The Impact of an Undergraduate Honors Program on Gifted University Students

Thomas P. Hébert
University of Georgia

Matthew T. McBee
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Abstract: Through a qualitative research design, this study examined the experiences of seven gifted university students in an undergraduate honors program. The findings indicated the students as adolescents experienced a sense of isolation resulting from the differences between their abilities, interests, life goals, religious value systems, and the communities in which they lived. At the university, the participants discovered within the honors program an intellectual and social network with other gifted individuals like them. Together they recognized their strong desire for self-actualization. In advanced-level courses, they found intellectual stimulation and academic challenge. Through several components of the honors program they developed significant psychosocial growth. Throughout their experiences, the honors program director became a mentor and played an important role in facilitating experiences designed to address the diverse needs of these gifted young adults. Implications of the findings are presented along with suggestions for designing appropriate honors program experiences for gifted university students.

Putting the Research to Use: The intellectual, social, and emotional needs of gifted young people do not end with high school graduation. Gifted university students have needs that should be addressed. A well-designed honors program may serve gifted collegiate students as a critical component of their university experience following years of not being intellectually challenged and feeling socially isolated, struggling to understand existential issues, and questioning the religious value systems of the adults in their lives. The findings of this study remind educators that not all gifted students are bound for Ivy League institutions, and the intellectual, emotional, and social needs of gifted collegians in smaller, less prestigious schools remain important. These findings should convince university personnel that mentoring programs for gifted collegiate students may positively influence their intellectual, social, and emotional development and may assist them in actualizing their full potential.

Keywords: gifted university students; honors program community; social and emotional development

Many colleges and universities provide honors programs to serve the needs of gifted undergraduates (Gerrity, Lawrence, & Sedlacek, 1993; Mathiasen, 1985; Pflaum, Pascarella, & Durby, 1985). The underlying philosophy of such programs is similar to that which underlies gifted programs at the K-12 level—that academically talented students require modifications to the usual classroom experience to fully actualize their potential. The accomplishments of these students enhance the entire university's reputation and prestige and help to create the desired atmosphere of academic rigor within the university community (Rinn & Plucker, 2004). Admissions to such programs are usually determined by students' ACT or SAT scores and high school grade point average. Some programs also require essays or interviews

with honors program staff to gain admittance (Long, 1998). Collegiate honors programs typically offer students enhanced academic challenge in the form of honors courses and seminars, smaller classes, more faculty contact (Fischer, 1996), and interdisciplinary classes (Mack, 1996; Mathiasen, 1985). Some provide students with mentoring, opportunities to engage in leadership activities, increased opportunities to conduct research (Denk, 1998), outlets for service activities, and intellectually oriented extracurricular activities such as movie and book discussion groups, lectures, writers' groups, and film societies (Long, 1998). They may also provide talented students with financial aid in the form of scholarships (Daniel & Digby, 2002) and special housing opportunities in an honors residence hall (Steinhauer, 2002).

Colleges and universities nationwide are seriously increasing efforts to recruit talented students. This renewed emphasis on recruitment has naturally amplified the need for more information about the effects of collegiate honors programs on gifted university students. In contrast with the wealth of information available on gifted and talented students in the K-12 context, there is a marked lack of research on these students at the collegiate level (Rinn & Plucker, 2004; Robinson, 1997).

Most of the existing research on the impact of honors programs on college students has focused on program description and rationale (Long, 1998), effects of honors programs on student achievement (Tsui, 1999), and student retention (DeSalvo & Ritchey, 1996). Most of this research has been written for student services personnel or honors program staff and administrators, and much of it focuses on community college honors programs (Crooks & Haag, 1994; Rinn & Plucker, 2004).

Nevertheless, a small number of studies have attempted to describe the characteristics of honors students themselves. Mathiasen's (1985) study compared honors to nonhonors students on study habits, locus of control, academic motivation, and personality dimensions. The results indicated that, compared to nonhonors university students, honors students placed more value on studying. They reported less need for deference, more need for achievement, more persistence, more facilitating anxiety, more orientation toward grades, more demandingness, more competitiveness, and more need for approval. They indicated less discouragement about school and did not differ on the locus of control scale.

Gerrity et al. (1993) contrasted honors to nonhonors students on dimensions of demographics, attitudes, interests, and behaviors. In terms of demographics, they found that honors students had more highly educated parents. Honors students differed from nonhonors students in their reasons for college attendance. Nonhonors students seemed to be attending school to increase their financial standing, whereas honors students attended school to prepare for future educational endeavors or simply for the sake of learning. Honors students also differed from nonhonors students in terms of important factors for making a career choice. Honors students chose careers based primarily on intrinsic interest whereas nonhonors students chose careers based on earning potential (Gerrity et al., 1993).

In summary, research on the effects of participation in university honors programs is limited. There is a marked lack of research on gifted students participating in honors programs. Furthermore, we were unable to uncover any research on affective outcomes of honors program participation. The current study represents an attempt to add to the body of literature on gifted students in university settings and, more specifically, to examine how a collegiate honors program experience benefited gifted students. The purpose of this research was to investigate how such a program influenced the intellectual, social, and emotional development of gifted university students.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) served as the theoretical framework for the current study. This framework is appropriate as it assumes that social behavior is motivated by the meanings that people create to explain and understand their world. Symbolic interactionism holds that one can best understand social behavior by grasping the meanings people apply to events, organizations, and objects, and attempting to consider their points of view as "actors" from within. This approach guided our efforts by helping us to maintain neutrality and sensitizing us to emergent patterns regarding the meaning of the honors program experience on the participants.

Research Methods and Procedures

We employed a case study research design. Merriam and Simpson (1995) defined a *qualitative case study* as "an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community" (p. 108). The goal of a case study approach is to describe and illuminate a specific case, looking holistically and in-depth within a context, and to present descriptions of the contextual influences on the individual or program under investigation. Case studies examine individuals' experiences within one bounded case and provide a thorough understanding of the particular, which is transferred when the particular becomes recognized across similar or diverse contexts (Stake, 2000). Therefore the unique interpretations within one case helps researchers explain the complex meanings of phenomena being studied. The goal of the current study was to examine the experiences of gifted university students and understand how their involvement in a college honors program influenced their intellectual, social, emotional, and moral development as young adults. The names of the individuals

and institutions described were changed to protect the identities of the participants involved.

Three Phases of Data Collection

We conducted the study in three phases. The first phase of the investigation involved traveling to Southeast Technological University (Southeast Tech), the home of the college honors program under investigation. The honors program at Southeast Tech was well established and had enjoyed a reputation for attracting high-achieving students from high schools across the state.

During our time on campus, we met with Dr. Carol Holt, the honors program director. Dr. Holt welcomed us to conduct the investigation and served as a key informant throughout the study. Dr. Holt invited us to join honors program students in their activities throughout our 3 days on the university campus. During that time we were able to conduct observations of the students engaged in typical honors program activities. Observations took place in the university honors program office, student lounge, and the director's home. We observed students studying, working on course assignments on computers in the honors lounge, and groups arranging travel plans to the upcoming regional honors conference. In addition, we enjoyed meals and casual conversation with students throughout our visit. We met with a university administrator to learn the history of the honors program to understand the significant impact the program had on the university. We also conferenced with Dr. Holt to obtain a list of program alumni for possible inclusion in the second and third phases of the current study. To conclude our initial data collection visit, we joined Dr. Holt and her staff at a holiday party held in her home that was attended by approximately 30 honors program students.

Throughout the 3-day visit to the university, we engaged in taking field notes by jotting down keywords to remind us later about experiences and important issues to document. We also incorporated taking photographs as part of the data collection, for this allowed us to attend to details that may have been forgotten or overlooked (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In addition to observational field notes and photographs, archival data were obtained including the Southeast Tech student newspaper, University Web pages, publications associated with the honors program, descriptions of honors courses, and the honors program student handbook.

In the second phase of data collection, we traveled to another part of the state to attend a reunion of honors program alumni. The reunion took place annually during a winter holiday weekend and was held in a large comfortable home of two alumni. Honors program alumni came together from all over the country, some traveling many hundreds of miles, to renew old friendships and discuss intellectual topics and personal issues. The reunion provided us with the opportunity to observe the participants within the culture of the program. We conducted in-depth semistructured interviews with those selected participants traveling the greatest geographic distance to attend the reunion. Following the reunion weekend, we continued interviewing alumni of the program who lived within an accessible geographic region. Interviews with all participants were completed within one academic semester.

The interviews with the seven participants constituted the primary source of data collection used in the current study. The in-depth interviews involved asking open-ended questions designed to have participants reflect on their experiences in the honors program. Through the semistructured approach, we began with an interview guide that delineated a predetermined range of topics to be explored in the interview that enabled us to maintain a flexible conversational style allowing participants to initiate new topics or expand on issues they saw as salient to their experience (Payne, 1999). Following the recommendation of Seidman (1998), we posed follow-up questions that provided the participants the opportunity to reconstruct their experiences according to their own perspective of what was significant, rather than being led by our interpretations. The interview guide used in the study is featured in the Appendix. One interview ranging in length from 2 to 4 hrs was conducted with each of the honors program alumni. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Following transcription of the interviews, additional e-mail correspondence took place when necessary to address any questions that needed clarification.

Phase 3 of data collection involved collecting reflective journal entries from the seven participants. As honors program students in the mentoring component of the program, the students maintained a reflective journal of their insights on life and shared these personal writings via a list serve with approximately 50 honors program students. Through the list serve, students participated in enlightening conversations that enabled them to better understand the complexities of their lives as gifted young adults. We requested that the seven participants review their personal archives of their collegiate journal reflections and share two significant entries that were representative of important developmental milestones. These journal reflections were transmitted to us by e-mail.

Table 1
Demographic Information About the Participants

Name	Age	Years at Southeast Technological University	Majors (chronological)	Current Position
Dawn	36	1985-1990 (5)	1 Computer science 2 English & Spanish[a]	Logistics management for a large corporation; music director for a large parish
Isaac	26	1995-2000 (5)	1 Engineering 2 English[a]	PhD program in library & information science
Mike	26	1995-2000 (5)	1 Electrical engineering 2 Chemical engineering 3 Chemistry[a]	PhD program in immunology
Marcus	26	1995-2000 (5)	1 Physics 2 Economics 3 Math & economics[a]	PhD program in sociology
Adam	24	1996-2002 (6)	1 Physics 2 Psychology & English 3 English[a]	PhD program in English
Kim	23	1998-2002 (4)	1 Biochemistry 2 Chemistry[a]	Medical school
Jacob	32	1990-1995 (5)	1 Civil engineering 2 English & psychology[a]	Owner of small computer programming business

a. Indicates degrees received.

Three phases of data collection that combined participant observation, semistructured interviews, and archival document review enabled us to address the following research question guiding the inquiry: What impact did a college honors program have on the intellectual, social, and emotional development of gifted university students?

Selection of the Participants

Following reputational-case selection in which a researcher chooses a population to study based on the recommendation of experts (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), we requested nominations for participants from Dr. Carol Holt. With a list of nominations from Dr. Holt, we incorporated purposeful sampling to determine participant selection. The objective of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the research questions being posed. More specifically, criterion sampling was implemented, whereby all cases had to meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2002). The criteria for selection of the seven participants were as follows: They (a) were identified as gifted during their K-12 school experience, (b) had been full-time students at the university, (c) participated in all three components of the honors program for at least 4 years, (d) continued participation as alumni, (e) geographically accessible for involvement in the current study, and (f) representative of the gender distribution within

the three components of the honors program.[1] Demographic data about the participants in the study are included in Table 1.

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis served as the strategy for analyzing and interpreting the data. Such an approach involved our examining the data closely in search of categories or themes within the phenomena under investigation followed by a search for relationships among the categories to explain the phenomenon investigated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The work of Miles and Huberman (1994) informed our process of coding and analyzing all documents, observations, and transcribed interviews. In coding, we closely examined the data to identify similar patterns, themes, recurring ideas or phrases, and commonalities or differences between and among segments of data. Combing through the data and labeling it allowed us to view the data from multiple perspectives and to consider more analytical possibilities. The second stage of analysis involved our examination of the single instances in the data, and meaning was derived from them without searching for multiple instances. This strategy helped us to break apart the data in an analytically meaningful way and required that we pose further questions about our data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

The third stage of our process involved examining the data through a display of diagrams of the codes

to explore the composition of each coded data set (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Such a display helped us to structure information into a compact, accessible format to better analyze the data. In the next phase of analysis, we established patterns and searched for any consistency between two or more patterns or themes within the data. We gradually established generalizations that explained consistencies in the data. To conclude our analysis, our generalizations about the participants' experiences were contrasted with published literature on students involved in university honors programs.

Our analysis process can be understood through the following example. In our first stage of coding, we noted similar patterns, recurring ideas, or commonalities in the data that were labeled using terms such as *developing humility, learning to give up control, more expressive affect, solid identity, empathy, compassion, tolerance, metacognition, critically examining beliefs,* and *emerging moral philosophy*. In our second stage of analysis, we searched for single instances in the data and noted that one participant, Marcus, was anomalous in that he spoke of extensive episodes of depression and social difficulties. However, on closer examination of interviews and documents from Marcus, we realized what he was describing was indeed consistent with the other participants in the current study in that he was experiencing growth along the same continuum. However, his growth experiences tended to be more painful. In using integrative diagrams, we concluded our process by establishing consistencies between several patterns in our earlier coding. In the final stage of analysis, it became apparent that relationships existed between and among these concepts, and they were eventually merged into a category labeled *psychosocial growth*.

Description of the Context

Removed from major metropolitan areas, the campus of Southeast Tech presents visitors with picturesque green lawns, lush shrubbery, and well-maintained red-brick architecture. However, the effect of years of budget cuts becomes more apparent on entering a building. The small campus offers a relaxed, casual, and friendly atmosphere that is especially quiet during weekends as many students leave campus to visit their families. Located in a conservative community of 30,000, the campus culture reflects the values of the surrounding area. The student body of 8,500 includes students pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees, with the majority pursuing bachelor's degrees in engineering, business administration, and education. Having won recognition as one of the most effective teaching institutions in the southeast, the university faculty are accustomed to stretching their meager budgets and making up the difference with their personal time, passion, and commitment to their students.

Description of the Honors Program

The Southeast Tech honors program consists of three major components. The first component is the Honors Student Association (HSA). It is a student club that is affiliated with the university honors program, is student run, and whose function is to provide opportunities for extracurricular enrichment and social activity. The second component is the academic honors program, which provides honors courses, seminars, and colloquia to students. Incoming freshmen must have an ACT score of 26 or above to gain admission to the honors program. To remain a full member, students must take the required number of honors courses and maintain a grade point average of 3.5 or above. Full members who have completed the required honors courses receive an honors diploma on graduation. On average, about 150 freshmen join the honors program each year, whereas only about 15 students graduate with the honors diploma each year.

The final component is the mentoring program that is conducted by the honors director, a personal development program that is referred to simply as "mentor." At any given time, there are 40 to 50 highly motivated students who volunteer to participate in mentor. Mentor students are asked to perform a number of activities. The first is writing journals on at least a weekly basis. These journals usually focus on personal events in the student's life and also philosophical, intellectual, political, or spiritual issues. These journals are shared with Dr. Holt and the other mentor students via e-mail.

The second activity involves participating in one-on-one conferences with Dr. Holt. In these conferences, students discuss their progress, future goals, and any issues of which the director should be aware. The third activity is attending mentor meetings in which large groups discuss developmental issues faced by college students. At other times, the meetings might focus on discussing a piece of literature, art, or poetry, dissecting a difficult book, debating current issues, or viewing a provocative film. The final activity is reading books from an extensive reading list. Mentor students are expected to pursue these readings independently.

Description of the Participants

Adam. Throughout the honors program reunion weekend, Adam entertained his friends by playing his mandolin. Known for his library of more than 1,000 music recordings, Adam enjoyed bluegrass music and jazz and had refined his skills in West African drumming by studying one summer in Ghana. The short, distinguished, bearded music lover was known among his peers as an easygoing young man with a strong sense of ethics, a sarcastic, self-deprecating sense of humor, and a down-to-earth personality. During his undergraduate years he was known for his tie-dyed clothing and Grateful Dead t-shirts; however, with his move to graduate school, he dressed in plaid, flannel shirts and jeans, having the appearance of the quintessential English professor. Arriving at Southeast Tech to study physics, Adam switched to majoring in English as he discovered a new passion for the work of T.S. Eliot and teaching. On graduation he was awarded a prestigious federally funded fellowship to pursue a doctoral program in literature at the University of Wisconsin.

Dawn. An attractive, vivacious extravert with long curly hair, a brilliant smile, and brown eyes that sparkled, Dawn also enjoyed sharing her love of music. Throughout the alumni reunion she led her friends in singing some of her favorite selections and accompanied herself on the guitar. An accomplished musician, Dawn had mastered several instruments and had been involved in adult choirs since middle school. Music continued to be an important part of Dawn's life. She was employed as a logistics manager for a large corporate conglomerate, and in her spare time she served as her church choir director and kept busy writing contemporary religious hymns for a small music publishing company. The energetic young woman was fluent in multiple languages, enjoyed many hobbies, had a passion for reading, and was known for quoting the Bible, the Koran, and Buddhist texts from memory. Today she is actively involved in church service. Following her graduation from Southeast Tech, she earned her first master's degree in English and a second degree in theology.

Isaac. Isaac attended Southeast Tech while living at home with his family. He explained with a laugh that he chose Tech because "it was there." Known by his peers for his dry sarcasm, friends claimed that he was far more sensitive than he allowed people to see. Isaac was respected as a man who was intellectually driven, a student who often refused to attend classes he perceived as lacking stimulation. Instead, this self-directed learner with diverse interests read voraciously on subjects that consumed him. With his vast, eclectic knowledge base, he thrived in engaging in philosophical discussions with his colleagues in the honors program. On entering the university, he majored in engineering and eventually changed his program to English. His grade point average fluctuated throughout his years at Southeast Tech; however, that did not concern him, as he was far more interested in learning what he chose to intellectually pursue on his own. A heavyset, distinguished gentleman with glasses and a heavy beard, Isaac arrived at the alumni reunion with his new fiancée and appeared content with his current doctoral program in information science at Indiana University.

Jacob. Jacob stood out among the honors program alumni in several ways. Jacob was very tall, he wore his hair in a long ponytail, carried himself with perfect yoga-style posture, maintained a perpetual smile, and could be heard above any large group conversation with his robust and distinctive laugh. An easygoing, sensitive gentleman, he enjoyed a reputation as a young man who was popular with young women and well respected by all who knew him. His knowledge of computers was extensive, and his passion for computer games was at times all-encompassing. As valedictorian of his senior class, he arrived at the university with plans to study civil engineering but eventually graduated with degrees in English and psychology. He completed a master's degree in English literature. He arrived at the alumni reunion happy to share that he had established himself in his private computer database company. Jacob reported that he planned on eventually pursuing yoga instruction as a full-time career.

Kim. Kim, the curly auburn-haired young woman with the mischievous smile, was known among the honors program students as a well-organized, conscientious leader who could always be depended on. She came to the university as a National Merit Scholar from a small rural community. Within a short period of time, she built an impressive college resumé with her active involvement as an officer in the honors program and student associations related to her field of chemistry. Known for her active leadership throughout her years in the honors program, Kim was respected as a quiet, serious student who maintained a 4.0 grade point average throughout her 4 years at Southeast Tech. With Kim, school always came first; however, she was known for having a good sense of humor. She gained notoriety for having offended her conservative dormitory mates when she displayed an inflatable man in her college dormitory window. The fun-loving young woman and

serious student was relieved to be attending the alumni reunion following weeks of intense final examinations in her medical school program at the University of Alabama—Birmingham.

Mike. Mike's friends described him as the man with a resumé "of myth and legend." As president of the honors program, a senator in the Student Government Association (SGA), and serious scholar, Mike had gained the respect of his peers by maintaining high standards for himself and others. A quiet, reserved gentleman, he achieved excellence in everything he accomplished as he brought the best out in those people with whom he worked. In addition to his strong academic record, Mike was respected as a soccer player, a Buddhist scholar and practitioner, a serious outdoorsman, a talented photographer, and a student leader. A tall, well-groomed young man who dressed in a conservative classic style, Mike set the standard for excellence within the honors program population. A strong scholar, he arrived at the university on a competitive engineering scholarship, and graduated from Southeast Tech having been accepted to many top-tiered doctoral immunology programs including Harvard University and The University of Washington. Not one to become seduced by Ivy League status, he chose to pursue his doctoral studies working under a Nobel Prize recipient at The University of Washington.

Marcus. *Serious*, *intense*, *philosophical*, and *conservative* were terms used by friends to describe Marcus. Arriving at Southeast Tech as the valedictorian of his small high school class, Marcus had experienced difficulty fitting in socially with students but found a small circle of friends within the honors program. Throughout the weekend reunion, Marcus appeared uncomfortable as he continued to struggle with small talk. Marcus was raised in a tightly knit, deeply religious Lutheran family and found real challenges accepting much of the college student culture at Southeast Tech. A stocky gentleman with a conservative appearance, he wore neatly pressed button-down shirts and jeans. The scholarly, introverted young man who was respected as a deep thinker struggled with a learning disability and depression. Fortunately, Marcus had experienced great personal growth through a number of the intellectual and social outlets provided by the honors program. He returned to the alumni reunion from his doctoral program in sociology at the University of North Carolina and was pleased to share his reflections on his Southeast Tech experience. The honors program had been a formative part of his collegiate experience, and to express his gratitude, he donated a significant sum of money to endow an award recognizing the university's best honors thesis.

Findings

The participants in the current study described feelings of isolation during childhood, a time in which they questioned or rejected their families' religious beliefs. After arriving at Southeast Tech and entering the honors program, they described the satisfaction of living in a community with intellectual peers, the strong desire for growth and self-actualization, and the experience of being mentored by Dr. Holt.

Isolation

The participants reported feelings of isolation during their elementary and secondary school experiences. The isolation resulted from asynchrony between the participants and their environments in terms of interests, goals, values, and intellectual ability. All of the participants described being oriented to the larger cultural and intellectual world from an early age. For some participants, this orientation stood in such stark relief with the values of the other people in the community that it became profoundly isolating. Marcus described that he always "felt like an oddball being an intellect" because of his interests. Similarly, Dawn became fascinated with astronomy following a unit on space science at her school. She spoke of sneaking up past her bedtime to watch the *Cosmos* series on PBS during a time when her friends were staying up late to watch MTV. She described this experience:

> But I remember LOVING it, just being fascinated with the hugeness of it all, and thinking that there was this entire world out there that was just waiting to be discovered. There was a world of people and things and ideas and all this stuff that nobody around me seemed to know about or care about, but that I knew was there. And I kept reaching for it and reaching for it and reaching for it. I didn't know what I was doing. I just knew that I was hungry.

Like several participants in the current study, Dawn often felt that she had to teach herself the things she wanted to learn. She was extremely motivated to experience more of this larger intellectual world. She spoke of this motivation as an intense longing, and the "other world" she described later took on quasi-religious meaning for Dawn:

> I wanted other people to love it as much as I did, and to encourage me to love it, and then shepherd me through what it was like to love it, and be able to

share that enthusiasm that I had. It didn't happen. It didn't happen. There was nobody who loved it like I did. It was very frustrating. I felt alone. My mom didn't get it either. There was nobody to show me these things. I was always trying to figure them out on my own. Go read, go try to put things together, try to figure out what the missing pieces are. Because I didn't feel like there was anybody in my life who was going to be able to show me the things that I wanted to learn.

Several of the participants grew up in small rural communities, a condition that exacerbated the experience of being alone. Marcus indicated that he was one of only five people in his graduating class of 100 to go on to college. In Marcus's words, "I felt so isolated. There wasn't a lot of emphasis directed to people who had academic or intellectual differences." Kim, who spent her early years in an urban mathematics and science magnet school, moved to a rural community during late middle school. She was struck by the difference between her old and new classmates. She said, "I was back in a normal school. I had never realized how stupid people could be. I was just appalled at some of the people."

Another source of difficulty for all of the participants was that they rarely experienced any sort of intellectual challenge in school. Referring to the advanced classes his school offered as "ridiculously easy," Mike's examples of the frustration this lack of intellectual challenge caused are representative of the participants' experiences:

I remember being very annoyed that in 7th grade I was required to take pre-algebra instead of taking algebra, and it was such a waste of time. I actually started doing all of my exams in base 7. I would actually write [on the paper] "everything on this page is in base 7." It was my way of getting back at the stupidity and futility of going through pre-algebra when I knew the majority of the concepts that were being covered in class.

Questioning Religious Value Systems

The participants in the current study also experienced a great deal of asynchrony between their own religious values and beliefs and the values of the community, which usually consisted of a fundamentalist and evangelical sect of Christianity. This misalignment served to further reinforce the feeling of isolation for the participants. Mike began his religious questioning at a very young age. He described

himself as a 4-year-old asking, "If God wants us all to go to heaven, then what are we doing on earth anyway? Why don't we all just skip this crap and go to heaven?" He laughed and then elaborated with "Then I thought when we die we go to heaven anyway, so why don't I just kill myself and get it over with? Then I won't have to deal with all this earthly bulls__t!" Mike concluded his description of his childhood questioning seriously as he reflected, "I remember actually having that thought and making myself sick over it." Dawn also asked many religious or philosophical questions as a child. At age 10 years, Dawn found herself in a quandary because she was unable to determine an ultimate source of value from which to describe the goodness or badness of people or things. As she explained, "If these people who are good and right turn out to be bad and wrong, well how do we know what's good and right? What if we're wrong about what we think is right?" This sort of questioning was not welcomed in the churches these young people attended, which Kim described as the "feet-washing type." Jacob described one of his first experiences with church that is representative of the feelings of all of the participants:

Brother Buddy got up there with a diagram one day. This diagram pictured heaven, hell, and earth and the different ways you can go from one to the other. You can go from earth to Hell, from earth to Heaven, from Heaven to Hell, but once you go to Hell, you couldn't get back to Heaven. That was kind of horrifying. Thinking back on it now, it doesn't leave a good taste in my mouth.

The conflict between the participants' internal values and the values of the church led to some uncomfortable situations for the participants. Kim and Dawn tried to avoid going to church but were forced to do so by their parents. Kim saw her mother enjoying church as a social outlet and believed that her mother simply wanted her daughter to have a social group. She explained, "She saw it as something I could list on my college application—youth group member." Dawn reflected on her early experiences with church explaining, "I was supposed to be going to Sunday school, but instead I would sit in the bathroom for the duration because I couldn't handle it." Eventually Dawn chose to be baptized because she perceived that it was the only way that she could make her family happy. However, as the baptism approached, she realized she wasn't comfortable with the theological consequences of this decision. She reflected on the day she was to be baptized and remembered thinking, "I don't really

believe this, but there's no way out now." She explained she had a real problem with the literalism of religious teachings: "I didn't believe it was possible to come back from the dead. I didn't believe it was possible to walk on water. I had logical problems with it. And if *that* wasn't true, then none of it was."

Mike's parents were adherents to the brand of conservative Christianity that permeated the region, though he claimed they did not have "the typical biases associated with fundamentalist Christians," a position that Mike believed was "not incompatible with making healthy choices and being well-reasoned and critical." Nevertheless, Mike could not accept the idea of a God that would banish some people to eternal punishment based on their adherence to a particular creed. By high school, Mike had reached a personal conclusion:

> One of the ramifications of doing Model United Nations in high school was realizing that if I had grown up in Iran, I'd be Muslim and I would be a strong Muslim. If I grew up in India, I would be Hindu and my beliefs about Hinduism would be as strong as my beliefs about Christianity. So it was total cultural relativism. . . . I remember having that realization and saying, "It's all cultural context!" and [after] understanding that, religion became a performance to keep people happy.

Being at Home in a Real Community

When Dawn arrived at the university she went in search of a group of new friends who would appreciate her creativity, her intellectualism, and her passion for learning. She described walking down the hall in her dormitory noticing the difference between how she decorated the door of her room and what other students chose to put on their doors: "I had Far Side cartoons and quotes and pictures. I was walking down the hall seeing all of these frilly sorority banners and the fru-fru girly stuff, and I thought: "Where are the people who are going to put Far Side cartoons on their door?" Wondering how she might connect with other students with similar interests, Dawn explained, "I was looking for a place to belong, looking for a social network where people were going to be like me somehow." Soon she became president of the science fiction club on campus with a membership roster of seven students. On the day that campus organizations recruited new members, Dawn set up a table in the student union where she displayed science fiction books and installed a video monitor to play science fiction movies. Within a short amount of time, she had a roster of 75 names and through this newly energized club she became connected to Dr. Holt, the advisor to the science fiction club. Enrolling in Dr. Holt's literature class, she then became connected to a group of students in the honors program. It was there that Dawn found her intellectual peers and established her social network. Dawn celebrated when she made the connection with the group describing the students as "the kind of people I had been looking for all of my student life—a group of people who loved what they were doing and weren't afraid to openly love it, and to challenge each other." Dawn explained that within the program she discovered others like herself who were intellectually alive:

> There were all kinds of geeks there and I loved hanging out with them all because what makes a geek a geek? Total dedication and love for what you're doing, in whatever way it expresses itself. Whether it's expressed in pocket protectors, or Birkenstocks or long flowing skirts. Geeks of all trades! I love being around people who are passionate about what they do. I needed to be around people who loved it, because it felt good. It felt safe.

The honors program quickly became the focal point of Kim's Southeast Tech experience as she described her early experiences with her new peers in the honors program:

> I was learning new things. I was with a group of people who were similar to me. I felt like I was at home. I had found a niche. All through high school I had been feeling out of place even though I had friends. In honors [at Tech] I was in a place where I was comfortable. I could be myself. I was happy.

The sense of community within the program supported students in a variety of ways—intellectually, socially, and emotionally. In his final entry in his journal, Marcus highlighted how the mentor program's group discussions allowed him to "open up and build tight friendships." Mike described a period during which he was struggling with the death of his grandmother and his ending a romantic relationship, and found support among his colleagues:

> I remember being incredibly broken about that and Kevin and Jacob just listening and being very compassionate about it. My freshman year, [there was a] group of five guys and we just talked about life, the universe, anything [that we needed to discuss]. That was a really powerful experience, to listen to all these guys talk about values, life, important issues. I became very attached to that group.

Hunger for Growth

All of the participants in the current study experienced a strong desire for self-actualization. This included a strong valuing of knowledge and education for its own sake, the desire to bring one's personal behavior into closer alignment with universal ethical principles, and the drive to overcome weaknesses. This was often expressed as a fixation with philosophical, religious, or political questions that took on great emotional significance rather than being intellectualized abstractions.

Dawn expressed this hunger for growth as early as high school. She explained that the first thing she did when she acquired a driver's license was to join the local community singer's group. A classical music lover, she wanted to be part of something that was challenging and beautiful. When the group performed Vivaldi's *Gloria,* Dawn described feeling "absolutely enthralled" by the experience. Much of Dawn's commentary centered on her concept of "the other world," and she described how she spent most of her life feeling conflicted about this hunger she experienced and even trying to cover the resulting behaviors.

> There's a fear of giving yourself to it [the other world] totally, knowing what the interpersonal result of that is going to be, but fear of not doing it because you know what that would mean for you. Like selling yourself short, or selling out, or even offending the other world somehow by not giving yourself to it totally.

Where Dawn's hunger was largely spiritual in nature, Isaac's was intellectual. He read voraciously in his spare time. He enrolled in courses to satisfy his curiosity and paid little attention to his grades. On completion of his bachelor's degree in English literature, Isaac contemplated getting another degree in other fields such as biology or philosophy, so he could have another intellectual position from which to "triangulate off to figure out what is reasonable and what is not." Isaac represented a whole subset of the population of students involved in the mentor program. In spite of admonitions to the contrary, he underachieved with respect to academic performance because he was so active in pursuing his own intellectual interests.

When given a structure from which to address this need for self-actualization, as well as a teacher to guide the process and an understanding and supportive peer group, many mentor students participated in the activities with a substantial commitment of time and energy. Marcus explained, "If Carol had a meeting, I was there." Isaac's commitment was reflected in his copious journaling and reading. As he described, "It was no big deal for me to sit down and write three journals a night. I mean from 1:00 to 4:00 am most every night."

Intellectual Growth

The honors program provided the seven gifted students excellent opportunities for intellectual growth. Through advanced-level honors courses they were intellectually stimulated and academically challenged as they explored new bodies of knowledge and began to shape their professional goals. The participants all referred to the high expectations that honors program faculty members maintained. Mike described the impact of a mysticism course and the role it played in redefining his view of himself as a learner:

> The mysticism class was Masochism 101 [laughs]. An incredible amount of reading was required, both for the course and for the person I chose to write on, Ibn-al-Arabi. The texts were amazingly dense, long, and always translated, so the cultural context that was lost was incredibly frustrating. It was obvious that the scholars who had written on him didn't understand him, and I didn't either, which was very frustrating. But it was beneficial to see that academic authorities are not always right. Just because someone is researching something doesn't mean that they get it. This class, more than any other class is what really stretched my head.

Adam reflected on the same course in which he wrote a lengthy paper on immortality in Taoism, describing it as "very good professional preparation" and a "really good experience of doing a mountain of research, as I went through about 50 books." Marcus described a senior project in an honors special topics course on the history of early Christianity in which he assimilated most of the literature on the historical Jesus and crafted a paper that he compared to something "a first year master's seminary student would write." Having spent a semester working on the paper, he described feeling a real sense of accomplishment about having assimilated so much information into a serious research paper. Isaac highlighted how the honors program helped to motivate him to read about a variety of subjects to which he had not been exposed through coursework. He explained, "I read five or six times what I would have read otherwise because I had people around who were interested in learning and growing and reading and figuring things out."

Psychosocial Growth

The mentor component of the honors program at Southeast Tech played a significant role in shaping the psychosocial development of the participants. All referred to the benefits experienced emotionally and socially through their work in mentor meetings in which they spent long hours engaged in discussions revolving around significant issues in their lives as gifted young adults. Marcus described the mentor experience as he explained, "We are friends dealing with very personal issues, we work with each other on a number of levels." Through mentor, Marcus grew more comfortable expressing his feelings, and he believed that the journaling associated with the mentor program was significant to him. He indicated, "I've sent out journals about very difficult personal issues to a group of 40 or 50 people and I feel comfortable with that."

For many of the participants in the current study who arrived at Southeast Tech as teenagers who for years had been questioning their family's religious value system, the mentor group often became an outlet for them to search for a deeper understanding of religion and spirituality. Mike explained how his critical reflection at times had him feeling unsettled:

> I remember realizing I only know the existence of God through things that say God exists, and their only validation is that they say they are valid. I came to a point where there was no way values existed unless I assumed values existed, and vice versa, and that was very frustrating. I felt like I was standing on quicksand, it was always moving. It came to a point where I couldn't evaluate any other aspect of my life, ranging from God to careers to values because there was no way I could evaluate anything without having a whole set of assumptions. I felt like I was sinking, in throwing all that crap away. And it became hard to choose anything. Do I go to class? Do I go to church? One morning I stopped by the Mini-Mart to get breakfast. I remember standing there crying because I couldn't decide what to eat, and I thought, "Man! I'm a moron!" [laughs]

For several of the participants, the mentor group enabled them to deal with the breakup of romantic relationships and experience personal growth. Adam referred to his experience with a breakup as "an opening-up experience with highs and lows." He elaborated by recalling one of Dr. Holt's axioms, "being open to lower lows lets you experience higher highs," and Adam was pleased to report that "the down stuff doesn't get to me as it would have before." Mike reported a pattern that he noticed in previous romantic relationships. He took on the role of the analytical thinker while his partner became the person who experienced the emotions. His work in mentor led him to realize that he had defined himself as a male with "deficiencies with compassion and emotion." Through his later work in mentor, he learned to become more balanced by learning to accept and deal with his emotions.

Psychosocial development evolved for the participants as a result of journaling with their peers in the mentor program. Entries in the journals provided evidence of the high level of trust within the mentor group, the freedom to disagree with Dr. Holt and other students, hard work in identity development, and discussions of vocational and philosophical issues. The following example from Adam's journal provides an example of the serious self-disclosure and his work at developing self-understanding:

> I have a very distinct memory of sitting in my room, my dad yelling at my brother about something. My face feels about an inch thick. I'm full of rage at my dad for being such an [expletive] to my brother, but I can't show it on my face. This [behavior] is still with me. I don't show emotion on my face—happy, sad, angry, whatever. I feel very awkward even smiling with anything other than a smirk or a grin.

For many of the participants, their journals served as an outlet to reflect on their process of learning more about self. The following entry from Kim is representative:

> "Waking up" was knowing that I have problems with control. I have to know things. I don't have to do anything with the knowledge, but I want to know things. I hoard it miserly and I glory in it. I want more of this knowledge. I know this is one of my faults. I realize that I have bad points, and I am not a perfect person, nor am I a good person. I am merely a person. I can see my faults and try to fix them, or deal with them as best as I can, but if I can't fix them, then I live with them. Big revelation: I'm human, and I'm not perfect. I'm also not always right, though I try to be and I want to be all the time.

Other aspects of the honors program supported the psychosocial growth of students. For the participants in the current study, psychosocial development was nurtured through developing skills and commitment to one's chosen vocation. For example, Adam aspired to become a university English professor, and Dr. Holt provided him opportunities to coteach an English class. This experience had a strong influence of his view of self. He described his experiences:

The first time I [taught a lesson] during my sophomore year I was horrible. I was nervous. I hadn't prepared very well. It was a train wreck! Later on I was very comfortable. I started making notes on pieces of literature and writing down important talking points and questions for discussion. I taught a section for several weeks. Carol and I reorganized the syllabus around themes instead of chronologically. It was fantastic to get this experience as an undergrad, and it was part of the process of me getting my stuff together and handling responsibility.

Search for Vocation

All of the participants in the current study arrived at Southeast Tech with plans to major in a particular field and eventually all seven changed majors once or twice during the course of their university experience. As they explored various fields of study and became fascinated with different concepts, big ideas, and new theories, they shifted their professional goals and made significant changes in their degree programs. Mike's description of his honors experience was representative of the participants as he explained the indirect path he traveled to arrive at his current field of graduate study:

> One issue I worked on was trying to determine career and what interests I had. I changed majors three times in college. I came in as electrical engineering, switched to chemical engineering, and eventually chemistry, and probably had enough hours for a major in biology, but didn't take one or two courses. I'm currently doing a PhD in biomedical, so there was a logical progression to all of it but it took me a long time to get to that point.

Dawn's description of her search for professional identity highlighted the mismatch between her passion for learning what she enjoyed most and a college major designed to guarantee marketability on graduation. As a computer science major, Dawn found she was unfulfilled. She explained, "I was taking UNIX and VAX assembly, and I was earning As and Bs in my computer science and math courses, but it was not speaking to my soul." Dawn changed her major to English as she explained, "because that was where I found things that were speaking to my soul."

Carol Holt as Mentor

A vivacious extravert, Carol Holt greeted friends with her warm smile and overwhelming hugs. A woman with an obvious joie de vivre, an insatiable love of learning, and a vast supply of energy, she tackled the daily challenges of operating the honors program at Southeast Tech with dedication. She remained determined to provide a high-quality honors program for the most intelligent and motivated students at Southeast Tech.

Dr. Holt's dedication was evidenced in the mentoring she provided her young protégés. When Jacob suddenly fell ill with food poisoning and was hospitalized, Carol came and sat through the night with him in the hospital room. In addition, as an English major, Jacob received a great deal of professional training from Carol. With her assistance, he won a highly prestigious grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities enabling him to work for several months on an in-depth research study and then to present his results at a national conference.

Marcus received a great deal of intellectual training from Carol through assigned readings, one-on-one discussion, and intense independent study coursework. When Marcus experienced his first episode of serious clinical depression, he reached out to Carol. She supported him by convincing him to seek professional help, in spite of his resistance to doing so. Furthermore, Carol supported Marcus through his development of the social skills that he had missed because of his isolated upbringing and his anxiety by encouraging him to take "baby steps" toward making friends.

Through his relationship with Carol, Isaac was pushed to fulfill his intellectual desires through intense and rigorous reading. Dr. Holt steered Isaac toward the books that she knew would stimulate and interest him and requested that he write journals to keep her up-to-date with his reading. She followed up these assignments with one-on-one discussion and through e-mail correspondence, ensuring that he understood what he was reading. Isaac described how this allowed him to build the type of broad, deep education that he wanted—an education that he did not think he could gain through coursework at Southeast Tech.

More generally, Dr. Holt supported all of her students by creating the honors program to provide a safe and close-knit community that would support the achievement and growth of all the students. She created dozens of opportunities to get involved in leadership. She taught rigorous courses in a variety of subject areas, connected students with professors who could mentor them in subject areas in which she was not an expert, and wrote powerful letters of recommendation for students on graduation. Her flexibility in taking on diverse roles allowed her to effectively catalyze the growth and development of a very wide range of students.

Discussion and Implications

Like most small-scale qualitative studies, one should not attempt to generalize the findings of the current study to other honors programs or even to other students within this program. The trade-off is that by studying a relatively small number of participants, we were able to study each of them in depth. The setting and the personalities involved, especially that of Dr. Holt, are quite unique. This is a limitation of the current study. In our conversations with Dr. Holt and the participants, it became clear that this university professor treats her mentoring role as a full-time commitment above and beyond her classroom instruction.

The early adolescent experiences of the participants in the current study highlight the challenges faced by gifted young people growing up. For some children, growing up gifted may mean growing up lonely and often misunderstood. For the participants in the current study, the honors program at Southeast Tech could be compared to an "oasis" following years of isolation in an intellectual and emotional " desert." In addition to feeling isolated, the participants struggled to understand existential issues and questioned the religious value systems of the adults in their lives. This finding is consistent with Cannister's (1999) research and highlights how religious faith during adolescence may be tenuous as young people begin to reduce their dependence on authority figures and increasingly think more for themselves. Educators and counselors working with gifted students may see this occurring earlier in adolescence such as was evidenced in several of the participants' lives.

Along with feeling isolated and out of sync throughout their early adolescent years, the K-12 school experiences of the participants did not provide the intellectual challenge they needed. For all seven participants, school was far too easy. Mike's story of submitting a math exam with "all answers in base 7" is an example of what happens when schools are not effective in addressing the needs of gifted students.

Fortunately, the seven gifted collegians in the current study found their "oasis" at Southeast Tech. Their "hunger for growth" was finally "nourished" when they arrived on campus and connected with an intellectual peer group with whom they felt at home. The sense of community is consistent with findings highlighted in the literature on full-time residential programs for gifted high school students (Britton-Kolloff, 2003) and special summer and Saturday programs for gifted students (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003). For the participants in the current study, having an intellectual peer group was a clean break with their past—their early teenage years when they felt so intellectually isolated. For the first time they found themselves in an environment where they were energized and stimulated by other students with similar intellectual abilities and interests. The importance of the significant relationships that formed for these students cannot be overstated. Dawn described her honors program friends as the kind of people she had searched for all through her student life. Kim described feeling elated to have found a place that felt like home, and Mike shared his experiences with a young men's discussion group that engaged in serious conversations about intellectual and emotional issues. These findings highlighting the importance the participants placed on their community of intellectual friends are consistent with literature on networks of high-achieving peers (Hébert & Reis, 1999; Speirs Neumeister, 2002) as well as literature describing the relief that gifted young people experience when placed in settings in which they no longer experience their giftedness as a social stigma (Cross, Coleman, & Stewart, 1993; Cross, Coleman, & Terharr-Yonkers, 1991). Postsecondary educators responsible for facilitating honors programs need to incorporate program components that ensure students will have opportunities for building important relationships with like-minded individuals.

The current study helps to remind educators that not all gifted high school students are Harvard bound. The intellectual, emotional, and social needs of gifted college students in smaller, less prestigious institutions remain important. Given that many gifted students in smaller institutions arrive at their universities from rural, isolated communities, the value of a well-run honors program increases. In such cases, a well-designed honors program will help "level the playing field" and prepare students who can compete against students from Ivy League institutions for highly selective graduate programs. Young people in rural university settings such as Southeast Tech deserve rigorous academic coursework and appropriate programs to address their affective needs. Having heard the experiences of the participants in the current study, it remains evident that these young people felt strongly they had obtained a world-class education at Southeast Tech. Some may argue that through the honors program they received a Harvard education for a much less expensive price.

The findings of the current study call attention to how honors programs provide gifted students opportunities for building intrinsic motivation. Through involvement in many of the cocurricular activities

associated with the program, the seven participants benefited from a rich collegiate experience beyond the classroom. Whether it was preparing for presenting research at a regional honors program conference, chairing a committee, organizing an honors program road trip, or publishing the program's newsletter or handbook, the honors program at Southeast Tech was certainly more than simply earning good grades. For the participants in the current study, honors was all about working collaboratively and feeling empowered to accomplish important tasks. By becoming involved in a community of students engaged in so many worthwhile activities, the honors program enabled students to develop their talents in a multitude of ways. Consistent with the findings of Heath and McLaughlin (1993), Hébert (2000), and Zaff, Moore, Papillo, and Williams (2003), involvement in these cocurricular activities provided opportunities for intelligent young adults to construct a sense of self-efficacy and success. A strong sense of worth evolved from being a member of a group noted for accomplishment; a sense of belonging came from being needed within the organization. Engaging the honors program students in highly valued cocurricular activities and out-of-classroom experiences provided them a strong source of interest and opportunity to develop talents, work with caring adults in supportive relationships, and enjoy significant social relationships that supported social and academic adjustment as well as the development of a strong identity as a gifted university student.

The findings of the current study provide evidence that a high-quality honors program incorporates affective development as a desired outcome. This component of the program was significant given the evidence of the psychosocial growth shown by the participants. Through the experiences of these seven intelligent college students, educators come to understand the endless energy, the insatiable love of learning, the heightened intellectual intensity, and emotional sensitivity described as "overexcitabilities" in Dabrowski's theory of emotional development (1964). These overexcitabilities are an abundance of physical, sensual, creative, intellectual, and emotional energy that is positively related to advanced emotional development in adulthood and were evident throughout the life experiences of the seven participants in the current study. This finding calls attention to the need to educate university faculty members and counselors associated with gifted students in honors programs with theories such as Dabrowski's to better understand and address the needs of such populations.

In addition to the heightened intensities was evidence of the participants' search for vocation. This search was related to the multipotentiality of the seven participants. Gifted high school students leaving for college do not necessarily know the professional options that may be most suitable for them. Expecting gifted students with multiple talents to stick with one college major may be unrealistic. The experiences of the seven collegians highlights what Silverman (1992) noted when she advised that the first 2 years of a college experience for gifted students was a time to gain an education by opening their minds to the liberal arts, a rich background that would serve them well in any field. Silverman maintained that exposure to interdisciplinary coursework enabled college students to see how several fields could be combined in one's vocation. Parents of gifted university students may be concerned with their children's inability to decide on a career. Postsecondary counselors and honors program personnel would serve parents well by educating them on the complexity of this search for vocation as well as assuring them that career decisions are not irreversible and helping them to understand that a vocational search requires patience on the part of adults guiding gifted college students.

The evidence of the significant influence of Dr. Carol Holt on the lives of the students within the honors program highlights how the significant role a mentor may play in developing talent and nurturing psychosocial growth. The multiple benefits of Carol Holt's mentoring of the seven gifted university students were consistent with research literature on mentoring (Clasen & Clasen, 2003; Hébert & Olenchak, 2000; Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002). Findings from the current study may convince university personnel that mentoring programs for gifted university students enrolled in honors programs may positively affect their intellectual, social, and emotional development and may assist them in actualizing their full potential.

Appendix
Interview Guide
The Impact of an Undergraduate Honors Program on Gifted University Students

Name and place of birth
Family background
Parents' education and occupation
Student experience in middle and high school
Reasons for deciding to attend Southeast Technological University
Experience with recruitment and orientation to the Honors Program

Experience with the Introduction to Honors course

Freshman through senior year experiences with the mentoring component of the Honors Program:
  Significant events
  Significant individuals

Freshman through senior year experiences with Associated Honors Guild
  Significant events
  Significant individuals

Freshman through senior year experiences with Honors courses
  Significant ideas and/or events
  Significant individuals

Significant developmental milestones during undergraduate and postgraduate years

Professional and educational experiences since graduating from Southeast Tech

Impact of work in Honors, Associated Honors Guild, mentoring program on:
  Intellectual development
  Social development
  Emotional development
  Value system and philosophy of life

Description of life goals and progress in meeting them

Note

1. Although males and females were equally represented in the honors program, males were overrepresented in the mentor component.

References

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Britton-Kolloff, P. (2003). State-supported residential high schools. In N. Colangelo & G. A. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (3rd ed., pp. 238-246). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Cannister, M. W. (1999). Mentoring and the spiritual well-being of late adolescents. *Adolescence, 34,* 769-779.

Clasen, D. R., & Clasen, R. E. (2003). Mentoring the gifted and talented. In N. Colangelo & G. A. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (3rd ed., pp. 254-267). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crooks, S. M., & Haag, S. G. (1994). Evaluating a community college honors program: Perceptions of effectiveness and value. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 18,* 485-497.

Cross, T. L., Coleman, L. J., & Stewart, R. A. (1993). The social cognition of gifted adolescents: An exploration of the stigma of giftedness paradigm. *Roeper Review, 16*(1), 37-40.

Cross, T. L., Coleman, L. J., & Terharr-Yonkers, M. (1991). The social cognition of gifted adolescents in schools: Managing the stigma of giftedness. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 15*(1), 44-55.

Dabrowski, K. (1964). *Positive disintegration.* Boston: Little, Brown.

Daniel, L., & Digby, J. (2002). Selling people on honors education. *National Honors Report, 23*(1), 1-2.

Denk, W. J. (1998). Honors as a recruiting magnet. *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum, 9*(2), 67-77.

DeSalvo, J., & Ritchey, N. P. (1996). The university scholars program: A case study in the recruitment and retention of high-caliber students. *College and University, 71*(4), 21-25.

Fischer, D. (1996, September 16). The new honors programs. *U.S. News & World Report, 121*(11), 108-110.

Gerrity, D. A., Lawrence, J. F., & Sedlacek, W. E. (1993). Honors and nonhonors freshmen: Demographics, attitudes, interests, and behaviors. *NACADA Journal, 13*(1), 43-52.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Chicago: Aldine.

Heath, S. B., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1993). *Identity and inner-city youth: Beyond ethnicity and gender.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Hébert, T. P. (2000). Defining belief in self: Intelligent young men in an urban high school. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 44,* 91-114.

Hébert, T. P., & Olenchak, F. R. (2000). Mentors for gifted under-achieving males: Developing potential and realizing promise. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 44,* 196-207.

Hébert, T. P., & Reis, S. M. (1999). Culturally diverse high-achieving students in an urban high school. *Urban Education, 34,* 428-457.

Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428-444). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

LeCompte, M. D., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and quali-tative design in educational research* (2nd ed.). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Liang, B., Tracy, A. J., Taylor, C. A., & Williams, L. M. (2002). Mentoring college-age women: A relational approach. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 30,* 271-288.

Long, A. (1998). Honors microcosm of the urban research uni-versity. *Metropolitan Universities, 9*(2), 13-22.

Mack, M. (1996). These things called honors programs. *Liberal Education, 82*(2), 34-39.

Mathiasen, R. E. (1985). Characteristics of the college honors student. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 26*(2), 171-173.

Merriam, S. B., & Simpson, E. L. (1995). *A guide to research for educators and trainer of adults* (2nd ed.). Malabar, FL: Krieger.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analy-sis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Olszewski-Kubilius, P. (2003). Special summer and Saturday programs for gifted students. In N. Colangelo & G. A. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (3rd ed., pp. 219-228). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation meth-ods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Payne, S. (1999). Interviewing in qualitative research. In A. Memon & R. Bull (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of interviewing* (pp. 89-102). New York: John Wiley.

Pflaum, S. W., Pascarella, E. T., & Durby, P. (1985). The effects of honors college participation on academic performance during

freshman year. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 26*(5), 414-419.

Rinn, A. N., & Plucker, J. A. (2004). We recruit them, but then what? The educational and psychological experiences of academically talented undergraduates. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 48*(1), 54-67.

Robinson, N. M. (1997). The role of universities and colleges in educating gifted undergraduates. *Peabody Journal of Education, 72*(3/4), 217-236.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Silverman, L. K. (1992). Career counseling. In L. K. Silverman (Ed.), *Counseling the gifted and talented* (pp. 215-238). Denver, CO: Love Publishing.

Speirs Neumeister, K. L. (2002). Shaping an identity: Factors influencing the achievement of newly married, gifted young women. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 46,* 291-305.

Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 435-454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Steinhauer, L. (2002). Results from the SMACOHOP Survey of Small College Honors Programs: Part 4. *National Honors Report, 23*(2), 13-16.

Tsui, L. (1999). Courses and instruction affecting critical thinking. *Research in Higher Education, 40*(2), 185-200.

Zaff, J. F., Moore, K. A., Papillo, A. R., & Williams, S. (2003). Implications of extracurricular activity participation during adolescence on positive outcomes. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 18,* 599-630.

Thomas P. Hébert is associate professor of educational psychology in the College of Education at the University of Georgia in Athens where he teaches graduate courses in gifted education and qualitative research methods. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). His research interests include social and emotional development of gifted students, underachievement, and counseling issues of gifted males.

Matthew T. McBee is the research and evaluation specialist for GEAR UP North Carolina, a federally funded program at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, that seeks to increase the numbers of low-income students enrolling in postsecondary education through early intervention. He recently completed his PhD in educational psychology at the University of Georgia. His research interests include the identification and assessment of students for gifted programs, underachievement, tests and measurement, and multilevel analysis.