

Fact Sheet on the Value of Honors Education



NCHC Advocacy Committee

Honors programs and colleges have a presence at 1,503 of the 2,500 nonprofit undergraduate institutions in the United States.¹

An estimated 300,000-400,000 honors students are currently enrolled at colleges and universities in the United States.²

Areas Where Honors Adds Value

1. **RECRUITMENT:** Strong honors programs/colleges attract outstanding students to an institution and in many cases are determining factors in their decision to attend.³ You can verify this at your own institution by surveying entering first-year honors students – “Would you have come to this institution if not for the honors program/college?”
2. **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION:** Honors programs and colleges offer excellent support for students from marginalized groups.⁴ This support often includes dedicated advising, smaller classes, intentional community-building, peer and faculty mentoring, and scholarships and financial resources. Because of their size relative to that of the institution as a whole, honors programs and colleges are better equipped to implement the holistic admission practices that have been proven to help students from marginalized groups.⁵
3. **STUDENT SUCCESS:** In response to the belief that honors students are more successful simply because they enter as high achieving students, see a recent study that controlled for various pre-matriculation variables (e.g., high school GPA, ACT/SAT scores, and socioeconomic background), which indicated that honors students are more successful and engaged in their college experience than non-honors students, as evidenced by first-term GPA, first-year credits earned, second-year retention, and graduation rates.⁶ The honors experience definitely adds in various ways to student success, and the clear increase in retention and graduation rates mitigates any institutional budget concerns.
4. **ENGAGEMENT IN HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES:** Honors programs and colleges intentionally engage students in high-impact educational practices, including undergraduate research and creative work, internships, community-based learning, study abroad, fellowships, and public presentations of their work. Students more involved with such practices are not only supported and retained, but also bring positive attention to the institution and are a model for all its students.
5. **HONORS AS A LABORATORY FOR THE INSTITUTION:** Honors programs and colleges are excellent places to pilot institutional initiatives. Honors students, who typically have a growth mindset, welcome innovation and are willing to take risks and experiment with the goal of deeper learning. Moreover, the smaller population of students in honors makes experimentation easier to implement and track.⁷

6. **FUNDRAISING:** Honors programs and colleges are often attractive to donors, and honors students can be excellent institutional spokespersons for potential donors. Institutions that showcase honors and honors students in communications with donors can increase support for all students at the institution.
7. **FACULTY SUCCESS:** Faculty are often energized and inspired by honors students, and they will be grateful for the classroom experience and outside-of-class interaction they have with honors students.⁸
8. **MODELING BEHAVIOR FOR ALL STUDENTS:** Because honors students typically take 75 percent of their classwork outside of honors, their influence on their peers across campus is substantial.⁹

¹ Smith, P. J., & Scott, R. I. (2016). Demography of honors: Comparing NCHC members and non-members. *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* 17(2): 83-101. Retrieved 7/9/21 at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcjournal/528/>.

² Cognard-Black, A.J., & Art L. Spisak. (2019). Creating a Profile of an Honors Student: A Comparison of Honors and Non-Honors Students at Public Research Universities in the United States. *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* 20(1): 123-157. Retrieved 7/9/21 at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcjournal/623/>.

³ Brown, R. D., Winburn, J., & Sullivan-González, D. (2019). The Value Added of Honors Programs in Recruitment, Retention, and Student Success: Impacts of the Honors College at the University of Mississippi. In *The Demonstrable Value of Honors Education: New Research Evidence*, edited by Andrew J. Cognard-Black, Jerry Herron, and Patricia J. Smith. (Lincoln, NE: NCHC, 2019), pp. 179-221. Retrieved 6/29/21 at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcmonochap/57/>.

⁴ Seifert, T. A., Pascarella, E. T., Colangelo, N., & Assouline, S. G. (2007). The effects of honors program participation on experiences of good practices and learning outcomes. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(1), 57-74. Also, Diaz, D., Farruggia, S. P., Wellman, M. E., & Bottoms, B. L. (2019). Honors education has a positive effect on college student success. In *The Demonstrable Value of Honors Education: New Research Evidence*, edited by Andrew J. Cognard-Black, Jerry Herron, and Patricia J. Smith. (Lincoln, NE: NCHC, 2019), pp. 59-91. Retrieved 6/28/21 at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcmonochap/55/>.

⁵ National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). 2020. "Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion. 2020. National Collegiate Honors Council Board of Directors Task Force," Lincoln, NE. Accessed on September 16, 2020 at: https://nchc.informz.net/nhc/data/images/nhc_enrollmentmanagement9.20.pdf.

⁶ Diaz, D., Farruggia, S. P., Wellman, M. E., & Bottoms, B. L. (2019). Honors education has a positive effect on college student success. In *The Demonstrable Value of Honors Education: New Research Evidence*, edited by Andrew J. Cognard-Black, Jerry Herron, and Patricia J. Smith. (Lincoln, NE: NCHC, 2019), pp. 59-91. Retrieved 6/28/21 at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcmonochap/55/>.

⁷ Recent case in point: experiential learning, which is now being adopted by higher education at large, has its roots in the honors education common requirement of a culminating or capstone project. Capstone projects typically take the form of an honors thesis, which requires research, writing, and public presentation, or a creative work and public presentation.

⁸ See, e.g., Miller, A. L., Silberstein, S. M., & BrckaLorenz, A. (2021). Teaching honors courses: Perceptions of engagement from the faculty perspective. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 32(1), 3-27.

⁹ Clauss, J. J. (2011). The benefits of honors education for all college students." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* 12(2): 95-100. Retrieved 7/29/21 at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1325&context=nhcjournal>.