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## Introduction to the special issue: Honors Communities

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On behalf of the Editorial Board we are honored to present you the second issue of of the Journal of the European Honors Council (JEHC). With the JEHC, we aim to share knowledge and good practices regarding honors programs and talent development programs in higher education. This second issue is a special issue, dedicated to contributions related to the International Honors Conference that was held at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle (the Netherlands) in June 2017.

### 1. Honors communities

Creating community was the central theme of the 2017 International Honors Conference, hosted by Windesheim University of Applied Sciences. The goals of the conference were to strengthen honors communities on a local, regional, national and international level; to deepen and broaden the community experiences of students, lecturers, researchers and the work field; and to give students a podium to present their research and innovative projects in collaboration with Glocality (Open Access Undergraduate Academic Journal - <https://www.glocality.eu>).

The conference tracks were:

1. Creating Community
2. The honors learning experience
3. The honors lecturer
4. Honors' impact
5. International collaboration and/in honors
6. Students' poster sessions for (under)graduate research and innovative projects (in collaboration with Glocality)

Community is one of the cores of honors education; faculty, students and practitioners form a learning community in which close contact, learning-by-doing and co-creation are key. More recently, community has been embraced by regular degree programs, which illustrates the pioneering and innovative role of honors education. The conference hosted the first three contributions on the transfer from honors to regular education.

## 2. Conference highlights

The conference welcomed around 350 visitors from eight different countries and hosted more than 50 workshops and presentations. The opening keynote was delivered by Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, who are well known for their work on communities of practice and social learning theory. In the closing keynote, Margriet Sitskoorn, professor of neuroscience at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, explained how the development of the prefrontal cerebral cortex is important for the success rate of all students. Sitskoorn showed how to develop talents and accomplish goals. She explained why social skills are so important and how students can learn from working in learning communities, to help them escape their stimulus response.

The students' poster sessions were a great success. In total 26 students and student teams participated in two categories: (under)graduate research and innovative projects. Students had to pitch their project and interact with several judges. For the first time the International Honors Conference awarded the best poster presentations in each category. There were two winners in the category (under)graduate research: Khadija Moses (Loyola University, New Orleans, USA) with 'Synthesis and Characterization of New Charge Transfer Complexes as Potential Superconductors' and Frederique Stapke (Windesheim Honours College, Zwolle, the Netherlands) with 'One person's trash is another person's treasure - Promoting pro-environmental behaviors on the household level in Balinese communities'. There was one award winner in the category innovative projects with the title 'Vegetables, Cows and Art' by Anna Kotcharayan, Daniëlle Bakker, Oafa Boukhri, Stef Windt and Tom Kooiman, from the Honors Programme New Towns (Windesheim Flevoland, Almere, the Netherlands).

For an impression of the conference, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu-ex7ZJoOQ>.

## 3. Contributions to this issue

In this issue, authors present you their notes and papers which are related to the presentations they held in Zwolle.

The first contribution 'Interdisciplinary Learning: A Strategy of Chinese Honors Education For providing the depth and scale of learning' is from China. Qiu Li-min, Ye Jing-jia and Tang Xiao-wu present the Chu Kochen Honors College, which offers a series of honors programs for talented and motivated students from all academic disciplines of Zhejiang University in China. The honors programs offer both general education and interdisciplinary learning. Through the customized curriculum and interdisciplinary training, honors students are required to push themselves academically and strive for excellence. Students enrolled in honors programs are encouraged to become independent thinkers and creative problem solvers.

The contribution of Amber Z. Smith (Virginia Tech Honors College, USA), 'Supporting Honors Students Through a Peer Advising Center', addresses the needs of honors students. Honors programs exist to address the unique educational needs of honors students, but as our services grow in scope and complexity, there is a risk of losing sight of some of those needs. The article discusses Virginia Tech's latest peer programming initiative, an Honors Peer Advising Center; and the pedagogy behind this approach.

The contribution of María Garcia Alvarez and Liesbeth Rijdsdijk develops around the new educational concept The Value Creators of the BBA programme in Global Project and Change Management offered by Windesheim Honours College (WHC) in the Netherlands. It presents the 4E model as a tool to enable students to navigate in a time restricted series of brainstorms through the steps of exploration, engagement, elaboration and evaluation in order to comprehend a global challenge (or a Sustainable Development Goal) like “No Poverty” or “Affordable and Clean Energy” and come to concrete ideas or solution perspectives and create value.

The paper by Tineke Kingma, Karien Dommerholt and Liesbeth Rijdsdijk presents the application of theories and experiences in the day-to-day environment of honors education: ‘the honours learning environment’. It presents a framework of eight characteristics which are the input for the content and design of honors programs at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences (the Netherlands). The model is designed for teachers to think critically about their behaviours and attitudes in order to challenge intrinsically motivated and gifted students. The eight characteristics are illustrated by animations.

The contribution ‘Which factors play a role in the development of students to become professional leaders?’ by Arie Kool from Hanze University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands poses the question how an honors coach could support the personal development of students to become future leaders in their work field. It is still fairly unknown what focus coaching should take, when it comes to the development of professional leadership qualities. The personal stories of the respondents show that positive development was speeded up when students became aware of their personal motivators and could connect to them.

‘Designing clinical reasoning simulation software through interdisciplinary collaboration of honours students from veterinary and computing sciences’ is written by Andrea A. G. Laumen, Milou van Velzen, Ivan Veul, Ineke Lam, Wolfgang O. Hürst and Yvonne R. A. van Zeeland from Utrecht University (the Netherlands). Clinical reasoning is an essential skill to master in professional veterinary and medical health sciences, yet teaching and learning this skill can be challenging for both teacher and student. The article presents an interdisciplinary project with veterinary and computing science honors students to develop a first prototype for veterinary sciences.

Finally, the paper ‘Honors programs as forerunner for 21st century skills?’ is an international collaboration between authors from the Netherlands and Belgium. Pierre van Eijl, Ton Peeters and Albert Pilot (Utrecht University, The Netherlands), Henmar Moesker (Hanze University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands), Annemie Dillen (KU Leuven, Belgium) and Stan van Ginkel (Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands) present an explorative study, focusing on students’ perceptions regarding their learning gains related to the application of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in honors programs. Aiming to explore the opportunities for incorporating 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in higher education curricula, the authors found that students perceived these skills as being highly promoted in their honors program, in comparison with their regular program. They conclude that honors programs can indeed be a forerunner for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, but that this requires a method to adjust and incorporate it into regular programs.

#### **4. Final remarks**

The wide range of issues and perspectives covered in the contributions to this issue shows a great determination by all involved to spread talent development programs in higher education and to critically reflect on the best ways to offer challenges to students willing and able to do more than the regular program offers. Aiming to offer an easily accessible platform for exchange of research insights and good practices, the Journal of the European Honors Council will continue to publish contributions in full open access in 2018. The Editorial Board of the JEHC invites you to contribute to the next issue(s) of the Journal by sending in your papers and notes. Our call for contributions can be found on the website [www.jehc.eu](http://www.jehc.eu).