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AN INCLUSIVE VISION FOR HONORS EDUCATION

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Addressing the legacy of racial inequities in American education poses significant challenges for college and university honors programs, which are often critiqued for their lack of racial and ethnic diversity.¹ While overall enrollment in American higher education does not adequately reflect the country's racial makeup,² the situation is exacerbated in honors programs. Accurate statistics are difficult to locate, but a recent study of honors programs at American public research universities found that only about 30% of honors students are students of color.³ Richard Badenhausen, Dean of the Honors College at Westminster College explains, "I have conducted program reviews at institutions where roughly a third of students are people of color while over 90% of the honors population is white."⁴ One example of a public research university, the University of California at Santa Barbara, boasts one of the most diverse student bodies of any American college, yet a similar diversity is not found in its Honors Program. White or Caucasian students make up only about 30% of the total student body, but almost 50% of the students enrolled in the honors program last year were white. According to UCSB's Office of Budget & Planning, Latinx students were 29% of the student body but only 12%

¹ My thanks to Ms. Patrice Weil, the Coordinator of Christ College Admissions, for her invaluable assistance with this essay.

² The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2017 the black population of the United States was 13.4 percent but African American enrollment in higher education was 4.51 percent.

³ Andrew J. Cognard-Black and Art L. Spisak, "Creating a Profile of an Honors Student: A Comparison of Honors and Non-Honors Students at Public Research Universities in the United States," *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive* (2019). <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcjournal/623>. This study excluded California institutions because the state's demographics are unique: percentage of Asian residents in California is about three times higher than in the U.S. population, and the percentage of Hispanic residents is about twice as high.

⁴ Richard Badenhausen, "Making Honors Success Scripts Available to Students from Diverse Backgrounds," *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive* (2018), <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcjournal/574>.

of the Honors Program; African American students made up about 5% of the student body and 2% of the Honors Program.⁵

Honors programs at smaller, private liberal-arts or comprehensive institutions typically have even less diversity. In Christ College, the honors college of Valparaiso University, where I serve as Dean, an average of 4% of students in each entering honors cohort between 2000 and 2013 were underrepresented minorities. Recently, with new efforts to develop more racial and ethnic diversity, the entering CC cohort of 2018 was 11% students of color, and this year's cohort (2019) achieved an all-time high of 17% students of color. Judging this progress against student body demographics, we find that Valparaiso as a whole has grown more diverse during these decades: in the 2000s students of color averaged around 15% of the first-year class, while in 2019, the number was closer to 30%. While our enrollment of underrepresented minorities has improved, Christ College still has a long way to go.

Nonetheless, we and most honors programs are committed both to diversity and to inclusion; not just to add more representative numbers but to offer a sense of belonging and participation to students of color. In 2017, the National Collegiate Honors Council articulated a strategic priority focused on "how honors can be a place of access, equity, and excellence in higher education."⁶ I suspect that honors programs' difficulty in becoming more inclusive probably reflects similar difficulties encountered by many liberal arts institutions. Therefore, a discussion of those obstacles and strategies for overcoming them may prove useful to

⁵ Sofia Mejias-Pascoe, "Honors for Who? A Look Into Diversity in UCSB's Honors Program," *The Daily Nexus*, 24 Aug. 2019, <http://dailynexus.com/2019-08-24/honors-for-who-a-look-into-diversity-in-ucsbs-honors-program/>.

⁶ Naomi Yavneh Klos, "Thinking Critically, Acting Justly," *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive* (2018), <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcjournal/569>.

conference attendees, even if your institution doesn't have an honors program or college. This essay reports on recent research into the challenges of honors programs becoming more inclusive and reviews successful strategies that have been implemented, including specific initiatives underway at Christ College. (I make no effort here to rehearse the reasons greater racial and ethnic diversity is essential for an honors program and will merely start with the assumption that it is a worthy goal.)

The dearth of ethnic and racial diversity in honors programs, on the surface, has a simple explanation: there simply are not enough students of color with the necessary academic credentials to achieve admission to such programs. One excuse for the homogeneity found in honors programs located in liberal arts or comprehensive institutions comes from the belief that there is a small pool of academically qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds, and they will naturally choose to attend the Ivies or major state universities. One honors director at a mid-size institution told me, "All the really bright African-American high school students are going to Harvard and Yale; they don't want to come here." The ostensibly small pool of qualified candidates, most scholars agree, come from social, economic, and cultural factors that disadvantage students of color, that provide an inadequate preparation for college, that narrow the honors pipeline. If public elementary and high schools primarily serving students of color are academically weak, have fewer guidance counsellors, don't offer AP or IB programs, have greater student-teacher ratios, and are chronically underfunded, it is no surprise that less of their graduates enter college-level honors programs. For example, about one-quarter of high schools that serve the highest percentage of black and Hispanic students don't even offer a second year of algebra, according to the Department of Education, but two years of algebra are

typically required for college-level math and science courses.⁷ Secondary school honors course “gatekeepers” often fail to encourage students of color to take such courses, and students and their families may not know to inquire about such options. Students of color also often have a higher degree of socioeconomic and life struggles that can impact their academic performance. Their home situations may not be conducive to educational enrichment activities, and they may be working many hours to help support their families.

So how do we provide equity when we lack equality? Do we dilute the academic rigor of honors programs, or do we enroll students with inadequate abilities and preparation, many of whom will then fail to thrive in such programs? Clearly that is not a good solution. We need to begin with the acknowledgement that how institutions identify and define the “really bright” students of color is fraught with difficulty. A common theme of those concerned about increasing diversity in honors program is the need to develop more holistic and flexible admissions practices. Most institutions rely heavily on standardized test scores and/or high school GPAs, which rule out many academically gifted, intellectually curious students who might thrive in an honors program. In a recent essay in *Inside Higher Education*, Alicia M. Reyes-Barriénte, an assistant professor of political science at Texas A&M University, recalls about her undergraduate education, “I didn’t apply to the university honors program because my SAT score was lower than the required threshold. But . . . I was, in fact, an excellent student: I graduated magna cum laude with a double major and a GPA of 3.93 and was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. I was certainly qualified for my university’s honors program, but the

⁷ Sophie Quinton, “The Race Gap in High School Honors Classes,” *The Atlantic*, 22 Dec. 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/12/the-race-gap-in-high-school-honors-classes/431751/>.

institution's discriminatory requirements denied me this opportunity."⁸ Achieving diversity requires new kinds of admissions protocols.

Calls for honors admission reform (and college admission in general) has primarily focused on the need to eliminate reliance on SAT/ACT scores. Requiring high standardized test scores is a barrier to minority involvement in honors programs.⁹ Large racial gaps in both mathematical and verbal SAT scores not only exist but have been widening during the past seventeen years.¹⁰ And as for the ACT, among 2016 high school graduates, the average African American student scores 5.2 points lower and the average Hispanic student scores 3.5 points lower on the ACT Composite than the average Caucasian student. In 2013, only 3% of African Americans and 10% of Hispanics nationally earned an ACT composite score of 25 or better, well below many honors programs' minimum admission standards.¹¹

Many researchers believe that such gaps are due to racial biases in the tests themselves (the SAT verbal, in particular). Others point to uneven access to high-quality elementary and secondary education, along with lack of financial and social access to test preparation services. But income gaps alone do not account for the differences. In 2005, black students from families with incomes of more than \$100,000 had a mean SAT score that was 85 points below the mean score for whites from all income areas and 139 points below the mean score of whites from

⁸ Alicia M. Reyes-Barriénte, "Lessons From a First-Gen, Working-Class Latinx Student," *Inside Higher Education*, 20 Dec. 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2019/12/20/what-first-generation-working-class-latinx-student-wishes-shed-known-she-went#.Xf0GrFxDxA0.email>.

⁹ K. McKay, "Predicting retention in honors programs," *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, 10(1), (2009): 77–87.

¹⁰ "The Widening Racial Scoring Gap on the SAT College Admissions Test," *Journal of Black Higher Education*, 49 (2005), https://www.ibhe.com/features/49_college_admissions-test.html.

¹¹ David M. Rhea, "A Regression Model Approach to First-Year Honors Program Admissions Serving a High-Minority Population," *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive* (2017), <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcjournal/550>.

families at the same income level.¹² A recent study by the Brookings Institute concludes, “The evidence for a stubborn race gap on [the SAT] . . . provide[s] a snapshot into the extraordinary magnitude of racial inequality in contemporary American society. Standardized tests are often seen as mechanisms for meritocracy, ensuring fairness in terms of access. But test scores reflect accumulated advantages and disadvantages in each day of life up [to] the one on which the test is taken. Race gaps on the SAT hold up a mirror to racial inequities in society as a whole.”¹³

Consequently, an increasing number of schools, colleges, and programs have turned to a greater reliance on high school GPAs, which are five times stronger than ACT scores at predicting who will graduate from college.¹⁴ Yet high school GPAs are also uncertain measures of academic potential. High schools determine GPAs in a mind-numbing variety of ways, and GPAs of well over 4.0 are common. One school’s 4.0 might be another’s 6.0. Inconsistency in grading scales between large urban schools and suburban or charter schools are also evident. Requiring a minimum GPA for entrance to an honors program may eliminate an intelligent student who has struggled with a particular set of courses, suffered significant health challenges, or only caught a passion for learning in their junior year. This is particularly common in male students, who are not as engaged or committed to secondary school,

¹² “The Widening Racial Scoring Gap.”

¹³ Richard V. Reeves and Dimitrios Halikias, “Race gaps in SAT scores highlight inequality and hinder upward mobility,” Brookings Social Mobility Papers, 1 Feb. 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/race-gaps-in-sat-scores-highlight-inequality-and-hinder-upward-mobility/>.

¹⁴ Elaine M. Allensworth and Kallie Clark, “High School GPAs and ACT Scores as Predictors of College Completion: Examining Assumptions About Consistency Across High Schools,” *Educational Researcher* 27 Jan, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20902110>.

compared to female students.¹⁵ Such a student might have a 3.0 GPA, but an ACT score of 35; outstanding recommendations from a teacher who ignited that spark for learning; or the innate curiosity and persistence to succeed in an honors program. We need new admission practices that will help us locate those students from underrepresented backgrounds who will thrive in and benefit from honors education.

In a regression model analysis of honors programs, David Rhea found that “key high school variables can predict nearly 50% of the variance in first-semester college GPA grades. The combination of high school GPA with the number of honors and AP classes completed, the ACT English score, and the college readiness of the high school provides an admissions approach that is holistic, quantitative, and predictive.” Because 77% of his sample population was non-Caucasian, his model “can provide an admissions approach that works to maintain high GPA standards in honors programs with large minority populations while at the same time reducing barriers that standardized tests scores can create.”¹⁶

Rhea’s study examined three variables: high school GPA, ACT English scores, and the number of honors or AP classes a student took. At Christ College, we’ve developed an even more comprehensive approach. As an interdisciplinary honors college, we are committed both to maintaining a rigorous academic program and to invite an ethnically diverse group of students to join our community and succeed. But how do we find these students? Like many honors programs and colleges, we run our own admissions process, and we have recently adopted a more holistic review process that has shown initial success. Two years ago, we

¹⁵ Thomas A. DiPrete and Claudia Buchmann, *The Rise of Women: The Growing Gender Gap in Education and What It Means for American Schools* (Russell Sage, 2015).

¹⁶ Rhea.

decided to widen our initial computer flags to make sure they do not automatically exclude talented, diverse students who may present differently than the traditional honors student. Students must now fit into only ONE of the following categories in order to have their admissions file individually reviewed for potential honors enrollment:

1. The student is in the top 5% of their class
2. Student GPA is 3.87 or above
3. ACT English score is 29 or higher
4. SAT Verbal score is 630 or higher
5. Student is referred by an admissions counselor or alumni
6. Student attend a CC visit day presentation
7. Student has personally expressed interest in CC membership.

Our use of the “one of the following” initial flag is friendly to diverse students and has worked well to narrow down the overall university pool substantially without excluding talented students who may not test well or fit standard GPA parameters.

If a potential student fits into one or more of these seven categories, we review their application using the following process: Step 1: analyze the transcript. This occurs regardless of GPA. We look at the kind of courses a student has taken—college prep, AP, IB honors level—and if they’ve done well in terms of receiving an A or B. Those who have taken difficult math and science courses, even if they don’t receive straight As, also catch our attention, as it indicates that they are not afraid to challenge themselves. We then consider the level of rigor found at the high school. A school’s state “report card,” typically attached to the transcript, can reveal much helpful information regarding the strength of their academic program. Step 2:

probe test scores. Every available test score needs to be reviewed, including ACT English, SAT Verbal, AP scores, and language scores on graduation qualifying state exams. We don't just rely on one or two. Many times diverse students will perform better on one test than another. Our program at Christ College features interdisciplinary small seminars crossing the humanities and social sciences, and requires extensive reading and writing, which is why we look more carefully at verbal or English scores than math. However, our largest group of students are engineering students, so this emphasis doesn't rule out the more technically inclined.

If the transcript and high school rigor are solid, but the verbal test scores are all consistently low, we exercise caution. If a student's highest SAT verbal is below 530 and their highest ACT English is below 24, and they receive scores of 1 or 2 on their humanities AP tests, and test on the lower end of their state exams, they may struggle to succeed in our program. We have learned from past experience that it is not always important the student tests extremely high, but it is important that they not consistently test extremely low. We do not want to set them up for failure. If a student retests several times and demonstrates improvement, it's a definite plus. Retesting with no significant improvement is a red flag.

Step 3: review the University application form. We look for motivation and resilience indicators by paying careful attention to the writing sample (both topic and quality); their listing of employment, volunteer, and extracurricular activities; and teacher recommendations. Students who have worked 20-30 hours a week during high school but performed little volunteer work or participated in few extra-curricular activities are thus not eliminated. If one of our admission counselors has met the student in person and learned their story, the counselor can be a helpful resource.

Step 4: Finally, we consider what we call the “Quest Quotient” (QQ). How interested is this student in our particular program? Have they requested a visit to CC or come to a CC session on a general visit day? Why are they pursuing admission to CC? The QQ can definitely supersede test scores, but it is not always enough to supersede a questionable transcript or a student who has major difficulties in writing. Promising candidates are then invited to apply to Christ College, completing an additional application form with six short writing prompts. This effort affirms that they have that questing spirit. The application assists us to recognize their motivation and interest in CC; it also helps us get to know them, but it actually has a relatively small influence on their admission. We only invite those students to apply who we believe will be successful. Students with a high QQ but unclear academic promise may be invited to apply but are admitted with the caution that the academic expectations may prove to be challenging. As we grade the first semester of honors work on a pass-fail basis, these students are encouraged to try out the honors program for a semester, as it will not negatively affect their GPA or delay their process toward their degree.

One of our recent “best and brightest” CC students was a first-generation college student and a student of color whose highest score was 18 on her ACT English after taking the test two times. But she received 4’s on her AP Lang and Comp and Lit and Comp tests. Her transcript from a reputable high school was solid. She took difficult humanities-based courses and performed well in them. She had some trouble with her math and chemistry courses (B- in both). This student’s high school GPA was a 3.95. She was passionate about social justice issues and started an organization while in high school to bring awareness to the issue of human trafficking. Her writing was solid, and her teacher recommendations were stellar. She attended

Honors Visit Day and additionally requested to speak with the Dean. We admitted her to Christ College, where she excelled, studying abroad in Namibia and winning a prestigious summer fellowship. She graduated from Valpo summa cum laude as a Christ College Scholar. Had we just relied on her GPA and ACTE score, she would not have been invited to apply to Christ College. But her work ethic and resilience were higher than many of her peers who had higher scores and perfect transcripts.

Admissions practices often work against diverse student enrollment, but even when students of color do enroll in an honors program, they may face obstacles in completing and thriving in the program. Pursuing higher numbers of diverse bodies is not enough; we must also work to cultivate a sense of inclusion and value for our students from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Inadequate academic preparation, lack of support networks, alienating pedagogies, few role models in faculty and peers, the loneliness of being one of only a few, and a traditional classical curriculum are all factors that can discourage a sense of inclusion. Too often the handful of students of color in a program may face suspicion and isolation. Eseka, an honors student at UCSB says, “The chance of me being the only Black person in [a] class is really high and sometimes maybe as an honors [student], you might get second looks, like ‘Are you in the right place?’ and you have to be like ‘Yeah, I am.’” Eseka continues, “Diversity is really necessary to encourage more people to come to the program and then to stay in the program, so you don’t feel lonely or feel left out or singled out.”¹⁷ Honors programs face an academic Catch-22: too few students of color enroll or remain in honors because too few students of color enroll or remain in honors.

¹⁷ Mejias-Pascoe, “Honors for Who?”

A qualitative study of African American honors students at Western Kentucky University found that many did not identify with the program and were less involved than other students were. The most common reasons for this feeling of disengagement were 1) the lack of diversity within the Honors College, 2) a lack of diversity in Honors College recruitment initiatives and materials; and 3) a feeling of not being accepted by their Caucasian peers.¹⁸ A study of nine Black students with high academic abilities in university honors programs, published in the *Journal of College Student Development*, revealed they felt a lack of support because they sensed they needed to prove their academic merit and to disprove negative stereotypes held by professors and peers.¹⁹ At Bowling Green State University, students of color pointed to the lack of faculty of color as a major detriment to a good honors experience.²⁰

Hiring more faculty of color in honors programs is of paramount importance, but in these days of budget challenges and falling demographics, is difficult. Christ College lost three faculty lines last year and has done no hiring for the past four years. Hiring more diverse faculty is a slow strategy to support diversity, due to the structure of the academy, but nonetheless needs to be pursued purposefully. However, in the meantime, other strategies to cultivate inclusion, to attract and retain students of color can be utilized. Reforming admissions practices must be accompanied by other practices like changing recruitment narratives,

¹⁸ Sarah Rigsby, Destiny Savage, and Jorge Wellmann, "African Americans in Honors Programs" (2012). Research & Program Evaluation (CNS598). Paper 1. http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/research_prog_eval/1.

¹⁹ S. Fries-Britt and K.A. Griffin, "The black box: How high-achieving Blacks resist stereotypes about Black Americans," *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5) (2007): 509–524. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2007.0048>.

²⁰ Pritchett, Derwin, "An Examination of the Experiences of Students of Color in the Honors College, BGSU," (2018), <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects/330>.

nurturing curricular innovations, creating new student support systems, and cultivating a communal culture of inclusion.

Even at early stages of contact with students we should demonstrate that we are an inclusive community. Recruitment materials should portray students of color, not in misleading proportions or stock file photographs, but in honest accounts of their involvement in honors life. Our new webpage that is going live soon features three short video clips of students talking about their Christ College experience; one portrays a gifted African American CC student reflecting on how she learned to be a leader and find her purpose in CC. Students of color should be invited to serve as hosts, tour guides, and panelists for campus visit days, so potential students can see a diverse community at work.

Curricular content is another crucial area for cultivating inclusion and value. Many liberal-arts honors curricula are heavily invested in the so-called Great Books tradition, structured around a history of western thought, “the best that has been thought and said,” as Matthew Arnold famously describes it. Reading lists consist of primary texts in philosophy, theology, history, literature, economics and political theory written by “the greatest minds in our tradition” (St. Thomas Aquinas College), both ancient and modern. Such texts traditionally include few authors of color (or women, for that matter) for a variety of historical and cultural reasons. Defenders of the Great Book tradition may argue that it establishes the foundation for thinking in the west, a foundation that college graduates should know. Furthermore, such texts are often considered to speak to the common core human identity that transcends time or place. Their universality suggests that all readers--from all times, places, ethnicities, and races--can engage with and learn from them. Yet the Great Books tradition often feels exclusionary to

those who do not hear their own voices in their texts or find their own stories. So-called universality, as postmodernism has demonstrated, is often a false denominator. The curriculum wars of the 1980s, epitomized in the Stanford chant, “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western civ has got to go,” resulted in the gutting of many western civilization courses, and honors programs at large state institutions now more typically involve leadership seminars, service-learning, and honors-enhanced sections of disciplinary courses. I would argue, however, that honors programs can diversify their curricula without eliminating the study of the traditional great texts. Christ College has attempted to do so, making some small but important changes, which need to go further.

Our curriculum begins with a first-year reading-and-writing intensive course in “Texts and Contexts,” which “offers students an opportunity to study selected great works of humankind and to engage the lively ideas that have shaped its traditions. The close reading of primary texts is accompanied by a survey of the wider aspects of the historical epoch and milieu appropriate to each.” Note that this course description speaks more modestly of “selected great works” than “*The Great Books*,” and also eschews “*the Western tradition*” for humanity’s “traditions.” Indeed, the Christ College Texts and Contexts course has included texts by profound influential thinkers from the East, such as Confucius, Mencius and Chuanzi, for over twenty-five years. The current Asian scholar on the CC faculty says, “When new faculty teach in the program, this is the part that they are most nervous about, but it teaches really well and ends up being a favorite unit because of the ways it connects and departs from the Western classics. In the words of Janet Lynn Kerr, a scholar of Chinese religion who was hired specifically to add Asian texts to the Christ College curriculum in the 90s, ‘By bringing different worlds

together, we give our students an opportunity to see their own traditions from a different vantage point. We help them see what belongs to us as humans and what is determined by culture.” Recent years have also seen the significant addition of other great thinkers, such as Virginia Woolf and James Baldwin, who speak out of very different subject positions. I would like to see an African text (beyond St. Augustine) added to this mix. These authors were not chosen as tokens but rather because they thought long and hard about important human issues and produced wise insights. But the historical organization of the course mitigates against adding many people of color or women in the first semester, and students are often quick to comment on such absences.

This makes the approach to teaching these texts even more important. These texts are both universal and historically limited, we suggest. Plato’s and Aristotle’s questions about what makes up the good life are ones we all share, no matter our color or ethnicity, but their answers are historically situated, with blind spots and limits that must be acknowledged. That’s where the “Contexts” come in. On the first day of Texts & Contexts, I present the Roman orator Cicero’s definition of the liberal arts: “the liberal arts are the education of free men for the exercise of their freedom rather than of slaves.” What’s wrong with this statement, I ask. Who is not invited to the liberal arts table? Why did Cicero exclude them? In the future, I plan to continue by explaining that great African American leaders like Frederick Douglass and William E. DuBois spoke passionately about the value of liberal studies, arguing that black students should have equal access to traditional college education and not just be limited to vocational training. E. Thomas Finan comments, “As [Frederick] Douglass demonstrated, the emancipation that comes from education is not confined to economic empowerment. Douglass’s own life

testified to the ability of the liberal arts—fields such as literature, philosophy, the physical sciences, and social sciences—to inspire internal emancipation as well.”²¹ Like Douglass, Cicero saw the connection of education and freedom, although he had a limited concept of human identity. Later in history, with greater access to freedom of movement and literacy, new voices enter the arena. Woolf’s or Baldwin’s ideas of the good life arise out of very different locations, situations, and possibilities. We don’t claim that *Texts & Contexts* is an introduction to Western Civilization, just that it includes great thinkers who discuss important issues about being human. And that’s what we want students to ponder: how to be a good human being as an individual, as a member of a community, and as someone in relationship to God.

This first intense year of study, which constitutes about half of our required curriculum, is obviously interdisciplinary, which is the guiding principle of Christ College. Subsequently students must take a number of interdisciplinary seminars that are topic or figure based. They can choose their own seminars, and we take care to offer a diverse range, including African-American History and Literature, Japanese Visual Culture, *Performing Arab Identity*, and *Cultural Approaches to Health Care*. Other seminars are less overtly diverse, such as *Suburban America*, *Portraits of Jesus*, *Nationalism and Patriotism*, *The End of the World*, and *Society and Technology*. This gives students the opportunity to choose areas of interest, curiosity, or identity, and demonstrates the diversity of areas and experiences that make up the intellectual life. Together with my faculty I want to continue to think about how to make our curriculum

²¹ E. Thomas Finan, “Frederick Douglass, Defender of the Liberal Arts,” *The Atlantic*, 7 Apr. 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/04/frederick-douglass-defender-of-the-liberal-arts/389904/>.

more welcoming and inclusive without giving up our challenging first-year program, how to situate and frame that course.

If you've read *Educated*, by Tara Westover, you know how someone can be extremely intelligent and hard-working, and just not have any idea what college is about. Academic culture is as foreign to them as Martian culture. Raised in a survivalist Mormon family in rural Idaho, Westover is an indomitable, brilliant young woman who ends up getting a Ph.D. from Cambridge University. Yet when she first arrives at Brigham Young University, after teaching herself enough to get a minimal ACT grade (after two tries), she flounders. She doesn't know what a syllabus is or that she needs to read the textbook. Westover's story reminds us that we can't expect everyone to have the same academic, cultural, and social background as ourselves. I cringed when her professor responds with sarcasm and anger when she asks what the word *holocaust* means; I had a similar reaction when Westover takes the ACT and asks the administrator what the answer sheet is and how it works, as she's never seen a bubble sheet before. The administrator is visibly scornful, thinking she was joking, but Westover feels stupid; yet we realize that she is an exceedingly intelligent person who has just not had many the basic educational experiences that most of us have had. She is far from stupid, and neither she nor those people around her should think of her as such.

What she does need are lessons in how to do college, support programs that help her understand what it means to be a college student, how educational institutions are organized, where resources are located, how much initiative a student needs to show, and how to address a faculty member in an email. This past fall at Christ College we ran a pilot program called "Bridge," a voluntary gathering for honors students who felt they needed assistance crossing

the bridge from high school to college, becoming acculturated to a new world. As I mentioned before, to help our honors students learn how to be honors students, the first-semester of their program is graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. Students received grades and extensive feedback on individual assignments, but their final course grade is S or U. This gives them the freedom and space to try, to practice, and to learn how to do Christ College.

Other student support programs involve providing several textbooks free of charge for the first-year program, offering special study abroad scholarships only for honors students, subsidizing commuter students' occasional night in the residence halls when they have especially demanding schedules, and providing financial assistance for presenting undergraduate research. All of these student support programs are open to any student, not just students of color, and many students can benefit from these opportunities. However, students of color may find them especially helpful. As we continue to add more diverse students, we plan to hold focus groups to identify some of the particular challenges these students face and how we might address them. We also need to do some more rigorous retention studies to identify if there are racial or ethnic gaps in our overall high retention numbers.

As one of the oldest honors colleges in the United States, Christ College is steeped in tradition. For many years this meant that the majority of professors and students were white males; in fact, I am the first female dean in its fifty-four year history. Honors programs are often perceived as elitist and exclusionary, and their histories do nothing to assuage that negative perception. But Christ College's identity and mission also include some unique features that support our efforts to become more inclusive, including our interdisciplinary

identity and our religious bedrock. Christ College was originally founded to counteract the increasing specialization and fragments of undergraduate education by emphasizing interdisciplinary teaching and learning. All of our courses are interdisciplinary, and our students come from every major on campus, from Art to Engineering, Business to Theology. The fundamental structure of our curriculum, student demographics, and pedagogy relies on approaching knowledge, skills, and ideas from multiple points of view. In our seminar discussions, we see equal value in contributions from engineers and music therapists, from theatre folks and future social workers. We stress community over competition, and help our students learn how to work cooperatively with people unlike themselves. This interdisciplinary DNA lends credence to and reinforces our valuing of the various perspectives and contributions arising from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Valparaiso University and Christ College are also grounded in the Lutheran tradition of scholarship, freedom, and faith. This does not mean that the faculty and the student body are all Lutherans, or even Christians from another branch of the ecumenical family. But it does mean that our educational practices have deep theological roots. While diversity, equity, and inclusion are commonplace priorities in American higher education today, Lutheran theological values ground, shape, and inspire Valparaiso's efforts to achieve such goals. Darrell Jodock uses the metaphor of a bridge to speak about the way this works. He envisions all of the activities that take place on a college campus—from classrooms to residence halls, from lab sessions to service activities, from a chapel program to athletic competition—as occurring on the broad deck of a great bridge. The institutional priorities that drive such activities, such as a commitment to pursue truth, encourage diversity, or develop character, make up the supports

or piers that hold up the deck. Jodock continues, “The third element involves the theological values that color, inform, and anchor the educational priorities. These are the footings that support the pillars of the bridge. Taken individually, the educational priorities may not be distinctive, but they become so when shaped and informed by Lutheran values.”²² Our values, what we say we believe about human beings and the world, can either create or obstruct the ways that we treat each other and form communities. The orthodox Christian tradition affirms diversity and inclusion because of its embrace of freedom *for* a life of service; the call to see those we think of as Others as actually our neighbors; the affirmation of all of humanity as created in the image of God; and a commitment to justice based on God’s unmerited love for all. Diversity and inclusion are not only democratic values or pragmatic values for success in today’s multicultural, global world, but deeply religious values that will hold even when governments fail and paths to success shift. Our commitments to diversity, while far from perfect, are tenacious and profound by means of their grounding in our drive to be faithful.

Awareness of the need to increase diversity can prompt us to be more thoughtful and creative about many of our current structures, from admissions policies to student support systems, from recruitment strategies to curricular content and delivery. Honors colleges and programs, as well as liberal-arts institutions, may then do a better job of educating a diverse pool of leaders for an increasingly diverse society.

²² Darrell Jodock, “In a Diverse Society, Why Should Lutheran Colleges/Universities Claim Their Theological Roots?” *Intersections* 29 (2019): 12.