is likely to happen within the framework of the traditional curriculum. When the program at Stetson began its operation less than five years ago the methods were frankly experimental. It succeeded because admini-

strators, faculty members and students were willing and eager to give their time and best efforts to it.<sup>2</sup>

In the first years of the program an Honors student entered at the beginning of his junior year, pursued a course of independent study under the supervision of a faculty committee, and took written and oral comprehensive examinations at the close of his senior year. As the program grew, special seminars in English and the social sciences were made available to outstanding freshmen and sophomores. In addition, the faculty established an interdisciplinary Honors seminar for juniors and seniors.

After four years of development there appears to be general agreement that the university cannot do without an Honors program. Any institution which aims for standards of excellence must strive to excite and challenge its best students. A program which allows a less fragmented use of the student's time and which encourages him to work independently offers hope that the bright undergraduate might even dare to make intellectual activity his central concern. There is also agreement on the need for proficiency in one of the traditional departments. Most of these students want to do graduate work of some kind; they do not want to sacrifice breadth for the sake of depth nor depth for the sake of breadth. Finally, there is growing agreement that the central problem is one of balancing the need for detailed supervision and some definite amount of regular course work with the legitimate desire for greater freedom and independent study.

#### THE FOUR-YEAR PROGRAM

In planning for the four-year program the Honors Committee's first assumption was that a superior student could acquire

<sup>1</sup>Chairman, Honors Program, Stetson University.

<sup>2</sup>For more information on the history of the program see John Hicks, "Stetson's New Honors Seminars for Freshmen and Sophomores," *THE SUPERIOR STUDENT* (May-June, 1959) 18.

the proper foundation for specialized work more rapidly than the regular student. Specifically, on the Stetson campus, this meant a different approach to general education requirements. The Committee decided to construct a program which could be completed early in the undergraduate's career but which would at the same time furnish a sufficiently diversified experience to enable the Honors student to select a major with some degree of competence during his sophomore year. To facilitate the achievement of this objective and because superior students should be able to dispense with some of the university's basic requirements when sufficiently motivated to do so, the Committee decided to *require* entering freshmen to pass a six-hour exemption examination in one of the general education courses as a prerequisite for admission to the Honors Program.<sup>3</sup> This also placed emphasis on actual achievement as well as high potential.

The integrated Honors program imposes five general area requirements which the student must complete by the end of his sophomore year. They are in the areas of the humanities, the social and behavioral sciences, the natural sciences, religion and philosophy, and either the history of western civilization or mathematics.

There is also each year a so-called professional requirement. In most cases this will mean pursuing the study of a foreign language for four years. For some students, an economics major for example, a year of statistics or an additional course in the natural sciences might be substituted for the second language. In any case the committee intends that a student should have a reading knowledge of two languages or genuine proficiency in one.

The Honors student will be expected

to meet the basic demands of his department during his sophomore and junior years. As a junior he participates in the *Upperclass Honors Seminar*, which is designed to relate all areas of the student's studies. The faculty-student ratio in the course is one to five, and members of the seminar staff serve as the chairmen for the various committees that supervise the students' work.

Because it is both a research and a content course, the Seminar plays an effective role in the Program. On one level it tends to make students more conscious of the vital interrelationships of knowledge which immediately concern the areas of their specialization. On another level it opens up new avenues of thought and often encourages students in the independent exploration of problems that bear directly on their chief intellectual concerns. The Seminar also gives faculty members an opportunity to evaluate the progress of each student and to assess more realistically the qualitative as well as the quantitative worth of his independent work.

At the conclusion of his junior year the Honors student takes a written comprehensive examination covering the areas specified in his departmental program. If he passes, he undertakes a program of full independent study in his senior year and prepares a thesis. At the end of the year he takes an oral comprehensive examination which begins with a defense of his thesis and gradually broadens to include the whole range of his undergraduate training. The examining committee includes faculty members from all divisions in the college of liberal arts.

#### FACULTY AND STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

From the standpoint of the student an Honors program must provide an opportunity for a type of study that would be

<sup>3</sup>Nineteen freshmen (thirteen men and six women) qualified for admission to the program in September, 1960.

impossible in the regular curriculum. He is likely to find the program appealing to the extent that it affords an opportunity for him to direct his own work and at his own pace. The more able student always believes that he will work twice as hard and twice as fast if he sets his own course of study. He will argue that the ordinary routine of classes fragments his day to such an extent that the aims of genuine scholarly endeavor are constantly frustrated. Once out on his own, however, he often faces an even greater frustration arising from a sense of loss of direction. Faculty members should be prepared to tolerate such a situation for a time. The student will either begin to find himself and the quality and quantity of his work will improve rapidly or his efforts will become increasingly more fruitless. In this case he should be removed from the program.

One cannot establish a precise formula for detecting the strays or misfits, but it does seem clear that faculty member and student must know each other well enough to create a basis for a realistic appraisal of the student's achievement. It is important too that the Honors student must be happy with his decision to keep academic matters foremost in his concern. More than this, it is essential, if he is to lead a disciplined life, that he willingly accept the responsibility for making his own choices, both among academic subjects and among the non-curricular aspects of collegiate life.

I would argue that it is the emergence of the disciplined mind and life which is or ought to be the real hallmark of an Honors program. Students who graduate with Honors must demonstrate that they are ready and able to assume the responsibilities of adults. They must have become conscious of standards

and, we would hope, also conscious of how they measure up to these standards. The disciplined life is a result of a high level of self-knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Such knowledge is likely to result from a situation in which students exert themselves in intellectual activities which they find meaningful.

Something is at stake in all of this which is of tremendous importance. My thesis would be that the disciplined and sensitive scholar can rebuild the bridges between intellectuals and non-intellectuals and furnish in the process new standards of leadership to a society which desperately needs them. We must create a new image for the educated man, and it must come from those who take their callings seriously.

The Honors program is not a panacea; by its very nature it cannot be. But it is an ongoing effort to make the educative process meaningful to our most talented students. It is based on the assumption that the skills of the intellectual, properly disciplined, constitute the most important resource which the nation possesses.

What we have tried to do is to create a program in which we could make certain that the early experiences of the undergraduate would provide a breadth of coverage which most high schools do not furnish. In addition we have sought to balance the desire of the student for freedom with the concern of the department about proper supervision. We find a constant need for revision and reinterpretation in this effort. Some things can be done more effectively in class; others outside of class. Our hope is that the framework created by the four-year program will allow for the gradual maturing of the Honors student, and that it will broaden and stimulate rather than stifle his intellectual pursuits.

<sup>4</sup>One method of encouraging such self-knowledge is the scholar's journal kept by the student. See John Hicks, "Honors Teaching," *THE SUPERIOR STUDENT* (April, 1960) 23.