Forum on "Gifted Education and Honors"

Gifted Education to Honors Education: A Curious History, a Vibrant Future
Nicholas Colangelo

Honors Is a Good Fit for Gifted Students—Or Maybe Not
Annamarie Guzy

Are You Gifted-Friendly? Understanding How Honors Contexts (Can) Serve Gifted Young Adults
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If Not Us, Who? If Not Now, When?
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Gifted Students, Honors Students, and an Honors Education
Jaclyn M. Chancey and Jennifer Lease Butts

Ways We Can Do Better: Bridging the Gap Between Gifted Education and Honors Colleges
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Research Essays

Not So Gifted: Academic Identity for Black Women in Honors
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Opening Doors: Facilitating Transfer Students’ Participation in Honors
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Social Media for Honors Colleges: Swipe Right or Left?
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The Value of Honors: A Study of Alumni Perspectives on Skills Gained Through Honors Education
Christopher M. Kotschevar, Surachat Ngorsuraches, and Rebecca C. Bott-Knutson
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CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue of *JNCHC* (**deadline: March 1, 2019**) invites research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community.

The issue will also include a Forum focused on the theme “Current Challenges to Honors Education.” We invite essays of roughly 1000-2000 words that consider this theme in a practical and/or theoretical context.

The lead essay for the Forum, which is posted on the NCHC website <https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/Pubs/Shunning_Complaint.pdf?1541382325179>, is by Richard Badenhausen of Westminster College. In his essay, “Shunning Complaint: A Call for Solutions from the Honors Community,” Badenhausen asks readers to consider the weightiest problems currently facing honors education and then home in on one of them, not just to complain about the problem but to “lay out the path” toward a solution.

Badenhausen’s essay is itself a Call for Papers, clearly explaining the kinds of essays he hopes to elicit, ones that take on “intractable, sticky problems that have no easy answers and require complex solutions, strategic thinking, long-term effort, and collaboration with multiple units.” Examples he provides include the need for pathways into honors for underrepresented groups; the prevalence of mental, domestic, and economic challenges faced by our students; the increasing number of AP and IB credits that students bring with them into honors; legislative agendas that threaten to compromise or undermine honors education; the fact that honors innovations are often coopted by and credited to other organizations; the need to place honors at the center of our campus cultures; and the growing disrespect for the written word. None of these challenges has an easy answer, and many other obstacles in the path of honors also merit substantial consideration in the quest for creative solutions. The hard part is not defining the problems but imagining ways through them.

Please send all submissions to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu.
EDITORIAL POLICY

*Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)* is a refereed periodical publishing scholarly articles on honors education. The journal uses a double-blind peer review process. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, discussions of problems common to honors programs and colleges, items on the national higher education agenda, research on assessment, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education. Bibliographies of *JNCHC*, *HIP*, and the NCHC Monograph Series on the NCHC website provide past treatments of topics that an author should consider.

Starting in 2019, all submissions to the journals must include an abstract of no more than 250 words and a list of no more than five keywords.

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to: Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu.

DEADLINES

March 1 (for spring/summer issue); September 1 (for fall/winter issue)

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We accept material by email attachment in Word (not pdf). We do not accept material by fax or hard copy.

The documentation style can be whatever is appropriate to the author’s primary discipline or approach (MLA, APA, etc.), employing internal citation to a list of references (bibliography).

There are no minimum or maximum length requirements; the length should be dictated by the topic and its most effective presentation.

Accepted essays are edited for grammatical and typographical errors and for infelicities of style or presentation. Authors have ample opportunity to review and approve edited manuscripts before publication.

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu or, if necessary, 850.927.3776.
Honors director, diversity advocate, book editor, journal reviewer, Virginia Woolf scholar, yoga and Pilates instructor—Lisa Coleman is a modern-day Renaissance woman.

Recently retired as English Professor and Honors Director at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Lisa has been a moving force in the National Collegiate Honors Council for two decades. Most NCHC members know her as the instigator and implementer of the Diversity Forums at the annual conferences for the past fifteen years or so. An active member and often chair of the Diversity Committee during that time, she has also been contributing co-editor to two monographs on diversity in honors education: Setting the Table for Diversity (2010) and Occupy Honors Education (2017), both published in the NCHC Monograph Series. She has, in addition, been an advocate for diversity as a member of the NCHC Board of Directors and has published scholarly articles in JNCHC and FYHC: First-Year Honors Composition.

Many NCHC members have also gotten to know Lisa at daybreak, as she provides yoga instruction at the annual conferences. She gets NCHCers as well as herself in shape for days full of sedentary panels, meetings, and sessions, no doubt improving the quality and mood of conference-goers in recent years. She performs the same service to members of the Publications
Board at their summer meetings, having served on the Pub Board since 1999 and on the editorial board of *Honors in Practice* since its inception in 2005.

What only a few NCHC members know about Lisa, however, is that she is a Virginia Woolf scholar. She has published book chapters and academic articles on Woolf as well as giving numerous papers and panel presentations at national as well as international conferences, most recently “Coming to Stillness: A Woolfian Meditation on Peace” at the 28th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf at the University of Kent in Canterbury, UK, in June of 2018.

With her soft voice and big laugh, Lisa has been a leader, teacher, and inspiration in the NCHC and far beyond. We gratefully dedicate this issue of *JNCHC* to our colleague Lisa Coleman.
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION
Ada Long
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Honors educators are used to organizing and teaching interdisciplinary courses and so are familiar with the paradox that faculty in different academic departments are typically unaware of what goes on in disciplines other than their own despite quickly recognizing that they have mutual interests, methodologies, and challenges. They inevitably learn about and from the work of colleagues in different fields, discovering opportunities to strengthen their scholarly and pedagogical work. They typically want and ask to teach other interdisciplinary courses and wonder why they haven’t thought to do so before.

The same paradox exists in the scholarship on gifted and honors education. The two fields each have a long history of tackling many of the same challenges and coming up with creative solutions that would be invaluable to each other. While some theorists and practitioners of honors education have a history of working with their counterparts in gifted education, most are peripherally—if at all—aware of the field of gifted education even though some of the problems that perplex honors teachers have long been studied and understood by professionals in gifted education. Now, at last, formal connections between the two fields are becoming primary to the agenda of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) as it undertakes serious collaboration with the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC).

The Forum on “Gifted Education and Honors” in this issue of JNCHC is one of the steps toward creating understanding and connection between the two fields. Appropriately, the Forum has two lead essays, the first by a member of NAGC and the other by a member of NCHC. The following Call for Papers went out via the NCHC website, listserv, and e-newsletter inviting members to contribute to the Forum:

[This issue will] include a Forum focused on the theme “Gifted Education and Honors.” We invite essays of roughly 1000–2000 words that consider this theme in a practical and/or theoretical context.

This Forum has two lead essays, which are posted on the NCHC website: <https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/Pubs/Gifted_Education_to_Honors_Education.pdf> <https://www.
The first is by Nicholas Colangelo, Director Emeritus of the Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development and Dean Emeritus of the College of Education, University of Iowa. His essay, “Gifted Education to Honors Education: A Curious History, a Vibrant Future,” describes the special needs of gifted high school students that are often surprising or invisible to honors professionals, and he calls for more communication between scholars and practitioners in the fields of gifted and honors education in order to serve gifted students more effectively. This communication is just now beginning in shared programs of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). The second essay, “Honors Is a Good Fit for Gifted Students—Or Maybe Not,” is by Annmarie Guzy, Associate Professor of English at the University of South Alabama, NCHC Fellow, and author of Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices. Guzy contrasts the typical traits of gifted students and high achievers (honors students), pointing out incompatibilities that often prevent gifted students from joining or being successful in an honors environment. Like Colangelo, she argues that if honors teachers and administrators want to recruit and retain gifted students, they need to understand and implement changes that welcome these students.

Contributions to the Forum may—but need not—respond to the two lead essays.

Questions that Forum contributors might consider include: A focus on one or more contrasting traits of gifted and honors students and how to interpret and accommodate them. Discussion of insights gleaned from past experiences in trying to accommodate gifted students in honors. The assets and liabilities of adjusting the honors culture to make it welcoming to gifted students. A discussion of not just how honors programs can help gifted students but how gifted students can help honors. An argument that maybe gifted students really do not belong in honors. A discussion of why honors educators have remained unconcerned or unaware of issues in gifted education for so long. Concrete suggestions for better adapting honors
programs to the needs of gifted students. Suggestion of a road map for ways that NAGC and NCHC can work together in the future.

Seven essays were submitted, four of which are included in the Forum.

The first respondent, Jonathan D. Kotinek of Texas A&M University, has worked on connecting honors to gifted education since 2004 and has also worked with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Commission on High-Achieving Students on establishing connections between the two fields. In his essay “Are You Gifted-Friendly? Understanding How Honors Contexts (Can) Serve Gifted Young Adults,” he argues for “adopting an understanding of giftedness as psychological difference to help realize Colangelo’s vision for future collaboration.” He uses this concept “to address Guzy’s concerns about the fit between honors programs and gifted learners by suggesting a policy and practice that is friendly to gifted learners and other students who may not fit the traditional profile of an honors student.” Based on a review of the relevant scholarship on giftedness since 1971, Kotinek suggests strategies that will open honors not just to gifted students but to “other students whose academic backgrounds may not match our previous expectations but who can demonstrate the ability to benefit from and contribute to the learner-directed environment and philosophy in honors through motivation, curiosity, creativity, imagination, and intellectual exchange.”

Betsy Greenleaf Yarrison of the University of Baltimore has also been long involved in the field of giftedness as well as honors and currently chairs NCHC’s Special Interest Section on Education of the Gifted. In “If Not Us, Who? If Not Now, When?” Yarrison argues that gifted students are often “a marginalized minority because they are not always high achievers, their behavior is hard to predict or measure, and extrinsic motivators don’t work well with them . . . .” Like Kotinek, she provides a useful overview of relevant scholarship on giftedness, leading to her argument that gifted students “are the ones who desperately want small, discussion-based classes, a chance to tackle complex, difficult problems, and opportunities for collaborative research with working scholars and undergraduate research of their own. Everything about our curricula is designed for them.” Strategies like holistic admissions policies and recruiting for students in lower grades, where giftedness is detected as early as elementary school, can benefit not only these gifted students who need intellectual challenge but also honors education. When honors programs recruit and welcome gifted students, they receive the gift of students “who have demonstrated themselves to be high achievers at a point in the educational system when high achievement meant creativity,
intellectual initiative, and a sophisticated understanding of complex topics”; they thus “enhance the likelihood of admitting students who will create new knowledge rather than repackaging what is already known.”

Like Kotinek and Yarrison, the two authors of the next essay have a long history of combining honors and gifted education in their careers. Currently working in the University of Connecticut Honors Program, Jaclyn M. Chancey and Jennifer Lease Butts both wrote dissertations that “used gifted education theories as lenses into the honors student experience” and subsequently have focused their research and administrative interests on “the shared space between gifted students and honors programs.” In their essay “Gifted Students, Honors Students, and an Honors Education,” they describe the theoretical background and framework of their strategies for accommodating individualized student needs, including “academic skill development, assistance with taking creative risks, and the self-discovery of one’s interests and values.” These strategies include, among others, multiple points of entry into the honors program, eportfolios, self-determined leadership projects, and community building. The authors stress the importance of institutional context as well as the wide range of potential definitions of “giftedness,” but they offer UConn’s collaborative model as one way to adapt honors to the needs of gifted students.

In “Ways We Can Do Better: Bridging the Gap Between Gifted Education and Honors Colleges,” Angie L. Miller of Indiana University Bloomington notes the gap that she has experienced between honors and gifted education during her decade of spanning both fields. Based on her experience, she offers three suggestions for addressing the disconnection. First, she suggests a Venn diagram to determine where the characteristics and experiences of gifted honors students, non-gifted honors students, and gifted non-honors students do and do not overlap; such a diagram might well suggest ways to help different groups participate and succeed in honors. Next, she suggests that honors educators replicate the findings of research on K–12 gifted students so that “programming can be better adapted to serve them.” Finally, she advocates developing a way to compare honors with non-honors students in the same way that gifted and non-gifted students are compared in grades K–12, which can be accomplished through partnership with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which the NCHC has recently undertaken.

Each of the Forum essays emphasizes the importance of collaboration with other organizations in order best to serve students in honors. The NCHC is now undertaking just such collaboration, which promises to enrich research, teaching, and learning in honors.
In the first of four research essays, A. Musu Davis of Rutgers University provides a different context and set of issues for the terminology of “gifted” and “high-achieving,” labels that often make African American women students uncomfortable. In “Not So Gifted: Academic Identity for Black Women in Honors,” Davis addresses the misperceptions about African American women in honors at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) “that their experiences are the same as students with similar intellectual and ethnic identities and that their academic talent precludes them from needing resources to be successful.” Davis reports on her study to determine “how students in this population make meaning around their academic identity or high-achieving label.” Based on two sets of individual interviews, each roughly an hour in length, with sixteen African American women in honors at PWIs, Davis examined their responses to labels that included “smart,” “high-achieving,” “gifted,” and “academically talented.” Davis finds that these students are reluctant to define themselves with these labels despite how apt they are, having been “socialized not to talk about how intelligent or accomplished they are, particularly as Black women.” Davis describes some of the reasons for this reluctance, which include not wanting to appear “show offy” or to make their peers uncomfortable, as well as the stereotype that “Black women are not commonly associated with intelligence.” Among the other implications of her study, Davis suggests “reexamination of admissions practices that exclude students who demonstrate academic talent beyond test scores as well as those who may be qualified but do not self-identify as high-achieving.”

Also arguing for reexamination of admissions policies and other honors practices is Patrick Bahls of the University of North Carolina, Asheville. In “Opening Doors: Facilitating Transfer Students’ Participation in Honors,” Bahls cites a National Student Clearinghouse report that nearly half of all four-year college graduates have attended a two-year college during the ten years before they graduated. The students “tend to represent greater ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and age diversity than students who complete their four-year degrees at one institution uninterruptedly. . . .” Taking commitment to diversity beyond simple rhetoric would include countering “the non-honors self-identification of members of traditionally underrepresented groups,” as described by Davis; advertising articulation agreements prominently on the program’s website; and eliminating “overly rigid course requirements, unrealistic ‘good-standing’ requirements, and time-consuming extra- and co-curricular expectations.” Bahls examined the honors websites of twenty-two institutions that are members of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges and describes the barriers he found for transfer students. If honors educators
are serious about their commitment to equity and diversity, they need to reduce these barriers and welcome transfer students as important contributors to their programs.

While honors educators are virtually unanimous in proclaiming their commitment to diversity and equity, a topic that has been controversial in the past two decades is the value of online learning. In “Social Media for Honors Colleges: Swipe Right or Left?” Corinne R. Green of Purdue University argues that no matter where honors educators stand on such issues, they need to “consider the likelihood of incoming classes of students who identify as digital natives.” This topic is one of many on which honors scholars can turn to research on gifted students for insights, one of which echoes Davis’s point about African American women students rejecting the label “smart”: some high school students “reported altering their online profiles for fear of being judged for certain intellectual or nontraditional interests.” Green’s study examines the social media behavior of honors students, how it compares to the behavior of non-honors students, and how programs can use social media effectively. Green adapted a survey from consumer brand research, which she administered to 600 non-honors and 400 honors freshmen at Purdue, with 36 honors and 75 non-honors students responding. Among her findings were that “honors students interact less with their college online than their non-honors counterparts” and that honors students were less likely to use Facebook and more likely to use email. Among the possible causes, again echoing Davis, Green suggests “the fear of looking too intelligent in front of classmates.” Honors educators should be aware that “if honors students avoid technology for fear of ostracism, they may miss out on learning critical technology skill sets that are required for new careers.”

The final essay in this issue of JNCHC, “The Value of Honors: A Study of Alumni Perspectives on Skills Gained Through Honors Education,” presents the results of a survey distributed to graduates of the South Dakota State University (SDSU) Honors College. The authors—Christopher M. Kotschevar and Rebecca C. Bott-Knutson of SDSU and Surachat Ngorsuratches of Auburn University—designed the survey “to fill a gap in honors research by identifying what skills honors graduates value from their honors education and determining whether post-graduation value aligns with the SDSU Honors College’s student learning outcomes.” The survey identified eleven skills and asked the participants, all of whom graduated between 2003 and 2017, whether they had gained these skills through their experience in the SDSU Honors College and whether the skills had affected them “personally,
professionally, in both ways, or in neither way.” At least half of the graduates responded positively about each of the skills. Another seventeen items focused on the desired outcomes of the SDSU Honors College and asked respondents to indicate whether they had achieved these outcomes; all responses had a mean score of over three on a Likert scale. The framework of this study is applicable to the self-assessment of any honors program or college. Further, the findings help “point toward the justification of an honors education and demonstrate that while there is room for improvement, the current value of honors goes beyond undergraduate education by actively contributing to the lives of honors alumni both professionally and personally.”
Gifted Education to Honors Education: 
A Curious History, a Vibrant Future

Nicholas Colangelo
University of Iowa

Gifted programs and honors education have evolved along parallel tracks in the past decades with little interconnection or cross-communication. Exploring what these two fields can teach each other should allow us to collaborate in addressing their overlapping goals and potential conflicts in order to better educate bright young students. At both the high school and college levels, teachers often assume that gifted students need no special attention, that we can simply get out of their way and focus our attention on students who struggle academically. Those of us in both gifted and honors education know better. At the University of Iowa, scholars and teachers in the two fields have shared our insights into how to help this special group of students, and we hope to encourage increased collaboration throughout K–16 education.

My introduction to gifted education took place in 1973 as a research assistant at the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Counseling Laboratory for Superior Students (Lab). Until then, I had been a seventh-grade social studies teacher, and while I had some very bright students in my classes, I had no experience or training with gifted education. Neither I nor any of my
teaching colleagues had given any thought to issues that might affect gifted students in or out of school.

Over the next four years at the Lab, I worked with high school students who were identified as gifted. Many were from small towns in Wisconsin who had received little special attention to their exceptional academic/artistic abilities, especially in terms of counseling. I learned that being smart in school was a complicated issue. Through individual and group discussion sessions as well as their written responses to open-ended stems, I learned from these Lab students about hidden issues regarding giftedness. Three takeaways from my four years at the Lab formed much of my later work in gifted education:

1. Students chose to deliberately earn lower grades and did not answer questions in class so that they would not be ostracized by their classmates as brains or nerds.

2. Teachers took subtle and not so subtle swipes at their students’ intelligence. Comments by teachers such as “Of course you should know the answer to this question, you are gifted” were not viewed as compliments, nor were they meant to be. What these students figured out was that in a school setting, it was not always smart to be smart.

3. Often these students were ready to learn more complex material and at a faster pace, but the curriculum did not allow for such customizing. Educators felt that students in the same grade should take the same curriculum.

So began my understanding of the ambiguous relationships between gifted students and their school environments; the attitudes of peers, teachers, and parents; and societal beliefs about gifted education. I focused my scholarship on these ambiguous relationships when I accepted a faculty position at the University of Iowa (UI) College of Education in 1977. Later, I focused on how acceleration provides the most effective way to teach gifted students, customizing a curriculum based on academic readiness and motivation rather than grade or age.

In 1988, I became the founding director of the University of Iowa’s Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development (BBC) at the University of Iowa (UI), which had a distinct relationship to the University of Iowa Honors Program (UI Honors). Both programs were housed in the same spectacular new building, which provided one home for teaching, research, and service to high-ability K–16 students. In putting these two programs together, we rubbed shoulders daily,
creating a greater possibility for integrating gifted and honors education. This is exactly what happened.

The integration of BBC and UI Honors has boosted the energy of both programs and opened opportunities for the future. The leaders of both programs serve on each other’s advisory boards, work with teachers of both programs, have their students living together in an honors residence hall, and share information on the developmental needs of high-ability K–16 students. My writing an essay for the Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council is a direct outcome of our commitments to merge gifted education with honors education.

In the Fiftieth Anniversary issue of JNCHC (16.2, fall/winter 2015), thirty-nine college and university presidents wrote about the value of honors programs on their campuses. They consistently mentioned how honors benefits not only the honors students but the greater campus. The values and benefits that these presidents enumerated could be said about gifted programs in K–12 settings, and I will be asking the leading journal in gifted education to consider a parallel special issue on the value of gifted programs as enumerated by principals and superintendents.

While gifted and honors programs seem like obvious soul mates, however, the historical reality has been the opposite. What should be an obvious melding and partnership has not taken place, and this is a loss for both. While the ages of the students and the institutions differ, the values, selection procedures, and goals of each have fundamentally the same heartbeat.

Gifted and honors education share three fundamental and robust commonalities. Foremost is dedication to a rich and intensive educational and social experience for students who are dedicated to going beyond the minimum requirements of their education. A purpose of any viable gifted or honors program is not to replicate what is already available but to provide a unique and intensive program tailored to the students’ high motivations and unique learning needs. The programs should demand more and enrich more. Second is that both programs share selection criteria for acceptance that typically include standardized test scores, grades, recommendations from teachers, and personal statements of motivation and goals. Lastly, both recognize that gifted and honors students come from a variety of backgrounds and that high ability does not always demonstrate itself in traditional measures or at particular ages, and so both programs see the need for alternative paths to acceptance.

Gifted and honors programs can both minimize the accusation of elitism that is often thrown at them. The “e” word has been destructive because
the accusation misses the point that these programs are based on legitimate differences in readiness to learn and motivation. The curriculum for gifted and honors programs would not be suitable for many students, nor would they want it. While both gifted and honors programs have been labeled elitist, the characterization has been more destructive at the K–12 level, where the students are younger and the demand for equity in educational attitudes and policy has been greater. Students coming out of gifted programs may be hesitant about entering an honors program since they have experience with the accusation. Honors administrators and faculty can be aggressive in insisting that honors is not about elitism but about willingness to step up to challenges.

Honors can recruit gifted students by being champions of gifted education as well as honors. Here are six ways that honors professionals can strengthen ties to gifted education and thus enhance the recruitment and retention of gifted students:

1. Meet with leaders of gifted centers or gifted programs if they exist on your campus. Residing in the same building may not be an option, but if such programs exist on your campus, working together will have strong benefits.

2. Initiate ties with gifted educators at a national level. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) are the primary professional organizations for the respective programs. They both hold national conferences that could serve as avenues for shared research, programs, and visions for the future. As I write this essay, NCHC’s immediate past president, Art L. Spisak, is initiating discussions with leaders of NAGC.

3. Communicate with gifted education teachers. These teachers, much like athletics coaches, know their students and can be helpful to honors programs in recruiting and retaining gifted students. Honors faculty can sponsor presentations and workshops for gifted teachers to share the intricacies and benefits of honors education as well as sharing honors curricula that could be initiated or adapted for gifted students at the pre-college level. At the same time, gifted education teachers can be a constant source of information about what their students want from honors programs.

4. Let gifted students and their parents know how honors can enrich the undergraduate experience and that they have earned passage to such an experience. Never underestimate the power of a personal contact.
5. Provide community to gifted students via honors. These students are seeking a place to feel at home with a true peer group. Honors programs, honors residence halls, and honors classes provide the meaningful community that is difficult to experience at the pre-college level.

6. Be a voice for honors and gifted education. Gifted students know what it is like to be invisible or have to hide their abilities. Honors professionals can give a resounding message that in their programs there is no honor in invisibility. Professors who direct and teach in honors programs can be a powerful voice in speaking up for gifted education.

Both honors and gifted programs provide exciting and in-depth opportunities based on their students’ abilities, readiness, and commitments, which are hallmarks for differentiated educational experiences. Excellent students are coming out of gifted programs who would flourish in honors programs and deserve a forceful, unambiguous welcome. Leading the way to a partnership between honors and gifted education can be a new focus for the NCHC. Let the partnership flourish.

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In the field of composition studies, a core pedagogical objective is to familiarize students with types of argumentation strategies, such as causation, evaluation, narration, rebuttal, and definition. Introducing definition arguments in their textbook *Good Reasons: Researching and Writing Effective Arguments*, Lester Faigley and Jack Selzer state that “[d]efinition arguments set out criteria and then argue whatever is being defined meets or does not meet those criteria. Rarely do you get far into an argument without having to define something” (97). They identify three categories of definition—formal, operational, and by example—and then apply these to sample documents.

For my honors composition course, I begin class discussion of definitional argument by writing this thesis statement on the board: “Honors programs are not a good fit for gifted students.” Initially, students are resistant: “Aren’t gifted and honors the same thing?” “Don’t all gifted students go into honors anyway?” I explain that we must examine definitions for gifted and honors to identify the similarities and differences, not only in intellectual ability but in other areas such as motivation and emotionality. I also admit to
them that the idea that gifted students might not naturally fit into honors had not occurred to me until I attended Anne N. Rinn’s 2004 NCHC conference session, “Should Gifted Students Join an Honors Program?” Rinn acknowledged a lack of empirical research supporting the premise that gifted students fit well into honors programs and used her dissertation as an occasion to contribute needed empirical support in favor of their joining.

To guide class discussion, I provide a series of extended definitions from the literature about honors and gifted education. First, to establish a professional baseline idea of what honors is, I take them to the NCHC website to examine the “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program” and “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College.” Next, I show them a modified version of Janice Szabos’s “Bright Child, Gifted Learner” table distributed by Jonathan Kotinek during his 2004 NCHC conference session, “Gifted & Honors: Is There a Difference?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Achievers</th>
<th>Gifted Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know the answers</td>
<td>Ask the questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are interested</td>
<td>Are curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have good ideas</td>
<td>Have wild or unexpected ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand ideas</td>
<td>Construct abstracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete assignments</td>
<td>Initiate projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy school</td>
<td>Enjoy learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are technicians</td>
<td>Are inventors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grasp meaning</td>
<td>Draw inferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy peers</td>
<td>Prefer adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn with ease</td>
<td>Already know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen with interest</td>
<td>Demonstrate strong opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absorb information</td>
<td>Manipulate information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copy accurately</td>
<td>Create new designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are receptive</td>
<td>Are critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve mastery in 3–8 repetitions</td>
<td>Achieve mastery in 1–2 repetitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top group</td>
<td>Beyond the group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initially, many of my honors students resist the possibility that these traits are diametrically opposed because most were in gifted programs themselves, so they argue in favor of an overlapping Venn diagram or a sliding Likert scale rather than a strictly defined dichotomy. I counter, however, that they are gifted students who self-selected into honors, and many of them know gifted siblings, relatives, or friends who elected not to participate in honors. We then discuss specific traits from the “Gifted Students” column that might make these other students less inclined to participate in honors; for example, “have wild or unexpected ideas” may not produce a publishable seminar paper, conference presentation, or thesis project.

Next, we review the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) webpage on “Traits of Giftedness” (see Appendix). The four main categories include not simply cognitive traits but also creative, affective, and behavioral traits. In student terms, this means not just being super-smart but also thinking in different kinds of ways and having emotional and behavioral traits that may not contribute to success in honors. For example, many of the table’s affective and behavioral traits can also be found in Susan Cain’s book-length definition of introversion, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking*. From the point of view of the extroverted, high-achieving honors student (or administrator or faculty member), the introverted gifted student who wants to sit quietly in the back of the room or who avoids community service projects and social gatherings may seem anti-social or lazy.

In his essay “Gifted Education to Honors Education: A Curious History, a Vibrant Future,” prominent gifted education scholar Nicholas Colangelo identifies three takeaways from his early experiences as a gifted educator. First, he notes that gifted students “chose to deliberately earn lower grades and did not answer questions in class so that they would not be ostracized by their classmates as brains or nerds.” High-achieving students may have no problem being perceived as the teacher’s pet, but members of the NCHC Education of the Gifted Special Interest Group (SIG), including the SIG co-chair Betsy Yarrison, have frequently identified this purposeful academic underachievement as one of the barriers preventing gifted students from applying to or being successful in postsecondary honors programs. Second, Colangelo states that teachers “took subtle and not so subtle swipes at their students’ intelligence. Comments by teachers such as ‘Of course you should know the answer to this question, you are gifted’ were not viewed as compliments, nor were they meant to be. What these students figured out was that in a school setting, it was not always smart to be smart.” Such swipes are
also detrimental to the gifted student’s emotional well-being, as seen in the “Traits of Giftedness” Affective column items on “Unusual emotional depth and intensity,” “Heightened self-awareness, accompanied by feelings of being different,” and “Easily wounded, need for emotional support.” Gifted education specialists are aware of these traits, but honors educators who come from academic disciplines across campus may not be as familiar with ways to meet gifted students’ unique emotional needs. Third, Colangelo argues that gifted students were “ready to learn more complex material and at a faster pace, but the curriculum did not allow for such customizing. Educators felt that students in the same grade should take the same curriculum.” As evidenced by NCHC’s recent battles over accreditation, we in honors argue steadfastly that we are open to a wide range of curricular approaches, but we seem to be heading toward a somewhat more cookie-cutter checklist of what constitutes an honors curriculum than we might care to admit: honors versions of general education courses, check; lower-division electives, check; upper-division seminars, check; capstone/thesis projects, check. As noted in the table above, high achievers who “Complete assignments” and “Enjoy school” may feel a sense of accomplishment in meeting these goals, but gifted students may bristle at what they interpret as uncreative educational constraints. Through these three takeaways, we can gain a better understanding of some of the underlying differences between gifted and honors.

The first half of the title of Colangelo’s essay, “Gifted Education to Honors Education,” identifies a separation of the two terms while subtly implying a transition from one to the other. For decades, we have seen this shift in labeling from “gifted” to “honors” take place during a child’s K–16 educational career, a shift that extends to curricular strategies as well. Early childhood and elementary education allow for identifying and providing enrichment activities for gifted children, but opportunities for pull-out classes and Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) begin to taper off in middle school. By the time a gifted child reaches high school, the “creative and different” gifted program model has been replaced by the “more material at a faster pace” honors coursework model, which has recently been subsumed in turn by the assessment-driven AP and IB models, where high achievers may thrive but gifted students may become disinterested and disengaged.

I navigated this transition from grade school and middle school gifted enrichment to high school and college honors programs, and as a student I had simply assumed that this was an intellectual “growing up.” During the first year of my master’s program in composition studies at Southern Illinois
University Edwardsville (SIUE), I took a seminar on basic writing, and I was introduced to medical-style education terminology, such as remedial students being diagnosed with learning disabilities. This clinical language reminded me of jargon I had heard at gifted meetings, so I began to do research on gifted education, building a layperson’s familiarity with resources such as NAGC, Gifted Child Quarterly, and various texts geared toward teachers, counselors, and parents of gifted children. During this time, I also began my first teaching assistantship, and the first composition course I taught at SIUE back in 1992 was an honors section for students admitted to the school’s honors program. Using my newfound resources, I constructed a special topics section titled “The Gifted Experience,” divided the semester into units on labeling, family, education, and special needs, incorporating readings such as “The Abdication of Childhood” by Nicholas Colangelo and Colette Fleuridas.

As I moved on to my doctoral program in rhetoric and professional communication at New Mexico State University, I was required to take three courses in an outside specialization. Because I had decided to write my dissertation on honors composition, I took graduate courses on gifted education that familiarized me with the basic history, legislation, research, and practice in the field. I also interned with our campus Preschool for the Gifted. On the admissions testing day, I had flashbacks to my own similar tests in kindergarten, ones that I had thought were simply games played with the school district’s psychologist. My colleagues in educational psychology can recite the names of specific instruments with more facility than I, but observing and remembering tests reinforced the fact that giftedness is not simply about IQ scores but also about creativity, curiosity, and emotional intensity.

Many of my honors composition students experience similar “aha” moments while discussing the NAGC “Traits of Giftedness” table. Eyes grow wide, fingers point, and pens scribble furiously. For some, the discussion becomes less about how to define honors and gifted and more about how to define themselves. Honors educators need to ask ourselves the same questions: when considering whether and how to increase recruitment and retention efforts to include more gifted students, how do we define ourselves? Philosophically, we claim to serve bright, motivated students, but we may not offer educational opportunities that gifted students want or need. Peruse the student tracks from our recent conferences, and you will see presentations and posters that favor the risk-averse high achievers who know how to craft submissions that will be safely accepted. Listen to nominations for Student of the Year, and hear a recitation of academic, leadership, and service
achievements more than individual traits. We argue that honors is more than numbers, quantitative admissions criteria, and four-year graduation rates, but we may also be marching students through a rigidly structured honors curriculum in rigidly constructed cohorts rather than allowing for the asynchronous development so commonly seen among gifted students.

So what is honors? Honors is the Socratic circle—in which the gifted introvert chooses not to participate. Honors is the experiential learning activity—which the gifted student avoids because he dislikes interaction with his age cohort. Honors is the community service leadership opportunity—which doesn’t interest the gifted student who prefers to spend quiet time alone in her room with her studies or her hobbies. Honors is the research-based capstone project—which the gifted student refuses to complete because the mini-master’s requirements are too restrictive and the prospective disciplinary topics are too boring. If honors professionals are earnest in our desire to recruit and retain more gifted students, then we need to reexamine how we define honors education in the twenty-first century and how we should expand our definitions to more fully embrace intellectual diversity.

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APPENDIX
National Association for Gifted Children's
“Traits of Giftedness”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Creative</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keen power of abstraction</td>
<td>Creativeness and inventiveness</td>
<td>Unusual emotional depth and intensity</td>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in problem-solving and applying concepts</td>
<td>Keen sense of humor</td>
<td>Sensitivity or empathy to the feelings of others</td>
<td>Boundless enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voracious and early reader</td>
<td>Ability for fantasy</td>
<td>High expectations of self and others, often leading to feelings of frustration</td>
<td>Intensely focused on passions—resists changing activities when engrossed in own interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large vocabulary</td>
<td>Openness to stimuli, wide interests</td>
<td>Heightened self-awareness, accompanied by feelings of being different</td>
<td>Highly energetic—needs little sleep or down time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual curiosity</td>
<td>Intuitiveness</td>
<td>Easily wounded, need for emotional support</td>
<td>Constantly questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power of critical thinking, skepticism, self-criticism</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Need for consistency between abstract values and personal actions</td>
<td>Impulsive, eager and spirited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent, goal-directed behavior</td>
<td>Independence in attitude and social behavior</td>
<td>Radicalism</td>
<td>Perseverance—strong determination in areas of importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence in work and study</td>
<td>Self-acceptance and unconcern for social norms</td>
<td>Aesthetic and moral commitment to self-selected work</td>
<td>High levels of frustration—particularly when having difficulty meeting standards of performance (either imposed by self or others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of interests and abilities</td>
<td>Radicalism</td>
<td>Advanced levels of moral judgment</td>
<td>Volatile temper, especially related to perceptions of failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aesthetic and moral commitment to self-selected work</td>
<td>Idealism and sense of justice</td>
<td>Non-stop talking/chattering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: <http://www.nagc.org>
Are You Gifted-Friendly?  
Understanding How Honors Contexts (Can)  
Serve Gifted Young Adults  

JONATHAN D. KOTINEK  
Texas A&M University  

I was tangentially aware of gifted education while I was in elementary and middle school, but my first real awareness of the concept came through my work in the University Honors Program at Texas A&M. In truth, I was not yet working for the University Honors Program; I was a graduate assistant for then-Associate Director, Finnie Coleman, who tasked me with helping host a group of Davidson Young Scholars visiting campus for a lecture from Stephen Hawking to mark the opening of the Mitchell Institute for Fundamental Physics and Astronomy in 2003. I was hired into a full-time role in the honors program not long after, and Coleman asked how we might build a special program that would attract outstanding students like the nine- to fourteen-year-old Young Scholars, who had impressed our physics faculty with their insightful questions on that visit. His question led to my focus on the experience of early entrance to college in my dissertation and my involvement with NCHC’s Education of the Gifted Special Interest Group.
My experience explains why my mental schema for gifted and honors education overlap. Not everyone sees the connections that I do, though. As noted in Guzy’s lead essay for this volume, I have been an advocate for helping honors practitioners realize how their programs might serve gifted students since 2004. I have also had the opportunity to discuss the overlap with advising practitioners at the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) conference in 2010, focusing on the language of giftedness during the formation of the NACADA Commission on High-Achieving Students.

A special experience for me has been working alongside Nicholas Colangelo, whose lead essay points out shared values between NCHC and NAGC and advocates for working together to address our common concerns. Colangelo’s work with Susan G. Assouline and Miraca U. M. Gross in A Nation Deceived to synthesize decades of research on academic acceleration provided foundational understanding of the issues surrounding early entrance to college for my own work and, I think, uniquely positions him to provide guidance on bridging the gap between secondary and post-secondary education. I am also pleased to be working again with Annmarie Guzy on the topic of gifted education since working with her on this topic was an early source of my connectedness to NCHC. I want to argue here for adopting an understanding of giftedness as psychological difference to help realize Colangelo’s vision for future collaboration, using this concept to address Guzy’s concerns about the fit between honors programs and gifted learners by suggesting a policy and practice that is friendly to gifted learners and other students who may not fit the traditional profile of an honors student.

**TERMINOLOGY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

College academic advisors differentiate the terms honors, gifted, and high-achieving, according to a survey by Kotinek, Neuber, and Sindt (2010). The survey was sent to 120 participants and got 49 responses (41%). Honors students were characterized as “motivated and committed [and] willing to engage in and become distinguished in courses they consider challenging and stimulating.” High-achieving students were characterized as driven by recognition of success and “academically distinguished relative to their peers” but also as “standing out relative to peers outside the classroom by engaging in research and other extracurricular activities.” Gifted students were characterized by capability for performance: “a gifted college student . . . surpasses or displays the capability for surpassing their peers in one or multiple areas of concentration not necessarily related to academics”; a significant minority
of respondents noted that the term gifted may not be appropriate after high school. The study concluded that advisors commonly talk about gifted and high-achieving persons and honors contexts; it recommended that—while scholarly literature contains contrary examples—the terms gifted, high-achieving, and honors not be used interchangeably even though a single person might be described as both gifted and high-achieving and be served in an honors context. This conclusion comports well with the Szabos chart that Guzy describes in her lead essay, which differentiates gifted and high-achieving learners through example situations.

The field of gifted education has an abundance of overlapping definitions of giftedness and approaches to identifying gifted persons. Some of the commonly referenced approaches include the following works: the 1971 Marland report, which established the national priority for developing gifted learners’ potential; Joseph S. Renzulli’s three-ring model, which describes gifted behavior as an intersection of above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment; François Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent, which describes the development of talents from natural abilities through a process that is influenced by environmental and intrapersonal catalysts; and the 1989 Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, which has provided a federal mandate for gifted programming. These influential approaches, like other psychometric approaches to defining giftedness, focus on giftedness as potential and on identification of giftedness as a priority to develop human resources.

Mönks and Heller argue that psychometric approaches to giftedness do not account for changes across the gifted person’s lifespan and that other, less commonly referenced definitions or approaches provide a way to think about giftedness as entailing a psychological difference rather than simply a difference in capability or performance. Understanding why and how this psychological difference sometimes, but not always, results in outstanding performance can help guide our approach to welcoming these students in honors. Approaches of the psychological differentiation sort include Annemarie Roeper’s, which defines giftedness as “a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences” (21).

The Columbus Group, which includes psychologists, parents, and teachers who were influenced by the work of psychologists Dabrowski and Terrassier and wanted to describe the lived experience of giftedness, described a theory of asynchronous development in which the intellectual
and emotional development of gifted persons would always outstrip their social and physical development (Morelock). Understanding giftedness as asynchronous development means acknowledging that the student sitting in front of us may have the intellectual capacity for graduate-level study and the emotional sensitivity and range of an adult but that these traits are filtered through the social experience—indeed through the life—of a pre-teen body.

A driving force behind the proliferation of definitions of giftedness has been the need to identify students who should receive the federally mandated educational opportunities “not ordinarily provided” in the public-school classroom but appropriate to the ability level of gifted learners (National Association for Gifted Children; Javits). Such an accountability-based economy that requires careful identification of gifted learners who will benefit from scarce resources may be familiar to honors deans and directors who feel increasingly under pressure to justify the outsized per-student investment typical of the small-section, individualized experience that has long characterized honors education (Smith & Scott). In a roundtable discussion at the 2010 NCHC conference, “Defining Honors: Distilling Meaning from a Chorus of Voices,” Joan Digby made the point that a vital function of honors education is to provide the fit our students will not find anywhere else. This point resonated with my understanding of the Javits bill’s mandate for opportunities “not ordinarily provided” and led to my advocating the inclusion of similar language in the development of the NCHC definition of honors education:

Honors education is characterized by in-class and extracurricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education. Honors experiences include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy, provide opportunities that are appropriately tailored to fit the institution’s culture and mission, and frequently occur within a close community of students and faculty. (National Collegiate Honors Council; italics added)

This definition was developed to complement the NCHC Basic Characteristics documents with more abstract language describing the theories and assumptions that support standard practices in honors. The abstract language of the definition may be easier for honors administrators to adapt to their campus circumstances in order to justify their programs. This definition of giftedness accounts for the wide variety of academic, social, and emotional
preparation necessary to make our programs more accommodating to gifted students.

WHERE DO GIFTED STUDENTS FIT IN?

Both gifted and high-achieving students can be served by the learner-directed environment and philosophy articulated in the NCHC definition of honors education and the markers of excellence that honors programs and colleges provide in their campus contexts. The selectivity and accolades that are typical of honors certainly feed the extrinsic motivation that drives high achievement. So, too, can the focus on scholarly and creative production and leadership described in the “modes of honors learning” portion of the NCHC definition. The opportunity to engage a self-directed thesis and take part in dialogue on broad and enduring questions might also feed the intrinsically motivated gifted learner.

Our population is bimodal, a characteristic not always reflected in our selection criteria and program expectations. As noted in Colangelo’s lead essay, identification and selection are common tasks for both gifted and honors educators. Quantitative approaches that rely on objective scores make this task simpler but may result in passing over qualified candidates whose abilities, as Colangelo notes, may not always be demonstrated in traditional measures or at the expected time. The gifted education model of making selection decisions based on a preponderance of evidence, such as what Colangelo describes (including recommendations, personal statements, and taking into account the student’s motivation), is a practice I believe honors educators would be wise to adopt if they have not done so already. Many of our selection processes probably already privilege characteristics of gifted learners that go beyond high test scores: intrinsic motivation, curiosity, creativity, imagination, and the love of rich intellectual exchange. The true task comes in considering how to admit (or retain) gifted underachievers who demonstrate these kinds of characteristics but do not have the standardized test scores or grades we want because they have blown off what they consider to be useless activities.

In the same way that the NCHC definition of honors education provides useful language to describe what honors is rather than what it looks like, focusing on giftedness as a psychological rather than psychometric difference can suggest strategies for helping these students find their motivation to excel in measurable ways. One simple way to get started may be to organize a discussion group that considers how giftedness is a psychological difference. Giving
students the language of Dabrowski’s overexcitabilities (Piechowski) or of the Columbus Group’s asynchronous development definition may provide them with the self-awareness necessary to adjust their instinctual reaction against some activities in the service of longer-term goals that are meaningful.

Finally, whether the gifted students in our honors programs and colleges are early-entrance, traditional, or non-traditional students, honors advisors would do well to become familiar with the work on adult giftedness. Lovecky describes five traits of adult giftedness that may result in interpersonal or intrapersonal conflict:

• Divergency—a preference for unusual, original, and creative responses.

• Excitability—high energy and the will to focus that energy in meeting challenges.

• Sensitivity—high levels of empathy and highly developed sense of justice.

• Perceptivity—the ability to see multiple layers of situations, make inferences, and understand personal symbols.

• Entelechy—from the Greek for having a goal, motivation toward a goal and charisma in organizing others around such goals.

Fiedler explains that the unique way that the intellect and emotions combine in the experience of a gifted person has implications for the way the person experiences different stages in life: gifted adults may be masking or denying their giftedness as a coping mechanism for not realizing their potential in ways they believe to be meaningful; and those who do accept that they are gifted may have a heightened sense of purpose as part of their drive for self-actualization. The context provided by Lovecky and Fiedler can help honors faculty and staff in better understanding gifted students’ differences in motivation and communicating program expectations in ways that connect to such students’ interests and future goals; it can effectively address the need among introverts to develop the capacity for interaction (and awareness of how to practice self-care afterwards), can connect service learning to intellectual passions, and can provide exciting inter-, cross-, and trans-disciplinary options to students whose interests transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries. These strategies will also be useful in opening honors opportunities up to other students whose academic backgrounds may not match our previous expectations but who can demonstrate the ability to benefit from and contribute to
the learner-directed environment and philosophy in honors through motivation, curiosity, creativity, imagination, and intellectual exchange.

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If Not Us, Who?
If Not Now, When?

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Last year’s surprise hit of the television season was The Good Doctor, in which Freddie Highmore plays a gifted surgical resident who is also a high-functioning autistic. Critics speculate that it succeeded because audiences are hungry for good-outcome fantasy, or “warm bath” television. Fantasy is right. As much as we love watching Shaun Murphy show up not only all the other residents but all the attending physicians, we wouldn’t want to work with him in real life. Gifted students who can move through the K–12 curriculum so quickly that they can earn college-ready SAT scores at 11 or 12 are a prickly annoyance after elementary school, and many of them, especially boys, are outright casualties of the secondary school environment. They may sabotage their chances for admission to colleges that could challenge them—through poor attendance, low grades, and issues with authority, making an early exit from the educational system to excel as entrepreneurs or perhaps deliver pizza until they eventually succeed without a formal education or go back to school years later. In college, they are reluctant to enter yet another honors environment where they expect to be chased around with a
“potentiometer.” How can they know that college is not high school—that, in college, they can do undergraduate research, take classes that are actually hard, and develop intellectual relationships with their professors that are truly collegial and rooted in mutual respect?

You might think that gifted students are a natural fit for honors education, and they are, but they are nevertheless a marginalized minority because they are not always high achievers, their behavior is hard to predict or measure, and extrinsic motivators don’t work well with them; it is hard to justify giving them money or a scarce slot in a program with competitive admission unless they have a solid track record of proven academic success rather than just a glittering pile of test scores indicating amazing potential but little to no accomplishment. Honors programs tend to steer admission away from high test scores and low grades because high grades and class ranking do predict college success, at least early on. Yet we also recognize that honors programs have historically experienced high attrition and problems with student persistence. One of the wickedest of all wicked dilemmas for honors is whether we can predict performance from potential.

Would you want Shaun Murphy in your honors program? What about his profound intellectual gifts suggests that, in the real world, he would be able to survive college, medical school, and residency to become a “good doctor”? Would he come back to tell you later that your honors program opened up to him a world of intellectual acceptance that permitted him to flourish rather than be forced, as Colangelo suggests, to bury his talents? That a high-functioning autistic could navigate medical school successfully is fiction. In the real world, adolescents as gifted as Shaun typically suffer a profound inner conflict between accepting their divergence from the norm and abandoning it in favor of perceived social acceptance. Some learn to imitate conventional thinking and keep their real ideas to themselves, but others withdraw completely or make riveting YouTube videos that tell their stories to thousands of strangers or put their gifts into activities like gaming that keep them stimulated but, in the end, lead nowhere.

True giftedness, as the “trait” model described by Colangelo suggests, is temperamental; it exists with or without matching achievement. A definition crafted by the Columbus Group in 1991, which is cited by the National Association for Gifted Children, asserts: “Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity.” Janice
Szabos’s legendary “Bright Child/Gifted Learner” chart from a 1989 article in Challenge magazine, which Annmarie Guzy has included in her article “Honors Is a Good Fit for Gifted Students—Or Maybe Not,” is the anecdotal double helix within gifted education for understanding how gifted children differ profoundly from their age peers and approximate adult intelligence in ways that IQ tests have sought for over a century to measure. Bright children become normal adults with high intelligence. Gifted children become gifted adults with associated temperamental traits. Deirdre V. Lovecky, in “Can You Hear the Flowers Sing? Issues for Gifted Adults,” summarizes these traits as divergency (unusual and strikingly creative thinking), excitability (along with the ability to stay focused on a task for an exceptional length of time), sensitivity (coupled with a powerful sense of justice), perceptivity (including the ability to see situations in multiple layers), and entelechy, a goal-directed inner strength so powerful that it attracts others to your flame. These temperamental traits are rarely if ever captured in any of the measures that we use to identify candidates for honors although we recognize them in our academic leaders, in our colleagues and, often, in ourselves.

In The Good Doctor, the dramatic conflict centers on the efforts of other doctors to socialize Murphy so that he can communicate with them and with patients in ways that conform to accepted norms. Although he is an extreme case because he is also autistic (and perhaps Sheldon Cooper is a less extreme example), social interaction is difficult for Murphy because of the asynchrony between his cognitive and emotional development and his social development. Gifted students may or may not be good members of an honors community. Some, like the characters in The Big Bang Theory, welcome the opportunity to be in a group of people like themselves as is well documented in the literature on gifted education for the young, which demonstrates decisively that gifted children do best in enhanced programs with other gifted children. Other gifted students are lone wolves, intellectual bullies, or high-maintenance divas. They are also prone to mood disorders and behavior disorders, some of which may be crippling.

Knowing the characteristics attributed by Lovecky (and Szabos before her) to the gifted, e.g., divergent thinking coupled with irrepressible intellectual excitability, or great persistence coupled with an exaggerated awareness of social injustice, would you want them in your honors program? If you did want them, and you decided to set aside a few spaces through holistic admission to take a flyer on some of them, how would you find them so you could invite them to Heaven? As Colangelo and Guzy both remind us, college
honors programs do not have robust relationships with the programs for gifted children in the educational systems surrounding them, and although they know a great deal about how to meet the needs of high achievers, most honors directors have little or no training in educational strategies for dealing with the gifted.

Elementary and middle schools know quite well who the gifted students are, especially the troublemakers who are smarter than their teachers and have less impulse control than their age peers and especially when they are driven to speak up against incorrectness or injustice. The Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth and other similar organizations help find these students nationally by offering elementary and middle schoolers an opportunity to take any of several well-validated standardized tests designed for students who are much older. If their verbal and quantitative reasoning skills are advanced enough at 11 or 12 for them to do well on these tests, they are ready to do college work—at least some of it. Sadly, that work is six years away, and the road to it is loaded with IEDs that explode if they do not suffer fools gladly or respect authority when the respect is unearned. The good news is that the cultural bias of some of these standardized tests is also greatly lessened when they are administered to the highly academically talented or to children.

But honors programs generally don’t recruit in elementary schools, even though most gifted children are also high achievers in elementary school. One of the more reliable definitions of intelligence is the number of repetitions needed for learning. At about third grade, when the work becomes harder because it depends on mastery of grade-level reading and mathematical concepts, instruction slows to a crawl to accommodate those whose intelligence is not superior. It is easy for gifted children, if they are not only not challenged but actively bored, to lose interest in school and for their teachers to lose patience with them, especially if they are disruptive. Unlike the students who decide not to do honors because they perceive it to be more work, these children are begging for more work—anything but another repetition of the same work, the same questions, the same answers.

NCHC’s Education of the Gifted Special Interest Group has long advocated for a place for the gifted in honors programs because these students need gifted and talented programs in college just as they need them at every other level. If not us, who will provide an appropriate college education for them? They are driven and creative. They are the risk-takers, whereas hard-working high achievers tend to be risk-averse. They are the ones who desperately want small, discussion-based classes, a chance to tackle complex,
difficult problems, and opportunities for collaborative research with working scholars and undergraduate research of their own. Everything about our curricula is designed for them. If the gifted are anything, they are persistent, and attrition rates in honors suggest that the kinds of students we now recruit tend to be more successful in the first two years, when most honors programs replace the general education curriculum with a richer version of itself, and less successful when the responsibility for learning shifts over to the student and professors become the gatekeepers, not the source of new knowledge.

Wide-ranging and holistic admissions strategies are essential in finding all the different kinds of students who might be successful in honors programs, especially gifted underachievers, so it is heartening to hear Colangelo contend that a partnership between the NCHC and the National Association for Gifted Children—in fact, with the entire complex network of educational resources for gifted children and their teachers—can be beneficial to us both. Honors educators can learn from experts in gifted education for the young about identification for academic success. We already know that the current measures of academic potential that we use to recruit honors students from among high school students are not particularly good predictors of success. The best predictor of success in college is success in college. According to the NCHC Admissions, Retention, and Completion Survey, students entering honors programs as transfers or internal late admits come in with a mean college GPA of 3.65, well above the mean GPA of 3.29 required to remain in most honors programs although their ACT and SAT scores are below those of students admitted as full-time first-year students. However, a potentially more accurate predictor of college success than high achievement in high school might actually be high achievement in K–5 programs.

Giftedness is particularly conspicuous in the early years. IQ tests measure the ability of a child to approximate adult behavior, so they are most accurate when used to identify young children who are capable of performing cognitive tasks that prove difficult even for adults. Ample anecdotal evidence suggests that giftedness manifests itself clearly in children because it is rare in the general population. Some children can do complex mathematics, play musical instruments like the violin, draw accurately, play games like chess that require cognitive sophistication, or perform athletic tasks like gymnastics or ballet that require coordination and artistry. Educational systems throughout the world use early identification measures to capture all kinds of giftedness. China became a world power in Olympic sports by identifying children who were athletically gifted, assigning them to sports to which their heredity
predisposed them, and dedicating their education to the pursuit of excellence in that one area. The problem with this strategy, of course, is that intrinsic motivation is necessary to persistence, and the gifted are notorious for their relentless pursuit of topics that interest them to the exclusion of topics that don’t interest them, no matter how much these topics interest other people such as professors or academic publishers. Steve Jobs famously dropped out of Reed after a semester so that he could spend the next eighteen months sitting in on only the classes he wanted to take. The very existence of an array of extrinsic motivators used to lure high achievers into honors programs and keep them there—money, perks, prestige, leadership opportunities—suggest that, while depending on proven achievement to predict future achievement, honors programs and colleges are not relying on intrinsic motivation to attract students to honors programs and retain them.

The issue of social justice would also suggest the value of recruiting for high-ability students in the lower grades. The measures used to identify gifted children work fairly well across all kinds of ethnic and socioeconomic populations because they identify traits that are innate, and they can identify academically talented low-income children, those from marginalized populations, or those whose parents did not attend college. The gifted among these populations have no idea what college even is, but if they did, they might begin to pursue a value-added college education when they were very young. Gifted elementary and middle schoolers could be permitted to get a glimpse of college through extracurricular adventures in science, game design, historical reenactment, crime scene investigation, musical theatre, and other higher-order and complex subjects, which honors programs could run for them. Both public and private institutions could induce their local academic superstars to stay home by reaching out to them while they are still in the lower grades and becoming a haven for them as they move through an educational system that “drags its slow length along” interminably. These students need to keep on the move intellectually even if they still have to sit through high school. We can give them entrée into the magical world of higher learning so they can know what lies ahead.

The real stumbling block to all of this visionary thinking is the discrepancy between the way we measure our own success and the way our success tends to be measured by the universities in which our programs reside. Honors programs have a disproportionately high cost per participant relative to the university’s overall per-student cost, and universities are understandably concerned about whether they can recoup this investment either in real
money or in free publicity and intangible assets such as goodwill. Honors directors are especially conscious of the extra pressure that exists in the complex world of recruiting for student success when the success of the recruiters depends on their ability to predict future performance with accuracy. It is easy to justify selecting recruits with a proven track record of success in secondary school but hard to justify selecting recruits, even those with measurable potential who have already been identified as gifted children, when their recent track record on performance measurables like grades falls short of what their potential measurables promised.

Still, honors programs exist to educate our future leaders. If they admit gifted students who have demonstrated themselves to be high achievers at a point in the educational system when high achievement meant creativity, intellectual initiative, and a sophisticated understanding of complex topics, then they enhance the likelihood of admitting students who will create new knowledge rather than repackaging what is already known. The twenty-first century is full of wicked problems that need solving, and it is moving fast. We need minds that move fast, minds that can capture the interdisciplinary complexity of global issues using tools that may be obsolete in a few months and need to be replaced by new tools that someone will have to invent. If honors programs don’t provide a place where people with these minds have an opportunity to educate themselves, forcing them to be internet autodidacts, we will have failed in the very purpose for which we exist. In the famous quotation that seems to have had its source in Rabbi Hillel but that has been widely used and misattributed since the first century BC: “If not us, who? If not now, when?”

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The seeming lack of connection between honors and gifted education has puzzled us for some time. Both of us incorporated gifted education and higher education into our doctoral studies, and both of our dissertations used gifted education theories as lenses into the honors student experience. Our lives as researchers and higher education administrators have been spent in the shared space between gifted students and honors programs. We know that this combination strengthens our work with the University of Connecticut Honors Program, and we are excited at the possibility of greater collaboration between the two fields. In this essay, we will respond to Guzy’s central tenet that there is a difference between gifted and honors students, using the theoretical framework and structure of UConn Honors for examples. Our recent programmatic changes have led us to the conclusion that we should focus on an honors education designed for gifted students and honors students.

One of the prompts for this special Forum of JNCHC invited us to “focus on one or more contrasting traits of gifted and honors students.” Not only
does this prompt presuppose that the two labels refer to different groups of learners, but it also implies that there are set definitions for both terms that are agreed upon across the professions. One of us has taught a master’s seminar on the various conceptions of giftedness, using Sternberg and Davidson’s 2005 book of that title and supplementing it with ideas from the Columbus Group (Morelock) and others. An ambitious recent effort to orient the field around talent development and the pursuit of eminence (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell) prompted significant criticism (e.g., Grantham; McBee, McCoach, Peters, & Matthews). On the honors side, variations in admissions and programming across institutions dictate that the only functional definition of an honors student is one who is enrolled in an honors program or honors college. For that matter, a similar approach is often found in gifted education research, where the operational definition of “gifted” is a student who has been identified as such by their school district.

Rather than viewing these variations in definitions and institutional contexts as an obstacle to greater collaboration between gifted and honors education, we would argue that they provide the opportunity for honors administrators to select the conceptions of giftedness and corresponding bodies of research that will enhance and strengthen their programs. For UConn Honors, that fit has been achieved by establishing a theoretical framework grounded in the work of University of Connecticut Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor Joseph Renzulli. This conception of giftedness aligns with the goals and practices of UConn Honors, and it also promotes greater collaboration between the honors program and the Renzulli Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development. We agree with Nicholas Colangelo on the importance of such partnerships, which in our experience are pivotal opportunities for creating scholar-practitioners among our staff members and providing shared practical strategies and considerations with our researcher partners.

A full exploration of our theoretical framework, which can be found online at <https://honors.uconn.edu/about-us/theoretical-framework>, would fall well outside the space constraints of this essay. Providing some context, though, is important. We based our model on three pieces of research. First, our operational definition of giftedness is expressed through Renzulli’s 1978 Three Ring conception: gifted behaviors are acts of creative productivity resulting from an interaction of above average ability, creativity, and task commitment applied toward any “potentially valuable area of human performance” (261). As honors educators, our job is to identify students who have the potential for gifted behaviors and then aid their development. This
approach allows us to welcome students who were identified as gifted by their K–12 schools as well as those gifted learners who may have been missed.

Second, Renzulli’s 1976 Enrichment Triad Model describes activities that provide opportunities for students to either (1) become interested in new fields or problems to solve, (2) build skills needed for creative productivity, or (3) demonstrate creative productivity and disseminate their products beyond the classroom. Finally, Renzulli’s 2002 Operation Houndstooth describes co-cognitive traits that influence whether creative productivity emerges as well as whether students will apply those gifted behaviors toward the social good. Once we combined these models into our honors theoretical framework, a central tenet emerged. We realized we should focus on an honors education and not just on educating “honors students.”

This framework is inclusive both in terms of the number of students—the UConn Honors Program enrolls approximately 10% of the university’s undergraduates across all undergraduate schools and colleges—and in terms of the types of students served. Rather than enforcing a dichotomy of “bright” vs. “gifted” learners, a distinction without research support and of questionable utility (Peters), we are able to adapt to a variety of student needs, including academic skill development, assistance with taking creative risks, and the self-discovery of one’s interests and values. To support the different academic paths that these students may take, we have multiple admissions points. Students who do not excel in high school and then find their passion at UConn have a place in the UConn Honors Program.

In order to be inclusive of all students who have the desire and academic ability to complete an honors experience, our framework and our practices also support individualization. A formal cohort-based program or lockstep curriculum would not be justified using this framework. We can define and even require certain categories of experiences that support the development of creative productivity, but we do not expect our students to all have the same experiences. For example, we are implementing a leadership project in order to develop students’ ability to apply creative productivity to effecting change in their academic, professional, or personal communities for social good. This project—inclusive of scope, timing, and audience—is determined completely by the student with assistance from peer coaches and is based on the student’s personal leadership style and goals.

We do not claim that students always enjoy individual experiences or that they agree with all of the requirements. Guzy’s example student who is not interested in community service may balk at the leadership experience in the UConn Honors Program, regardless of the individualization, thus
highlighting the importance of intentionality. In the honors program, the faculty and staff have taken great care to connect, via the theoretical framework, our admissions practices, our program outcomes, our curricular requirements, and our co-curricular experiences. However, this framework is only the first step. That intentionality must be clear to the students, or they will still view their honors experience as a set of meaningless check boxes.

For us, the focus on intentionality begins at orientation, when students are introduced to the three concepts of explore, create, and lead, and it continues through the frequent use of reflection. Students begin building eportfolios in conjunction with their first honors events, and throughout their honors career they consider what they have done, what it has helped them learn, and where they are heading as a result of this learning. Reflection helps the stereotypical “school-smart” student build lifelong learning skills, and intentionally connecting reflection to program outcomes helps the more iconoclastic student see the purpose behind program requirements. Eportfolios also fulfill a crucial need for us administratively as we seek data to assess student learning and evaluate our learning outcomes and program objectives.

Finally, this theoretical framework supports our ongoing emphasis on building an honors community. Operation Houndstooth recognizes the centrality of students’ social/emotional and mental health to their personal and professional success. As Colangelo states in his essay, honors students need that peer home. In the precollege environment, intellectual peers may have been scarce, but an honors program can provide deep connections and a sense of belonging. In turn, honors students learn what it means to be a contributing member of multiple communities, which is an essential part of helping them to recognize their own capacity to create change and to understand that working in conjunction with other community members multiplies their effectiveness.

Our model is not the only way—or necessarily the best way—to connect gifted and honors education. The combinations of conceptions of giftedness and honors program structures may be infinite, so there is no limit to the possibilities of a true partnership between the two fields. We have spent three years developing our new model. We involved our honors faculty board, a task force of faculty and students representing all schools and colleges on campus, and ultimately received approvals to pursue our new venture via our university senate and governance structures. The effort has been collaborative from the beginning and has drawn on our university culture, academic structures, and student culture in order to develop a model that fits UConn. The process has crystalized for us our sense of who we are as an honors community and what we believe in as educators. We plan to add to this ongoing
conversation between faculty partners and scholar practitioners through our contributions as researchers. We hope that by doing so we will continue to bring cutting-edge research, the needs of our students, and the values of our program into a UConn honors education.

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Ways We Can Do Better: 
Bridging the Gap Between Gifted Education and Honors Colleges

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Over the past decade of my academic career, I have increasingly noticed the gap between K–12 gifted education and honors college education as my research has forced me to straddle the two areas. My doctoral education at Ball State University included a specialization in gifted studies, which was a natural fit with my own interests in creative cognitive processes. During this time, I worked with a team that amassed a large data set from the honors college students, with twelve different measures ranging from topics of temperament to perfectionism to social dominance orientation. These measures addressed mostly psychosocial and emotional constructs, which are important considerations within K–12 gifted education. However, as I first began presenting and publishing findings from this data set, I noticed a gap between the conceptualizations of elementary, middle, and secondary-level gifted education and the function of honors colleges within higher education. This disconnect was further illuminated through my work at the Indiana
University Center for Postsecondary Research, where I noticed that many of my colleagues from doctoral programs in higher education, in contrast to my own background in educational psychology, used different terminology to explain what seemed to be essentially parallel constructs. I also discovered extensive research on honors colleges and programs, which largely seemed to be separate from gifted education, i.e., published in different journals, presented at different conferences, and not often cited in one another’s works.

Colangelo’s essay in this issue, “Gifted Education to Honors Education: A Curious History, a Vibrant Future,” presents an excellent description of many similarities between the two fields while Guzy’s “Honors is a Good Fit for Gifted Students—Or Maybe Not” points out some of the distinctions we should keep in mind. Given the important points in these essays, along with my own personal experiences spanning the two fields, I have generated three general suggestions for how my fellow researchers might better address the disconnect between gifted and honors education.

**SUGGESTION 1:**
**FIGURE OUT THE OVERLAP BETWEEN GIFTED STUDENTS AND HONORS STUDENTS**

If we imagine an overlapping Venn diagram, with one circle representing gifted K–12 students and the other representing honors students, we can identify the kinds of information we have in the different areas and the extent of the overlap. In my research, we found that 92% of honors students reported some kind of previous participation in gifted programming during elementary, middle, and/or high school but reported wide variation in the types of programming. Some noted opportunities for accelerated courses, such as grade skipping or AP/early college credits, while others received more enrichment-based extracurricular experiences like Odyssey of the Mind, Future Problem Solving, or summer programs. We should examine certain types of gifted programming exposure that are over- or under-represented in the overlapping section of the Venn diagram and consider the demographic and personality characteristics of this group. We should then compare the overlapping features with what is already known about both gifted students and honors students.

We can also explore the parts of the circles that do not overlap, i.e., gifted students who do not end up in honors colleges, or honors students with no
prior gifted identification or programming experiences. If gifted students do not go on to an honors college, we can explore their potential options. Since honors colleges tend to be more prominent at large and/or public universities, perhaps these non-honors gifted students choose more selective or smaller private schools instead, where their academic experiences might or might not be comparable to those at honors colleges. Alternatively, students might want to explore their giftedness within a particular domain and opt for an independent college of art and design or chose to study engineering at an independent technical university. Gifted students might decide against honors college enrollment even if it is available at their institution because they feel that they are not well-prepared or that honors will threaten their perfect GPA or their self-identity as “the smart kid,” i.e., the big-fish-little-pond effect. In the case of gifted underachievers, who are also more likely to be part of disadvantaged minorities, they may decide against higher education altogether.

Non-gifted honors students might also provide insight into the functioning and effectiveness of honors colleges. We can identify the characteristics that have allowed these students to succeed. Perhaps we can confirm that students from more privileged backgrounds rely on their social capital to garner the grades, test scores, and other criteria necessary to gain admission to honors programs. Assuming that a certain amount of motivation or work ethic contributes to the success of these students, we can examine whether their motivation is more extrinsic, i.e., “Honors College participation will look good on my résumé,” or intrinsic, i.e., “I am really interested in X topic, so studying this in depth with professor Y for my honors thesis sounds like fun.” More research on the characteristics of gifted honors students, non-gifted honors students, and gifted non-honors students, along with a better terminology scheme than what I have clumsily devised here, would be an important step forward in bridging the gap.

**SUGGESTION 2:**
**BETTER APPLICATION OF GIFTED THEORIES AND FINDINGS WITHIN HONORS RESEARCH (AND PRACTICE)**

Honors colleges place a strong emphasis on describing and assessing the curricular experiences and requirements of their students in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of this type of resource-extensive programming, especially as budgets within higher education continue to shrink. On the
flip side, however, the knowledge from gifted education that homes in on the social and emotional needs of gifted children seems to be a tangential consideration among honors colleges. As Marylou Kelly Streznewski emphasized in her book *Gifted Grownups*, a student does not simply stop being gifted upon turning eighteen years old. The unique needs of the gifted are still there when the students start college. Gifted researchers have explored many constructs to better address the social and emotional issues of gifted children, and honors colleges should take note of these in order to improve the experiences of their students. Such considerations are especially pertinent to honors colleges that have specially designated residence halls or living-learning communities where students continue to interact with one another outside the classroom. Within gifted studies is a plethora of research on topics such as overexcitability, social coping, perfectionism, personality traits, mental health, self-efficacy, identity, relationship styles, and parenting styles. If the findings from K–12 populations can be replicated in honors college populations, programming can be better adapted to serve them. If not, the differences might be explained by the Venn diagram described above or might result from different developmental levels. Perhaps the honors college environment can be a significant social and emotional benefit for gifted students, providing a community of like-minded individuals whom they have never been able to access before.

Gifted children need to be prepared for what lies ahead of them as adults, not only in their academic and career pursuits but also in their social and personal experiences. Educators and administrators should not ignore the non-academic needs of honors college students simply because they are officially “adults” now. Instead, a holistic understanding of gifted individuals, including their social and emotional lives, can be addressed through programming and services in honors colleges, perhaps demonstrating whether the enhanced curriculum and learning experiences, or the concurrent social aspects of honors participation, contribute positively to their cognitive and affective states. Such exploration would be beneficial in determining whether there are longer-term impacts of such experiences that extend into adulthood, as well as giving honors students tools to address potential social and emotional issues once they graduate and venture out on their own.
SUGGESTION 3:
MORE COMPARISONS BETWEEN HONORS AND NON-HONORS COLLEGE STUDENTS

K–12 education has a decided advantage in the availability of data from students of all ability levels. As much as we bemoan the prominence of standardized testing, it does allow us access to an easily identified “non-gifted” group for comparison purposes. Longitudinal data can provide information on academic increases, decreases, and stasis while holding constant other characteristics such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. However, once students begin higher education, they rarely receive this kind of ability-based assessment, so we do not have comparable data for all students. Much of the existing research on honors college students can only provide comparisons to non-honors students on metrics like GPA, retention, or graduation rates that are available for all students. Similarly, honors colleges do not have a “gifted identification” process although they do have criteria for admission.

If we wish to demonstrate the effectiveness of honors colleges as well as identify areas for improvement, we need a sample of non-honors students for comparison, without which the research on honors education is siloed. While comparison is not impossible, it requires cross-campus coordination. Offices of institutional research and assessment could be a great resource for gaining the necessary information as they generally house data that can serve for comparisons. Some institutions administer writing competency exams or major field exams, and these offices could merge honors college participation with demographics, entrance exam scores (SAT/ACT), and the like.

The NCHC is taking a proactive step in addressing the gap between gifted and honors education by partnering with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). My current work involves research and data analysis for this project, and NSSE contains a wealth of information that might be useful for honors college educators and administrators. A recent special issue of Journal for the Education of the Gifted focusing on honors college students featured some findings that compared honors and non-honors students on indicators of engagement such as reflective and integrative learning, student-faculty interaction, and supportive environments within a sub-sample of participating institutions. The 2019 consortium between the NCHC and NSSE provides an opportunity to administer additional items on topics of interest. Administration of NSSE to all first-year and senior students at a participating...
institution will generate a wealth of data for comparisons between honors and non-honors students. The results from this collaboration should be shared with both the gifted and honors communities for optimal awareness.

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Not So Gifted: Academic Identity for Black Women in Honors

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INTRODUCTION

Honors students are often regarded as the best and brightest at their universities, but the standard definitions of high achievement are not always useful for identifying talented undergraduate Black women. In a qualitative study of Black women in honors inside and outside the classroom at two urban predominantly white universities (PWIs), data derived from the students’ experiences provide insights about the standard labels of high achievement in higher education. The voices of these women expand the discourse on student academic identity.

Picture one of these honors students: Anissa wipes her finger through the word “gifted,” which is written on the small dry erase board. Then she erases “smart.” Despite earning admission to honors as an incoming freshman and thriving in her competitive courses, she does not consider herself gifted or smart like her classmates. They confidently answer questions in class and help
other people understand the homework. She knows the answers in class but is too shy to speak up. Although Anissa would never refer to herself as smart or gifted, her university might label her that way.

Anissa is one of sixteen students who participated in the qualitative study of the experiences of Black women in honors at two urban PWIs. While the literature on students in collegiate honors programs characterizes them as high-achieving or gifted, the reflections of the women in this study on their own identities indicate that some of the labels for their academic identity are not how they would define themselves. Honors educators need to know how underrepresented students in honors perceive their academic identities, and then they can select strategies for adjusting policies and practices with these perceptions in mind.

Understanding the experiences of high-achieving Black women is an important yet often overlooked part of fostering student success in college, particularly at PWIs. The most prominent studies in higher education on undergraduates of color over the last fifteen years largely focused on the experiences of Black men of a variety of ability types, expanding the knowledge on that population (Cuyjet; Harper; Harper & Quaye; Pearson & Kohl; Strayhorn). From that body of research came valuable information about how to enhance the academic environment for Black men (Bonner & Bailey), best practices for specific interventions that support the needs of Black men through mentoring or community-building organizations (Bledsoe & Rome; Baker), and patterns and outcomes of their engagement in campus life (Harper; Strayhorn & DeVita; Harper & Quaye). Alternatively, some focus on Black students generally (Solorzano et al.; Fries-Britt & Turner; Mwangi & Fries-Britt). Although these studies offer major contributions, there is limited similar research specifically on Black women high-achieved.

Volumes of research have been produced on how college affects students (Pascarella & Terenzini), the phases of their psychosocial and identity development (Evans et al.), and influences on their success or attrition (Tinto, “Dropout” and “Taking Retention”), yet, high-achieving Black undergraduate women were not the focus of any of those influential studies (Sanon-Jules). The experiences of this population of Black women remain understudied (Fries-Britt & Griffin; Strayhorn; Sanon-Jules).

Patton and Croom’s 2017 edited volume on Black women and college success addresses part of the gender imbalance. The volume features some of the leading and emerging scholars focusing on Black women in higher education research and provides a historical and generational perspective of Black women (Stewart), examination of identity politics (Porter), analysis of the
influence of sociostructural stressors (Donovan & Guillory), and strategies for institutionalizing support for Black women undergraduates (Shaw). Only one of the chapters focuses on high-achievers, examining the experiences of working-class Black women attending an Ivy League university (Johnson). The scholar known best for generating early studies on high-achieving Black women is Fries-Britt, whose works include an examination of stereotype resistance (“The Black Box,” with K. A. Griffin) as well as general research on gifted Black collegians: “Moving Beyond Achiever Isolation: Experiences of Gifted Black Collegians” in 1998 and “High-Achieving Black Collegians” in 2002. Griffin also contributed to the work on Black high achievers, focusing on academic motivation. The smallness of this collection of research, however, is evidence that the voices of Black women in honors are limited in the literature on the college student experience, leaving them invisible to campus support programs and institutional policy.

**Politics of Identity**

As a professional honors educator, I have observed two misperceptions associated with high-achieving Black women: that their experiences are the same as students with similar intellectual and ethnic identities and that their academic talent precludes them from needing resources to be successful. Both assumptions oversimplify the complex issues that result from these students’ overlapping identities, but the lack of research on high-achieving Black women seems to support these misperceptions.

Despite the intellectual abilities they have in common, high achievers are not a homogeneous population. The ethnic differences within the population mean that academically talented Blacks encounter an assortment of challenges at PWIs that differentiate them from their white peers (Strayhorn; Sanon-Jules). Black women are underrepresented at PWIs, especially among high achievers (Coleman & Kotinek). High-achieving Black students often feel racially isolated on campus and alienated from their majority and other minority peers. Inside and outside the classroom, they experience subtle and overt forms of racism from peers and instructors. They feel constant pressure to prove themselves academically (Fries-Britt & Griffin; Strayhorn). Additional unique issues would no doubt emerge if more empirical research were available.

Racial identity matters in the context of Black women’s experiences as the issues facing Black and high-achieving students “come together in unique ways” (Griffin 384). Some of the problems they face echo the negative
experiences of their non-honors Black peers at PWIs, who also report experiencing racist microaggressions (Swim et al.) and stereotype threat inside and outside the classroom (Fries-Britt & Turner; Spencer et al.; Steele). Environments at PWIs can pose several challenges for students of color. For Black high-achieving women, their position at the intersection of multiple oppressions and their membership in a variety of group identities play a role in how they experience various spaces in college life (Steele). Campus life mirrors the patterns of racial organization in greater society through its “racial marginalization, racial segregation of social and academic networks” and underrepresentation inside and outside the classroom among faculty and university staff (Steele 26). How high-achieving Black women perceive their various identities in these contexts needs more attention, but at the same time not all Black students are the same. The diversity within the group—in social interactions and academic ability particularly—make it important to examine the differences despite, as the research illustrates, consistencies in the hostility of the campus environment (Strayhorn; Griffin; Stewart, “Perceptions”).

Identifying High Achievement

Undergraduate high achievers are often students with high SAT scores and excellent grades in high school that earn them merit awards in college admissions. They also typically maintain at least a 3.0 college GPA, have high IQs, and are member of a scholars or university honors program (Freeman; Griffin; Harper & Quay; Strayhorn). They may have taken honors, Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, or International Baccalaureate courses. Honors admission criteria vary by university, so pre-college indicators may also include high school involvement, a letter of recommendation from a teacher, or an application process that evaluates students’ writing and critical thinking skills. Undergraduates meeting these criteria are expected to “achieve the highest levels of academic and professional success” (Solano qtd. in Fries-Britt & Griffin). Students of color, particularly from low socioeconomic backgrounds, have historically underperformed on standardized tests, including the SAT or ACT (“More Blacks”). Lacking scholastic opportunities such as AP courses to prepare them for such high-stakes tests (“More Blacks”), the high-achievement criteria easily miss talented and otherwise qualified young Black women (Borland). In the present study, the definition of high achievement is expanded to include the term “academically talented” to be more directly inclusive of students whose performance inside the classroom is an indicator of their qualification for honors.
For Black women, the intersections of race and gender play a role in their worldview (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*) and how they make meaning around college experiences, particularly as high achievers, in a way that differs from their peers (Winkle-Wagner; West et al.). In their study of African American undergraduate women, Winkle-Wagner found that culture shock and isolation on campus were common. According to a review of the literature by West et al., “several theorists have argued that Black women’s position at the intersection of racial and gender oppression creates a unique lived experience different from that of Black men” (333). Studies on Black men echo this perception (Cuyjet). Unfortunately, the lack of research on high-achieving Black women makes other, more specific differences from their peers unclear.

Many believe that excellent credentials mean that high achievers face fewer obstacles to collegiate success than their peers, but the literature suggests otherwise (Fries-Britt, “High-Achieving”; Fries-Britt & Griffin; Freeman). The challenges facing some Black women include isolation, alienation, and negative interactions with faculty and peers, which are common feelings among students who leave college (Tinto, “Dropout”; Strayhorn). Despite their academic talent, these challenges can put students at risk (Strayhorn). As a matter of social justice, institutions need to learn about high-achieving Black women to foster the same opportunities for their success as other collegians and to promote retention (Fries-Britt, “High-Achieving”).

**Academic Identity and Performance**

As with racial identity, existing research argues that environments affect how students develop their sense of academic identity. One study argues that the complex meanings that African American high school students attribute to their academic identity are informed by the attitudes and practices in their school context (Nasir et al.). The same study finds a predictive positive relationship for students with high ethnic identity and high academic achievement. Other researchers argue that there is a stigma against academic achievement among Black students because of its association with whiteness (Fordham & Ogbu). Often high achievers, or students who identify strongly with their academic identity, are accused of “acting white,” as Carter found in a 2006 study of Black and Latino youth. A few contemporary examinations of the “acting white” phenomenon argue that some Black students’ resistance to doing well in school is more of a resistance to white normalcy than to getting good grades or valuing education (Winkle-Wagner; Spencer et al.).
Based on the way Black people are portrayed in the media and popular culture, and given the cultural and social norms in the contexts where they live and are educated, several stereotypes are associated with the academic identity of Blacks. Socially, they experience pressure to represent a kind of Blackness commonly associated with “speaking stupid” (Carter) or having an “attitude” (Winkle-Wagner). These stereotypes reflect a social perception that “producing intellectual work is generally not attributed to Black women artists and political activists. Such women are typically thought of as non-intellectual and nonscholarly, classifications that create a false dichotomy between scholarship and activism, between thinking and doing” (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 15). The pervasiveness of these perspectives signals the importance of studying smart Black women to foster awareness and offer strategies for their support.

**METHODS AND DATA**

As part of a broader study on the experiences and identities of high-achieving Black undergraduate women, my focus is how students in this population make meaning around their academic identity or high-achieving label. To meet the standard practices of research in honors education, high-achieving Black women are identified based on honors program membership, consistent with Fries-Britt & Griffin’s research. The limitations of the honors indicator, particularly applied to students of color (Borland), result from a lack of more comprehensive measures for identification.

Areas of focus for the present study are (1) the experiences of Black high-achieving college women inside and outside the classroom at an urban PWI and (2) the salience of various aspects of these students’ identities. A purposive sample of students was selected from individuals who responded to a call for participation via email from the honors college staff at two urban universities. Sixteen students completed both the online background questionnaire and individual, semi-structured, in-person interviews between fall 2015 and spring 2016. Participants shared their availability for interviews as part of the background questionnaire. Based on their availability, I communicated with each participant to coordinate an interview at an on- or off-campus location of their preference. Interviews lasted 60–75 minutes, were audio recorded, and were later transcribed for analysis. Second interviews, which were also in-person, served as member checks and follow-ups to discuss themes from the first interviews. They lasted 45–60 minutes. Table 1 lists participants’ age, class year, and academic discipline.
Data analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti software and was an iterative process during and after the data collection (Lichtman). I incorporated Seidman’s approach to analyzing interview data by creating a participant profile after each interview that included responses to the background questionnaire and my observations from our interaction. Profiles and memos provided early indicators of commonalities across participants’ backgrounds and themes in their experiences. Transcripts were closely read, and codes were created inductively from data as well as based on the questions in the interview protocol and constructs significant to the topic of interest: the importance of gender, race, and high-achievement status (among other identities addressed by the student in her interview) and the nature of interactions with others in campus life (Lichtman). Codes were then clustered into code families and organized into major themes.

The present study focuses on academic identifiers, but it is important to acknowledge that there are many more facets to the participants’ identities. The complex identities of high-achieving undergraduate Black women make them subject to multiple oppressions (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*). Intersectionality is an instrumental “interpretive framework for thinking through

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Class Year</th>
<th>Field of Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anissa</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>STEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauryn</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Health Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shantel</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Health Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Health Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keshia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Health Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Humanities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>STEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Health Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serena</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>STEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>STEM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
how intersections of race and class, or race and gender, or sexuality and class, for example, shape any group’s experience across specific social contexts” (Collins, *Fighting Words* 208). Grounded in the work of law scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and in Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins’s Black feminism, this paradigm recognizes Black women as “agents of knowledge,” examining the perceptions of Black women from their own words to learn about them individually and collectively (Collins, *Fighting Words* 177). The intersectional framework recognizes that identity “salience varies among and within groups” (Collins, *Fighting Words* 208) and that the analyses of power in various contexts serve to “reveal which differences carry significance” (Tolinson qtd. in Cho et al. 798). This framework provides a theoretical lens for this study and would serve future research on Black women in honors as well. As microcosms of U.S. society, colleges are sites where the systems of power that subordinate these students as women, as Black, and by class manifest in the interactions that occur as part of campus life.

In line with the intersectionality framework, the broader study features a holistic analysis of participants’ identity salience and experiences in college contexts. As a Black woman, I recognize that Black women in honors are more complex than just their academic identities and that each facet can play a role in students’ perceptions and experiences, but definition and salience of academic identity are among the robustly explored constructs in the study and are the focus in this paper. I anticipate discussing more holistic analysis of the identities of the students in future articles.

**Validity and Trustworthiness**

Black women speaking for themselves provide the best way to learn more about their experiences. The selection of qualitative interviews for the data collection method privileges these women’s perspectives, providing them an opportunity to contribute their voices to the discourse on the college experience. Although qualitative studies are not generalizable, the participants’ perspectives may resonate with the experiences of other Black women in similar honors contexts. Methodologically, the decision to consider the experiences of these students without a comparison group centers them in the study. These experiences are valuable as sources without the need for comparison against a white or male normative group (West et al.).
FINDINGS

Academic Identities Defined

During the interviews, participants shared their perceptions about a list of terms I provided that were associated with honors students. Among the list were “smart,” “high-achieving,” “gifted,” and “academically talented.” Students defined each term and described the behavior it signified. They also reflected on how well the term fit their self-description and if others have used those terms to describe them. On the dry erase board, I wrote the academic identities the participant selected during the interview, the racial or ethnic identity indicated on their background questionnaire, female, and college student. Participants then added any additional identities or group memberships they felt mattered to their self-description.

Table 2 shows participants’ selections of the honors descriptors that fit them best as part of the dry erase board exercise. Table 3 lists each participant’s selected academic identity terms. Nearly all the students feel the term “high-achieving” is a good fit for their academic identity. Most also describe themselves as smart. “Academically talented” and “gifted” are not among their preferred terms.

High-Achieving

Participants associate being high-achieving with being a “go-getter,” “driven,” “disciplined,” “getting high grades,” and “not willing to settle.” Earning good grades is important to the students. Keshia feels the term fits her well. “I see myself as high-achieving because I know that I don’t like to settle. I cried when I got a 3.67 GPA this past semester” (Keshia). Standard academic measures of achievement factor into the participants’ definitions and performance of being high achievers. Also common is the idea that high achievers are willing to put in work to achieve their goals. Shannon describes them as people who “go above and beyond even though they don’t have to. So they’ll put in extra work to attain their goal . . . they’re not just trying to get that easy A” (6:44). Effort plays a role in achieving their goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Frequency of Participant Self-Description of Academic Identity Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-Achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Zoe describes herself as a high achiever, one of those “people who are just always striving to get to a better place than where they are now.” Nicole also describes herself with this term, noting that high achievement can occur inside and outside the classroom. It means “you’re just shooting to do your best and to be the best out of your peers and be at a next level versus everyone else” (Nicole). Amber describes herself the same way, and Mia agrees, noting that high achievers are “always doing a lot, signing up for things, giving back to other people, [and] maybe receiving awards” (Mia). In contrast to how the literature uses the term in relation to honors students, the participants feel high achievement means more than just SAT scores and GPA, nor does it require natural smarts. “You just try really hard,” Lauryn observes. In describing their own achievements, effort and a sense of agency play a role in whether the participants are successful with their big goals.

The high-achieving label does not fit for a few of the participants because they reason that it requires giving 100% of their effort or attention to something. If they sense that they can give more to some aspect of their involvement

**Table 3. Academic Identity Terms by Participant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Identifiers Selected by Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>smart, high-achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>smart, high-achieving, gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anissa</td>
<td>high-achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>high-achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline</td>
<td>smart, high-achieving, gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keshia</td>
<td>smart, high-achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauryn</td>
<td>high-achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>high-achieving, academically talented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>high-achieving, academically talented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>smart, academically talented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>smart, high-achieving, academically talented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serena</td>
<td>gifted, academically talented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>smart, high-achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shantel</td>
<td>smart, high-achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>smart, high-achieving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
or academics, then they do not achieve as highly as they feel capable. Miranda and Crystal are particularly critical of their achievements.

I walk away from opportunities a lot, just because I feel like I have too many, and I don’t want to overwhelm myself. So sometimes I’ll just opt out of applying for something or, you know, signing up for the extra seminar or something. Because I know that I want to go, and I know I’m interested in this, but I do not have the time, and I can’t give it 100%. (Miranda)

Because she is a very involved student leader who is also focused on her academics, limitations on Miranda’s time prevent her from achieving all that she could. Crystal is less involved in campus life and agrees that her lack of effort keeps her from achieving, but she believes she would be a better, higher achiever if she applied herself. Being high-achieving would mean “accomplishing all the things that I’ve set out for myself . . . maybe even accomplishing things that I never perceived . . . I was able to” (Crystal). Her assessment of her college performance is that she has yet to reach her potential.

Smart

Participants commonly define “smart” as “intelligent,” “book smart,” and “academic success.” Keshia defines the term by saying “it just means that they do well in academics. I think when people look at honor students and say we’re smart, they’re like, ‘oh, you get your A’s in your classes, you know a lot of things, you do well in college classes’” (Keshia). As Keshia’s description suggests, for many of the students being smart is associated with good grades and performing well on tests.

They also expect that “smart” includes characteristics and behaviors that test scores do not measure, like creativity. Grace is talented in the arts; she sings and plays multiple instruments. “I think it ties in with being good at things. Being good at playing an instrument would mean that you’re smart musically. Or if you’re good at coming up with ideas, then you’re smart intellectually.” Zoe feels that being smart means “knowing yourself, plus a willingness to learn or an eagerness to learn, and then the ability to use the information that you have resourceful[ly].” Aisha and Jacqueline agree. “I feel like smart is someone who knows a lot of things, who knows how to apply the knowledge that they know” (Aisha). Jacqueline notes that “it’s not enough to just know the facts from the textbook. You have to be able to make them
actionable and put them into context.” Continuing to gain knowledge and understanding how to apply it is important to being smart.

Participants note the difference between book smarts and street smarts and say that the kind associated with honors students tends not to be street smart. They suppose that a person who is smart should also have common sense, a quality “which a lot of people lack,” according to Amber. “I have engineering friends who are brilliant, absolutely brilliant, but can’t function sometimes.” Serena and Jacqueline echo Amber’s sentiments. Mia feels that an important part of being smart is “knowing what’s right and what’s wrong” and making good decisions: “I try not to base intelligence off of test scores or anything. It’s more about the person and how they react to things.” Simply being book smart and able to do well in classes does not mean that a person is smart in every area of her life.

Participants vary in their perceptions of the amount of agency required to be labeled with or to perform smartness; it can be innate or a product of effort. Lauryn describes both in her definition of “smart” and feels the term does not apply to her.

Well, I guess that there’s some people who are naturally “smart,” and they may be very good at math or science or something like that. But then I think there’s also people who just work really hard to do better, and so they would be considered smart too. I mean, I think it’s a hard word because sometimes people will be like, ‘oh, you’re so smart,’ but really if they just worked the same amount, then they would really be in the same place. So sometimes, it’s kind of like that.

Lauryn feels that other people could improve their grades or academic performance by working hard like people who are labeled smart. Anissa feels the same way, particularly in relation to one of her friends from high school whom she considers smart but who is lazy. “Anyone can be smart if they try. It’s not something you’re born with.” Anissa’s view is evident in how she describes encouraging her high school friend to go to class and do his homework so that he will get better grades. According to Nicole, students would be “taking that extra mile to study versus just getting by” if they were smart. Agency is significant to a student’s being considered smart, based on Lauryn’s, Anissa’s, and Nicole’s ideas. Studying, being diligent, and working hard pay off.

Although most participants feel that being described as smart is a compliment, a few acknowledge a stigma associated with the term, particularly as they reflect on how they are treated regarding that label in other contexts.
“I used to think it was an insult back in the day. Like ‘Oh, you’re so smart.’ The way people would say it. It’s like oh, is that not a good thing to be smart? Doesn’t that take you places?” Nicole’s peers tried to make her feel bad about her good academic performance, insinuating that it is different in a bad way and not okay to be smart.

Miranda has another connotation of smartness. “Even when I was younger, actually, it was kind of used to punish me a little bit. It’s like ‘Are you trying to be smart?’ Like, you had an attitude.” In a familial context, when she needs to be respectful of authority, it can be inappropriate to act smart or behave like a know-it-all. Other students share similar school-age experiences as well and allude to the role these earlier experiences play in how well the list of honors identities describes them. The variety of connotations for this term suggest that the participants receive mixed messages from their social, academic, and familial environments about the meaning of being smart and whether it is something constructive or even socially acceptable.

**Academically Talented**

I introduce the term “academically talented” to add more precise language to the discourse on honors students. Participants describe academically talented people as those who “perform better in classes,” are “good at schoolwork,” and are “book smart.” Amber describes being academically talented as related to “the amount that you put into learning that material. I think you can be talented, but not get the results that you want, because you don’t put the work into it” (Amber). Putting in work is also key to Anissa’s understanding of the term.

You have to study to be academically talented. You can’t just, you know, just read the book and then go take a test. That isn’t going to get you a good grade on the test. You’re not understanding the material you’re just knowing it. I feel like if you don’t apply it, I don’t think you’re academically talented in my opinion.

Application and effort matter in many of the other participants’ definitions as well. Crystal, though, feels the term refers to an innate quality: “I think talent’s also something that you’re naturally good at, so it’s just where you thrive, and academics is for academically talented.” Participants have a lot of opinions about the term, but only five add the term to their list of descriptors.

Michelle feels the term fits her. She describes academically talented people as “good at schoolwork. So, good at studying and organizing, getting
things in on time, and asking questions. Just good at figuring out how they can learn stuff.” Serena adopts the term as well, suggesting it refers to excelling at school, understanding concepts, and passing tests. Nicole likes calling herself academically talented. It means “you get really good grades. Maybe you know how to finesse a test and can really . . . write a good paper, and sound eloquent. I think that just means you’re a superstar in school, in your classes and stuff like that. Academically talented, yeah, a smarty pants basically, but not in a sassy way.” As Nicole’s definition suggests, ascriptions of academic talent can be associated with having an attitude or an air of arrogance. She is careful to clarify her meaning.

Several of the definitions associate the term “academically talented” with the other honors labels, particularly among students who indicate that it is not a salient part of their identity. Shantel indicates that she feels “like that’s another word for smart, academically talented. They’re good at school or good at school-related things.” Amber relates the term with the idea of smartness as well. Shannon feels the terms are similar, too, but “academically talented” has a different tone than smart, though she cannot describe the difference she senses.

I feel like a student would be someone who, like I want to say someone who’s actually really interested in what they’re learning. They’re not just trying to get the grade, but they really are taking it. They want to do something with that work, but also it somehow comes easy to them, the talent aspect. Because I feel like a talent is something that comes naturally, we don’t have to work at it.

Shannon goes on to indicate that academically talented is the same as smart, and gifted and academically talented are the same.

Gifted

Three participants include the term “gifted” in their academic identity, but only one participant consistently describes herself as gifted on her list and during her interviews. Many participants’ constructions of the term are associated with innate abilities or biology. Nicole describes a gifted person as “someone that’s just a little bit smarter or does better in the subject or something like that. They’re wired differently so that . . . they can go to the next level in that subject.” Others say that gifted people have “special talents,” are “born smart,” or have a “natural” ability to do well at something on the first
try. People can be gifted academically or in music, art, sports, or other extracurricular endeavors.

A few of the students associate the term with their participation in special programs in primary or secondary school: they took achievement or IQ tests and were placed into resource or project classes to enhance their academic curriculum. At this point in their academic careers, however, they no longer feel that the label is appropriate for them. Crystal reflects on being gifted as a child and the differences she feels in her aptitude as a college student.

I used to think I was, I guess gifted, but that has since changed since entering college. So, just, I was definitely the person in high school that didn’t try. I could listen and, you know, I guess internalize and regurgitate later, ’cause that’s all learning is in high school. And now that it’s not internalize and regurgitate, it’s more like internalize and apply, it’s not, I can’t excel the way I used to or excel in the same manner.

In college, the expectations for learning and understanding information are different than in high school; Crystal feels she is not gifted anymore because she cannot use the same effortless methods for learning from prior educational environments. Crystal describes a common transition issue many new college students face: formerly successful ways of learning in their high school classroom environment are not a good fit for the demands of their college academic environment. The new teaching and learning environment requires the need to adapt their learning style. Anissa’s definition is consistent with other participants’ but draws attention to additional factors in the outcomes associated with giftedness.

I feel like when people use the word “gifted” it seems inherent. Like the child was born with it. But I feel like you’re not born intelligent or academically talented, it’s something you achieve over time. It’s based on your circumstance and how you’re brought up and what your own personal goals are and based on what your parents instill in you.

Amber and Jacqueline agree with Anissa’s notion of parental influence. Amber was told she was gifted as a child and participated in special academic programs, as did Serena. Jacqueline consistently labels herself gifted in her interviews and feels there is more than biology involved in being gifted: there are sociocultural and economic privileges that help foster these abilities.
Academic Identity Salience

The results suggest that students are socialized not to talk about how intelligent or accomplished they are, particularly as Black women. Student descriptions of their academic identities reflect their acculturation in society as part of their position at the nexus of various social groups. They are reluctant to adopt the terms “smart,” “high-achieving,” “academically talented,” or “gifted” for themselves despite fitting their own definitions of the terms. They experience a palpable tension between embodying their honors identities and feeling comfortable acknowledging those abilities. Michelle’s perceptions illustrate this concern. “I feel like, oh, I’m showing off if I say I’m smart and academically talented. But I feel like I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t.” She is reluctant to own her academic identifiers because she feels it is “show offy.”

Because self-praise is kind of like, I don’t know. . . . It’s not as if it’s looked down on, but you kind of look at people sideways when they talk about how great they are, even though everyone’s supposed to be proud of all of their things that they’ve achieved and how good they are at things. But then when you talk about it, it’s like, stop.

Michelle alludes to the mixed messages she receives about having pride in her achievements. Instead of touting their own accomplishments, Keshia and Shantel mention that others would describe them as high-achieving. Although Shantel does not like the labels for herself, she feels her family does.

So I know that my mom would use the word “smart” to describe me—academically talented, high-achieving—because whenever I get, like all my report cards, if they were good, which they usually were—like straight As and stuff like that—she would put it on Facebook, show all her friends, tell everybody, you know. So I know that she’s proud of me as far as that goes, and she would describe me as smart.

It is alright for others, but not for them, to acknowledge their abilities. Students express concern about how they would be perceived by their peers and by society more broadly if they brought attention to their achievements or accepted the high-achieving label. Despite the various constructive and judgmental connotations that high achievement carries, most participants willingly own that term as part of their identity. Students in the study do not seem to embrace my introduction of the term “academically talented,” but the overlap in participants’ definitions across the other honors terms and
“academically talented” suggests that the term may offer a suitable alternative term in future research.

Numerous participants stress the importance of natural talent or putting full effort into their goals as part of the reason for their achievement. Although these ideas play a role in their performance, they are all intrinsic explanations of success. They mostly ignore the structural barriers that sometimes limit access to resources or social capital that might enhance their ability to succeed. Neglecting external influences on their performance means that students may blame themselves for not achieving their full potential whereas the cause may be a combination of internal and less visible external obstacles.

Despite mentioning how some of the achievement terms do not fit, participants’ definitions are descriptive of their academic outcomes and performance. People are socialized differently along the lines of race, class, and gender, and other identities, so the disconnection with the terms is also an indicator that Black women are not commonly associated with intelligence. This disconnect signals the need for reconsideration of the language used to describe honors students—methodologically as well as in practice—to enhance how this population of students is supported by faculty and staff or recruited by admissions.

Implications

Expanding Definitions

Participants in the study problematized the institutional focus on test scores as indicators of high-achievement ability, arguing that academic behaviors and extracurricular engagement criteria may also be key to identifying students with potential. “Gifted” is not at the top of the list of preferred descriptors for the honors students in this study. Their choice of other terms to describe themselves does not reduce the value of existing discourse on honors students, but we need to expand the labels we assign honors students and other talented undergraduates to be more inclusive of students’ experiences. We may also need to reinforce to students how impressive their achievements are as incoming or current college students to encourage them to contribute their talents to campus life.

Definitions of “gifted” or “high-achieving” from the literature are not a reflection of how all students think about their abilities, creating a call to shift research on students with academic talent to be more inclusive of multicultural perspectives. Intersections of race, gender, social class, and religion
play a role in how students perceive the importance of their high-achieving identity in their college experiences. We can take our definitions beyond the literature and meet students who engage with our programs where they are. More discussion of experiences in honors, academic identity, and other student perspectives needs to be centered in our work in honors, especially in regard to high-achieving Black women, who are not the focus of any recent major honors studies.

Echoing Guzy’s Forum essay in this issue of JNCHC, my findings stress the need to consider how students define themselves in concert with the existing research on their behavior and lists of gifted and high-achieving student traits. The results of my study offer new reflections on honors identities in the students’ own words.

Reconsidering Admissions Practices

The underrepresentation of Black women in honors and in research on high-achieving students may be a reflection of the limitations of the selection criteria for honors programs. Many institutions and honors programs stress standardized testing in assigning high-achievement status, but there is more to these students than their scores. As one participant argues, “There should be more to determining smartness or high-achieving than a student’s ability to perform well on assignments and tests.” Some ways that institutions can remedy an overemphasis on testing and enhance attention on other areas include requiring an application for honors that is separate from the general admissions process, interviewing prospective students, and considering a student’s extracurricular excellence.

Several schools already require incoming first-year, transfer, or current students to apply for the opportunity to enroll in honors courses and receive associated benefits and resources (Willingham). Although students with exceptionally high standardized test scores may earn automatic admission to honors, an application gives students the opportunity to express for themselves how they would thrive in an honors community and to demonstrate their interest in taking deeper and more rigorous academic coursework. High school performance matters for incoming first-year students, but academic performance at college is a better reflection of a student’s actual ability to perform at a high level in undergraduate coursework.

Virtual or in-person interviews for prospective honors students can be used in tandem with a direct application to help universities assess students’ interest in engaging in the specialized learning opportunities provided by
honors programs. As the honors students in this study share, plenty of capable students in the general campus population could thrive in honors coursework; interviews could facilitate the admission of students whose potential contributions to the honors community are not demonstrated by their performance on high-stakes tests in high school.

Extracurricular involvement and achievement outside the classroom should be considered as part of the honors admissions process if it is not already integrated in a holistic review. As a way of recognizing that honors students are more than book smart but also talented musicians, artists, writers, leaders, and athletes, weighing students’ contributions to their university community enhances the diversity of the honors community. SAT or ACT scores cannot convey these talents.

To include underrepresented populations, particularly at PWIs, high achievement should not be characterized solely by students’ performance in the classroom or testing; community involvement and demonstration of character are also important factors in determining a student’s ability to achieve. Current methods of selection for honors often leave this piece out of the admissions process, potentially overlooking many qualified candidates.

CONCLUSION

Social justice requires that we do more research on Black women in honors as well as students with other social identities and that we use that new knowledge to revise terminology and inform practices that foster inclusivity and nurturing support. Not all honors students have the same definitions or perceptions about the salience of their academic identities. In our consideration of what it means to be an honors student—whether gifted, high-achieving, or something in between—we need to consider students’ perceptions of the meaning and salience of their identities.

As Guzy argues in this issue, “If honors professionals are earnest in our desire to recruit and retain more gifted students, then we need to reexamine how we define honors education in the twenty-first century and how we should expand our definitions to more fully embrace intellectual diversity.” The results of my study call for reexamination of admissions practices that exclude students who demonstrate academic talent beyond test scores as well as those who may be qualified but do not self-identify as high-achieving. Without additional knowledge about talented Black women, we risk their remaining invisible, missing out on opportunities to fulfill their potential in honors. If they are navigating their lives along the margins of the academic
and social spaces at PWIs, they could experience lasting effects on their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Identifying talented students and helping them fulfill their potential—including the Black women among them—is what honors education is all about. Let us more inclusively live our honors missions.

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Opening Doors: Facilitating Transfer Students’ Participation in Honors

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Those of us who reflect on our work as honors educators and administrators are more certain than ever that honors programs and colleges are critical sites for development of equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education. Numerous roundtable discussions and research presentations at recent regional and national honors conferences signal this awareness as do equally numerous honors-related publications, including two monographs released through the National Collegiate Honors Council; Setting the Table for Diversity, edited by Coleman and Kotinek, and Occupy Honors Education, edited by Coleman, Kotinek, & Oda. Lisa Coleman opens the former volume with a series of questions that frame the conversation on diversity in honors:

Who is in our honors programs, who isn’t, and why? Do we serve all members and potential members equally by providing them with the support systems, the resources, mentors, and faculty and staff with
whom they can identify? Do we help our students and ourselves address difference and do so in a respectful and constructive manner that enables all students to feel welcome and at home in the honors space? Do we construct curricula and create experiential-learning and service-learning opportunities that serve the ends of diversity (equity and inclusion) and social justice? (12)

Clearly, the need for honors programs to recruit, retain, and meaningfully engage diverse populations of talented students is widely acknowledged.

I claim that the following assertion is a natural corollary: honors faculty and administrators should make every effort to ensure that honors is accessible to and inclusive of transfer students. A large number of college students transfer from one post-secondary institution to another: a 2015 study by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) shows that 37.2% of all students beginning post-secondary education in the United States in 2008 transferred at some point in their college careers, most often in the second year, and many of these students transferred from two-year institutions to four-year institutions. A 2017 NSC “Snapshot Report” shows that during the 2015–2016 academic year, 49% of all students completing a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution in the U.S. had been enrolled at a two-year institution for at least one term in the past ten years. In some states this figure was over 70%, and the states with the highest two-year-to-four-year transfer rate were those where a plurality of two-year-college students came from populations historically underrepresented in college. Honors programs that are unprepared to admit these students will miss out on their considerable contributions.

Transfer students are not only numerous, but as suggested in the previous paragraph, they also tend to represent greater ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and age diversity than students who complete their four-year degrees at one institution uninterrupted, and this is particularly true of students who begin their studies at two-year colleges. For example, a 2016 report from The College Board shows that Hispanic and African American students are overrepresented in two-year colleges, and the 2017 NSC report on “Current Term Enrollment Estimates” shows that 61.9% of all first-time nontraditional college attendees, defined as those over twenty-four years old, in the fall of 2017 were enrolled at two-year public institutions. Further, in my attempts to better understand the contribution of two-year colleges to four-year institutions’ racial and ethnic diversity, I collected demographic data on the four-year schools considered below as well as on each of these institutions’ primary two-year “feeder” school. Averaging all of the pairs for which data
was available for both members of the pair, I found that 21.4% of the most recent entering class were persons of color while the corresponding mean for the two-year “feeder” schools was 27.2%, a slightly but not insubstantially higher figure. (See Appendix 2 for a fuller description of these data.)

Thus, if we believe that honors programs and colleges benefit by engaging a diverse population of learners, we must make serious efforts to make honors accessible to transfer students. My purpose here is to demonstrate that though we, as leaders of honors programs and colleges, acknowledge the need to develop increasingly diverse honors communities, our efforts to reach out to transfer students in particular are currently insufficient to ensure these students’ inclusion in and engagement with honors. I echo the words of Finnie D. Coleman, who opens his contribution to the volume *Occupy Honors Education* by urging us to move past merely talking about what “occupying honors” might look like to actually doing it:

I intend here only to challenge honors faculty, students, and staff to look beyond the rhetoric of occupation to develop strategies and plans that will lead to a specific set of positive outcomes: placing honors education on the cutting edge of educational practice and promoting the democratic values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. (317–18, emphasis in the original)

Coleman’s charge is not a hollow one: many of the moves toward equity made by honors programs appear to be largely rhetorical. For instance, as Philip Frana and Stacy Rice noted in 2017, a majority of honors programs and colleges at four-year institutions report having some sort of articulation agreement or memorandum of understanding (MoU) with at least one two-year college honors program, according to the terms of which agreement the four-year school recognizes some honors credit earned at its two-year partner. However, as we will see later, many four-year schools’ honors programs do not even make these agreements known on their websites, sites that are many students’ first source of information on a program’s offerings. While these agreements’ invisibility does not vitiate their institutional force, it does make them less effective at encouraging transfer students’ involvement in honors curricula.

The advertisement of MoUs is one of many moves an honors program or college might make to ensure greater inclusion and engagement of transfer students and others historically underrepresented in the four-year college honors experience. Other such moves range from the purely rhetorical, e.g.,
being intentional in the wording of the program’s website, to the elaborately structural, e.g., overhauling the design of a program’s curriculum. In the sections that follow, I examine several of these moves and analyze a sample of honors websites to determine the extent to which honors programs appear to be making them. I use the words “appear to be making” intentionally: although a program’s practices may serve to accommodate transfer students, if those practices are not prominently advertised, then their invisibility may instead discourage transfer students’ involvement.

A note on language. From this point on I will use the term “honors programs” to refer to both honors programs and honors colleges in order to avoid wordiness. Moreover, though almost everything I discuss in this article applies equally well to both programs and colleges, the majority (90.9%, or 20 out of 22) that I consider in my survey are honors programs.

WHY THERE ARE SO FEW TRANSFER STUDENTS IN HONORS PROGRAMS

In 2006, Dowd et al. noted the rich potential in the nation’s two-year colleges: “the talent pool at community colleges is large and growing. Students who manage to transfer complete their bachelor’s degree programs at high rates” (3). The most recent relevant data from the National Student Clearinghouse in 2018 suggest that this success rate continues today, with a six-year graduation rate of 41.8% for students beginning at a public two-year college. Meanwhile, it has been clear for some time that putting articulation agreements into place is insufficient to ensure transfer students’ involvement in honors. As Bagnato lamented in 2006, “while many colleges have articulation agreements with state universities, even an honors program at a community college doesn’t necessarily translate to acceptance at an elite U.S. university” (5).

We face numerous challenges as we attempt to bring transfer students, from two-year schools or elsewhere, into honors programs. To begin with, transfer students may not be aware that honors is an option for them. Furthermore, even if honors is actively marketed to transfer students, these students may not identify themselves as “honors material,” which may lead to their undermatching and electing not to take part in honors programming. Finally, for those transfer students who do opt to participate in honors, curricular obstacles may prevent them from successfully completing honors requirements.
It is worth our time to consider the idea of “honors identity.” Twenty years ago, writing specifically about nontraditional honors students, Betsy G. Yarrison remarked:

Many prospective honors candidates from among the non-traditional population do not see themselves as intellectually gifted. . . . It is very common for us to approach a student who is transferring into the university with a GPA of 3.83 and have her say, “Honors? You must be kidding! I’m not smart enough for Honors.” (23)

As Yarrison suggests here, many students from nontraditional college-going groups undermatch, intentionally placing themselves in less challenging academic settings than their talents would allow them to navigate. Dziesinski, Camarena, and Homrich-Knieling explain:

For students from majority groups, negotiating an honors identity may not be problematic in itself because honors likely coordinates well with other identities more associated with privilege. . . . In contrast, for students coming from underrepresented or marginalized groups, becoming enlightened simultaneously to the privilege of honors and to the oppression related to their underrepresented or marginalized group status put[s] these students in a difficult position. (92)

Jones, writing in the same 2017 volume, agrees, pointing out that undermatching can “lead some students to voluntarily opt out of program participation if they [do] not perceive themselves as being honors qualified” (68). The more recent work of Kang and Torres in 2018 found that roughly 40% of a sample of nearly 5,000 students undermatched in their choice of college (by enrolling in a school that was not as selective as they were qualified to attend) and that even after controlling for a number of other factors, undermatching was responsible for a decrease in completion of a college degree.

Various authors (e.g., Bagnato; Gabbard et al.; Pressler; Sanon-Jules; Jones) recommend specific policies, practices, and pedagogies to help students develop cultural capital and counter the non-honors self-identification of members of traditionally underrepresented groups. Honors administrators must go further and ensure that their policies, practices, and pedagogies are made as transparent as possible, prominently displaying them on honors websites and other publicly available materials. Absent this transparency, policies intended to help students with less academic cultural capital will have a lessened impact as these students may not know to ask about their existence.
We should also work to dismantle curricular barriers to transfer students’ success in honors programs, including overly rigid course requirements, unrealistic “good-standing” requirements, and time-consuming extra- and co-curricular expectations. Because transfer students often come to their new institutions having already earned a great deal of credit, many face a shorter path to on-time graduation than their peers who began at the same institution. As a consequence, many transfer students find themselves focusing on their major coursework at the expense of other courses, including honors. If the honors curriculum is insufficiently flexible, transfer students may not be able to complete the courses needed to graduate “with honors” or to remain in good standing in the honors program. As Yarrison notes, many transfer students have neither interest in nor need for the extra- and co-curricular participation some honors programs require of their students.

We thus need to focus on the following aspects of an honors program in regard to transfer students:

1. admissions criteria and procedures;
2. requirements for graduating and remaining in good standing in honors;
3. design of the honors curriculum (with specific attention to required courses and to the “balance” of the curriculum throughout a student’s career);
4. existence (and advertisement) of articulation agreements, memoranda of understanding, or other recognitions of transfer honors credit; and
5. website language and design.

Each of these data can be taken as a marker both of an honors program’s attitude toward transfer students and of the program’s active commitment to recruiting and retaining transfer students in its community. We need to ask the following questions: Are transfer students eligible to take part in honors at a particular institution? If they are eligible to take part, are they, further, encouraged to take part? And, once admitted to the honors program, how are they made to feel welcome and helped to succeed?

Before addressing these questions, I need to explain my methodological choice to survey honors websites rather than contact honors directors and deans directly. As I have previously noted, the effectiveness of honors policies in helping transfer students and others to engage is dependent not only on those policies’ emplacement but also on their advertisement. That is, what matters is not only what we do to help our students but also how and how well we make known what it is that we do. Even if transfer students are technically
welcome in honors, potentially aided by articulation agreements and waivers of honors requirements, these practices and others are unhelpful if the students are not aware of their existence.

**Admissions Criteria and Procedures**

In evaluating potential honors students, many programs rely heavily on traditional measures of academic excellence:

- high school GPA (weighted or unweighted);
- standardized test scores;
- lists of honors, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or dual enrollment courses taken in high school;
- lists of extracurricular activities; and
- lists of volunteer, service, and community engagement activities.

Cleaving too closely to such measures generally privileges already privileged individuals, who are disproportionately white, middle- and upper-middle-class, and from households headed by college graduates. Some of these measures have built-in cultural, racial, and ethnic biases (see, for example, the groundbreaking work discussed in Steele). Moreover, scoring highly on measures that require time commitment beyond regular school hours is difficult for high school students from families with lower socioeconomic status, who must work to support themselves or their families or to save up for college (Eccles et al; Lareau; Dumais; Covay & Carbonaro; Stearns & Glennie; and Putnam).

Moreover, if admissions criteria are designed in such a way to specifically rule out transfer students or to effectively deny transfer students’ interest in the program, few are likely to apply successfully. For example, admissions criteria may expressly state that students must be entering first-year students, or they may require that the applicant have earned no more than a certain number of hours of college credit or be a member of an honors program at a previous institution. Admissions criteria may omit any mention of transfer students, forcing such students to contact the honors office to learn more when they may lack the academic cultural capital or “honors identity” to know to take this action.

Several authors (Godow; Soares; Jones) make specific recommendations for more inclusive practices such as the ones described below.
Requirements for Graduating and Remaining in Good Standing in Honors

If requirements for graduation are overly burdensome, many transfer students will be unlikely to complete them successfully. The same is true of certain “good standing” requirements. For instance, if students must take one honors course every term or even every other term to remain in good standing, sufficient honors courses must be offered to enable all students, including transfer students, to clear this bar. Introducing honors contract courses and allowing “double-dipping” between honors and major requirements can add flexibility and accessibility to the honors curriculum. Youmans, for example, notes the positive impact of hybrid courses in the disciplines that include both honors and non-honors students, courses in which honors students raise the bar for all students in the class as well as the instructor: “faculty members who have agreed to develop hybrid courses have reported an influx of new ideas, both methodological and content-based, that naturally carry over to the other sections of the course” (22).

Extra- and co-curricular requirements may also offer unrealistic challenges to transfer students, whose paths to on-time graduation require a quicker pace. As Yarrison reminds us, nontraditional students in particular “don’t need mandatory public service or volunteer work. . . . They do not need freshman colloquia that teach them how to live away from home for the first time. . . . [They] do not need programs that depend on their willingness to study away from their home campus” (26–27).

Design of the Honors Curriculum

The structure of the honors curriculum has a strong impact on students’ successful completion of honors requirements. Transfer students, who typically face a shorter time to graduation and less flexibility in their focus on major coursework, are more strongly impacted than others. If an honors curriculum is designed in such a way that many of the required courses must be taken in the first year or two of college, students entering the program in their second year or later may find it difficult or impossible to complete honors graduation requirements. The curriculum might also be imbalanced by requiring a large number of courses outside of the major. Since many transfer students, especially those coming from two-year colleges, come to their new institutions having met most or all of their general education requirements, they often plan to enroll in major courses only. If honors course offerings are
too rigid, transfer students may find it difficult to reconcile their major course schedules with their honors requirements.

Finally, even if an honors curriculum is designed to be navigable by both continuing and transfer students, the curriculum’s structure may not be clearly described on the program’s website, once again forcing interested students to be proactive in seeking more information about the program’s offerings and expectations.

**Articulation Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding**

Many honors programs have put in place articulation agreements, memoranda of understanding, or some other formal procedure enabling official recognition of honors credit earned elsewhere. Frana and Rice have provided information on how to craft such measures, and others (Morphew, Twombly, & Wolf-Wendel; Townsend & Wilson) also discuss articulation agreements and other means of ensuring a smooth transfer process. In the absence of such measures, many transfer students find it difficult to complete honors requirements. Moreover, if the measures are not advertised clearly on the honors program’s website or other promotional literature, transfer students are unlikely to benefit from them.

**Honors Program Website Language and Design**

Websites are rhetorically complicated texts. The composition of an effective website requires attention to many often-competing considerations. Carliner, for example, provides an exhaustive list of design elements, and Arola and Gallagher provide opposing viewpoints on website templates. The formal study of website design is a nontrivial matter requiring considerable technical expertise (e.g., Eyman, ch. 3). Even minor decisions involving wording, organization, and visual elements can have a profound impact on the way visitors receive the website and its content and can be unwelcoming to transfer students:

1. **Absence of transfer students from mention.** Even if they are technically welcome to take part in an honors program, if transfer students are not explicitly acknowledged, then they are unwelcome and have to take additional steps to gain admission into the program.

2. **Language.** Website language might signal an assumption that all honors students
a. plan to be in the program for four years,
b. wish to live on campus,
c. need to take part in “acclimation to college” activities, or
d. have time for cultural, community-building, or other co-curricular events aimed primarily at first-year students.

Such language minimizes the experience of transfer students, who will often neither need nor desire to take part in these activities. Language suggesting a “traditional” college experience can be coded in other ways, too. For instance, some institutions’ websites (particularly those of liberal arts schools) may tout for example, their schools’ selectivity, prestige, rigorous curriculum, or longstanding campus traditions, all of which signal an unwelcome atmosphere for transfer students who do not represent a traditional college-going population.

3. **Visual elements.** While many institutions take care to visually represent racial, ethnic, and gender diversity on their websites, not all websites identifiably showcase transfer students. Moreover, visual elements provided without captions or other contextualizing language may rely on the viewers’ familiarity with a traditional academic setting for them to properly interpret the visuals’ content. Transfer students’ familiarity with this setting may be lower than that of more traditional honors students.

**CURRENT PRACTICES, AS ADVERTISED:**
**A SURVEY OF COPLAC HONORS PROGRAMS’ WEBSITES**

To better understand current policies and procedures related to transfer students’ engagement with honors, at least as advertised, I collected data from nearly two dozen honors program websites in December 2017 and January 2018. I surveyed program websites at member institutions of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC), twenty-two of whose thirty members have some sort of formal honors program or college. (See Appendix 1 for a list of these programs’ landing pages.) I chose this collection of schools because, though varying somewhat in size and structure, they share a more or less common mission of providing a liberal arts education within a public, regional context. In theory, this similarity of mission should trickle down to the schools’ honors programs.
Another compelling reason to consider COPLAC institutions follows from Jones’s assertion that honors programs “at public universities have often served as a cost-effective way for underserved first-generation students to gain the benefits of high-impact pedagogies such as undergraduate research, smaller class sizes, and the like” (35). Jones notes, “Where honors can have perhaps its greatest impact is by serving as a rigorous, persistent, and public advocate for change in how diversity, inclusion, and equity are perceived, enabling honors to model for other campus programs ways of implementing inclusive excellence” (38).

Although here I consider only websites, many of the observations below apply equally well to other texts and materials that were not surveyed, including student handbooks, course catalogues, promotional brochures, university tour scripts, and guidelines.

Also, while twenty-two schools represent a tiny fraction of all four-year institutions with honors programs and COPLAC schools represent a specific sort of institution, the consistency of my findings demonstrates the need for a broader study of how we make our programs known to all students, including transfer students.

**Admissions Criteria and Procedures**

Of the 22 honors program websites, fewer than half (10 programs, or 45.5% of the total) mention transfer students explicitly. Six of the programs whose websites do mention transfer students hold somewhat strict eligibility requirements for them: two bar entry to students with more than 45 earned hours, and a third does not accept students with more than 50 earned hours; one program requires transfer students to arrive with a GPA of at least 3.7 at their prior institution and another at least a 3.75; and one program restricts membership to students who took part in an honors program at their prior institution.

Some institutions are less clear about transfer admissions policies. For instance, Henderson State University’s homepage notes that “other Henderson students, as well as transfers, may consult with the honor director about becoming members of the Honors College or about taking particular Honors College courses” (“Honors College”), without any indication of either an admissions process or criteria that will be applied. Meanwhile, Truman State University’s website states, “no credit toward becoming an Honors Scholar shall be given for high school, transfer, or online courses, (including AP, CLEP, Study Abroad or substitutions) unless approved by the Honors
Scholar Committee” (“Important Policies and FAQ”). Fort Lewis College’s instructions to transfer students are similar: “Interested students transferring to Fort Lewis College or FLC students who do not meet the aforementioned requirements should contact [the Honors Director] to discuss their particular situation” (“Applying to the Honors Program”).

Only two of the ten programs whose websites mention transfer students (or 9.1% of all programs surveyed) offer both clear and complete instructions to transfer students and entry to transfer students without severe restrictions on past honors membership, GPA, or credit hours earned. Thus, most programs’ websites either do not welcome transfer students or showcase rigid prerequisites for transfer students’ participation in honors.

Requirements for Graduating and Remaining in Good Standing in Honors

Six out of 22 programs’ websites (27.3%) make no explicit mention of requirements for remaining in good standing. The most common good-standing requirement mentioned is overall GPA: 14 of 22 programs, comprising 63.6% of all programs and 87.5% of those explicitly mentioning good-standing requirements, require students to maintain a given minimal GPA to be retained in the program. This minimum ranges from 3.0 to 3.6, with a mean of 3.282 (σ = 0.1565) and a nearly identical median of 3.275. One program (at Eastern Connecticut State University) offers a “sliding scale,” requiring first-year students, for instance, to maintain a GPA of 3.3 and seniors a GPA of 3.5. In all cases, the GPA required for staying in good standing is lower than the GPA required of transfer students by the two programs with GPA requirements.

The next most common good-standing criterion is regular completion of honors courses: 7 out of 22 programs (31.8% of all programs and 43.8% of those mentioning good-standing requirements), all of which also require a minimum GPA, require students to complete a certain number of honors credit hours per semester or per academic year. All but one of these programs require one course per academic year; the remaining program requires two courses. Only one program requires students to complete at least 28 hours of any coursework, including honors, per academic year. Three programs, all of which require a minimum GPA and two of which also require regular completion of honors courses, have co-curricular requirements as well, necessitating that students take part in a certain number of honors events per month or per term. As I noted in the previous section, requiring participation
in co-curricular programming may be a significant barrier to many transfer students’ success in honors.

The University of Minnesota, Morris’s program is unique in that it has no good-standing requirements at all. This program’s website declares, “once you’re admitted to the program, you’re in and will not be asked to leave it. If there’s a course you’d like to take, don’t hesitate to enroll” (“FAQ”).

For graduation with honors, all 22 programs require students to complete a certain number of credit hours in honors. Four programs (18.2% of the total) have multiple tiers of achievement, permitting students to earn different levels of distinction for different levels of commitment to the program. The average number of hours required to graduate with highest distinction is 21.8; this drops to 18.6 after removing the two “outlier” programs that require students to complete the majority of their general education courses in honors.

Fourteen out of 22 programs (63.6%) additionally require students to complete an honors thesis, capstone, course-based study abroad, or some other substantive curricular activity to graduate with honors. While some programs insist on a specific sort of activity, others are more flexible. Midwestern State University, for instance, allows students to choose between a research project, an internship, or a study abroad program. This program, however, joins five others (together comprising 27.3% of all programs surveyed) in requiring students to participate in various co-curricular and extracurricular events in order to graduate with honors.

In summary, while most programs’ good-standing requirements are reasonable and pose no more difficulty to transfer students than they do to any other students, graduation requirements, largely based on the number of credit hours students must complete in honors, may place barriers between transfer students and graduation with honors.

**Design of the Honors Curriculum**

Regardless of the number of honors credits required, the structure of an honors curriculum can strongly affect transfer students’ success in completing it. In particular, some transfer students may find it difficult to complete honors curricula that are “frontloaded,” with a significant portion of required courses falling in the early years of a student’s college career. On the other hand, an honors curriculum that places too many requirements in the final semesters of a student’s study may find itself in competition with major departmental curricula for transfer students’ time.
To assess how well balanced the curricula were, I separated all honors courses required for each program into three categories: (a) specific required courses at the 100- and 200-level, (b) specific required courses at the 300-level and higher, and (c) required honors credits that can be earned at any point in the student’s tenure in honors. On average, 21.3% of all credits fall into the first category, 32.5% into the second, and 46.3% into the third. These categories offer an oversimplification, of course, particularly when students (like transfer students) who enter a program after one or more terms may be granted waivers for earlier courses and when students are granted the opportunity to earn honors credit for upper-level major courses.

Some curricular structures can give flexibility to all students, including transfer students, without sacrificing the richness of the honors experience. Granting waivers to honors “latecomers,” including both continuing students and transfer students, respects these students’ academic efforts prior to joining the honors community. Such waivers are reasonable for courses like first-year seminars or first-year writing, which students are likely to take in their first one or two semesters regardless of their membership in an honors program. Moreover, honors contracts, reading courses or independent study in honors, and honors credit for high-impact practices like study abroad and internships grant students autonomy in crafting a sustainable honors schedule. USC Aiken’s honors program provides an example of curricular flexibility through its honors-designated “enriched” courses:

These courses are not offered as separate sections; rather, the department or school identifies courses each semester as Honors-designated ‘enriched’. Faculty members meet separately with Honors students enrolled in the course to work with them on a topic or topics of interest in order to provide more depth to the course. (“About Honors Courses”)

Half of the programs (11, or 50%) surveyed have in place some such curricular structure. Seven programs (31.8%) offer some variation of an honors contract option for receiving honors credit through otherwise non-honors coursework while one program specifically rules out such an option; 5 programs (22.7%) offer honors credit for study abroad; and 3 programs (13.6%) mention the possibility of obtaining honors credit for other high-impact practices, including internships, undergraduate research, or community-engaged learning projects. Two programs, those at Truman State University and the University of Montevallo, regularly offer honors sections of a significant number
of general education and major courses, ensuring a high degree of curricular flexibility without the burden imposed by the requirement that many or all general education courses be taken in honors as in some programs surveyed.

**Existence of Articulation Agreements or Memoranda of Understanding**

Only one out of 22, or 4.5%, of the honors programs’ websites makes any mention of formal articulation agreements or memoranda of understanding; this university lists all nine two-year college honors programs with which the program shares a formal agreement. Moreover, only three out of 22 (13.6%) of the websites mention the possibility of earning honors credit for courses taken elsewhere.

While it is reasonable to expect that honors programs be wary of over-promising benefits that ultimately cannot be delivered, these programs’ websites might project a more welcoming image to transfer students if they at least indicated the possibility of honors credit being granted for honors credits earned elsewhere.

**Honors Program Website Language and Design**

**Absent Mention of Transfer Students**

As already noted, only 10 out of 22 programs (45.5%) make explicit mention of transfer students anywhere in the program website. Moreover, only three of these (13.6% of the total) mention transfer students on the program’s landing page. Thus, transfer students are generally invisible on honors websites.

**Language**

A simple breakdown of the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs appearing on programs’ landing pages tells us something about the programs’ communication with students. The table given in Appendix 3 lists the most commonly occurring lexical words, including the 20 most commonly used nouns and adjectives and all verbs and adverbs used at least 5 times. The figures given in the final row are the percentage of the listed words represented by the respective part of speech. More concisely, Table 1, below, gives the relative frequency of the same parts of speech (expressed as a percentage of all lexical words) in both conversational English and academic prose, with data taken from Biber et al. (1999).
The distribution of parts of speech on honors landing pages is closer to that of academic prose than conversational English. This similarity is even more pronounced if we eliminate the three obvious outliers ("honor," "student(s)," and "program(s)"), yielding the following distributions of parts of speech for honors landing pages:

- Adjectives: 27.8%
- Adverbs: 5.9%
- Nouns: 50.7%
- Verbs: 15.6%

One inference might be that honors websites place more emphasis on description than on action. More careful analysis would be needed to conclude that honors programs are more likely to treat students as objects than as agents, but this conclusion seems plausible in that the verbs above refer as often to action performed by the program as to actions performed by the honors students.

**Visual Elements**

I performed a similar review of the visual content of honors landing pages. These 22 webpages contained a total of 90 still images and 6 videos. The most common subjects of the still images were experiential learning, including co-curricular activities, and study abroad (32 images, 35.6% of total); general university scenes (14 images; 15.6%); and informal honors gatherings (13 images; 14.4%). Only 6 of the 20 (30%) websites that had visual elements of some kind provided captions for some or all of their images. This absence of contextualizing information is not only an accessibility issue but makes it difficult for visitors to decode the images. Visitors must rely on an understanding of the images’ context to decode their meaning, and this understanding comes more easily to visitors familiar with traditional academic conventions.

**Table 1. Relative Frequency of Parts of Speech in English Communication**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Conversation</th>
<th>Academic Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>18.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverb</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>5.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>56.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>18.87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHARTING A WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUTREACH TO TRANSFER STUDENTS

I offer here some specific recommendations for how we might adapt our policies and their promotion so that we make more evident our desire to recruit and retain outstanding transfer students. These recommendations, if implemented, would assist not only transfer students but all students, regardless of the way they come to honors.

Admissions Criteria and Procedures

Admissions criteria and procedures for transfer students should be designed so as not to restrict admissions to too small a group of transfer students, and they should be clearly listed on the program’s website alongside corresponding criteria for entering first-year students.

In crafting specific criteria for transfer admission, I urge us to listen to David M. Jones, who offers evidence for the success of admissions criteria that are “based on a diversity-aware review of multiple measures of academic performance” (46). Specifically, honors administrators should not rely exclusively or even predominantly on standardized test scores, high school GPA, and other measures that may not only reinscribe historical inequities but may no longer be valid indicators of transfer students’ current readiness for honors. After all, many transfer students come to honors a few years after having taken the SAT or ACT, making these already-suspect indicators of academic excellence even less valid measures. In contrast, asking transfer students to describe, in writing or an interview, their experience with learning outside the classroom, study abroad, community engagement, or other life experiences enables those screening honors applications to gain a much clearer view of the applicant. Soares indicates how various institutions, including Tufts University and UC Berkeley’s Law School, have had success in asking students to demonstrate “situational judgement” by responding hypothetically to specific problems in specific contexts.

Requirements for Graduating and Remaining in Good Standing in Honors

Graduation requirements should be realistically achievable in a timely fashion by all students, including transfer students, and all requirements
should be prominently placed on the program’s website. Honors contract courses and options for obtaining honors credit for major coursework, as well as multiple “tiers” for graduation with honors, should be available and advertised. For instance, the University of North Carolina, Asheville Honors Program recently began offering “Recognition as an Honors Scholar,” which requires completion of twelve hours of honors credit, as an alternative to the longstanding acknowledgement of “Distinction as a University Scholar,” which requires completion of twenty-one hours of honors credit. Three other programs surveyed offered similar options.

Similarly, requirements for remaining in good standing should be realistically achievable and should not include co-curricular or extracurricular expectations that are unlikely to be useful to transfer students. In providing meaningful out-of-class experiences for transfer students in honors, we need to consider their specific needs. For example, in addition to orientation programming designed to welcome brand-new college students to the honors experience, we might offer opportunities for transfer students to interact with each other socially, helping to foster a community of learners with similar prior academic experiences. Those transfer students who are of non-traditional age for college, a group comprising a majority of those enrolled in two-year colleges (see, for example, The College Board, “Trends”), have co-curricular needs but often find required activities pointless. As Yarrison reminds us, such students

need a life of the mind away from their families and their dead-end jobs. . . . They need exciting guest lectures, Sleeping Bag seminars, field trips, and opportunities to attend conferences to present their research. They need space. . . . They don’t need mandatory public service or volunteer work, but they know its value and can make younger students aware of it. . . . They already see the relevance of school to life: that is why they are back in school. (26–27; emphasis in the original)

As Yarrison suggests throughout her work, successful honors programs leverage transfer students of any age as an asset, encouraging their participation rather than placing barriers to involvement.

Finally, flexible curricular opportunities, such as contracts, honors credit for major courses, study abroad, and other high-impact practices, should be provided to help all students, including transfer students, remain in good standing in honors programs.
Design of the Honors Curriculum

Honors administrators should seek ways of adding flexibility to their curricula without sacrificing challenge by offering classes broadly and frequently enough to permit all students to complete honors requirements expeditiously. In particular, the honors experience should be distributed evenly throughout the students’ careers in college, avoiding “frontloading” requirements in the first year or two of college. As just noted, honors contract options and honors courses in the major increase a curriculum’s flexibility, as do multiple tiers of honors distinction at least one of which is reasonably accessible to hardworking transfer students.

Existence of Articulation Agreements or Memoranda of Understanding

Honors administrators should work with other campus leaders, including the institution’s legal representatives, as needed, to formalize the means by which students transferring from other institutions can earn honors credit for courses taken elsewhere. Any such means should be advertised prominently on the university’s website and in other promotional materials. See Frana & Rice for information on designing effective Memoranda of Understanding.

Honors Program Website Language and Design

As a minimal first step, honors websites should explicitly mention transfer students. Even this minor step signals a program’s acknowledgement of the contributions transfer students can make to an honors community. Language and visual elements should be chosen to help all students feel welcome. All students will feel more welcome in a program whose website features student-centered language and photos of students (including transfer students) in action, with appropriate captions to help contextualize the students’ work.

CONCLUSION

Given the axiom that diversity is an intrinsic good with immeasurable value to any academic community, honors programs should implement and promote practices facilitating admission and retention of transfer students. We need to move past the rhetoric of equity and inclusion and take real steps toward achieving these goals in reality. Pehlke reminds us,
If some honors administrators insist on using primarily unjust means to admit incoming students into honors programs across the country, I would argue that honors is not living up to its name... Administrators need to actively seek out diverse representation in the honors student body and faculty. This needs to be one of the foremost tasks of the honors commitment. (29–30)

Though a broader and deeper study of honors programs’ promotional materials would be needed to get a complete picture, the survey I have provided here shows us a disconnect between our principles and our practices, at least in our advertisement of those practices.

Institutional change is slow, and it is unrealistic to expect every program to adopt equitable practices overnight. However, we must start by looking through a lens tinted by access, equity, inclusion, and diversity as we review and revise our courses, our curricula, and all of our offerings outside the classroom and far from our campuses. We must look through the same lenses as we work to make known to the world what it is we do. I end as I began, by invoking Lisa L. Coleman, who exhorts us to change, arguing that “each of us in honors in America is naïve if we believe that honors does not have to change integrally, significantly, if we are to continue to be productive players on the world stage as well as on the campuses of our home institutions” (xiv). Let us not be left behind. Let us remain the leaders we claim to be. Let us get to work.

REFERENCES


Gabbard, G., et al. (2006). “Practices supporting transfer of low-income community college students to selective institutions: Case study findings.” Section IV in *The study of economic, informational, and cultural barriers to community college student transfer access at selective institutions.* Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts, Boston.


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APPENDIX 1

COPLAC Honors Program and Honors College Websites

The following websites, along with various secondary and tertiary pages and various documents (e.g., course listings, student handbooks, and graduation checklists) found therein, were examined between December 2017 and January 2018.

• Eastern Connecticut State University:
  <http://www.easternct.edu/honors>

• Fort Lewis College (CO):
  <https://www.fortlewis.edu/honors>

• Georgia College and State University:
  <http://www.gcsu.edu/honors>

• Henderson State University (AR):
  <http://www.hsu.edu/HonorsCollege/index.html>

• Keene State College (NH):
  <https://www.keene.edu/academics/honors>

• Mansfield University (PA):
  <https://www.mansfield.edu/honors-program>

• Massachusetts College of the Liberal Arts:
  <http://www.mcla.edu/Academics/undergraduate/honors-program/index>

• Midwestern State University (TX):
  <https://mwsu.edu/academics/honors>

• Ramapo College of New Jersey:
  <https://www.ramapo.edu/honors>

• Shepherd University (WV):
  <http://www.shepherd.edu/honors>

• Southern Oregon University:
  <http://sou.edu/academics/honors-college/program>

• Southern Utah University:
  <https://www.suu.edu/honors>
• State University of New York, Geneseo:  
  <https://www.geneseo.edu/edgarfellows>

• Truman State University (MO):  
  <http://honors.truman.edu>

• University of Illinois, Springfield:  
  <https://www.uis.edu/caphonors>

• University of Maine, Farmington:  
  <http://www.umf.maine.edu/majors-academics/honors-program>

• University of Mary Washington (VA):  
  <http://academics.umw.edu/honorsprogram>

• University of Minnesota, Morris:  
  <https://academics.morris.umn.edu/honors>

• University of Montevallo (AL):  
  <https://www.montevallo.edu/academics/experiential-learning/honors-program>

• University of North Carolina, Asheville:  
  <http://honors.unca.edu>

• University of South Carolina, Aiken:  
  <https://www.usca.edu/honorsprogram>

• University of Virginia, Wise:  
  <https://www.uvawise.edu/academics/honors-program>
APPENDIX 2

Comparing the Racial and Ethnic Makeup of COPLAC Schools with that of Their Corresponding “Feeder” Schools

In the introduction, I alluded to an analysis of the racial and ethnic diversity of the student body of the four-year institutions surveyed in this article. I describe this analysis a bit more fully here.

By examining publicly available data and by contacting admissions offices for several of the COPLAC institutions considered in this article, I was able to determine the racial and ethnic makeup of a recent entering class of first-year students for 21 of the 22 schools surveyed here. (These data are quite recent, corresponding to either the Fall 2016 or Fall 2017 cohorts for all but two of these schools.) Further, for 13 of these institutions, I was able to determine both (a) the two-year college from which a plurality of transfer students to the corresponding four-year institution are graduated and (b) the racial and ethnic makeup of this two-year college.

On average, the entering first-year class of one of these 13 COPLAC schools comprised 21.4% students of color. Meanwhile, the average corresponding cohort from the 13 two-year “feeder” schools comprised 27.2% students of color. Moreover, in only four (4) of the 13 pairs was the percentage of students of color higher in the four-year COPLAC institution than it was in the corresponding two-year college.

Though much more (and more precise) data must be collected to say more, these preliminary findings suggest that, as a rule, two-year colleges have more racially and ethnically diverse student bodies than the four-year schools to which those students transferred.
APPENDIX 3

The Most Commonly Used Substantive Words in Honors Website Landing Pages, Broken Down by Part of Speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Adverbs</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Nouns</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
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<td>12</td>
<td>student(s)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>design(s)</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>beyond</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>program(s)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>offer(s)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>intellectual</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>intellectually</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>apply</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>required</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>successfully</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>course(s)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>include(s)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>first</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>together</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>provide</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>interdisciplinary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>after</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>year</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>complete</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>experience(s)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>participate</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>challenging</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>scholars</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>contact</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>curricular</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>community</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>develop</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>motivated</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>faculty</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>achieve</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>opportunity/ies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>become</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>special</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>requirements</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>creative</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>class(es)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>enhance</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>activities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>global</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>learning</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>19</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>study</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>unique</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>engagement</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>403</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>121</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.89</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>52.06</td>
<td>10.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Social Media for Honors Colleges: Swipe Right or Left?

Corinne R. Green
Purdue University

INTRODUCTION

In the face of new technologies, honors faculty and staff should begin understanding the way their students interact with these technologies to apply them appropriately within the honors experience. Social media is a prominent and controversial technology that requires more research on how honors students and students with gifts and talents embrace or reject the trending innovations. Honors pedagogues express some controversy over whether the presence of online technology enhances or decreases the sense of community within their college (Alger; English; Johnson, “Meeting”; Salas), but this issue is moot if honors professionals do not seek understanding about how honors students use the technology before labeling it as right or wrong for continued incorporation in the college.

To understand how honors students use social media, I compared the self-reported social media habits of honors and non-honors undergraduate
students at Purdue University, a public, land grant institution in the American Midwest, and developed an instrument for examining collegiate social media engagement (CSME), or rather how college students engage with their college online. Once we have greater understanding of the differences, if any exist, between honors students and the average peer population’s use of social media for themselves and for interacting with their colleges, honors faculty and staff can benefit from knowing how to use it with their students without detracting from the community they intend to create.

The Honors Technology Tug-of-War

In the honors literature, a disconnect appears between those attempting to embrace technology in their programs and those who wish to continue traditional pedagogies. Some faculty have come to the conclusion that social media and online forums can be a good thing when used constructively (English; Johnson, “Meeting”), others call it a distraction that takes away from the community building of the honors experience (Alger), and some who have tried to fully embrace technology experienced concerns from students who quickly realized the professors were learning along with them instead of being technology-fluent authorities (English). These issues can be balanced to understand the concept as a whole.

Honors educators need to consider the likelihood of incoming classes of students who identify as digital natives. Although being born after 1980 does not guarantee that someone identifies as a digital native, being from a developed country makes one more likely to own technology and use it frequently, therefore having greater scores on digital native measures (Akçayır, Dundar, & Akçayır). Akçayır et al. also found that people can learn to be digital natives through continued experience with technology and that requirements to use technology at the university level advances these competencies over the course of one’s college experience. Students’ technology preferences as freshmen can inform practitioners on the next steps for smooth application in colleges.

Honors studies have touched on students’ social media preferences, but current research on social media and people with gifts and talents focuses on younger populations in middle and high school (Cross; Freeman; Gaerlan-Price; Siegle). Since the populations of honors students and students who participated in K–12 gifted and talented programs overlap, they share similar needs for academic challenges and emotional support, as described by Nicholas Colangelo in this issue of JNCHC. Therefore, the social media tendencies
of young students with gifts and talents may be useful in understanding the social media tendencies of their older counterparts in honors.

**Social Media and Students with Gifts and Talents**

Gaerlan-Price used qualitative phenomenological research to understand how high school girls with gifts and talents in leadership positions use social media. Participants reported having to sustain outstanding role model appearances in public, and some reported altering their online profiles for fear of being judged for certain intellectual or nontraditional interests. This online behavior is similar to what educational researchers see among high-achieving students in mixed classrooms, where students may act less knowledgeable to fit in socially (Colangelo; Davis, Rimm, & Siegle). Similarities of these students’ behavior in online and in-person contexts indicate that other habits may also carry over to an online context. For example, Gaerlan-Price noted that a positive outcome of using social media was that it increased the girls’ competence in establishing themselves responsibly online and that it also allowed them to connect with their peers in new ways, such as organizing events for the academic societies they lead. Other traits cited by researchers that could transfer to online environments include asynchronous development (Cross) and seeking mentorship for talent development (Freeman). If honors students also carry their collegiate involvement into a social media environment, benefits exist for faculty members who are willing to understand how this takes place. Therefore, discovering how they use social media on a day-to-day basis proves important in relation to the college experience.

**Effective Use of Online Social Environments for Honors Colleges**

Not all attempts to incorporate new technology into honors environments have been successful. When honors professors have tried to carry academic seminars over into online discussion forums, they have often found it less beneficial than in-person seminar classes (Johnson, “Meeting”), and the answers honors students gave often did not contain the depth of thought they had intended. Studies of students with gifts and talents have yielded similar results. For students to provide answers with the same depth of thought as they would in an in-person class or on paper, online assignments required highly specific instructions (Miller & Olthouse). Therefore, the value of an online setting may be limited for class discussions unless a professor is skilled
in how to support it, but this does not mean that social media lacks all educational value.

Some honors professors see the importance of online spaces such as wikis and blogs to revive course content and drive out the online distractions that other professors sometimes fear (Johnson, “Building”). To approach this divide proactively, one university instituted a Digital Literacy Initiative meant to help professors incorporate constructive technologies in the classroom and help students gain competencies they will need in their careers (English). Participating professors received training and grant support to incorporate technology skills in their standard curricula. Instructors and students felt it was an overall positive learning experience that developed their abilities to use technology resourcefully and solve problems with it. Still, some students expressed frustration over how little digital literacy their professors displayed while teaching new technologies to the students (English). For an older generation of professors, teaching accelerated learners to use technology in an innovative way can prove a challenge.

Despite the challenges of integrating online technology into the classroom, honors colleges can use social media intuitively with their students. For example, one honors college used online advising to increase retention by allowing honors students to access the details of their progress on a Google app. Since the honors students knew more general information ahead of the meeting, students could ask detailed questions during the appointment, therefore improving the value of the honors advisors’ time (VanDieren). Another researcher remarked that a revitalized website can showcase the important experiences students glean from honors programs such as gratitude, the ability to appreciate nuance, and the ability to make friends who have different political perspectives (Salas). Where the internet cannot convey the full value of these in-person benefits, presentation of them online assists in college recruitment, thus facilitating future student experiences.

These two studies by VanDieren and Salas give honors professors a look into how online tools can be used to increase engagement and activity within an honors college beyond course curricula. Exploring how college students interact with their college daily via social media has scholarly value and may illuminate possibilities for continued engagement in the honors communities that professors intend to preserve. Additionally, scholars need to understand the difference, if any, between honors and non-honors use of social media so that specific and effective strategies can be implemented for the honors population. The following research questions are derived from these principles:
R1: How do honors students use social media daily, and how does that use relate to their traits as academically high-achieving students?

R2: How do the college-related social media interactions of honors college students compare to the interactions of students not enrolled in an honors program?

R3: How do these interactions help clarify how honors colleges can use social media wisely?

Measuring Social Media Interactions in Relation to Collegiate Engagement

To compare the interactions of honors and non-honors students with their respective colleges, I incorporated a survey from consumer brand research that relates closely to actions students may take while interacting with their college online. Consumer online brand engagement has become important for understanding what consumers enjoy about a product. One instrument has been grounded in the theory of motivations for consumers’ online brand-related activities (COBRAs) (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit) and can be adapted to look at how college students interact online with their college as it presents similar constructs to educational theory.

Muntinga et al. interviewed consumers through a social media platform dedicated to fans of certain companies (e.g., Puma, Volkswagen, Nintendo) to understand themes motivating COBRAs. Muntinga et al. finalized a continuum of three categories—consumption, contribution, and creation—where COBRAs could fall. These three categories describe the level of involvement people have with a brand online. For example, consumers who fall under the usage type of consumption involve themselves in COBRAs such as viewing, downloading, and reading brand-produced content. Their engagement does not involve giving feedback or commenting on the brand. The contribution type categorizes those who show deeper interaction with a brand by commenting on brand content, discussing the brand in a forum, or liking brand-related content. Finally, creation, the deepest usage type, represents consumers who create their own content related to a brand, which includes writing reviews, creating posts, or writing blogs.

This typology was used to develop the Consumer’s Engagement with Brand-Related Social-Media Content (CEBSC) scale (Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski). The scale underwent tests of validity by the researchers in a three-part study, which is discussed in detail in the methods.
section of this paper. What is unique to this typology and applicable to the education sector is that the three levels of involvement can be easily mapped onto the levels of thinking in a revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Krathwohl). For every two levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, there is one related level of COBRA usage type. Consumption COBRAs relate to the two lowest orders of thinking: remember and understand. Similarly, contribution can be related to the two middle levels: analyze and apply. Finally, creation, the most involved of the activities, is directly related to the two highest levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy: create and evaluate. For a more direct conceptualization of how these two theories relate, see Figure 1.

Instructors have used Bloom’s Taxonomy to judge student engagement in online classes with gifted students (Miller & Olthouse) and with teachers in graduate programs for gifted education (Christopher, Thomas, & Tallent-Runnels). Miller and Olthouse found that for students to give answers involving higher-order thinking in an online class environment, they needed more structure for how their responses should be written compared to students who gave responses in writing. Christopher et al. supported the idea that more academically engaged students provided in-depth answers that showed

**Figure 1: A Comparison of COBRA to the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy**

![Diagram showing the comparison between COBRA usage typology and revised Bloom’s Taxonomy.](image)

COBRA Usage Typology (Muntinga et al., 2011)  
Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002)
greater depth of thinking in online environments. These results support the idea that honors students may be more likely to engage with their college at a greater depth while online than average college students. The researchers also found it helpful for the instructor to use a rubric that followed the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy to analyze high-ability students’ online engagement. Since the CEBSC follows a similar continuum as Bloom’s Taxonomy, the next step is to test the CEBSC with a sample of college-level students to investigate whether it is appropriate for analyzing CSME.

METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of honors and non-honors students from Purdue University. After obtaining university IRB approval, I used the university registrar email service to distribute information about the survey to 600 non-honors and 400 honors college freshmen (because honors college students are admitted from the larger pool of admitted freshmen, fewer honors students could be contacted about participation). Participants who took the 38-item, 15-minute survey had the opportunity to win one of four $10 Amazon gift cards as compensation for their time. Many students (n=117) responded to the call, about one third of whom (n=39) had entered the honors college in fall 2016 as freshmen.

The Purdue Honors College uses the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT) scores along with personal essays to determine the eligibility of honors college applicants at the beginning of their undergraduate career. When applying to the honors college, students promise to complete rigorous coursework beyond the normal undergraduate requirements. The requirements consist of 5 preliminary credit hours, plus 19 honors elective credits, a minimum 3.5 GPA, and a culminating honors thesis or independent study project. Purdue holds high standards for non-honors students as well: the average GPA for the 2016 freshman class was 3.75, the average SAT 1783, and average composite ACT 28.1 (Purdue University, Data Digest West Lafayette). The honors class average scores of the 2016 incoming class were still greater, with the average GPA 3.79, SAT 1990, and ACT 31.28 (Purdue Honors College). While some honors and non-honors students may have similar scores upon admission, the choice of the honors students to challenge themselves with rigorous coursework sets them apart. Another unique characteristic of the Purdue honors experience is that students live within the
honors college itself, with residence halls contained in the same building as honors classrooms and professor offices. The honors freshman participants in the study spent six months living in the same community in which they learn prior to taking the survey, whereas the non-honors freshmen live in dorms separate from their academic community.

Of those who responded, 111 students, including 36 honors students, completed the adapted CEBSC and reported demographic information. Table 1 lists the gender, ethnicity, college of academic major, age, and age range during which the students began using social media, for honors and non-honors students in the sample.

The honors group contained 26 female students and 10 male students (72.20% v. 27.80%) whereas the non-honors group had 37 female students and 38 male students (48.00% v. 49.30%). The majority of both groups identified as White (72.20% & 66.70%), with fewer students in both groups who were Asian (11.10% & 13.30%), Black (8.30% & 8.00%), or mixed race (5.60% & 4.00%). While students in this sample were not asked to report their residency status, it is important to note that 46.00% of admitted freshman for fall 2016 were Indiana residents, making this sample more likely biased to the majority culture than to out-of-state (32.00%) or international students (23.00%) (Purdue University, Data Digest West Lafayette).

Students in both groups declared majors in all colleges of the university except veterinary sciences. Of the honors students who reported their major, none of them identified as undeclared, but 4.00% of non-honors students were undeclared. In addition, no honors students reported having a major in pharmacy or education. The largest college representation for both groups was engineering (30.60% & 21.30%), which was expected because engineering is a mainstay of the university. The second largest group of honors students was in the technology college (16.70%) whereas the second largest group for non-honors students was in health and human sciences (17.30%).

Differences between groups in current age and the age that they began using social media are skewed in opposite directions. Participants were 17, 18, 19, or 20 years old, and all were college freshmen. While the majority of honors students reported being 17 or 18 (63.90%), the majority of non-honors students skewed on the upper range of 19 or 20 (56.00%). Inversely, when reporting the age range when they began regularly using social media, most honors students began at the age of fourteen or older (66.60%); fewer non-honors students began at fourteen or older (54.70%), and a greater percentage (44.00%) than honors students (30.50%) began when they were thirteen or younger.
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Honors (n=36)</th>
<th>Non-Honors (n=75)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>72.20%</td>
<td>49.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27.80%</td>
<td>48.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Nonbinary</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>13.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>72.20%</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College of Major</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>6.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>30.60%</td>
<td>21.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Human Sciences</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>17.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>13.90%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>14.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>16.70%</td>
<td>13.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>58.30%</td>
<td>44.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>30.60%</td>
<td>50.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Began Social Media Use</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 yrs.</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>6.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–13 yrs.</td>
<td>19.40%</td>
<td>37.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14–17 yrs.</td>
<td>58.30%</td>
<td>48.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18+</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>6.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Report</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instrumentation

The survey used here was developed to assess everyday social media interactions along with CSME. It contained Part A with 15 items and Part B with 23 items, for a total of 38 items. I developed Part A of the survey from scratch to provide descriptive data regarding students’ social media preferences, and I adapted Part B from Schivinski et al.’s CEBSC because of its similarities to Bloom’s Taxonomy. Whereas Bloom’s Taxonomy may guide qualitative research in online engagement, the CEBSC was designed to quantify such engagement, giving it the potential to guide the development of a college-related counterpart.

Part A asked students about the types of social media outlets they used to keep in touch with friends, family, academic college, and professors; to pursue personal interests; and to search for humorous content. Email was considered a form of social media since the colleges studied used frequent mass emails to interact with their students online. These data were gathered to assist in the interpretation of other analyses and give a general overview of what both groups of students do on social media.

Schivinski et al. developed the CEBSC using the theoretical model of Muntinga et al. The researchers created a pool of questions through online focus groups, interviews, and netnography representing the constructs of consumption, contribution, and creation of brand-related content on social media. The two quantitative studies that followed focused on providing evidence of validity. The first tested the instrument with confirmatory factor analysis using a representative sample of Polish consumers (n=2,252), and the second distributed the survey to a new sample of participants to validate the scale revisions made. After the researchers eliminated 14 poor-fit items in study one, construct reliability for the remaining 17 items and three constructs yielded Cronbach’s alpha scores for consumption (α=0.88), contribution (α=0.92), and creation (α=0.93). Though the chi square showed significance, this result was likely related to the large sample size and the sensitivity of the likelihood ratio fit index (Fabrigar, & Wegener). The Comparative Fit Index, Tucker-Lewis index, RMSEA, and SRMR together showed evidence of good fit—(χ²(115)=557.47, CFI=0.95, TLI=0.94, RMSEA=0.05, and SRMR=0.06)—and researchers found a hierarchical structure of the constructs with contribution relying on consumption (β=0.61, p=0.02) and creation relying on contribution (β=0.81, p=0.02). Researchers then used bias-corrected bootstrapping to test indirect effects, discovering contribution to be a significant mediating factor between consumption and creation.
Schivinski et al. tested validity of the CEBSC with a new sample of participants (\(n=416\)) and included additional scales of brand equity and attitudes to test if their constructs were related to already developed constructs in the field. Measures used for brand equity and attitudes are auxiliary to the CEBSC and were not used in my study but were important to its development. Theoretically, consumption, creation, and contribution should have direct relationships to popularity with and positive regard of consumers. The multifactorial confirmatory model yielded evidence of fit similar to the prior study. Again, the chi-square test statistic was significant, but the CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR indicated goodness of fit: \(\chi^2(288)=600.95,\) CFI=.96, TLI=.95, RMSEA=.05, and SRMR=0.6). Cronbach alpha estimates were greater than 0.7 for brand equity (\(\alpha=0.93\)), brand attitudes (\(\alpha=0.94\)), consumption (\(\alpha=0.88\)), contribution (\(\alpha=0.92\)), and collaboration (\(\alpha=0.95\)). These results provide evidence of the reliability and validity of the data for this instrument.

Since the colleges of the university use social media platforms to post information and to share news with students in a similar way to consumer brands, the activities measured by the CEBSC, e.g., viewing, liking, posting, and blogging, mimic the actions this sample of students uses to interact with their colleges online, e.g., liking college posts, commenting on college pictures, writing posts about the college. Even with those similarities, I modified the wording of the survey to better fit the college environment; for instance, I changed the wording from “brand” to “your academic college” or “the Honors College.” A list of constructs, original items, and revised items are shown in Table 2.

**Data Analyses**

I completed the factor analysis with oblique rotation, Maximum Likelihood extraction, and Kaiser Normalization using SPSS. Missing data via unanswered questions were omitted with pairwise deletion. Items with loadings less than 0.5 were suppressed. After the initial factor analysis, items that loaded on two factors or none of the factors were removed and the factor analysis repeated in a trimmed model as recommended by Matsunaga. Oblique rotation was used because the factors were hierarchical and therefore associated with each other (Matsunaga). Correlations among constructs were calculated and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients determined as a measure of internal consistency.

The means for non-honors and honors groups on the scale of social media engagement by each identified factor were compared in a General
Table 2. Survey Questions Adapted from the CEBSC Scale
(Schivinski et al. 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Original Item</th>
<th>Revised Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumption</td>
<td>I read posts related to Brand X on social media.</td>
<td>I read posts related to the Honors College on social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I read fan page(s) related to Brand X on social network sites.</td>
<td>I read fan page(s) related to the Honors College on social media websites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I watch pictures/graphics related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I view pictures/graphics related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I follow blogs related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I follow blogs related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I follow Brand X on social network sites.</td>
<td>I follow the Honors College on social network sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>I comment on videos related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I comment on videos related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I comment on posts related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I comment on posts related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I comment on pictures/graphics related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I comment on pictures/graphics related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I share Brand X related posts.</td>
<td>I share posts related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I “Like” pictures/graphics related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I “like” pictures/graphics related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I “Like” posts related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I “like” posts related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation</td>
<td>I initiate posts related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I initiate posts related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I initiated posts related to Brand X on social network sites.</td>
<td>I initiate posts related to the Honors College on social network sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I post pictures/graphics related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I post pictures/graphics related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I write reviews related to Brand X.</td>
<td>I write reviews related to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I write posts related to Brand X on forums.</td>
<td>I write posts related to the Honors College on forums.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I post videos that show Brand X.</td>
<td>I post videos that show the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linear Model (GLM). In the representative equation below, $y$ represents vector of the scale mean of each CSME factor. $B_0$ is the intercept of the factor vector. $B_1$ is the coefficient for the slope of being honors or non-honors. $X_1$ is the binary factor of a student being honors or non-honors. $B_2$ and $B_3$ are the slopes of being either male or female in comparison to the non-binary gender. $X_2$ and $X_3$ are the conditions of being either male or not male or female. $B_4$, $B_5$, and $B_6$, are the slope for the categorical age ranges that participants began using social media (11 or younger, 12–13 years, or 14–17 years respectively) in comparison to the category of 18 or older. $X_4$, $X_5$, and $X_6$ are the binary conditions of being part of each age group respectively. Finally, $e_1$ represents the error associated with the $y$ factor vector.

$$y = B_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + B_3X_3 + B_4X_4 + B_5X_5 + B_6X_6 + e_1$$

Effect size was analyzed using partial eta squared.

RESULTS

Descriptive Findings

Part A of the survey provided general information on non-honors and honors students, their use of different social media outlets, and what actions they performed to engage online for different purposes. Students reported all social media outlets they used frequently. The percentages of honors and non-honors students who used each outlet are provided in Table 3. More honors students reported using email for social media (83.30%) compared to non-honors students (66.67%). A greater percentage of non-honors students used Facebook (71.60%) and Snapchat (76.54%) compared to email. Of the students surveyed, a greater percentage of honors students reported using YouTube (61.11% vs. 51.85%), Pinterest (27.78% vs. 18.52%), Reddit (25.00% vs. 12.35%), Tumblr (25.00% vs. 12.35%), and LinkedIn (22.22% vs. 9.88%) than non-honors students. A lesser percentage of honors students used Twitter (30.56% vs. 50.62%), Tinder (2.78% vs. 7.41%), Instagram (58.33% vs. 62.96%), and Google+ (2.78% vs. 8.64%) than non-honors students. The Other category was provided to give respondents a way to list platforms used regularly but unlisted in the original options. Honors students listed GroupMe, ResearchGate, and Discord, and non-honors students listed WhatsApp, Texting, Imagr, and Grindr.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Percent of Sample</th>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Percent of Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>83.33%</td>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>76.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>71.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>61.11%</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>62.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>51.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>30.56%</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>50.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>27.78%</td>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reddit</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>12.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>Reddit</td>
<td>9.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>9.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>8.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PB</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>Tinder</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinder</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>Yik Yak</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yik Yak</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>PB</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GroupMe</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Gate</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>Texting</td>
<td>2.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discord</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>Imagr</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grindr</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>52.78%</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>35.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>4.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yik Yak</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend Socialization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>46.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>19.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>13.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students also reported their top way of using social media for the purposes of family, friends, college, talent development, humor, and employment. These are reported in Table 4. No major differences were found in how the groups communicated with family on social media since many honors and non-honors students marked private messaging as their most preferred form of online family communication (51.43%, 43.75%), with reading and observing posts and discussions as the second most preferred way (22.86%, 12.50%). Similar observations held true for socializing with friends and communicating with one’s college categories.

Within honors and non-honors groups, about 80% reported reading and observing other posts and discussions as their preferred way of engaging in talent development (80%, 85.53%), with sharing content being the second most preferred way (11.43%, 6.58%). Differences between groups were identified in the category of communicating with employers. Although both groups marked reading and observing posts as the primary preference
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Action Taken</th>
<th>Honors</th>
<th>Non-Honors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicating with Family</strong></td>
<td>Posting Original Content</td>
<td>17.14%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing Content</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Messaging</td>
<td>51.43%</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comment on posts</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read/Observe other posts and discussions</td>
<td>22.86%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manage Pages and interact with groups</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socializing with Friends</strong></td>
<td>Posting Original Content</td>
<td>8.57%</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing Content</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>13.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Messaging</td>
<td>45.71%</td>
<td>32.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comment on posts</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>15.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read/Observe other posts and discussions</td>
<td>22.86%</td>
<td>17.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manage Pages and interact with groups</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicating with College</strong></td>
<td>Posting Original Content</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>10.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing Content</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Messaging</td>
<td>48.57%</td>
<td>32.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comment on posts</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>5.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read/Observe other posts and discussions</td>
<td>37.14%</td>
<td>49.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manage Pages and interact with groups</td>
<td>8.57%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaging in Talent Development</strong></td>
<td>Posting Original Content</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing Content</td>
<td>11.43%</td>
<td>6.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Messaging</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comment on posts</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>3.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read/Observe other posts and discussions</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>85.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manage Pages and interact with groups</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finding Humorous Content</strong></td>
<td>Posting Original Content</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing Content</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Messaging</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comment on posts</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>7.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read/Observe other posts and discussions</td>
<td>74.29%</td>
<td>75.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manage Pages and interact with groups</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicating with Employers</strong></td>
<td>Posting Original Content</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>2.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing Content</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
<td>4.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Messaging</td>
<td>17.14%</td>
<td>24.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for employer communication (45.71%, 66.67%), the second greatest preference for the honors group was managing pages and interacting with groups (28.57%), and the second greatest preference for the non-honors group was private messaging (24.64%). Additional information on the ways honors and non-honors students used social media for these purposes can also be found in Table 4.

**Instrument Development Findings**

In the first factor analysis, the Kaiser Normalization test resulted in a $\text{KMO}=0.87$ and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity significance of $p<0.0001$ ($X^2(136)=2073.82, p<.0001$), meaning the sampling adequacy condition and correlation matrix condition were met. Three factors were uncovered in the model, explaining 78.49% of the variance in CSME. These three factors consisted of items similar to the Consumer Brand Engagement model; the first factor, explaining 58.3% of the variance, resembled the factor of Creation with one item moved from Contribution; this includes the actions of sharing posts from a student’s college as well as advanced actions such as creating blog posts about the college. The second factor, explaining 14.12% of the variance, resembled Consumption with actions such as reading and liking posts. The final factor resembled Contribution and explained 6.07% of the variance in CSME with all items loading related to commenting on college posts, videos, and pictures.

Due to two items not loading on the Consumption factor (Reading College Fan Pages and Following College Blogs) and two items cross-loading onto the Creation Factor and the Contribution factor (Writing Posts about College and Posting Videos Showing College), it was necessary to rerun the model with those elements removed. The four subsequent factor analyses dropped these items from the model, one by one, until a model with 13 items and two factors remained. To better suit the binary structure found in the data, the factors were renamed as Passive and Active College Social Media Engagement. Passive CSME describes the actions of reading and liking college posts, along with following college-related pages, while Active CSME describes the actions of writing reviews and creating new posts about the college or continuing discussions about college topics via comments. Students

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comment on posts</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read/Observe other posts and discussions</td>
<td>45.71%</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage Pages and interact with groups</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>15.94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
displaying passive engagement are open to receiving new knowledge about the college but do not take any steps to do more with that information online. Students displaying active engagement are interacting with the new information about their college through overt and observable actions that the college and other students can respond to in kind. Any student can display both passive and active CSME at different times, but it should not be assumed that the observable behaviors described by the factors represent the inner thinking of the students.

A Kaiser Normalization test resulted in a $KMO = 0.85$ and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity significance of $p < 0.0001$ ($X^2(78) = 1656.96$, $p < 0.0001$), again meaning the sampling adequacy condition and correlation matrix condition were met. The two revised factors explained 77.36% of the variance in CSME. Passive CSME explained 60.90% of the variance in CSME, with factor loadings ranging from 0.59 to 0.99. Active CSME explained 14.17% of variance in CSME, with factor loadings for each item ranging from 0.65 to 0.96. Overall, the revised model accounted for 1.13% less variance in CSME than the original 17-item model but is more concise in its 13-item form. The final rotated factor loadings are displayed in Table 5.

Due to the change in factor structure comparatively to the CESBC, it cannot be said that the college-based model matches the theoretical structure of the factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.10) Like Pictures</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.11) Like Posts</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.5) Follow College on Social Network Sites</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.1) Read Posts</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.15) Write Reviews on College</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.16) Write Posts on College</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.13) Initiate Posts on Social Network Sites</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.14) Post College Pictures</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.12) Initiate Posts</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.7) Comment on Posts</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.6) Comment on Videos</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.8) Comment on Pictures</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16.9) Share Posts</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the consumer-based model. A comparison of the original and revised model can be found in Table 6.

Response percentages and alpha reliability estimates can be found in Table 7. Under the item column, the number following “16.” represents the item’s order of appearance in the survey. For example, “16.1” corresponds with the first item in the CSME survey, which is “I read posts related to my college on social media.” A list of all the items in the order presented can be found in the Appendix.

Respondents reported their likelihood to engage in one of the action items on a frequency scale from zero to seven, zero representing “not at all,” one representing “not very often,” four representing “somewhat often,” and seven representing “very often.” Internal consistency estimates, measured by Cronbach’s alpha, for each factor were greater than $\alpha=0.90$, indicating good reliability of the data and remained above $\alpha=0.87$ if any one item was deleted. The means of each item response ranged between $=0.63$ and $=2.83$. Zeros were averaged into the item mean, which explains why the means are low on a 7-point scale. Therefore, the item responses were not normally distributed as it was more common for participants to report not performing an action at all or to perform that action somewhat often, especially for actions related to the Active factor.

The two factors had a moderate correlation at 0.51; this is greater than the usually acceptable 0.30, which would satisfy the idea that the factors must be each representing a significant portion of variance on their own (Tabachnick & Fidell). Since the factors were theoretically known to be dependent on each other, this result is less concerning; it is unlikely that someone would be engaging in higher levels of CSME, like sharing and creating posts, without also engaging in lower levels of CSME such as reading posts.

**Group Comparison Findings**

The multivariate GLM compared the means of the two groups on Active and Passive CSME. The model analysis indicated significant differences between honors and non-honors CSME on both factors. Non-honors students had greater mean scores than honors students on the Passive Factor ($t_1=-1.17, \sigma_x=.44, p=.009, \eta^2_p=.07$) and on the Active Factor ($t_1=-.94, \sigma_x=.29, p=.002, \eta^2_p=.10$). Therefore, non-honors students were more likely to interact with their college online than were honors students. Parameters for the control variables of gender and age that participants began using social media showed significance in certain groups, but not all groups. Post Hoc Tukey test showed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumption</th>
<th>Revised CSME Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I read posts related to College X on social media</td>
<td>I “Like” pictures/graphics related to College X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read fan page(s) related to College X on social media</td>
<td>I “Like” posts related to College X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I watch pictures/graphics related to College X</td>
<td>I follow College X on social network sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow blogs related to College X</td>
<td>I read posts related to College X on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow College X on social network sites</td>
<td><strong>Active</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td><strong>Eliminated Items</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I comment on videos related to College X</td>
<td>I write reviews related to College X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I comment on posts related to College X</td>
<td>I write posts related to College X on forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I comment on pictures/graphics related to College X</td>
<td>I initiate posts related to College X on social network sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share College X related posts</td>
<td>I post pictures/graphics related to College X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I “Like” pictures/graphics related to College X</td>
<td>I initiate posts related to College X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I “Like” posts related to College X</td>
<td>I comment on posts related to College X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I initiate posts related to College X</td>
<td>I share College X related posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I initiate posts related to College X on social network sites</td>
<td><strong>Eliminated Items</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I post pictures/graphics related to College X</td>
<td>I read fan page(s) related to College X on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write reviews related to College X</td>
<td>I follow blogs related to College X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write posts related to College X on forums</td>
<td>I watch pictures/graphics related to College X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I post videos that show College X</td>
<td>I post videos that show College X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>16.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>16.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.13</td>
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<td></td>
<td>16.14</td>
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<td></td>
<td>16.12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.70</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.60</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that though female students scored greater on Passive CSME than male students \((t=1.20, \sigma_x=.40, p=.009, 95\% \text{ CIs } [2.15, 2.49])\), there was no difference between genders in the Active factor of CSME. Non-binary participants did not differ from male or female participants on either factor. Participants who began using social media at ages 12–13 and 14–17 scored significantly less on the Active \((t_3=-1.64, \sigma_x=.52, p=.002, \eta^2_p=.09; t_4=-1.36, \sigma_x=.50, p=.008, \eta^2_p=.073)\) factor than those who started using social media at 18 years of age or older, but those who began at 18 or older did not differ in Active CSME from those who began at 11 or younger; this means that the honors and non-honors scores on CSME remained significantly different on both factors even after taking gender and the age at which they began using social media into account.

Overall, the GLM indicates that non-honors students score significantly greater on Active and Passive CSME than honors students. Therefore, no evidence within these data show that honors students show more collegiate social media engagement than their peers outside the honors college.

**DISCUSSION**

Previous studies have not specifically focused on how honors students engage with social media in their daily lives nor how they use it to interact with their college. Information about this topic will help honors administrators and professors as they try to make informed decisions concerning social media use for the college and classroom. Despite reasons to believe that honors students, or students with gifts and talents, would be more likely to use social media for academic purposes, such as the need to lead school organizations (Gaerlan-Price), the evidence generated here does not support this idea. Honors students may be more likely to bring deeper levels of thought to a classroom setting as do students with gifts and talents (Miller & Olthouse), but this characteristic does not directly transfer to online social environments among students in this study. This finding becomes clear in the students’ answers about general social media habits as well as their answers on the CSME scale in comparison to their peers who are not in the honors college.

In Part A of the Survey, more honors students reported using email as a form of social media for school communication than non-honors students. Email does not allow students to comment, contribute, or create and share information about one’s college for other students and faculty to see. Rather, the major actions students can take with email are simply to receive information sent by the college, read and understand the information, and then contact someone if they have questions. Mass emails from the college may
provide invitations to participate in new opportunities and activities going on elsewhere in the college but do not provide a forum for students to share ideas concerning the academic environment and initiate ideas for new ventures within the college community. This finding contrasts with statements given by gifted high school girls described in the work of Gaerlan-Price, in which the participants mention that one of the benefits of social media is using it to organize academic-based groups and honor societies. In the transition from high school to an honors college setting, something seems to outweigh the benefits of social media’s organizational properties in favor of a mostly one-way communication platform. Since the participants were all freshmen, they possibly had less to contribute to leading groups and were still depending on the authority of the college or older students to provide structured events and activities; this would line up with the findings of Akçayır et al. that college students are more likely to develop as digital natives as they progress through college, but it would not explain why non-honors freshman are more likely to display active CSME than those in the honors college.

Non-honors students were more likely to report using Facebook for connecting with their college, with email as a second choice. Facebook provides more avenues for engaging with groups online, and this preference is later reflected in their CSME scores, which reveal that non-honors students were more likely to actively engage with their college by sharing content, reviewing different aspects of their college, or creating new college-related content. This finding was unexpected given the amount of academic motivation honors students present to be admitted to the college, but it makes sense when considering the known social characteristics of K–12 students with gifts and talents. These characteristics include their tendency to hide their academic ability in front of others to gain social acceptance (Davis et al.). They may also wish to avoid a fabricated sense of self that comes from interacting with peers online (Gaerlan-Price). Honors students may be just as sensitive to these issues as younger students with gifts and talents and may be unwilling to interact with their college on mediums that are available for others to see. Female students were more likely to use Passive CSME than male students. The fabricated sense of self mentioned in Gaerlan-Price is possibly stronger for female students than male students, causing them to take fewer risks of peers evaluating their posts as could result with Active CSME.

Interesting information also came through the “Other” outlets students reported using that were not included in the original list. The honors students reported using GroupMe, ResearchGate, and Discord; the first is for small group discussion, and the latter two are related to special interests in research
and gaming respectively. The non-honors students reported using WhatsApp, Texting, Imagr, and Grindr, which are all outlets related to socializing and dating. This finding supports Cross’s and Siegle’s suggestions that high-ability students may be more motivated to seek out websites to help develop their talents since the honors students mentioned platforms that support specific talents and interests in comparison to the non-honors students’ more generalized platforms. English discovered that honors students criticized their professors for trying to increase digital literacy for technology and software on which they were not experts. But by learning subject-specific platforms that students use regularly, honor professors can make better pedagogical decisions for inclusion in the classroom when implementing programs such as the Digital Literacy Initiative by capitalizing, for instance, on students’ knowledge of ResearchGate within the context of a leadership class. In this way, course activities can extend from the programs students already know instead of introducing an entirely new software from scratch at the same time they are learning new course content.

Returning to the factor analysis, a two-factor model was identified from the data rather than a three-factor model. The students’ activity clustered mainly around the Passive factor, with fewer students reporting habits of the Active factor. The finding was unexpected but maybe understandable when we consider findings such as those by Christopher et al., where online prompts used in the class discussion forum did not predict varying levels in student response, partially because of the small variation in the level of thought the prompts required. If the statuses and posts produced by colleges at Purdue do not encourage active participation, the likelihood that students respond with Active CSME is low. Possibly, the students who scored higher on Active CSME were more likely to encounter college social media posts that encourage them to interact online; this would account for the binary nature of the factor analysis results.

Even so, students displaying Passive CSME are not necessarily lacking engagement. VanDieren suggested that honors professionals could be using the online applications to enhance face-to-face time such as class time, counseling meetings, and special events. Therefore, honors students’ use of passive CSME can still be useful by providing students with information they need to succeed. Additionally, Miller and Olthouse found that giving more structure to online prompts is better for engaging students in forums. If honors administrators are willing to post structured prompts on social media such as polls and discussions, they could increase online student interactions and make better decisions about college programming.
Limitations and Future Research

Caution should be taken in generalizing these findings due to the sample size. Replication is needed to provide evidence that the CSME scale can yield valid and reliable data, and samples from other universities are warranted. Additionally, the honors group of this sample only included 10 male freshmen compared to 26 female freshmen whereas the non-honors participants were evenly split between men and women. Therefore, this study’s results may not be robust for male honors students, and researchers should aim to include more male students in future studies.

Regarding the instrument and its usefulness in the future, using a confirmatory factor analysis to explore whether the factor model holds with more diverse populations could add evidence to its ability to yield valid data. A sample that includes all levels of college honors students from freshmen to seniors would also be helpful to see how use of social media changes over the course of the students’ careers and whether it varies with in-person engagement and program completion. Qualitative interviews with students about their social media habits would also introduce more depth and clarity about how and why they interact online.

Conclusions and Implications

Though labeling social media as wholly good or bad for honors colleges creates a problematic ideology for using it most effectively, the evidence from the current study shows that honors students interact less with their college online than their non-honors counterparts. Social media seems less important to their honors experience than to the non-honors students represented.

Different reasons might explain why these honors students engage with social media technology less than their non-honors peers. Within Purdue, honors students tended to be older than non-honors students when beginning to use social media, which may mean that their parents prevented them from using the technology at a younger age. Therefore, these students might approach social media with greater caution and a certain amount of wisdom about its advantages and disadvantages.

Second, honors students are busy. Given the rigor of their program and the dedication they have to their studies, the lack of social media interaction with their college could be a direct effect of the amount of work the program requires along with other responsibilities an honors student may have. Honors students belong to two colleges, including the college of their major; along with their advanced honors assignments, they must complete every
requirement of their major. This significant amount of work may prevent students from socializing online. Perhaps they would rather take part in more relaxing opportunities online than continue to focus on academic pursuits in the little free time they have. Additionally, since the surveyed honors students were housed in the honors college itself, they may have had less need to stay in touch with the college online given plenty of resources in the building where they live.

Social characteristics of high academic ability also play a part in less social media use, such as the fear of looking too intelligent in front of classmates. If honors colleges choose to use social media for interaction with their students, setting the page to private may encourage honors students to interact with the college as they could feel free to express their academic ideas without fear of judgment from outsiders. Also, by using private group settings, honors colleges can capitalize on the use of social media for organizing student events and increasing in-person engagement without outside interference.

The findings of the present study also indicate why honors researchers must consider the developmental traits of younger students with gifts and talents as they carry over into honors settings. Honors professionals should aim to be sensitive to these traits because if honors students avoid technology for fear of ostracism, they may miss out on learning critical technology skill sets that are required for new careers. Social media may not be most advantageous or necessary for honors colleges since in-person discussions and experiences have always been central to honors culture and remain the most important component in developing critical thinkers. However, openness to understanding new trends and how they affect advanced learners will help honors colleges stay fruitful in their mission to produce visionary leaders in society.

REFERENCES


The author may be contacted at green252@purdue.edu.
APPENDIX

Survey Questions

Q1. What are the top social media outlets you use on a regular basis?

☐ Facebook ☐ Twitter ☐ Instagram
☐ Snapchat ☐ LinkedIn ☐ Yik Yak
☐ Email ☐ Personal blog ☐ Tinder
☐ StumbleUpon ☐ Pinterest ☐ Reddit
☐ Google+ ☐ YouTube ☐ Tumblr
☐ Other _________________________________________

Q2. On what platform do you prefer to interact with family?

☐ Facebook ☐ Twitter ☐ Instagram
☐ Snapchat ☐ LinkedIn ☐ Yik Yak
☐ Email ☐ Blog ☐ Tinder
☐ StumbleUpon ☐ Pinterest ☐ Reddit
☐ Google+ ☐ YouTube ☐ Tumblr
☐ Other _________________________________________

Q3. On what platform do you prefer to interact with friends?

☐ Facebook ☐ Twitter ☐ Instagram
☐ Snapchat ☐ LinkedIn ☐ Yik Yak
☐ Email ☐ Blog ☐ Tinder
☐ StumbleUpon ☐ Pinterest ☐ Reddit
☐ Google+ ☐ YouTube ☐ Tumblr
☐ Other _________________________________________

Q4. On what platform do you prefer to interact with your academic college?

☐ Facebook ☐ Twitter ☐ Instagram
☐ Snapchat ☐ LinkedIn ☐ Yik Yak
☐ Email ☐ Blog ☐ Tinder
☐ StumbleUpon ☐ Pinterest ☐ Reddit
☐ Google+ ☐ YouTube ☐ Tumblr
☐ Other _________________________________________
Q5. On what platform do you prefer to interact with your professors?

☐ Facebook ☐ Twitter ☐ Instagram
☐ Snapchat ☐ LinkedIn ☐ Yik Yak
☐ Email ☐ Blog ☐ Tinder
☐ StumbleUpon ☐ Pinterest ☐ Reddit
☐ Google+ ☐ YouTube ☐ Tumblr
☐ Other _________________________________________

Q6. On what platform do you prefer to interact with your potential employers?

☐ Facebook ☐ Twitter ☐ Instagram
☐ Snapchat ☐ LinkedIn ☐ Yik Yak
☐ Email ☐ Blog ☐ Tinder
☐ StumbleUpon ☐ Pinterest ☐ Reddit
☐ Google+ ☐ YouTube ☐ Tumblr
☐ Other _________________________________________

Q7. Do you keep multiple accounts of any of the aforementioned platforms to separate interactions with different groups of people (e.g., having two Facebook accounts, one for family and one for friends)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Q8. If you do keep multiple accounts, which platforms do you keep multiples of, and who is the intended audience for each account?

_______________________________________________

Q9. What is the most common way you interact with family through social media?

☐ Post original content
☐ Share content from other websites
☐ Have private message discussions
☐ Comment on posts/participate in discussions by commenting
☐ Read/observe other posts and discussions
☐ Manage and interact on group/event pages
Q10. What is the most common way you interact with friends through social media?
☐ Post original content
☐ Share content from other websites
☐ Have private message discussions
☐ Comment on posts/participate in discussions by commenting
☐ Read/observe other posts and discussions
☐ Manage and interact on group/event pages

Q11. What is the most common way you interact with your academic college through social media?
☐ Post original content
☐ Share content from other websites
☐ Have private message discussions
☐ Comment on posts/participate in discussions by commenting
☐ Read/observe other posts and discussions
☐ Manage and interact on group/event pages

Q12. What is the most common way you explore your own interests (e.g., social activism, religion, politics, technology, sciences, arts) through social media?
☐ Post original content
☐ Share content from other websites
☐ Have private message discussions
☐ Comment on posts/participate in discussions by commenting
☐ Read/observe other posts and discussions
☐ Manage and interact on group/event pages

Q13. What is the most common way you use social media to engage with humorous content (e.g., comics, memes, videos, etc.)?
☐ Post original content
☐ Share content from other websites
☐ Have private message discussions
☐ Comment on posts/participate in discussions by commenting
☐ Read/observe other posts and discussions
☐ Manage and interact on group/event pages
Q14. What is the most common way you use social media to seek out career opportunities and interact with potential or current employers?
☐ Post original content
☐ Share content from other websites
☐ Have private message discussions
☐ Comment on posts/participate in discussions by commenting
☐ Read/observe other posts and discussions
☐ Manage and interact on group/event pages

Q15. What is your academic college?
(Note: If you are an Honors College student, please designate the Honors College instead of your Academic Major college)
☐ Agriculture
☐ Education
☐ Engineering
☐ Exploratory Studies
☐ Health and Human Sciences
☐ The Honors College
☐ Liberal Arts
☐ Krannert School of Management
☐ Pharmacy
☐ Purdue Polytechnic Institute
☐ Science
☐ Veterinary Medicine

Q16. Consider how often you participate in the following activities related to the Purdue Honors College when engaging in online social media. Rate the following activities on how often you participate in them from (1) not very often, to (7) very often, or (0) not at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>not at all</th>
<th>not very often</th>
<th>somewhat often</th>
<th>very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I read posts related to the Honors College on social media. (1)
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I read fan pages related to the Honors College on social media websites. (2)
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Activity</th>
<th>Options</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I view pictures/graphics related to the Honors College. (3)</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow blogs related to the Honors College. (4)</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>I follow the Honors College on social network sites. (5)</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I comment on videos related to the Honors College. (6)</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>I comment on posts related to the Honors College. (7)</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I comment on pictures/graphics related to the Honors College. (8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I share posts related to the Honors College. (9)</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>I “like” pictures/graphics related to the Honors College. (10)</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
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<td>I “like” posts related to the Honors College. (11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I initiate posts related to the Honors College. (12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I initiate posts related to the Honors College on social network sites. (13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I post pictures/graphics related to the Honors College. (14)</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>I write reviews related to the Honors College. (15)</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>I write posts related to the Honors College on forums (16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I post videos that show the Honors College. (17)</td>
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Q16 Consider how often you participate in the following activities related to your academic college when engaging in online social media. Rate the following activities on how often you participate in them from (1) not very often, to (7) very often, or (0) not at all.

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<th>not very often</th>
<th>somewhat often</th>
<th>very often</th>
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<tr>
<td>I read fan pages related to my academic college on social media websites.</td>
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<td>I follow blogs related to my academic college.</td>
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</table>
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I write posts related to my academic college on forums (16) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I post videos that show my academic college. (17) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Q17 At what age did you begin using social media regularly?
☐ 11 years of age or less
☐ 12–13
☐ 14–17
☐ 18+

Q18 What is your current age?
☐ 17
☐ 18
☐ 19
☐ 20

Q19 What is your ethnicity?
☐ African American
☐ Asian
☐ White
☐ Mixed
☐ Native American
☐ Hispanic/Latino

Q20 What is your gender?
☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Non-Binary

Q21 What is your major?
Q22 What is your projected graduation year?

Q23 Would you be interested in participating in a follow up interview to discuss social media and how you use it on a daily basis?
☐ Yes; My email is ...........................................
☐ No

Q24 Please enter a valid email if you would like to participate in a drawing for one of four $10 amazon gift cards.
The Value of Honors: 
A Study of Alumni Perspectives on 
Skills Gained Through Honors Education

Christopher M. Kotschevar 
South Dakota State University

Surachat Ngorsuraches 
Auburn University

Rebecca C. Bott-Knutson 
South Dakota State University

INTRODUCTION

Honors education is often marketed as a means to offer enhanced value to a collegiate education. This value has the capacity to bolster a student’s academic experience, to add to his or her comprehensive skill set, to enhance a resumé, and to improve professional development. Ernest Pascarella argued that theoretical value without data is often used to justify collegiate programs such as honors and criticized those practices for lacking research and data to
validate the claim of enhanced value. The current research was designed to obtain validation by eliciting the perspectives of alumni from South Dakota State University’s (SDSU’s) Honors College on the value of their honors education. The data presented here sought to fill a gap in honors research by identifying what skills honors graduates value from their honors education and determining whether post-graduation value aligns with the SDSU Honors College’s student learning outcomes.

Assessing the effectiveness and value of honors education is a challenge, heightened by the fact that no two honors programs are exactly alike. However, there have been attempts dating back at least as early as 1995 to assess the value of honors education. Among these attempts are studies on grade point average (GPA), student involvement, exposure to collegiate “good practices,” student awards, and measures of emotional intelligence among honors students. These studies have largely been conducted with undergraduate students in an attempt to justify the value of an honors education, but these previous studies can help scholars assess where future research is needed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grade Point Average

As recently as 2017, scholars have discussed the impact of honors education on a student’s GPA. While GPA is often used as a predictor of success for high school students entering honors programs, participation in a collegiate honors program may not influence collegiate GPA.

In 2017, Mould and DeLoach sought to longitudinally examine measures of student success in an honors program and to compare them with high school graduation measures. Among the predictive measures studied, they found that weighted high school grade point average (HSGPA) was a significant predictor of success. In 2006, Frank Shushok, Jr., had cross-examined honors students with non-honors students who were honors eligible. At the end of the fourth year, the GPA among the two cohorts was similar, suggesting that honors had less impact on college GPA over the course of four-years.

While honors education caters to high-achieving students, honors colleges and programs do not necessarily seek to raise the grades of students who participate. Instead, programs are intentionally designed to enhance student education, making it more impactful and providing further value to the education students would have otherwise received. Thus, measures outside of GPA must be considered to determine whether honors outcomes are being attained.
Value of Honors

Involvement

Several scholars set out to determine whether honors yielded value through increased campus involvement. In 1995, Raechel E. German found that honors students demonstrate a high level of involvement, defined as being involved in four or more activities outside of the classroom. However, limitations to this study included a low response rate, lack of a comparison cohort, and lack of attribution of responses to honors experiences. Additional scholarly endeavors have failed to connect honors education and higher levels of student involvement. Shushok found similar levels of involvement between honors and non-honors students after the first year of collegiate coursework. However, he also found that, after four years, male honors students were more likely to engage in activities outside the classroom that had an academic focus than non-honors males.

Other scholars have also observed a lack of influence of honors on student involvement. Seifert, Pascarella, Colangelo, and Assouline surveyed more than 3,000 students from eighteen institutions. Nearly 2,000 of those students were identified as honors students. This longitudinal study yielded further evidence of a similar level of involvement among the honors and non-honors cohorts. The large sample size and external validity of this 2007 study strongly suggests that students in honors are not inherently more involved than non-honors students.

Involvement offers a measure of value complementary to the academic realm. Involvement can certainly add value to a collegiate education, but the goal of honors education is not necessarily more involvement but more meaningful involvement. Thus, defining the value of honors based on a quantitative measure of involvement does not necessarily reflect the best route of measurement, and other methods should be examined.

Exposure to Good Practices

According to many studies, honors shines in what some may call “good practices” of higher education. Good practices may be evidenced by increased retention rates, and examples of good practices may include high-order questions and discussion of career goals with faculty. In 2007, Seifert et al. examined these forms of good practices and found that, while extracurricular involvement was similar among honors and non-honors cohorts, honors students had increased exposure to six areas of academic good practices in higher education: exposure to course-related interactions with peers, academic
involvement, use of high-order questions by instructors, prompt instructor feedback, number of assigned readings, and instructional clarity. In total, the authors examined twenty areas, which indicated that honors education excels in some but not all areas of best practices.

Shushok also reported positive findings regarding good practices. Notable good practices included a higher likelihood of meeting with faculty, discussing career goals with faculty, and discussing social, political, and world issues outside of the classroom. The study also suggested potentially higher gains in certain areas for males than for females. These good practices not only contributed to a student’s success during his or her undergraduate tenure but could also contribute positively in the post-graduation years. Additionally, while good practices are not the only constituents of honors education, they do offer a tangible means toward the goal of enriching a student’s academic experience.

**Emotional Intelligence**

A fourth, less researched area used to measure the value of honors education is emotional intelligence. In 1997, Mayer and Salovey defined emotional intelligence as perceiving, expressing, understanding, and regulating emotion to promote growth. In 2013, Castro-Johnson and Wang examined the correlation between emotional intelligence and high achievement in students. Two cohorts, one consisting of 300 honors first-year students and another of 230 non-honors students, were engaged in this study through a survey that examined multiple branches of emotional intelligence. Honors first-year students were found to display a higher understanding of emotion, and females in the honors cohort displayed a higher ability to perceive emotion than males in either cohort and females in the non-honors cohort. The study also found a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and SAT scores, and they concluded that high intellectual ability is positively correlated with emotional intelligence.

One of the key limitations of the Castro-Johnson and Wang study was that it did not look longitudinally at student growth in emotional intelligence but rather looked simply at first-year students. Thus, these findings do not indicate that honors education offers growth in the area of emotional intelligence. However, with further research among upper-level honors students or honors graduates, a correlation between honors education and growth in emotional intelligence may be discovered.
Limitations to Current Assessment of Value

Historically, the assessment of honors value has been limited to four main areas: GPA, involvement, good practices, and emotional intelligence. For each of these measures, the cohort used has always been undergraduate students. However, outcomes are not fully experienced by a student until after graduation, and the value of each individual outcome may not be fully realized until these valuable skills are applied beyond the undergraduate experience. Thus, if value is defined in terms of the outcomes of honors education, then assessing alumni perceptions of a program’s impacts after graduation is imperative.

Honors Alumni Surveys

Until recently, little research was available on the use of alumni surveys to assess the value of honors education. In 2015, Marc A. Johnson and Tamara M. Valentine highlighted how an honors education has benefits that cannot be justified on paper but are obvious when honors student successes post-college are observed. Johnson cited a number of testimonies and examples of honors alumni to illustrate these benefits.

Several honors scholars—Pascarella in 2006 and Scott & Frana in 2008—articulated a continual need for assessment of honors and justification of its value. Innovative methods for assessing honors outcomes are needed, and alumni surveys are one area for this innovation. Alumni surveys can provide backing to claims of increased professional marketability for graduates, increased value in a collegiate education, and increased attainment of applicable skills through an honors program. Fully defining benefits could significantly increase the recruitment of high-achieving students. Finally, alumni surveys allow a program to learn whether its desired outcomes are achieved from graduates as they reflect on their experience. The feedback offered from alumni surveys allows for the continued betterment of programs to offer value to the students it serves and offers a solution to Pascarella’s and to Scott and Frana’s calls for continued adaptation and justification of honors programs.

With previous evidence providing justification of investment in alumni surveys and in order both to provide further evidence of the effectiveness of honors and to allow further program betterment in the future, we surveyed honors college alumni of South Dakota State University to determine their perceptions of the value of honors education after graduation. While our goals were not to provide a comparative and quantitative analysis of the value of
honors education, the questions did aim to provide an initial outline of what honors alumni value from their honors education as a starting point for future investigation into the precise value of honors. While the current literature on the value of honors education focuses on GPA, student involvement, good practices of higher education, and emotional intelligence, we have a dearth of information on the perspective of alumni regarding the value of skills gained through their honors education. This study is the first to explore this specific gap in our knowledge of the value of honors education.

METHODS

Methods of Data Collection

A survey was composed with the honors alumni audience in mind. The survey began with demographic questions, which were followed by three sections, each section defining a set of 11 skills based on the student learning outcomes of the SDSU Honors College. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had gained each of the skills from their honors experience and whether these skills affected them professionally, personally, both professionally and personally, or neither professionally nor personally. They were also asked to rank their top five professionally and personally important skills (1 = Most Valuable, 5 = Least Valuable). In addition, 17 items were included that related to alumni perception of various areas of honors education, covering statements regarding interactions with honors students and faculty, honors’ impact on a participant’s drive to achieve, and the willingness to repeat honors if given the opportunity. Alumni were asked to respond to each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Completely disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Completely agree). The survey tool was tested by an alumna of the SDUS Honors College as well as a faculty member trained in survey creation and validation.

Emails of honors alumni graduating between 2003 and 2017 were identified from records maintained by the SDSU Honors College and the SDSU Foundation. The electronic survey was approved by the SDSU Human Subjects Internal Review Board (IRB-1709002-EXM) and then distributed via email on 22 September 2017 and on 2 October 2017. Email reminders were sent on 11 and 20 October 2017. Data were collected between 22 September and 1 November 2017 via a QuestionPro (San Francisco, CA) survey tool.
Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0, was used for all analyses. The demographic data were descriptively analyzed. The percentages of the graduates who responded to questions about whether they gained the skills and whether the skills affected them professionally or personally were calculated. The percentages of the graduates for both professional and personal skills rankings were calculated. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to examine the association between personal and professional ranking of each skill. Additionally, male and female cohorts were analyzed by calculating the rankings of each skill for the personal and professional sections. Chi-square tests were used to examine the association between the rankings and these two cohorts. All significance levels were set at 0.05. Lastly, the percentages, means, and standard deviations of students’ responses were calculated for each Likert question, and a difference of means test was used to compare the gender cohorts in this section.

RESULTS

Of 307 alumni contacted, 106 alumni responded to the survey, resulting in a 34.5% response rate. Almost 70% of the respondents were female and more than 90% were Caucasian (Table 1). Over 80% of respondents had a single major, and alumni from all six academic colleges at SDSU responded to the survey.

The percentage of participants who selected each skill they felt they had gained from their honors college experience is represented in Table 2. Every skill was credited to honors by at least 50% of respondents. Communicate ideas and beliefs with clarity, civility, and respect was the most selected skill while Analyze and integrate multiple sources of information and Demonstrate effective leadership were among the least selected skills.

The breakdown of skills selected by respondents for personal, professional, both professional and personal, or neither professional nor personal affects is also presented in Table 2. Respondents most commonly indicated that each skill had affected them both personally and professionally. Demonstrate effective written communication was most commonly credited for impacting our alumni in their professional endeavors. Communicate ideas and beliefs with clarity, civility, and respect had high marks in this section as well, with over 75% of respondents indicating that this skill affected them both personally and professionally.
The ranking of skills, seen in Figure 1, reveals where respondents placed high value in their honors experience. *Demonstrate applications of critical thinking* was the most-selected skill for professional ranking. *Communicate ideas and beliefs with clarity, civility, and respect* was the most-selected skill for personal ranking and was the second-highest selected skill for professional ranking, demonstrating high value of this skill throughout the survey.

The attributed value of each skill within respondents’ professional and personal lives, along with a statistical comparison between personal and professional ranking, can be seen in Table 3.

Five skills resulted in a significant difference in rank distribution between professional and personal ranking, including *Analyze and integrate multiple sources of information*, *Demonstrate applications of critical thinking*, and *Articulate personal values, beliefs, and self-identity*. The perceived value of honors and the distribution of professional and personal rankings for men and women were compared. Only one skill in the professional ranking, *Demonstrate effective written communication*, ranked differently among men and women (P=0.025). No other distribution differences among gender were identified in either the professional or personal ranking, nor were any significant differences in mean detected in the Likert data.

Perceptions of alumni in various areas of the SDSU Honors College are reported in Table 4. The lowest mean came from the statement *During my undergraduate studies, I participated in foreign travel, a study abroad experience, foreign language study, and/or global studies* (mean=3.16±1.808). All skills had a mean greater than 3, with over 50% of participants marking “Somewhat Agree” or “Completely Agree” in all skills. Additionally, 11 of 17 skills had a mean greater than 4. The highest mean resulted from the statement *If I were to begin my undergraduate studies now, I would work to graduate with Honors College Distinction* (mean=4.79±0.534), with 83.7% of participants completely agreeing with this statement.

**DISCUSSION**

The data gathered from the study, while not offering comparative analysis between honors and non-honors students, offer valuable insights to honors educators and supporters. First, the skills sections of the current survey offer insight into what honors alumni most value from their honors experience. Most survey participants indicated that they valued communication skills gained through honors. In an increasingly complex world, that honors graduates are learning how to communicate their ideas and beliefs in a well-formed
manner is highly significant. Professionalism and critical thinking are two areas that were also highly ranked and attributed to honors education by survey respondents. As honors colleges look at what value they can add to an otherwise quality education, communication, professionalism, and critical thinking skills can be areas of focus if they are not already. Although the data cannot show that honors students are better communicators, professionals, or critical thinkers, they do demonstrate that graduates of the SDSU Honors College value their growth in these areas and that they further attribute this growth to their experiences with honors.

**Table 1. Demographics of Survey Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and Biological Sciences</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Human Sciences</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, not of Hispanic or Latino Origin</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>93.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Percentage of Alumni Indicating Skills They Gained from Their Honors Experience at SDSU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Did you gain this skill from Honors experience?</th>
<th>Did the skill affect you personally, professionally, in both ways, or in neither way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze and integrate multiple sources of information</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate ideas and beliefs with clarity, civility, and respect</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate effective written communication</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate effective verbal communication</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate professionalism in a variety of contexts</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate applications of critical thinking</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate effective leadership</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate self-reflection and inquisition</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulate personal values, beliefs, and self-identity</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulate the value of social awareness and civic responsibility</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulate the value of diversity, inclusion, equity, and access</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Numeric values are presented as a percent.
²This skill was mistakenly omitted from the survey and thus could not be analyzed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyze and integrate multiple sources of information</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate ideas and beliefs with clarity, civility, and respect</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate effective written communication</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate effective verbal communication</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate professionalism in a variety of contexts</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate applications of critical thinking</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate effective leadership</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate self-reflection and inquisition</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulate personal values, beliefs, and self-identity</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulate the value of social awareness and civic responsibility</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulate the value of diversity, inclusion, equity, and access</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 3. Distribution of Professional and Personal Skills Ranking and Comparison of Distribution between Personal and Professional Skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Percentage of Participant Ranking</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze and integrate multiple sources of information.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate ideas and beliefs with clarity, civility, and respect.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate effective written communication.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate effective verbal communication.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate professionalism in a variety of contexts.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate applications of critical thinking.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate effective leadership.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate self-reflection and inquisition.</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Articulate personal values, beliefs, and self-identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>15.0</th>
<th>5.0</th>
<th>35.0</th>
<th>15.0</th>
<th>30.0</th>
<th>0.009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Articulate the value of social awareness and civic responsibility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>21.1</th>
<th>31.6</th>
<th>15.8</th>
<th>15.8</th>
<th>15.8</th>
<th>0.671</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Articulate the value of diversity, inclusion, equity, and access.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>27.8</th>
<th>5.6</th>
<th>11.1</th>
<th>33.3</th>
<th>22.2</th>
<th>0.715</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. P-value is calculated for the difference in distribution between the overall distribution of frequencies within professional and personal rankings.
2. Ranking of 1= most valued skill, ranking of 5= fifth most valued skill.
3. Reference Figure 1 for total number of participants ranking each skill.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills I gained from interactions with Honors students prepared me for</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future professional interactions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills I gained from interactions with Honors faculty prepared me for</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>0.417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future professional interactions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being challenged in Honors enhanced my ability to overcome challenges</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in my career.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors independent study experience added to my repertoire when</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interacting with potential employers and/or grad schools.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors independent study experience helped me grow in seeking current</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>credible, and comprehensive information.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors independent study experience helped grow my ability to develop</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solutions to complex problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors experience has contributed to my current level of productivity.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors experience has contributed to my current level of success</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in my career.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors experience has contributed to my current level of emotional</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awareness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors experience has contributed to my current level of empathy.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>p-value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors increased my drive to achieve.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During my undergraduate studies, I participated in foreign travel, a</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>study abroad experience, foreign language study, and/or global studies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of my honors experience, I now have an enhanced understanding</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of diverse domestic and global customs, practices, and belief systems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of my honors experience, I now have highly proficient writing</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and speaking skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors experience has prepared me for my chosen occupation or</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>profession or graduate/professional school study.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors experience has encouraged me to be a socially responsible and</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engaged citizen.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I were to begin my undergraduate studies now, I would work to</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>0.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graduate with Honors College Distinction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1=Completely disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Completely Agree.
Furthermore, our data indicate that a strong majority of alumni believe their honors experience added value in a personal and professional context. At least 80% find value in each skill when indicating whether a skill impacted them personally or professionally. This set of results contributes positively to determining whether the SDSU Honors College is meeting its current goals for its graduates and delivering on the promise of high standards of honors. From social awareness and civic responsibility to valuing diversity, inclusion, equity, and access as well as communicating both in written and verbal contexts, graduates find value in skills gained from their honors education.

Additional indications of value from honors came from the Likert ratings. With all statements averaging above a mean of 3, the results from this section provide further evidence that the SDSU Honors College is reaching desired outcomes in a meaningful way for graduates. Shushok observed that honors students were more likely to have meaningful interaction with faculty, and our study aligned with these results. Faculty interactions are highly rated, and all participants indicated that they “Agree” or “Completely Agree” in this area. Honors strives to have highly engaged and innovative professors, and our results indicate that honors faculty are positively engaging in ways that prepare students for the future. Another highlight comes from the question regarding whether study participants would pursue graduation with honors distinction if given the opportunity again. This statement offered the highest mean (4.79) and is an extremely positive indicator that the SDSU Honors College gave the large majority of students enough value that they would be willing to put in the effort to graduate with Honors College Distinction if given the option again.

In regard to areas for improvement, global exposure is one area that has room to grow. Historically, the SDSU Honors College had not made global exposure an explicit goal. However, recent amendments to student learning outcomes promote global exposure and study abroad programming. Thus, if it is a goal within an honors college to improve global exposure, then the honors college should be intentional in its design to expose students to this area.

Our data showed less difference in a comparison of the gender of students than did some other studies, such as those of Shushok and Castro-Johnson and Wang. With no significant differences in the skills section outside of professional written communication, as well as no significant differences in the Likert questions between men and women, our study suggests that the SDSU honors experience is providing similar outcomes for its male and female graduates.
A strength of the present study is that alumni data from fifteen years of graduates were gathered and analyzed. This long range allowed for extrapolation of results for both recent and older graduates. Other strengths include analysis of difference in value between genders and in impacts of honors on graduates from professional and personal perspectives. Finally, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, this study is the first of its kind in the honors education literature and lays the groundwork for future studies to further examine the outcomes of honors education from the alumni perspective.

Limitations to the study include small sample sizes in some demographic areas such as race and individual areas of study, which limited statistical analysis of these areas. Perhaps the most obvious limitation to the research is its study of only one university’s honors college; this limits the study’s external validity and applicability to other honors colleges and programs as the study design was based on the outcomes of the SDSU Honors College. However, the SDSU Fishback Honors College is representative of the Basic Characteristics that the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) attributes to a Fully Developed Honors College and is intentional in addressing the NCHC characteristics of an honors course. Therefore, the results of this study may be representative of the value attained from other honors programs or colleges that subscribe to the NCHC Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program. Additionally, this research provides a successful model and approach for gathering alumni feedback regarding their perception of the value of their honors experience. The goal of the study was not to point toward higher levels of the areas studied for honors alumni. Rather, the aim of the study was to evaluate where honors graduates perceive the value of their honors education lies, and the study was successful in this area.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study provides a framework for conducting alumni surveys on the value of honors education. The results of the study also begin to fill a gap in the literature through a meaningful study of honors alumni. The SDSU Honors College is contributing meaningful value to graduates in their post-graduation years. Our results outline that the ways honors offers value to men and women alumni is similar. Most importantly, the study contributes to Pascarella’s and to Scott and Frana’s calls to justify honors with innovative studies that move beyond theory and allow for program adaptations. The data presented here point toward the justification of an honors education and demonstrate that while there is room for improvement, the current value of
honors goes beyond undergraduate education by actively contributing to the lives of honors alumni both professionally and personally.

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REFERENCES


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ABOUT THE NCHC MONOGRAPH SERIES

The Publications Board of the National Collegiate Honors Council typically publishes two to three monographs a year. The subject matter and style range widely: from handbooks on nuts-and-bolts practices and discussions of honors pedagogy to anthologies on diverse topics addressing honors education and issues relevant to higher education.

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Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook by Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrer (2005, 98pp). This monograph includes an overview of assessment and evaluation practices and strategies. It explores the process for conducting self-studies and discusses the differences between using consultants and external reviewers. It provides a guide to conducting external reviews along with information about how to become an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor. A dozen appendices provide examples of “best practices.”


Breaking Barriers in Teaching and Learning edited by James Ford and John Zubizarreta (2018, 252pp). This volume—with wider application beyond honors classrooms and programs—offers various ideas, practical approaches, experiences, and adaptable models for breaking traditional barriers in teaching and learning. The contributions inspire us to rethink the ways in which we teach and create curriculum and to rethink our assumptions about learning. Honors education centers on the power of excellence in teaching and learning. Breaking free of barriers allows us to use new skills, adjusted ways of thinking, and new freedoms to innovate as starting points for enhancing the learning of all students.


A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges by Theresa James (2006, 136pp). A useful handbook for two-year schools contemplating beginning or redesigning their honors program and for four-year schools doing likewise or wanting to increase awareness about two-year programs and articulation agreements. Contains extensive appendices about honors contracts and a comprehensive bibliography on honors education.

The Honors College Phenomenon edited by Peter C. Sederberg (2008, 172pp). This monograph examines the growth of honors colleges since 1990: historical and descriptive characterizations of the trend, alternative models that include determining whether becoming a college is appropriate, and stories of creation and recreation. Leaders whose institutions are contemplating or taking this step as well as those directing established colleges should find these essays valuable.

Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices by Annmarie Guzy (2003, 182pp). Parallel historical developments in honors and composition studies; contemporary honors writing projects ranging from admission essays to theses as reported by over 300 NCHC members.

Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges by Samuel Schuman (Third Edition, 2011, 80pp). Practical and comprehensive advice on creating and managing honors programs with particular emphasis on colleges with fewer than 4,000 students.

The Honors Thesis: A Handbook for Honors Directors, Deans, and Faculty Advisors by Mark Anderson, Karen Lyons, and Norman Weiner (2014, 176pp). To all those who design, administer, and implement an honors thesis program, this handbook offers a range of options, models, best practices, and philosophies that illustrate how to evaluate an honors thesis program, solve pressing problems, select effective requirements and procedures, or introduce a new honors thesis program.

Housing Honors edited by Linda Frost, Lisa W. Kay, and Rachael Poe (2015, 352pp). This collection of essays addresses the issues of where honors lives and how honors space influences educators and students. This volume includes the results of a survey of over 400 institutions; essays on the acquisition, construction, renovation, development, and even the loss of honors space; a forum offering a range of perspectives on residential space for honors students; and a section featuring student perspectives.

If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Education by Samuel Schuman (2013, 256pp). What if honors students were people? What if they were not disembodied intellects but whole persons with physical bodies and questing spirits? Of course . . . they are. This monograph examines the spiritual yearnings of college students and the relationship between exercise and learning.

Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students edited by Larry Clark and John Zubizarreta (2008, 216pp). This rich collection of essays offers valuable insights into innovative teaching and significant learning in the context of academically challenging classrooms and programs. The volume provides theoretical, descriptive, and practical resources, including models of effective instructional practices, examples of successful courses designed for enhanced learning, and a list of online links to teaching and learning centers and educational databases worldwide.

Occupy Honors Education edited by Lisa L. Coleman, Jonathan D. Kotinek, and Alan Y. Oda (2017, 394pp). This collection of essays issues a call to honors to make diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence its central mission and ongoing state of mind. Echoing the AAC&U declaration “without inclusion there is no true excellence,” the authors discuss transformational diversity, why it is essential, and how to achieve it.
The Other Culture: Science and Mathematics Education in Honors edited by Ellen B. Buckner and Keith Garbutt (2012, 296pp). A collection of essays about teaching science and math in an honors context: topics include science in society, strategies for science and non-science majors, the threat of pseudoscience, chemistry, interdisciplinary science, scientific literacy, philosophy of science, thesis development, calculus, and statistics.

Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks by Joan Digby with reflective essays on theory and practice by student and faculty participants and National Park Service personnel (First Edition, 2010, 272pp). This monograph explores an experiential-learning program that fosters immersion in and stewardship of the national parks. The topics include program designs, group dynamics, philosophical and political issues, photography, wilderness exploration, and assessment.

Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks edited by Heather Thiessen-Reily and Joan Digby (Second Edition, 2016, 268pp). This collection of recent photographs and essays by students, faculty, and National Park Service rangers reflects upon PITP experiential-learning projects in new NPS locations, offers significant refinements in programming and curriculum for revisited projects, and provides strategies and tools for assessing PITP adventures.

Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning edited by Bernice Braid and Ada Long (Second Edition, 2010, 128pp). Updated theory, information, and advice on experiential pedagogies developed within NCHC during the past 35 years, including Honors Semesters and City as Text™, along with suggested adaptations to multiple educational contexts.

Preparing Tomorrow's Global Leaders: Honors International Education edited by Mary Kay Mulvaney and Kim Klein (2013, 400pp). A valuable resource for initiating or expanding honors study abroad programs, these essays examine theoretical issues, curricular and faculty development, assessment, funding, and security. The monograph also provides models of successful programs that incorporate high-impact educational practices, including City as Text™ pedagogy, service learning, and undergraduate research.

Setting the Table for Diversity edited by Lisa L. Coleman and Jonathan D. Kotinek (2010, 288pp). This collection of essays provides definitions of diversity in honors, explores the challenges and opportunities diversity brings to honors education, and depicts the transformative nature of diversity when coupled with equity and inclusion. These essays discuss African American, Latina/o, international, and first-generation students as well as students with disabilities. Other issues include experiential and service learning, the politics of diversity, and the psychological resistance to it. Appendices relating to NCHC member institutions contain diversity statements and a structural diversity survey.

Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education edited by Peter A. Machonis (2008, 160pp). A companion piece to Place as Text, focusing on recent, innovative applications of City as Text™ teaching strategies. Chapters on campus as text, local neighborhoods, study abroad, science courses, writing exercises, and philosophical considerations, with practical materials for instituting this pedagogy.

Teaching and Learning in Honors edited by Cheryl L. Fuiks and Larry Clark (2000, 128pp). Presents a variety of perspectives on teaching and learning useful to anyone developing new or renovating established honors curricula.

Writing on Your Feet: Reflective Practices in City as Text™ edited by Ada Long (2014, 160pp). A sequel to the NCHC monographs Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning and Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education, this volume explores the role of reflective writing in the process of active learning while also paying homage to the City as Text™ approach to experiential education that has been pioneered by Bernice Braid and sponsored by NCHC during the past four decades.

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC) is a semi-annual periodical featuring scholarly articles on honors education. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education.

Honors in Practice (HIP) is an annual journal of applied research publishing articles about innovative honors practices and integrative, interdisciplinary, and pedagogical issues of interest to honors educators.

UReCA, The NCHC Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity, is a web-based, peer-reviewed journal edited by honors students that fosters the exchange of intellectual and creative work among undergraduates, providing a platform where all students can engage with and contribute to the advancement of their individual fields. To learn more, visit <http://www.nchc-ureca.com>.
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