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An Augustinian Culture of Learning for Interdisciplinary Honors Programs

At the beginning of each school year, our faculty, excited to meet the incoming students who are about to become members of our honors learning community, make a point during our first gathering with new students to ask what they thought “honors” meant when they were in high school.¹ Year after year the answers show the same trend: to incoming college students, “honors” has no set meaning and instead seems to mean an array of things. For some students, taking honors classes means that teachers present the same materials, but the class moves faster or encourages more creative and critical thinking. For others, honors education is simply a more difficult course of study as a result of more homework and more difficult tests. Honors can be associated with more tangible rewards like scholarships, college credit, and weighted grade point averages. A few new freshmen tell us that in high school honors courses are unique because they make it all the way to the end of the textbook. Some think honors classes are better because the students are smarter.

Students’ lack of consensus isn’t that surprising, given that college administrators, honors program directors, and faculty members themselves have spent a great deal of time addressing this question, and they have yet to achieve agreement on what honors ought to mean at the college level.² Though official publications of the National Collegiate Honors Council have formally defined honors as “a system that exposes students of exceptional ability or promise to an equally exceptional educational experience”³ (Mullins, 2005, p. 19–20), the confusion seems to come from the fact that most honors programs are interdisciplinary, addressing a variety of academic subjects and providing a diverse curriculum. Like rhetoric in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where Socrates criticizes rhetoric because it has no subject matter all its own, honors programs seem to suffer a similar fate: our programs teach content from a variety of disciplines and seem to be united by technique more than by subject matter.⁴

As a result of this ambiguity, honors programs come in all shapes and sizes, a result of all manner of institutional pressures. Nevertheless, honors education ideally allows space for experimentation with curriculum and pedagogy, and honors programs are often used as academic programs that help a university to achieve something that it values but cannot offer on a university-wide scale. Samuel Schuman contends, “The honors program, in distinguishing itself from the rest of the institution, serves as a kind of laboratory within which the faculty can try things they have always wanted to try but for which they could find no suitable outlet” (2006, p. 66). Thus, many universities, for example, value improved outreach to

the community and wish to connect these efforts with the academic program. A service-learning program might be piloted in these schools' honors programs to address the university's unmet need. Others might seek better undergraduate research and as a result implement a senior thesis for honors.⁵

In attempting to align an honors program with the aims of a Christian college, we might be frustrated to find that the term "Christian college" can be just as difficult to define as an honors program. Faith-based institutions can be affiliated with a variety of denominations or have no denominational affiliation at all. Christian colleges embrace a variety of theological assumptions, and those assumptions often shape the curriculum and campus life. Some emphasize the liberal arts. Others emphasize the professions. Some institutions are teaching colleges, while others have a strong research program. In *The Idea of a Christian College*, Arthur Holmes (1987) asserts, "Too many young people attend college or university, and their parents encourage them, without any gripping sense of what college is all about beyond tentative vocational goals or questionable social aspirations" (p. 3). As a consequence, any attempt to discern the purpose of honors education and to integrate it with the unique ethos of a Christian institution can prove to be difficult. Yet, describing and articulating a sense of purpose is essential for an honors program to justify itself. This essay contends that a philosophy of education based on Augustine's *Confessions* can provide such a sense of purpose to an honors program, not to supplant its modern aims but to complement them. The *Confessions* can be seen not just as a spiritual autobiography but also as an intellectual autobiography. Augustine's intellectual journey narrates a kind of Christian education that strongly contrasts with the utilitarianism and materialism of the contemporary academy. The major elements of Augustine's approach to learning have been the basis for a distinctive culture in the honors program at Palm Beach Atlantic University. By pursuing an Augustinian kind of education, our honors program has tried to define itself as a distinct subculture within, and an enhancement to, the university's interdenominational Christian mission.

Institutional Context

Palm Beach Atlantic University (located in West Palm Beach, Florida) is a non-sectarian Christian institution with no formal ties to a specific denomination. Although it was founded by Southern Baptist clergy and laity on surplus property belonging to a Southern Baptist Church, from the beginning the university was not financially supported by the Southern Baptist Convention and did not require its students or faculty to be Baptist. Today the faculty and students are drawn from a variety of denominations, and students are not required to have any particular faith commitment to enroll at the university. The result is a theologically diverse climate in which a number of Christian traditions interact with one another.

Along with its theological diversity, Palm Beach Atlantic University (hereafter PBAU) is home to divergent educational philosophies. Founded in 1968, the university is a young institution that has experienced tremendous growth in a short time, partly because of its location. Although it was established as a liberal arts college, the university has attempted to add professional programs such as phar-

macy and nursing and to professionalize programs like music while maintaining its commitment to the liberal arts.

Though the theological and academic diversity found at PBAU can be an asset, the school at times can attempt to be all things to all people, causing it to lose any claim to a distinctive vision. Conflict often accompanies the juxtaposition of views, but the university's Baptist heritage tends to keep this ambiguity in check. The institution's ethos is best described as broadly Christian with a strong evangelical influence. To maintain its Christian distinctiveness in a diverse environment, PBAU and other broadly Christian schools like it must rely on their organizational cultures. Organizational culture is "a pattern of beliefs and values shared by members of an organization" (Goldhaber, 1993, p. 69). William Bergquist (1992) argues that the culture of an academy "provides meaning and context for a specific group of people" and "helps to define the nature of reality for those people who are part of that culture" (p. 2). As such, an honors program provides an opportunity to create a unique subculture that embodies a heightened love of learning on a Christian college campus. Honors programs can benefit their universities when their subculture influences the larger culture of the institution in a positive way. Slavin (2008), for example, cites the ability of a good honors culture to encourage interdisciplinarity on campus: "Students in honors are willing to take intellectual risks both in their discipline and outside of it; they enjoy the challenge. They are the exceptional English students who revel in discussions of quantum mechanics and the outstanding engineers who can't read enough history" (pp. 15–18).⁶

Thus, in articulating a purpose and vision for an honors program, one begins by shaping a distinctive culture within the program. Following Eisenberg and Riley (2001) in thinking that "communication is constitutive of culture" and knowing that "ceremonies, symbols, assumptions, and modes of leadership in a college or university are always directed toward the institution's purposes and derive from its cultural base" (p. 3), the honors director and faculty at PBAU are acutely conscious of ways that communication behaviors shape the program's culture. To shape a distinctive identity we seek to integrate Augustinian terms and concepts in departmental discourse. We believe that cultural constructs such as recruitment patterns, welcome receptions, ceremonies and rituals, narratives passed among students, vocabularies, and metaphors reflect the philosophy of a program and provide meaning and context for all that is experienced by its students.⁷ Our students appreciate a rationale and comprehensive framework for their studies. Our distinctive subculture can help them answer questions like "how is a Christian honors education distinctive from other alternatives?" Further, a distinctive culture helps to determine the types of faculty and students who will be attracted to the program. More than rules, an institution's culture shapes the conduct of students and the extent to which they identify with their school.

Importantly, the honors program at Palm Beach Atlantic University provides its own subculture in the context of a theologically and educationally diverse institution. Although they are not required to demonstrate a faith commitment, most students in the program profess to be Christian. The students do, however, represent a broad spectrum of Christian denominations. Honors students also

represent every academic discipline on campus, choosing both professional and liberal arts majors. The honors curriculum provides students with a substitute for the university's general education requirements. As a result, the honors program is a place where students from both professional and traditional majors interact with one another and learn to appreciate the many voices that have shaped the history of ideas. The program also includes important extracurricular components, such as a variety of academic and social activities outside the classroom and an honors residence hall. The program's goal is to ensure that each student, regardless of major or career choice, leads the examined life in the context of Christian truth and integrity.

This emphasis on the "examined life" grows out of our program's commitment to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which has provided the philosophy of education that has shaped the learning culture in our program. According to Richard Gamble (2007), a former professor in our program, one of the designers of our curriculum and an instrumental figure in the inculcation of Augustinian learning into our program, "the *Confessions* embodies an entire theology of education—education as worship" (p. 214). For us, a distinct view of learning and moral growth emerges from the *Confessions* that can be translated into educational principles.

First, Augustine emphasizes formative knowledge, especially in contrast with the instrumental knowledge that human nature leads us to pursue. The second goal of Augustinian learning is the well-ordered soul. For Augustine, education should teach us to love the proper things, and the well-ordered soul loves the Creator above all else. Finally, the *Confessions* encourage a style of learning that results in rest in the Lord. Overall, then, educated students move toward that which they have been called to be: servants seeking to please God.

Formative Knowledge

In the Augustinian view, formative knowledge involves an inward journey, a profound examination of the state of one's own soul. By comparison, modern education is an outward-looking search. Historian George Marsden (1994) finds that as the practical, the value-neutral, and the scientifically verifiable came to dominate the academy, Christianity was forced to the margins of American higher education. With a focus on formative knowledge, honors education can provide a valuable complement to a contemporary approach to learning that tends to privilege utilitarian value and the material world. Augustine (trans. 1998) repeatedly contrasts formative knowledge with "star knowledge," a prideful quest for dominion: "By the proud you are not found, not even if their curiosity and skill number the stars and the sand, measure the constellations, and trace the paths of the stars. . . . Their irreligious pride makes them withdraw from you and eclipse your great light from reaching themselves. They can foresee a future eclipse of the sun, but do not perceive their own eclipse in the present" (p. 74). Augustine is certainly not to be understood as anti-intellectual; his concern is that the disciplines be kept in proper context.⁸

This formative knowledge is integral to knowledge in general. If liberal education exists to improve character, this cannot happen if a student only pursues worldly knowledge and neglects the state of his or her own soul. Augustine

(trans. 1998) writes, “People are moved to wonder by mountain peaks, by vast waves of the sea, by broad waterfalls on rivers, by the all-embracing extent of the ocean, by the revolutions of the stars. But in themselves they are uninterested” (p. 187). Here, Augustine establishes a theme that has challenged many Christian thinkers. This is illustrated by Petrarch (trans. 1999), who in *The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux* reaches the peak of the mountain and randomly opens a treasured copy of the *Confessions*. He turns to this very line about mountain peaks and, likewise, regrets his own neglect of formative knowledge and says, “I closed the book, angry with myself for continuing to admire the things of this world when I should have learned a long time ago from the pagan philosophers themselves that nothing is admirable but the soul” (p. 17).

The focus of modern education is often on instrumental knowledge, and many educators are content with well-trained graduates, rather than encouraging the pursuit of soul-knowledge. Students demand a useful degree that will prepare them for a successful life. And even when success is defined as helping others or changing the world, the focus is on the external world. Yet, familiar clichés tell us that if we want to change the world, we should start with ourselves. Higher education frequently neglects this emphasis on the formation of the individual soul. By contrast, honors education provides an opportunity to encourage students to pursue formative knowledge. Although formative knowledge can enhance a student’s practical training, it need not do so. It is an end in itself, and honors can establish an organizational culture that recognizes it as such. In our honors program we often acknowledge that most colleges and universities put a premium on making students fit for the modern world. Graduates “use” their degrees to become fit for their profession, for consumer markets, for a mass-mediated world, or for the government. We encourage our honors students, in contrast, to see themselves as unfit for the modern world. Gamble (2007) writes, “Apart from God, human learning and skill impede our knowledge of God and knowledge of self. Knowledge of the natural world pursued for human power and glory will ‘eclipse’ our knowledge of God. Preoccupation with the countable, measurable, weighable objects of the visible world will distract us from knowledge of self. Only the humble and poor in spirit will know as they are known” (p. 214). Graduates put their honors education together with their majors to become dual citizens. Having pursued utilitarian knowledge, they serve the temporal world, but they transcend these temporal truths, which are merely useful in this world.

One important responsibility of the honors faculty in an interdisciplinary program is to help students to bring intellectual history together with their own lives. A professor, for example, should help students to see that the difficult moral decisions faced by literary characters or the intellectual virtues embodied by great thinkers are not merely abstractions. Any contemporary student would be well served by seeking to imitate the eloquence of Demosthenes, the civic virtue of Cicero, or the sense of calling of the mighty Aeneas. The ability to have our character shaped by the books we read has been illustrated often by those who have tasted the fruit of the great conversation. Seneca (trans. 1970), for example, shows how literary characters can model for the reader essential virtues like purity. He writes:

Show me, rather, by the example of Ulysses, how I am to love my country, my wife, my father, and how, even after suffering shipwreck, I am to sail toward these ends, honourable as they are. Why try to discover whether Penelope was a pattern of purity, or whether she had the laugh on her contemporaries? Or whether she suspected that the man in her presence was Ulysses, before she knew it was he? Teach me rather what purity is, and how great a good we have in it, and whether it is situated in the body or in the soul. (pp. 353, 355)

In Augustine's view, one's faith journey is just as much an inward journey as it is an outward journey because, ultimately, the inward journey toward self-knowledge leads to faith. Christian scholars have noted that while God is found in nature or in other people, we can also find God by looking inwardly: "Augustine celebrates the memory as the thread of personal identity, the bearer of the mystery of continuity. And he journeys more and more deeply into the interior of his soul believing that he will there find his Maker. . . . Augustine believes in order to understand" (Schwehn, 1993, p. 121).

Humility, for Augustine, is another key characteristic of an educated human being and should be an important part of an honors subculture that values formative knowledge. Augustine sees humility as a necessary precursor to knowing. For an educated person, humility not only includes recognizing one's propensity to sin—the fallenness of the will—it also includes epistemic humility, which is a recognition of the fallenness of reason. Wisdom is possible when one recognizes human limitations in discerning certain knowledge. Hugh of St. Victor (trans. 1991) illustrates this assumption, which has persisted among Christian thinkers:

Now the beginning of discipline is humility. Although the lessons of humility are many, the three which follow are of especial importance for the student: first, that he hold no knowledge and no writing in contempt; second, that he blush to learn from no man; and third, that when he has attained learning himself, he not look down upon everyone else (pp. 94–95).

The pursuit of formative knowledge is an unbroken thread that unifies nearly all premodern Christian scholarship, and an honors program can recapture this tradition as a matter of emphasis. A culture of self-knowledge can be a product of an emphasis on intellectual history, memory, and humility. In our honors culture students are encouraged to seek formative knowledge as they work their way through the great books of the enduring conversation. In other words, students read primary sources and we try to go beyond asking, "What can we do with the information in the books that will be useful?" There is not always practical knowledge to be found in the great books of past generations. Instead, students are encouraged to ask, "What do these ideas do to me?" We ask students not to just read the books, but to let the books form them.

The Well-Ordered Soul

Augustine's famous account of the stolen pears in the *Confessions* is a story of the well-ordered soul. Some might find the story odd because the depth of Augus-

tine's guilt seems out of proportion with the minor infraction of taking pears from a tree that does not belong to him. This story makes more sense if one reads it as an illustration of a disordered soul. Augustine's love of the pears surpassed his love of the one who created them. One also notes that it is love, albeit a disordered love, that causes the sin. His love for the worldly pleasure derived from the fruit eclipses his ability to love that which is transcendent and permanent.

St. Augustine shows the reader that everything in the temporal world is of God and, therefore, good. It is a disordered love that leads to sin. Beauty and goodness can be found even in the ordinary, low things of the world. We can love the good things of this world, but a disordered soul is characterized by a love of the temporal, worldly goods above the eternal. Augustine (trans. 1998) laments, "If only someone could have imposed restraint on my disorder. That would have transformed to good purpose the fleeting experiences of beauty in these lowest of things, and fixed limits to indulgence in their charms" (p. 25). The notion of the well-ordered soul has persisted throughout the great tradition of Christian education. One example is found in Cassiodorus (trans. 2004), who warns of the dangers of studying the creation and ignoring the Creator: "Some have been led astray by the beauty and brilliance of the shining stars, and eagerly seek reasons for their own destruction" (p. 229).

According to Augustine (trans. 1998), a well-ordered soul is the result of loving the proper things. It may seem surprising to argue that education is not just about teaching students to know, but also to love. However, we are so busy weighing, counting, and measuring the things of the temporal world that we neglect the world's Creator: "It is stupid to doubt that he is better than the person who measures the heaven and counts the stars and weighs the elements, but neglects you who have disposed everything 'by measure and number and weight' (p. 76). This idea is also illustrated by Augustine's famous line about the *Aeneid* in which he regrets a disordered love for literary characters that surpassed his love for God. He writes, "What is more pitiable than a wretch without pity for himself who weeps over the death of Dido dying for love of Aeneas, but does not weep over himself dying for his lack of love for you, my God?" (p. 15).

Even our love for our neighbor is to be kept in proper perspective. The well-ordered soul recalls that our brothers and sisters are created by God and are not to be loved as a replacement for him. Augustine (trans. 1998) writes, "The greatest source of repair and restoration was the solace of other friends, with whom I loved what I loved as a substitute for you; and this was a vast myth and a long lie" (p. 60). The Christian tradition in education holds that when a student is taught to love things in proportion, his or her character will be transformed. Vico (trans. 1990) illustrates, "The soul must be enticed by corporeal images and impelled to love; for once it loves, it is easily taught to believe; once it believes and loves, the fire of passion must be infused into it so as to break its inertia and force it to *will*" (p. 38, emphasis original). In the Augustinian tradition, one's ability to be good and to do good hinges on an ordered soul that loves the eternal things.

This Augustinian view of the temporal and eternal allows us to affirm worldly knowledge. We would never discourage our students from loving and studying the truths of the sciences, the arts, or the professions. However, we do encour-

age our students to nurture a love for the transcendent. This style of education is not a mere quest for erudition but becomes an act of worship. Such an approach to education is best described by Arthur Holmes in *Building the Christian Academy* (2001). Doxological learning leads to a “broad education and a contemplative approach to life; it involves not just doing things or doing them thoughtlessly, but reflecting on how whatever we do in life relates to its Creator and Lord. It makes life and learning a continuous doxology of praise to God” (p. 5).

Students in our honors program, then, are encouraged to lead a contemplative life in order to cultivate a love for the eternal. In *On The Teacher*, Aquinas explains, “The active life turns on temporal things but teaching turns rather on the eternal, teaching about that which is more excellent and perfect” (Gamble, 2007, p. 297). Although our program is not a Great Books program, our reading list traces the theme of the well-ordered soul through the enduring conversation. In our experience, students who read great texts and contemplate them with a sincere sense of wonder better appreciate that which is eternal, transcendent, virtuous, and honorable. The written words of those authors who have loved and honored God with their intellect can help students to glimpse God’s eternal truth and goodness. Rhetorician Calvin Troupe (1999) argues that human communication through language can mediate the temporal and eternal worlds. He writes, “The incarnate Word does not present truth by altering temporality, but by enacting eternal wisdom within our temporal experience and memory” (p. 114).

The curriculum of our honors program is designed to encourage a well-ordered soul. Students take six interdisciplinary courses that are organized chronologically and designed to provide them with an appreciation for intellectual history. The courses present primary sources from a variety of disciplines, and the course titles acknowledge the role of worldview formation in studying the history of ideas:

- The world of polis and covenant
- The world of Caesar and Christ
- The world of Christendom and Islam
- The world of humanism and reform
- The world of reason and revolt
- The world of despair and hope

The books we include in the curriculum are chosen for their contribution to the enduring conversation on themes that develop the human soul. These books lead to organic conversations about enduring questions about the nature of man, the nature of good and evil, the good life, the nature of God, and so on. As a result our canon is not a fixed set of books but a set of questions that are helpful for an education aimed at the well-ordered soul.

Rest in the Lord

At the end of Augustine’s autobiographical journey, he has arrived in the place he was created to be. He has fulfilled his own *telos*, which is to please and to praise God. When we do this, Augustine says, we are at rest. Our souls are created to move toward God. Only in God can we find the rest that comes from discovering

and pursuing our true purpose. He says, “In your gift we find our rest. There are you our joy. Our rest is our peace” (trans. 1998, p. 278). St. Augustine describes the human longing for rest in the Lord. While his ancient picture of the natural world may be outmoded, his metaphors still accurately describe a soul at rest:

A body by its weight tends to move towards its proper place. The weight’s movement is not necessarily downwards, but to its appropriate position: fire tends to move upwards, a stone downwards. They are acted on by their respective weights; they seek their own place. Oil poured under water is drawn up to the surface on top of the water. Water poured on top of oil sinks below the oil. They are acted on by their respective densities, they seek their own place. Things which are not in their intended position are restless. Once they are in their ordered position, they are at rest. My weight is my love. Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me. By your gift we are set on fire and carried upwards: we grow red hot and ascend. (p. 278)

Education, then, should help students to find rest in the Lord. Unlike modern connotations for the terms, “leisure” is not simple recreation, nor is “rest” a vice or a sign of laziness. A Christian is called to this form of leisure. After Augustine’s conversion, he remembers that “a total intention to ‘be at leisure and see that you are God’ (Ps. 45:11) was born in me and had become quite firm” (trans. 1998, p. 157). Christians can also learn from Seneca (trans. 1995), who said, “Are you always on the go, allowing yourself no time to turn from things human to things divine?” (p. 177).

The rest that comes from being in one’s proper place, contemplative, and at peace stands in direct conflict with the restlessness of the world. Contemporary culture honors wandering or a spirit of adventure. The undistracted life of contemplation is as difficult today as ever. In St. Augustine’s (trans. 1998) own time, he was frustrated that “so many things . . . surround our daily lives on every side with a buzz of distraction” (p. 212). The curiosity and distraction of worldly “noise” undermines our ability to be at rest in the Lord. Augustine explains, “When my heart becomes the receptacle of distractions of this nature and the container for a mass of empty thoughts, then too my prayers are often interrupted and distracted” (p. 213).

Unfortunately, a Christian college campus can be one of the most restless places imaginable. Students busy themselves with academic activities, social activities, service activities, and campus ministries. While all of these are good things worthy of affirmation, college ought to be a time of respite and contemplation. Many students expect that college will be preparation for life, but it is also a break from life. It can be the one time in our lives that we can devote ourselves wholly to reading, discussion, and contemplation.

Rather than preparing students only for their work, honors can prepare students for a life of rest in the Lord, whether they are at work or at leisure. Because they are serious and engaged, honors students tend to be receptive to a life of quiet contemplation. However, they are quickly labeled “leaders” on campus and can become among the most distracted and overextended students. Our honors

director and faculty encourage students to participate in the life of the community, but they warn students about the dangers of busyness.

An essential role for honors programs should be to provide a contemplative subculture in an otherwise restless academic culture. Our honors program seeks to form a community of scholars in which the members encourage, support, and challenge one another. This gives them the opportunity to practice the intellectual virtues and to share the pursuit of wisdom with classmates who often become friends for a lifetime. Newman (1959) writes of the role of community in learning. In a community students “are sure to learn one from another, even if there be no one to teach them; the conversation of all is a series of lectures to each, and they gain for themselves new ideas and views, fresh matter of thought, and distinct principles for judging and acting, day by day” (p. 156). Scholars have long recognized the role of community in supporting the contemplative life. Schwehn (1993) writes, “Instead of Weberian *mastery* of the world through calculation and control, academics ought primarily to seek understanding of the world through communal inquiry” (p. 58). More specifically, he believes that this community is a way of living out the principles of Christian character.

Sadly, even our libraries, once a contemplative space, have become hubs of activity. They cater to group study and take on labels like “information commons.” An honors program can offer physical spaces on campus that welcome those seeking quiet contemplation. Honors programs can offer housing in a separate residence hall or as part of an existing residence hall. Honors might also offer a “common room” in the tradition of Oxford or Cambridge to provide physical space that can protect the contemplative life. By providing these well-used contemplative spaces, honors programs encourage a contemplative culture in a number of ways.

The last course in the honors curriculum at Palm Beach Atlantic University is a capstone course that encourages students to look ahead at their calling and vocation while also looking back upon their education and the changes that it brought about. The last book in that final course is Os Guinness’ *The Call* (2003). In it, the author reminds readers that before being called to something, Christians are called to someone. Our primary call is to be a follower of Christ. Our secondary call is to do, think, speak, and live entirely for Him (p. 31). Honors can teach students to discern and pursue a call in a way that differs from career services. Students are concerned with what they will do after graduation. They should be equally concerned with who they will be after graduation. In *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine (trans. 1997) explores calling and the ability to urge others to embrace the good: “The life of the speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence. . . . Let him so order his life that he not only prepares a reward for himself, but also so that he offers an example to others, and his way of living may be, as it were, an eloquent speech” (pp. 164, 166).

An honors philosophy of learning provides a valuable service to the Christian college campus if it provides a contemplative subcommunity on campus. That community ought to be populated by students and faculty who seek to find rest in the Lord.

Conclusion

In the *Confessions*, Augustine provides a model of Christian education that is radically different from the most common modern views of education, and focusing on it allows our honors program to complement the majors and other courses taken by our students. Although the *Confessions* are not overtly a text about education, St. Augustine's intellectual and spiritual journey provides a teleological framework for a Christian honors program. "Unsparring in its self-examination yet abounding in hope and joy, the *Confessions* testifies to Augustine's pride and God's mercy. For Augustine, the task of education is inseparable from its moral context; it requires humility, sacrifice, gratitude, love, and true delight" (Gamble, 2007, p. 214).

This model, animated by the pursuit of formative knowledge, the well-ordered soul, and rest in the Lord, is ideally suited to Palm Beach Atlantic University's honors program. Like many Christian universities, ours has struggled to maintain its liberal arts emphasis while also introducing professional education into the curriculum. An honors program offers an ideal tool for the university to address this issue without having to compromise the liberal arts or the professions on a university-wide scale. It allows the university to provide opportunities for those students who are interested in the Augustinian approach and in integrating it into their majors.

The honors program accomplishes this task in a number of ways that can be replicated at other broadly Christian universities. We carefully include the vocabulary of Augustinian learning in our discourse describing and justifying the honors program. We also promote this view with students, communicating it first in our freshman orientation class and throughout our courses. This task necessitates a curriculum based on intellectual history. The study of the history of ideas organically leads students to the three Augustinian aims of education. While not every student on our campus may be interested in reading and discussing the primary sources of intellectual history, the attitude and aptitude of honors students make them ideally suited to do so. Finally, the program combines curricular and extracurricular elements. Its programming and facilities provide a venue for the Augustinian subculture to be shared in students' major classes and on campus.

While students' majors make them more employable and fit for the world, the honors program with its Augustinian emphases seeks to help students transcend worldly values like profit, efficiency, or professional competence. Our hope is that students pursue these values but keep them in the proper context. John Henry Newman (1959) is critical of the narrowness of mind that results from overspecialization. He calls the modern specialists of the bureaucratized university "men of information" (p. 157). An honors program can add an interdisciplinary subculture to university life, helping students to become more than "men of information." This is made possible with a program that is populated by students who self-select and embrace the Augustinian mission of the program. If we do these things, we will have achieved the primary purpose of an honors program: to serve the entire university by providing for an unmet need that is central to the institution's values.

Notes

- 1 This question is not asked for the purpose of gathering data on student expectations. It is asked for rhetorical effect only. For an excellent example of a study on new student expectations for college honors programs see Hill (2005, pp. 95–107). See also Freyman (2005, pp. 23–29) for the prerequisites and assumptions about honors education necessary for a successful incoming honors student.
- 2 Brewton (2005) documents contradictions, tensions and contrary perspectives among institutions and across time.
- 3 Mullins (2005) provides the introductory piece for a special issue dedicated to the question “What is Honors?” See also Schuman (2006): “Collegiate honors programs consist of enhanced educational opportunities for superior students” (p. 7).
- 4 Historically, honors programs derived their purpose from learning methods that required self-motivated students but could be applied to almost any academic discipline. Rinn (2006): “Honors programs were initially designed to provide a better education for students who were more talented and motivated than the average student. Independent study, the tutorial method, and the seminar method have long dominated the honors movement in the United States in an attempt to provide individualized instruction for the academically gifted students” (p. 78). The author traces the roots of American honors programs to the Oxford tutorial system and to honors pioneer Frank Aydelotte at Swarthmore College in the early twentieth century.
- 5 For an example of an honors program designed to address its university’s unmet needs, see Maynard (1996, pp. 34–40). At the University of Maryland, he writes, “honors needed a curricular focus, one appropriate to a campus filled with experts but sometimes light on reflective, critical learning for a student’s early years.” The program addressed this “lack” with an interdisciplinary course called “Knowledge and Its Human Consequences.”
- 6 Slavin emphasizes the role of honors administrators in establishing an honors culture that is characterized by risk-taking. See also Mariz (2008): “Honors culture is exclusive or elite to the degree that it admits only those who are committed to the culture’s mission, however and by whomever this mission is defined” (p. 23). Strong (2008) identifies honors culture as a counterculture that is an irreverent corrective to shortcomings in the larger university culture.
- 7 See Jeffers (2002) for a detailed discussion of practical ways to implement an honors subculture that embraces liberal arts learning in the context of a Christian University. The Torrey Honors Institute at Biola University employs a number of labels that are taken from the Oxford/Cambridge tradition. The classics-based curriculum also aims to establish a culture that emphasizes a “unified Christian understanding” and inculcates in students a love for the life of the mind.
- 8 Augustine worries that Christians will appear to be ignorant and lose credibility if they ignore reason and have an inaccurate view of scientific matters. This can happen if scripture is wrongly applied to answer cosmological questions. He writes in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (trans. 2002a), “There is knowledge to be had, after all, about the earth, about the sky, about the other elements of this world. . . . [I]t is quite disgraceful and disastrous, something to be on one’s guard against at all costs, that they should ever hear Christians spouting what they claim our Christian literature has to say on these topics.” (p. 186.) See also Mark Noll’s (1994, pp. 202–203) discussion of this passage.

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