



## PREPARING LEADERS OF FAITH AND VISION

### The Challenging Templeton Honors College Experience

By Dr. Christopher Hall and Beth Chapman

*A small group of students sits exhausted at the crest of Mount Marcy, one of the tallest mountains in the Adirondacks. For some of this entering class of Templeton Honors College (THC) students, the trek up the mountain has been one of the most difficult, challenging, and rewarding experiences of their lives.*

What might be the rhyme and reason behind such an arduous, demanding task? Virtues such as perseverance, grit, determination, and resolve come to mind. If leaders are to guide others to new, unforeseen terrain, they themselves must possess the traits and skills to navigate their course safely and skillfully. They must understand themselves well. What are the strengths they already possess? What are the hidden cracks in their personalities, crevices in danger of widening under stress? Because a central goal of the Templeton Honors College is to identify and develop students who will be future leaders in our society – whether their field is education, journalism, the arts, business, medicine, law, politics, or science – we head off together each fall for a week-long camping trip with first-year students.

#### IMAGINE A WELL-CONSTRUCTED LADDER

In describing leadership development at the Templeton Honors College, we often use the illustration of a ladder. A ladder has two rails, along with any number of rungs, depending on its length. Picture the first rail of the ladder. At the THC, this rail represents our emphasis on the life of the mind. We want our students to think well, read well, and write well. After four years at Eastern, Honors College students should be well on their way to becoming educated people: familiar with the great works of the Western canon, well-versed in both the humanities and sciences, and well aware of major

currents and developments domestically and internationally.

A well-formed mind, however, represents only one rail of our ladder. If the intellectual growth of our students were our only goal, we would match the primary emphasis of most honors colleges across the country. But the second rail of our ladder is equally important: the character development of our students. We are deeply concerned about the spiritual formation of THC undergraduates. We ask during their time at Eastern whether THC participants are increasingly being shaped into the image of Christ. As Egyptian monastics used to put it, are students learning to study with “the mind in the heart?” The Templeton Honors College is focused on developing leaders whose intellect and character have matured through immersion in an academically and spiritually challenging environment.

Finally, the rungs on our ladder represent the important skills our students must develop to lead effectively. Practice in public speaking, lessons in societal graces, exposure to cultural events, studying abroad, and opportunities to lead are just a few of the experiences we provide throughout a student’s four years.

#### SOUND CHALLENGING?

It is. But for students who are wired to excel and compelled by a drive to make a difference, this program is the experience they seek. Although only three cohorts of the THC have graduated, we have alumni pursuing graduate degrees in fields such as

theology, medicine, genetics, musical performance and clinical psychology, and alumni who are already employed in their chosen vocations. We have a graduate who is engaged in conflict resolution in El Salvador, another who is a corporate and financial analyst for Gaudenzia, Inc., and one who is working with Arab refugees in Atlanta. These alumni are young but determined. They realize the responsibility associated with their gifting. They are paving the way for future generations of THC graduates.

It’s time for that exhausted group of hikers to begin their descent from Mt. Marcy. They pick up their packs, a little unsure of what this challenge has to do with an honors college, but a bit surer of themselves and each other. They take one last glance at the breathtaking view and wonder what the next few years will hold. What their future holds is an experience that will push them, shape them, and prepare them for the calling God has placed on their lives. At the Templeton Honors College, leadership development is designed to position people of faith to engage their entire world. The first-year hike may be coming to an end, but the journey has just begun.

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