

## **Evidence and Argument in Honors—Call for Contributions to Planned NCHC Monograph**

**Abstracts Due - May 1, 2020 (175-300 words)**

**Papers due –September 1, 2020 (4,000-7,000 words)**

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“Making a presentation is a moral act as well as an intellectual activity. . . To maintain standards of quality, relevance, and integrity for evidence, consumers of presentations should insist that presenters be held intellectually and ethically responsible for what they show and tell. Thus *consuming* a presentation is also an intellectual and a moral activity.”

-Edward Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence* (2006)

The relationship between knowledge, “true belief,” and error has been central to western philosophy since Plato, and formal discussions of evidence often feature in introductory classes on composition or logic. However, despite its familiarity, the topic of evidence is complex and difficult. Honors teachers delve deeply into interdisciplinary issues with strong students, and so are uniquely placed to develop innovative and multifaceted approaches to the question of how to help students think intelligently about evidence. This volume aims to gather their wisdom.

Teaching about evidence has become more challenging during the rise of the attention economy. We have moved well beyond concerns about Wikipedia to the less transparent world of social media: denialism, fake news, deepfakes, and conspiracy theories abound. A simple lie is more likely to go viral before any truth. “Black box” algorithms govern search results. Students come to classes with diverse opinions and varying levels of expertise in thinking critically about sources. Faculty must juggle credibility, disinterestedness, authority and open-mindedness as they help students to think about evidence.

Contributions to this volume might include papers that touch on questions like those below:

- What statistical, rhetorical, or philosophical methods are useful to honors students thinking about evidence?

- How do particular honors classes develop student thinking about evidence? Is honors learning in this area measurably deeper/more complex (i.e., is there evidence about teaching evidence effectively)? How do honors students respond to ambiguity in knowledge claims?
- How do different disciplines define evidence? How can interdisciplinarity deepen our understanding and that of honors students?
- Can refusing to judge (or judging incorrectly) have ethical implications? How can honors students learn about ethics and evidence without feeling indoctrinated?
- How do honors students at various levels/years react to learning that scientific evidence evolves, and that science is not simply an unchanging answer-bank? How do we teach honors students from all majors to read and judge scientific evidence?
- Information literacy: as the lines between authoritative and untrustworthy media information sources become blurred, how do we help our honors students?
- How can understanding the shift to information abundance and an online attention economy help students think about evidence?
- Polarization: What strategies can stop us from talking past each other and simply selecting the evidence that confirms the beliefs we already hold? Can concepts such as emotional intelligence and empathy assist honors students in differentiating meaning from polarized language/rhetoric?
- Diversity: How do our lived experiences and biases change the way we understand and accept evidence? Do honors classes—with their emphases on experiential learning and student engagement—provide particular opportunities/challenges to exploring such questions?
- Stewardship: How can honors students acquire a sense of civic responsibility, stewardship, or expectations of informed citizenship with respect to evidence?

Given the challenges faced by honors students born in the new millennium, we think this volume will be useful to honors faculty and others willing to push further as they seek to help their students understand what the word *evidence* means and how to think carefully about a category that will remain central to resolving modern crises.

### Sample

Climates of Doubt and Knowledge: Evidence and Policy in an Honors Class on Climate Change

Richard England, Dean, Pine Honors College, Eastern Illinois University

As climate change becomes more apparent in both the physical and the media atmosphere, a leadership class at Eastern Illinois University explored how our response

to data and evidence ought to inform our plans to address this growing global crisis. This paper will describe teaching about climate change denial by using diverse datasets to contextualize the claims of “mainstream” and “skeptical” interlocutors: we also investigated the construction of these common categories. Students learned how to think about the role of rhetoric in making popular claims about climate. The class then considered the challenges of making a rapid transition to a carbon-neutral energy system, using data about the global history of energy transitions and per capita energy consumption. Given the vast volume of data, and the many critical perspectives from diverse disciplines that illuminate our understanding of climate change, the class demonstrated that an intelligent response involves a critical awareness of the distinction between arguments that are well-grounded and those that are indefensibly selective in their choice of evidence. The paper will include student perspectives on the experience and outcomes of this honors course.

**Please send abstracts or questions to Richard England ([rengland@eiu.edu](mailto:rengland@eiu.edu))**

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