Demography of Honors: Comparing NCHC Members and Non-Members

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Recent research describing the landscape of honors education has demonstrated that honors programs and colleges have become an important and expanding component of American higher education. Since its inception nearly a century ago, collegiate honors education offering campus-wide curricula has spread to more than 1,500 non-profit colleges and universities (Scott and Smith, "Demography"). NCHC has served as the umbrella organization for the collegiate honors community during a fifty-year period in which the number of known programs delivering honors education has experienced a more than four-fold increase (Rinehart; Scott and Smith, "Demography").

In 2012, NCHC undertook systematic research of its member institutions' structural and operational features, but we revealed in a previous article that the NCHC membership does not include 43% of institutions offering honors education (Scott and Smith, "Demography"). Since the 2012 NCHC study described only a fraction of the honors landscape, we seek to extend that vantage point to include non-members, examining structural features, engagement with regional honors councils, and reasons that non-member

institutions' administrators give for not joining NCHC. Additionally, we seek to explore information about the location of each campus offering honors education in order to observe how it is distributed throughout the United States.

Regarding the location and distribution of honors programs and colleges, we address the following research questions:

1. How are NCHC member and non-member honors programs and colleges distributed in the United States?
2. What proportion of institutions in each state offers honors education?
3. How are two- and four-year honors programs and colleges distributed in the United States?
4. To what extent is honors education being delivered at four-year institutions in each state and by institutional type?

Additionally, since NCHC's mission is to support honors education through strategic initiatives that include research, professional development, and advocacy, we explore not only the percentage of honors programs that are affiliated with NCHC but to what extent NCHC's support truly reaches institutions offering honors education. To begin to address this issue, we need to understand how institutions without membership vary from those represented among the membership, so we additionally sought to address the following research questions:

5. How do NCHC members differ from non-members in specific structural arrangements, i.e., enrollment of the institutional host, enrollment of the honors unit, title of the honors administrator, and presence of dedicated honors faculty, staff, academic space, and housing?
6. How do NCHC members differ from non-members in affiliation with regional honors councils?
7. What reasons do administrators of non-member institutions cite for not joining NCHC?

METHODOLOGY

To explore the research questions, we created a comprehensive data set from multiple sources. The original dataset was first developed to explore the

national landscape of honors education (Scott and Smith, "Demography"). Starting with the 2016 list of 4,664 institutions in the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System, or IPEDS (Carnegie), we eliminated institutions that did not deliver a traditional undergraduate education at non-profit institutions. That focus removed 1,290 for-profit institutions, 261 graduate-only institutions, 479 institutions offering special-focus curricula, 35 tribal institutions, and all 49 institutions located outside of the 50 states of the United States, leaving 2,550 colleges and universities. The 2016 IPEDS dataset uses the Carnegie Basic Classification that distinguished associates colleges (two-year institutions) from four-year institutions and further divides the latter into baccalaureate colleges, masters universities, and doctoral universities in their 2015 report. Note that the IPEDS definitional structure includes a branch campus of multi-campus systems only when the former has its own governance unit, which on rare occasions leads to honors programs with multiple memberships in NCHC having to be classified as one honors program despite operating as multiple programs within one branch campus.

To the dataset we added information about institutions offering honors education based on England's web-crawl procedure that "defined an honors program as any program so-named online and providing information to off-campus website visitors" (73). Like England, we limited our dataset to those institutions that offer honors education in a campus-wide manner, excluding those having only departmental honors programs. We relied first on the Google search engine and then each institution's internal search engine to locate the presence or absence of information on honors education at each of the 2,550 institutions studied; when the presence of honors was detected, we further examined whether it was institution-wide and whether it was designated as an honors program or college (for more information, see Scott and Smith, "Demography"). Membership in NCHC was based on its 2013–14 list of institutional members, excluding for-profit companies, organizations that provide study abroad or internships, honors societies, and individual/professional members.

In order to address the first four research questions, we added to the dataset the location of each of the institutions and then created maps of the locations. We additionally recorded the location of each institution within one of the six regions of the United States as defined by the regional honors councils: Southern, Northeast, Mid-East, Western, Great Plains, and Upper Midwest. Consulting the website for each regional council, we identified regional member institutions and recorded membership in the growing dataset.

Survey of Non-Members

Once this dataset was complete, we sought to gather contact information for presiding administrators at the 643 institutions that were identified as having honors education but had no affiliation with NCHC according to the 2013–14 membership roster. By searching their honors websites, we were able to identify working email addresses for 451 administrators. Of the remaining 192 institutions, many did not list contact information, and 45 had contact information that was no longer up to date. The 451 administrators were then sent an electronic survey that asked about the particular features of their honors academic unit and the reasons they were not members of NCHC. Specifically, they were each asked about enrollment at the institution, enrollment in the honors program or college, the administrative title of its chief academic officer, whether they had dedicated honors faculty, staff, academic space, and housing, and why they were not NCHC members. Replies came from 119 honors administrators, representing a 26% response rate and approximately 19% of the total population of non-members. An analysis of the survey respondents shows that a disproportionate number of baccalaureate and doctoral institutions responded to the survey of non-members relative to their distribution in IPEDs. Additionally, the average institution size of respondents is approximately 20% larger than the average institutional enrollment as represented in IPEDs data. Although four-year institutions and institutions with larger enrollments are represented at a higher rate in the survey findings, the distribution of honors programs and colleges in the sample is roughly the same as in the total population according to the study by Scott and Smith ("Demography").

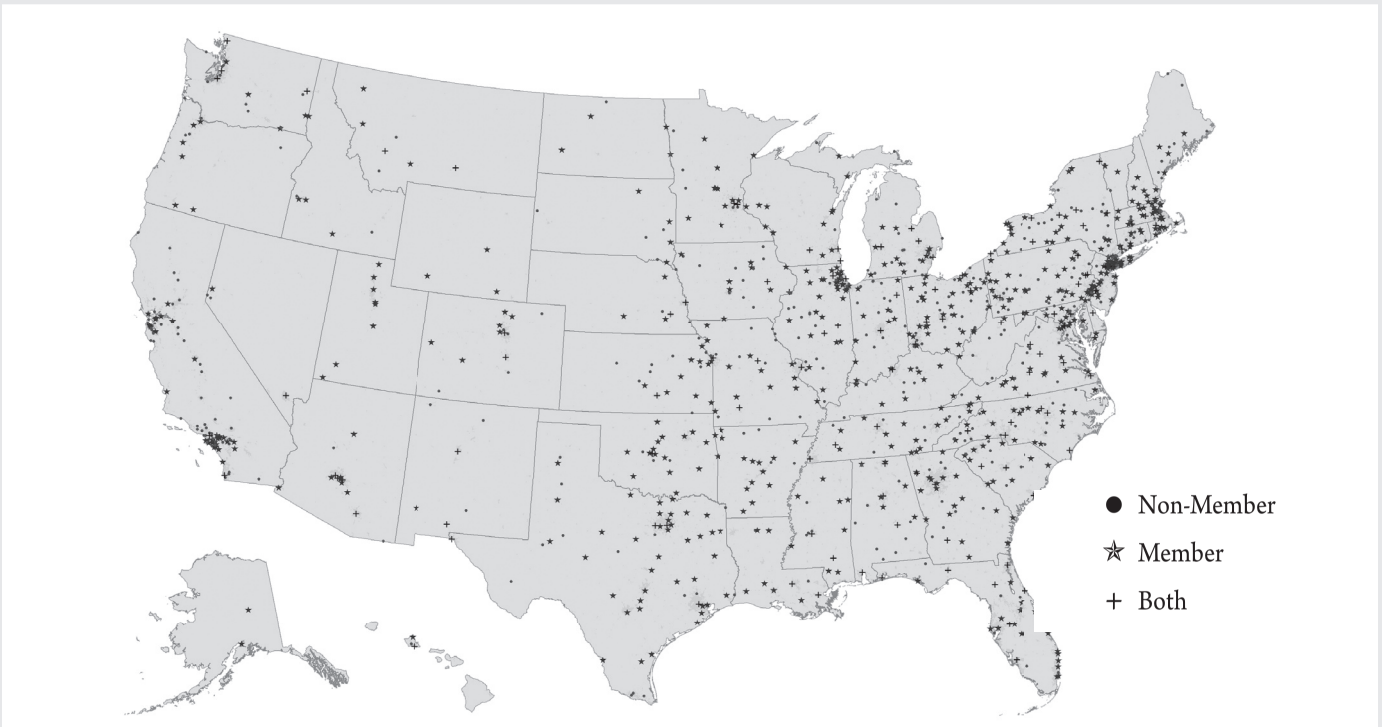
Responses to the survey were then compared to the results of the 2012 NCHC Member Survey (Scott). For the membership survey, 890 institutions with NCHC memberships in 2012 were surveyed; 446 (50%) responded. Summary results about NCHC member institutions are referenced in the following analyses when comparing them to non-members. Use of the 2012 survey results presents several limitations for the present study. First, the data available on NCHC members are now four years old whereas the data on non-members are current. Second, both surveys had relatively low response rates, with the 2012 membership survey having a 50% response rate but the survey of non-members representing merely 19% of the total non-member population. Additionally, the membership list that was used in Scott and Smith's 2016 demography study is now two years old, so membership status may have changed during this time.

RESULTS

Using the location of each institution in the original dataset, we were able to demonstrate the distribution of honors education throughout the United States. Figure 1 depicts the location of the 1,503 institutions with campus-wide honors education. Cities hosting institutions with at least one of the 860 NCHC members are represented by stars (✯) while those with one of the 643 non-members are symbolized by dots (●). Those cities hosting both a member and non-member institution are marked by a plus sign (+). The landscape of honors education map shows that the 1,503 institutions are located in 1,106 communities; 422 locations had 447 non-member institutions (21 of those locations had more than one non-member institution and no member institution); 564 locations had 638 member institutions (55 of those locations had more than one member institution with no non-members); 120 locations had at least one member and one non-member institution (65 locations had more than two institutions). Institutions offering honors education appear to be disproportionately found along the eastern seaboard, in southern and mid-eastern states, and in California, but some of this distribution follows the locational pattern of institutions within the United States offering traditional undergraduate education. To get a different view, one that shows the concentration of honors programs and colleges across the states, see Figure 2.

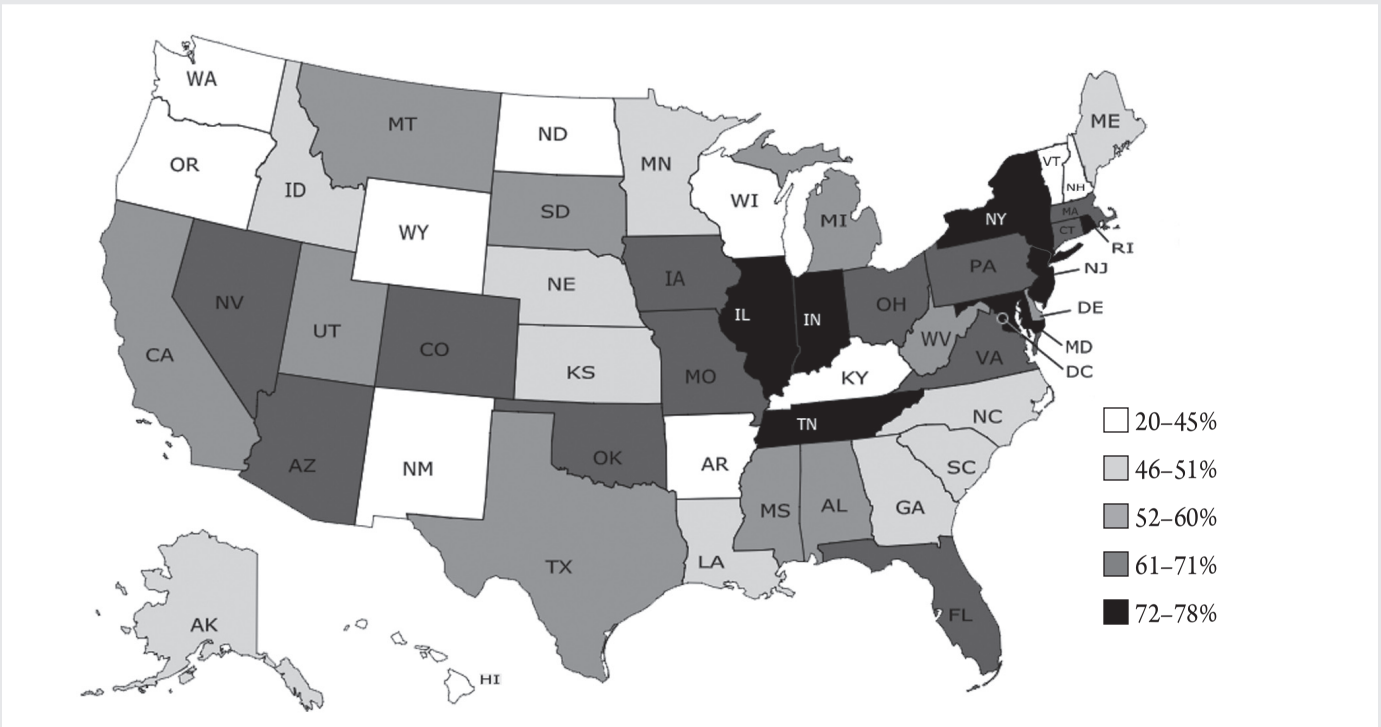
Figure 2 displays the percentage of institutions in each state that deliver campus-wide honors education. The honors concentration map shows that in 8 states more than 72% of undergraduate colleges and universities offer honors education, including 5 states in the northeast along with Indiana, Illinois, and Tennessee. In another 12 states, 61–71% of the institutions of higher education deliver honors, and they are spread throughout the nation. In a total of 35 states, 50% or more of the colleges and universities offer honors education. Six states approach having half of their institutions (44% to 49%) offering honors education. Concentrations of honors education are lowest in six states, ranging from 20 to 38%: Hawaii, North Dakota, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Wyoming. A closer look at these latter six states, however, reveals that at least 44% of the four-year institutions in Oregon and North Dakota offer honors education. In five of the six states, excluding only Vermont, the percentage of private institutions in the state is lower, often significantly, than the national average, with private institutions making up 13% to 35% whereas the national average is 40%.

Figure 1: Location of Institutions with Honors Education by NCHC Membership Status



Note: Map by Stephen O'Connell, UCA Geography, using ArcGIS 10.2

Figure 2: Percentage of Undergraduate Institutions Offering Campus-Wide Honors Education



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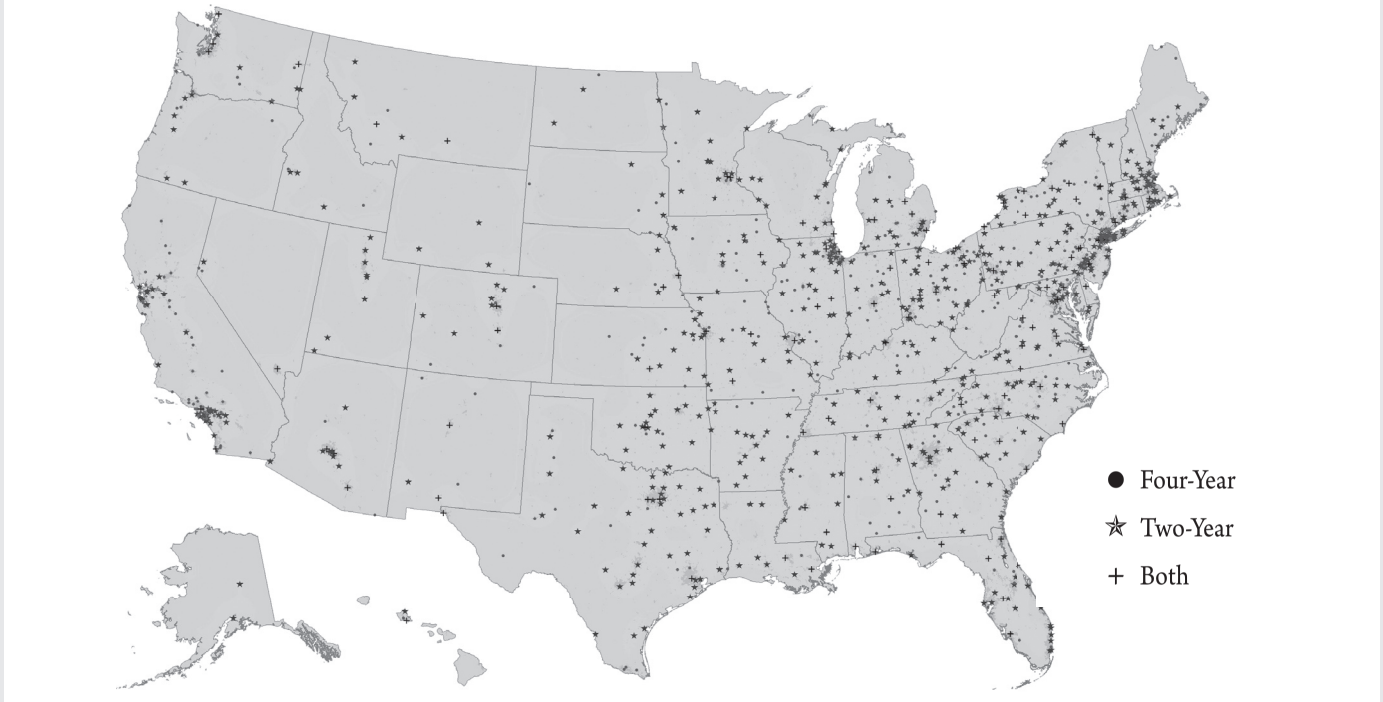
To further understand the presence of honors education, we explored the variation in prevalence between two-year and four-year institutions and institutional classification. While honors education is continuing to spread through two-year colleges and is currently being championed as one of the top five retention strategies for two-year institutions (Noel-Levitz), honors is still a much newer trend in these types of institutions. In fact, honors education is currently present in only 42% of all two-year institutions (389 of 919). Because of these differences, we examined the distribution of honors in each state, looking separately at two-year and four-year institutions. In Figure 3, cities hosting institutions that offer at least one of the 1,114 four-year institutions with honors education are represented by stars (★) while those with one of the 389 two-year institutions offering honors education are symbolized by dots (●). Those cities hosting both a four-year and two-year institution are marked by a plus sign (+).

We further focused on four-year institutions given their greater presence in honors education. Figure 4 demonstrates the percentage of four-year institutions offering honors education and shows that all but seven states (Vermont, New Mexico, Wyoming, Hawaii, North Dakota, New Hampshire, and Washington) have honors education at 50% or more of its four-year institutions. In fact, 26 states are offering honors education at 70% or more of their four-year institutions, with one (Delaware) having honors programs at 100% of its four-year institutions. Overall, the findings show that 68% of all traditional undergraduate four-year institutions are currently offering honors education (1,114 of 1,631), and 74% of all honors programs are located within four-year institutions.

Of the honors programs located within four-year institutions, our dataset revealed that 47% are located at public institutions and 53% at private institutions. These percentages do not show that a greater percentage of private institutions are offering honors, however, because 60% are private while only 40% are public. Of the 517 four-year institutions not offering honors education, 392 (76%) of those are private, so while a greater percentage of honors programs are located within private institutions, a greater percentage of all public institutions are offering honors programs.

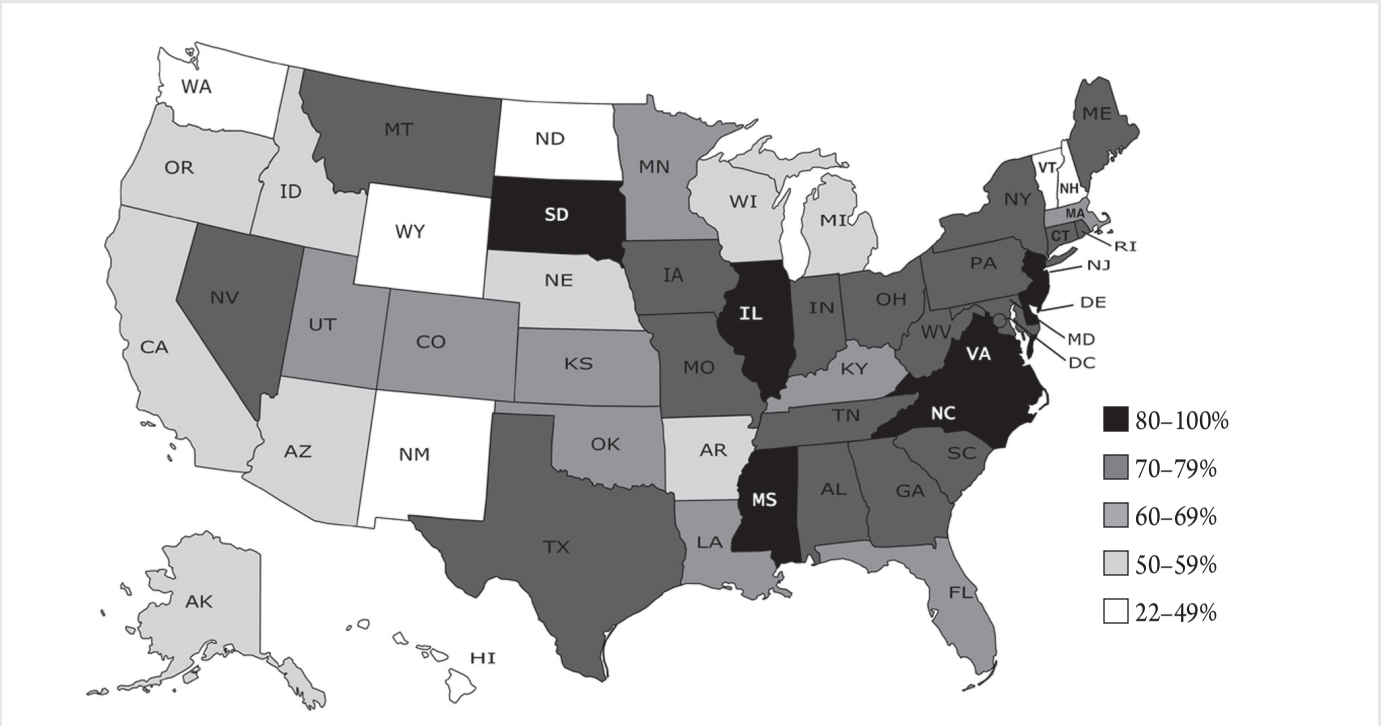
Looking more closely at public four-year institutions, we find that 95% of all public doctoral institutions, 84% of public masters, and 62.5% of public baccalaureate institutions offer honors education. At private four-year institutions, however, masters universities have the highest rate of honors education at 73% while 67% of private doctoral and just 48% of private baccalaureate institutions offer honors education.

Figure 3: Location of Institutions with Honors Education by Institutional Type (4-year & 2-year)



Note: Map by Stephen O'Connell, UCA Geography, using ArcGIS 10.2

Figure 4: Percentage of 4-Year Undergraduate Institutions Offering Honors Education



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Having examined the national distribution of honors, we turn to issues of membership. Previous research revealed that four-year institutions are more likely than two-year institutions to be members of NCHC (Scott and Smith, "Demography"). Additionally, doctoral institutions have higher percentages of NCHC membership, followed by masters and then baccalaureate institutions, regardless of whether honors is delivered through a college or a program. Institutions offering honors colleges are more likely than those offering honors programs to hold memberships in NCHC, regardless of institutional classification, but institutional type was a factor for honors colleges but not for honors programs. Specifically, "honors colleges at public institutions are more likely to be NCHC members than those at private institutions . . . [while] there is very little variation in NCHC membership rates for institutions offering honors programs, regardless of whether they are private or public" (Scott and Smith, "Demography" 89).

Table 1 displays information from IPEDS and the web-crawl about structural features of NCHC institutional members and non-members. Institution type and honors type are repeated here from the Scott and Smith 2016 study "Demography of Honors: The National Landscape of Honors Education" in order to provide a broad vantage point for the analysis that follows. A clear difference in NCHC membership rates emerges between masters and doctoral universities, on the one hand, and baccalaureate and associates (two-year) colleges on the other, with the former having much higher rates of membership. This difference may be underscored by comparing the mean enrollments

Table 1: National Landscape of Honors Education (Scott & Smith, 2016)

	NCHC Members n=860	%	Non-Members n=643	%	Total
Institutional Type					
Associates	177	46	212	55	359
Baccalureate	151	43	197	57	348
Masters	328	65	178	35	506
Doctoral	204	79	56	22	260
Average Institutional Enrollment	10,676		7,126		
Honors Type					
College	138	76	44	24	182
Program	722	55	599	45	1,321

of NCHC members and non-members, showing member institutions to be larger on average. Member institutions also tend to have higher enrollment in honors—an average 37% higher for members than non-members—with the caveat that the small number of very large member institutions might skew the comparison. Also striking is the much higher membership rate for honors colleges than programs, with more than 75% of colleges being members versus 55% of programs; this difference might result from honors colleges having greater resources for membership fees or from a trend within the NCHC toward conversion from programs to colleges, a trend possibly unnoticed by non-members.

In exploring differences in structural arrangements between NCHC members and non-members, we used the information collected in the 2016 survey of non-members and compared it with the 2012 membership survey results for these features. Table 2 shows that NCHC members are far more likely than non-members to have a director or dean, with nearly a quarter of non-members having other administrative assignments such as coordinators, non-administrative faculty, and staff. In addition, compared to non-members, NCHC member institutions are far more likely to have dedicated staff, academic space, and housing, and they are five times more likely than non-members to have an affiliation with regional honors councils. Though the findings of the 2016 non-member survey appear to show that non-member institutions have a higher rate of dedicated faculty, this difference is likely due

Table 2: Size and Characteristics of Members and Non-Members

	NCHC Member	Non-Member
Average Honors Enrollment	378	275
Honors Administrative Type (%)		
Dean	87.0	67.5
Director	13.0	9.4
Other	0.0	23.1
Program Characteristics (%)		
Honors Faculty	20.0	36.8
Honors Staff	74.0	34.0
Honors Academic Space	70.6	29.9
Honors Housing	51.8	23.9
Regional Honors Membership	70.2	14.6

Note: NCHC Member Characteristics are reported from the 2012 NCHC survey while Non-Member Characteristics are reported from the 2016 survey taken for this study.

to the wording of the questions. While the 2012 membership survey asked administrators whether they have faculty that report to honors, the 2016 non-member survey asked more broadly about whether they have faculty specifically assigned to teach in honors. Because the survey of non-members over-represents larger and more comprehensive institutions, institutions with fewer resources are probably underrepresented; consequently, the differences between members and non-members may be even greater than is observed here.

The findings in Table 2 clearly demonstrate that member institutions have greater operational resources than non-members and are far more engaged in their regional honors communities. To explore the latter point further, we turn next to examining the regional distribution of institutions offering honors education. Table 3 lists the location for all institutions with campus-wide honors programs or colleges, placing them into one of the six regional honors council groupings of states. The listings in Table 3 reflect the pattern seen in Figure 1, with the preponderance of institutions found in the more densely populated states of the eastern seaboard, mid-east, and south. Several provisos are necessary in a discussion of affiliation to regional honors councils. In principle, institutions are not restricted to membership in only one regional honors council, nor does any regional honors council consider an institution ineligible to join based on its location. In practice, however, we discovered that only one institution is a member of a council outside its general regional

Table 3: Regional Locations of NCHC Member and Non-Member Institutions

Regional Location	NCHC Members	Non-Members	Total
Upper Midwest	77	106	173
Western	125	130	255
Great Plains	138	63	201
Southern	214	134	348
Northeast	231	164	395
Mid-East	209	186	395
Total*	994 (55.9%)	783 (44.1%)	1777

*Because institutions in states bordering two regions could join either, eligibility for regional membership double-counts some institutions; as a result, the total number of institutions delivering honors education in Table 3 is inflated (1,777 compared to 1,503). But when comparing NCHC members to non-members the proportions are nearly the same (the arrangement slightly deflates the proportion of NCHC members compared to non-members by 1.3%).

location and that just five institutions have memberships in more than one region. States that border two regional honors councils can be deemed as residing in both, e.g., Arkansas is located in a state that is part of both the Southern Regional Honors Council and the Great Plains Regional Honors Council. For institutions in overlapping states we counted their location in both regions, inflating the total number of institutions with honors education from 1,503 to 1,777; however, when the number of member and non-member institutions is examined, the proportion is nearly the same, with NCHC members fewer by only 1.3%.

The degree of engagement with regional honors communities can be readily judged from findings in Table 4; membership percentages show what might be called market share and are derived from the number of member institutions divided by all institutions located in the region (as seen in Table 3). The totals indicate that NCHC members are more than three times as likely as non-members to affiliate with a regional honors council (43.5% to 12.9%). The pattern of greater involvement in regional honors organizations by NCHC members is replicated in each of the six regions. In the Western or Mid-East regions, NCHC members have twice the membership rates compared with non-members, and that ratio doubles in the Great Plains or Upper

Table 4: Regional Affiliation of NCHC Member and Non-Member Institutions

Regional Membership	NCHC Members	% of Eligible Members by Region	Non-Members	% of Eligible Non-Members by Region	Total	% of Total Eligible Honors Programs by Region
Upper Midwest	65	84.4	15	14.2	80	43.7
Western	95	76.0	43	33.1	138	54.1
Great Plains	71	51.4	7	11.1	78	38.8
Southern	90	42.1	19	14.2	99	28.4
Northeast	91	39.4	8	4.9	99	25.1
Mid-East	20	9.5	9	4.8	29	7.3
Total*	432	43.5	101	12.9	533	29.9

*Because institutions in states bordering two regions could join either, eligibility for regional membership double-counts some institutions; as a result, the total number of institutions delivering honors education in Table 4 is inflated (1,777 compared to 1,503). But when comparing NCHC members to non-members the proportions are nearly the same (the arrangement slightly deflates the proportion of NCHC members compared to non-members by 1.3%).

Midwest region and more than doubles again in the Southern or Northeast region. Five of the eight states represented by the Mid-East region have eligibility to join other regions, however, which may account for the lower percentage of membership in that region.

Of the participants in the 2016 non-member survey, 16% reported having a regional membership whereas the actual percentage of non-members with a regional association is 12.9%, indicating that institutions with regional memberships were more likely to have participated in the survey and are represented at a higher than average rate in the results that follow. NCHC representatives have attended regional honors conferences in recent years to reach out to non-member institutions. Results in Table 4 show that such an outreach market, while comprising about 100 institutions, taps just over 15% of the entire group of non-members (101/643). The findings make plain that colleges and universities without memberships in NCHC are likely to be disengaged from other professional honors organizations.

To explore the reasons that institutions have not joined NCHC to date, we next examine responses from a survey of non-members that asked participants why they were not members. The survey provided three potential reasons and encouraged participants to select all that apply; it also provided "other" as a fourth option to encourage specifying any reasons not listed. A qualitative analysis of the "other" category revealed one additional theme. Table 5 presents the most frequently occurring responses. Just over 40% said their funding was insufficient to pay membership dues or attend the national conference, and nearly a third were unaware that a national honors organization existed. A cross-tabulation of respondents' length of administrative service in honors with reasons for not joining NCHC reveals that those with

Table 5: Reported Reasons by Non-Members for Lack of NCHC Affiliation (n=116)

Reason Cited	%
Cannot afford membership or the national conference	41.0
Not familiar with NCHC and unaware of a national organization for collegiate honors	31.9
Do not believe NCHC offers programs or opportunities that would be of benefit	23.0
Other	
Intending to join	13.8

Note: Respondents could select more than one reason.

three years or fewer are far more likely (71%) to be unaware of NCHC or of any professional educational association devoted to advancing honors education. Almost one in four said they did not believe NCHC offered any benefits or opportunities for their specific program. Of these, approximately 50% have served as an honors administrator for 10 years or more. Responses in the "other" category revealed that a number of administrators at non-member institutions (14%) were aware of NCHC and expressed an intention to join.

Survey respondents were also asked an open-ended question about what the organization could do specifically to entice them to join as an institutional member. Of the 116 participants, 49 responded to this question. Using qualitative analysis, three basic themes emerged, and they closely resemble the reasons for not having a membership. Participants most commonly suggested that the NCHC explore ways to make membership more affordable (51%); one participant suggested "waiving membership fees for the first year so that membership could be shown to be beneficial," and another suggested that NCHC offer a "pro-rated membership price based on number of students at (the) institution." The second most frequent suggestion was that NCHC present more information about itself and the benefits of membership (35%). A third category of responses indicated that NCHC was currently not meeting the needs of their program (12%); specifically, one participant said that in order for NCHC to entice the program to join, "there needs to be a perception change that the NCHC is a strong organization that understands the nuances of a highly intensive research institution," and a few respondents from doctoral universities expressed their sole interest in belonging to a professional association of their peers, including Honors Education at Research Universities (HERU), the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), and the Southeastern Conference (SEC).

CONCLUSION

Conducting an examination of honors at an institutional level affords the opportunity to describe the population structure and distribution of honors programs and colleges. NCHC undertook systematic institutional research of its members' structural and operational features in 2012, but that study described a fraction of the honors landscape because the survey was not sent to non-members. The present study extends that vantage point to include non-members, examining structural features, engagement with regional honors councils, and reasons non-member institutions' administrators give for not joining NCHC.

These findings show that although NCHC has in its membership more than half of the population of institutions offering honors education (860 of 1,503, 57%), membership could grow further with more than 640 institutions eligible to join. Differences between NCHC members and non-members are extensive. NCHC members are more likely to come from masters and doctoral universities and have more dedicated human and physical resources than non-members. Based on the reasons cited for not joining NCHC, many non-members have few monetary resources. Non-member institutions are also nearly four times more likely to be operating without another type of resource: support from or engagement with regional honors councils. When non-members were asked why they did not affiliate with NCHC, the most common reply other than expense was lack of awareness of the organization or its membership benefits. A small subset indicated a more active intention not to join NCHC because their institutions had needs that, in their view, NCHC was not currently meeting. Given NCHC's mission to "support and enhance the community of educational institutions, professionals, and students who participate in collegiate honors education around the world," NCHC has work to do in bringing the support of the national organization to a greater number of institutions (NCHC).

NCHC can use the most common reasons for not joining—affordability and lack of awareness—as the focus for intensifying its outreach efforts. Respondents' suggestions on affordability included, for instance, variable membership rates depending on institution size and free membership for the first year so that new members could realize the benefits. The latter recommendation also begins to address the issue of awareness of member services and benefits.

Another recommendation might be for NCHC to create a national database of honors administrators and update it on an annual basis. Periodic emails could then inform non-members about the benefits the organization offers. Drawing non-member directors and deans to the publicly visible side of its website through these emails, NCHC could offer webinars, research results, an inclusive index of research on honors education, and analytical strategies for showing the value of honors to central administrations. NCHC could also use the list to promote regional organizations and to advertise the services it provides at regional honors council conferences, e.g., a curriculum development workshop or a condensed version of Beginning in Honors.

Overall, dispossession and disengagement are striking elements of many non-members' honors operations. While their honors administrators could

no doubt benefit from training, not to mention greater awareness of the norms and best practices associated with the profession of honors education, it is perhaps even more important to educate those running these institutions that honors cannot be sustained with few resources. NCHC can play a key role in disseminating this message, backed up by compelling data about what it takes to produce student success.

The present study has limitations. A lack of contemporaneous data necessitated comparisons between categories of honors operations based on information collected years apart. Moreover, the comparisons were restricted to structural differences between NCHC members and non-members. These limitations, combined with a compelling research question that remains to be answered by this demographic approach, point to a need for further study.

This remaining research question, arguably more significant than what has been presented here, should address operational variations between NCHC members and non-members. To answer this question, the survey NCHC conducted of its member institutions in 2012 needs to be repeated with non-members as well, basically conducting a census of the national honors community. The operations to be investigated would include curricular offerings, co-curricular programming, presence of a variety of high-impact pedagogical approaches, availability of scholarships, existence of living/learning communities in dedicated honors residence halls, faculty and staff arrangements, and more (Scott). This information would enhance NCHC's efforts to support institutions with honors education by categorizing areas of difference and therefore targeting areas of need, e.g., honors curriculum development, administrative training for new honors directors, documentation of value added in order to defend or grow resources, recruiting and admissions processes, and student success programming.

The period of rapid growth in honors education in the 1980s and early 1990s slowed as funding for higher education constricted. What pushed the earlier growth spurt most likely was intermural competition in attracting a perceived scarcity of high-achieving students, especially in public institutions. With budget constraints now pervasive in American higher education, conditions have shifted toward intramural competition for scarce and highly valued human and financial resources as well as infrastructures. To sustain and improve operations, honors administrators need to do more than just track information about their honors program or college; they also need contextual information about the national honors landscape to provide perspective for successful assessment and evaluation.

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