

1 Gender and Ethnic/Racial Differences in Community College 2 Student Enrollment in Honors Courses: A National Study

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6

7 **Abstract**

8 Examined in this study was the gender and ethnic/racial composition of students who had
9 participated in community college honors courses. Data were gathered from the Community
10 College Survey of Student Engagement, a 38 question instrument in which information was
11 obtained about student perceptions of the academic and nonacademic community college
12 environment. The data that were examined consisted of survey responses from over 108,000
13 students, a 25

14

15 **Index terms**— honors, honors courses, honors students, honors programs, community college, community
16 college survey of student engagement, CCSSE.

17 **1 Introduction**

18 The first honors program was started at Swarthmore College, a private liberal arts college, in 1922 (Rinn, 2003).
19 In community colleges, the development of honors courses first occurred in the 1950s and 1960s (Barnes &
20 Woodward, 1959; Bogdan, 1962; Bradshaw, 1962). Since that time, honors courses have become a common feature
21 of the community college setting. Approximately half of all community colleges provide opportunities for students
22 to enroll in honors courses (Beck, 2003). As the number of community colleges with honors courses, honors
23 programs, and honors colleges increases, the debate regarding the congruence of honors and the mission of
24 community colleges continues (Floyd & Holloway, 2006).

25 **2 II.**

26 **3 Review of the Literature**

27 Community colleges enrolled approximately 45% of all undergraduates in the Fall of 2014 (American Association
28 of Community Colleges, 2016). Further examination shows that 57% of students were female, 51% considered
29 themselves ethnic/racial minorities, and 36% were first generation college students. Within this diverse group of
30 students who attend open enrollment community colleges are a select group of students who meet defined academic
31 guidelines that allow access to closed enrollment honors courses.

32 Honors programs and colleges have been established in approximately half of all community colleges in the
33 United States (Beck, 2003). Institutional resources, that are limited in nature, are spent on a very small group
34 of students (Galinova, 2005). Due to the ubiquity and resource needed to operate honors in community colleges,
35 questions have been raised around whether or not promoting a structure to serve a selective group of students is
36 congruent with the meritocratic and egalitarian missions of community colleges (Treat & Barnard, 2012).

37 Congruence with the mission of community colleges is more likely when the composition of the honors programs
38 includes groups who have had higher historical barriers to transfer such as students from lower socioeconomic
39 backgrounds ??Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Treat and Barnard (2012) posited that diverting 5% of an average
40 community college budget to serve upward of 250 students may adversely affect the community college mission
41 of serving a broad range of students.

7 STUDENT SUCCESS PREDICTORS

42 Therefore, Treat and Barnard (2012) suggested that honors program administrators should focus on diversity,
43 excellence in teaching, and developing community to connect honors to the mission of the college.

44 The influence of honors course participation on student success continues to be debated. Researchers (e.g.,
45 Outcalt, 1999) have analyzed the influence of honors in community college environments and the factors
46 that predict the success of honors students.

47 4 III.

48 5 Influence of Honors

49 Multiple attributes have been touted as benefits for community college that have an honors curriculum.
50 Proponents of community college honors tout the opportunity to attract well prepared students to campus
51 as a beneficial component of honors (Owens & Travis, 2013). Honors students may also positively influence a
52 college's academic environment and benefit all students.

53 Recent comprehensive national studies of honor courses in community colleges are limited. Outcalt (1999)
54 conducted a comprehensive study of community college honors in the late 1990s. In this study, Outcalt (1999)
55 examined a random sample of 163 community college honors programs to determine the institutional and student
56 characteristics that existed in the 36% of community colleges where honors programs were present. A finding of
57 note was the presence of fewer honors programs in community colleges with higher percentages of Black students
58 who were enrolled.

59 When examining academic engagement, honors students expressed less concern for grades and greater concern
60 for learning compared to their nonparticipating peers (Brimeyer, Schueths, & Smith, 2014).

61 Honors students perceived autonomy, complexity, and instructor expectations as challenges, especially when
62 all three challenges were encountered at the same time (Scager, Akkerman, Pilot, & Wubbels, 2013). Faculty
63 interaction continued as a factor in persisting in honors along with the richness of the learning environment
64 (Nichols & Chang, 2013). Echoing the findings of Scager et al. (2013), Nichols and Chang (2013) noted that
65 students were challenged most by the independent study component of the honors program. significant decreases
66 in GPA at the end of their first university semester.

67 6 IV.

68 7 Student Success Predictors

69 A challenge involved in analyzing the effects of honors programs is quantifying the benefits derived from honors
70 participation. Although the goals of honors education encompass the personal and professional growth of students,
71 empirical data regarding the influence of participating in honors education are limited (Bulakowski & Townsend,
72 1995).

73 Researchers (e.g., Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; McDonald & Gawkoski, 1979; McKay, 2009) have examined a
74 number of factors to ascertain which factors best predict successful student completion of honors programs.

75 The ability to be selective in an otherwise open enrollment environment may bring opportunities as well as
76 increased scrutiny to community college honors endeavors (Trucker, 2014). Reports regarding honors student
77 success are noted to be valuable but are not as readily available as overall community college student completion
78 rates (Byrne, 1998). Due to varying entrance and completion requirements, minimal reporting, and the dearth
79 of national studies, assessing how students fare in honors programs is difficult (Byrne, 1998).

80 When entering a community college, 80% of students start with the goal of earning a bachelor's degree (Jenkins
81 & Fink, 2016). Students who start at a community college and transfer do possess the academic preparation to
82 succeed in the university setting (Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011). Readyng students to transfer to a university
83 and achieve the goal of a bachelor's degree has been a challenge for community college faculty and administrators.
84 Jenkins and Fink (2016) determined that only 14% of 720,000 first time in college students who enrolled at a
85 community college in the Fall of 2007, received a bachelor's degrees within six years. Although research is limited,
86 honors opportunities in community colleges may provide an opportunity to increase transfer rates. For example,
87 an urban community college system in Maryland reported that 84% of students who entered in the Fall of 2006
88 transferred or graduated from the community college within four years (Trucker, 2014).

89 Universities face similar challenges to community colleges when retention rates of students admitted to
90 university honors programs are examined. In a study of a Midwestern university's honors cohort, Campbell and
91 Fuqua (2008) documented that less than 20% of students graduated with honors at the end of five years. Keller
92 and Lacy (2013) compared retention and graduation rates of a sample of 2,071 Colorado State University honors
93 students with a sample of students with similar credentials who did not participate in honors courses. Retention
94 rates as measured by returning to the university for the fall semester of the second year were approximately
95 5% higher for honors participants. Honors programs can influence student success by increasing transfer to
96 4-year institutions (Bulakowski & Townsend, 1995). The benefits of enrolling in community college honors
97 courses may persist after students transfer. Participating in honors courses increases the ability of students
98 to transition successfully to the university setting without experiencing transfer shock (Hammond, McBee,
99 & Herbert, 2007; Phillips, 2004). The term transfer shock refers to a drop in GPA when transferring from a
100 community college to a university (Phillips, 2004). In a study on transfer students, Phillips (2004) concluded

101 that the GPAs of students who had taken community college honors courses remained stable during the first
102 semester at a university.

103 Students with similar community college GPAs who did not participate in honors prior to transfer experienced
104 statistically Four-year graduation rates were 64.2% for students versus 55.8% for nonparticipants, substantially
105 higher than the results reported by Campbell and Fuqua (2008)

106 **8 Theoretical Framework**

107 A number of initiatives such as orientations, first year experience courses, and student organizations are used
108 in community colleges to try to engage students in their environment and enhance learning and personal
109 development. In a similar manner, honors educators focus on developing opportunities that engage students
110 in intellectual and personal growth (Galinova, 2005).Honors courses and honors infrastructure provide students
111 with opportunities for engagement including smaller classes and committed faculty ??Treat & Bernard, 2012).

112 Astin's (1999) theory of involvement was used as a framework for this study. Involvement is defined as "the
113 amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518).

114 In the theory of involvement, Astin (1999) theorized that students grew and learned when they were engaged
115 in their environment. Astin (1999) documented that involvement in honors programs was one of the areas which
116 led to a higher level of retention and a higher than average change in student characteristics. According to Astin
117 (1999), honors students, "?are more likely than other students to persist in college and to aspire to graduate and
118 professional degrees" (p. 525). Therefore, honors courses may provide the opportunity to engage community
119 college students in ways that are beneficial to student retention, transfer, and graduation rates.

120 VI.

121 **9 Significance of the Study**

122 According to McClenney and Marti (2006), community college samples are used in less than 10% of higher
123 education investigations. Within this body of work on community colleges, the current scholarship related to
124 honors in community colleges is limited (Achterberg, 2004a;Holman & Banning, 2012). Achterberg (2004b) stated
125 that, "?research that addresses questions about honors education is not only needed but should be a high priority
126 within individual institutions as well as the general community of higher education" (p. 33). The most recent large
127 scale study of community college honors students occurred in the late 1990s (Outcalt, 1999). Further, Holman and
128 Banning (2012) recommended more quantitative or mixed methods research when examining dissertations and
129 publications related to honors in higher education. Therefore, results of this empirical investigation may be used
130 to enhance the understanding of educational leaders and policymakers regarding the demographic composition
131 of students who have completed honors courses at the community college.

132 **10 VII.**

133 **11 Purpose of the Study**

134 The purpose of this study was to examine the demographic composition of students who had participated
135 in community college honors courses. Through this study, the degree to which differences were present in
136 community college honors course enrollment as a function of student gender and ethnicity/race was addressed. As
137 such, the extent to which disproportionalities might be present in honors course enrollment by these two student
138 characteristics was ascertained.

139 **12 VIII.**

140 **13 Statement of the Problem**

141 The growth of community colleges has allowed more people to access higher education than ever before but has
142 not had the envisioned effect of an educated populace (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Leinbach, & Kienzl, 2006;
143 Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Bailey et al. (2006) stated that within 3 years of enrolling for the first time in college, 38%
144 of full time students received a degree or transferred to a university. A lower than envisioned success rate occurs
145 because the mission of the community college is to provide opportunities for all students, regardless of academic
146 preparation, financial means, and knowledge or guidance in navigating entry to closed enrollment institutions
147 (Treat & Barnard, 2012). Honors programs in community colleges, however, are patterned after universities and
148 focus resources on a small cadre of high achieving students (Galinova, 2005). These programs, therefore, attract
149 students who are preparation (Treat & Barnard, 2012). There fore, understanding the composition of students who
150 have participated in honors courses can enable a deeper understanding of the influence of institutional policies
151 and practices related to honors in the community college.

152 **14 a) Research Questions**

153 The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What is the difference in honors course
154 completion as a function of gender for community college students?; and (b) What is the difference in honors
155 course completion as a function of ethnicity/race for community college students?IX.

156 **15 Method Participants**

157 Participants in this study were students at community colleges who completed the 2014 Community College
158 Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). The dataset acquired from the Center for Community College Student
159 Engagement included 108,509 students. This group of over 108,000 students represented a 25% random sample
160 of the full 2014 three-year CCSSE cohort dataset. For the purposes of this investigation, students who had
161 participated in an honors course were relevant to the analysis. From this group of students who had participated
162 in an honors course, 6,609 students indicated their gender, and 5,507 students indicated being in an ethnic/racial
163 group on whom data were analyzed in this research study.

164 The data set includes 684 institutions from 48 states and the District of Columbia along with select Canadian
165 provinces and three island nations (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, n.d.b.). Institutions
166 varied in size, with 168 colleges classified based as small (i.e., enrollment less than 4,500 students) and 79 extra-
167 large institutions (i.e., enrollment of at least 15,000 students) based on number of credit students. The gender
168 of the CCSSE cohort student respondents included 43% male and 55% female (2% of data was missing). The
169 ethnicity/race of the respondents included 56% White, 14% Hispanic, and 11% Black, with 19% of respondents
170 choosing other categories or choosing not to respond.

171 **16 X. Instrumentation and Procedures**

172 The CCSSE survey is a 38 question instrument in which Likert scales were used to gather information about
173 student perceptions of the academic and nonacademic community college environment. The results of the survey
174 can be used by researchers to gather demographic information about students and to measure students' academic
175 and nonacademic perceptions (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, n.d.a). The instrument has
176 been tested to, "indicate that the instrument and the constructs derived from it are reliable and valid measures
177 of student engagement in the two-year sector" ??Marti, 2008, p. 13). Evaluation of the instrument's reliability
178 demonstrated, "a high degree of consistency between first and second survey administrations" ??Marti, 2008,
179 p. 12). For further information regarding the reliability and validity of the instrument, readers are directed to
180 the CCSSE website at <http://www.ccsse.org/aboutsurvey/> aboutsurvey.cfm Data were obtained directly from
181 CCCSE as a comma separated values (CSV) file of CCSSE survey results. This file was imported into the
182 Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software program for analysis. The CCSSE data file was then
183 converted into a SPSS data file and relevant variables used for this study were labeled. After preparation of the
184 data file in SPSS, procedures were completed and the resulting data was analyzed.

185 **17 XI.**

186 **18 Definition of Terms**

187 The focus of this study was the demographic composition of students who participated in honors courses at
188 community colleges across the United States and beyond. Although honors courses are varied based on how they
189 are defined by administrators at each institution, honors courses, "should generally be small and seminar-based
190 with active discussion" ??Achterberg, 2004b, p. 4). Additionally, Achterberg (2004b) stated that, "the purpose
191 of an honors course is to show students how knowledge in the field is discovered, developed, evaluated, argued,
192 tested, compared, and applied" (p. 4).

193 The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is a 38 question survey administered to
194 students in community colleges. Likert scales are utilized for survey responses in order to gather information
195 about how students, "spend their time; what they feel they have gained from their classes; how they assess their
196 relationships and interactions with faculty, counselors, and peers; what kind of work they are challenged to do;
197 [and] how the college supports their learning?" (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, n.d.a, para.
198 1).

199 **19 XII.**

200 **20 Results**

201 In this empirical investigation, the independent variables were gender and ethnicity/race of community college
202 students. The dependent variable was whether or not students had participated in an honors course while enrolled
203 in a community college. To determine whether gender or ethnic differences existed in honors course participation in
204 community colleges, Pearson chi-squares were conducted. This statistical procedure was selected as the preferred
205 statistical procedure XIII.

206 **21 Discussion**

207 A subtext implicit when honors education is offered is that opportunities are increased for students to gain social
208 mobility (Weiner, 2009). Thus, the composition of students who have the opportunity to participate in honors
209 may increase in importance. If involvement in honors increases student engagement (Astin, 1999), increases
210 transfer rates (Trucker, 2014), and decreases transfer shock ??Hammond, McBee, & Herbert, 2007;Phillips,
211 2004), providing opportunities for diverse populations will increase retention and success and position students

212 from underrepresented populations for success (Treat & Barnard, 2012). Ethnic, racial, class, age, and academic
213 diversity can enrich an honors program (Herron, 2013) and the students within the program.

214 Due to the results not being statistically significant for gender, differences in honors participation based on
215 gender were not conclusive. It may be beneficial to continue this line of inquiry and investigate other aspects
216 of honors based on gender or gender disparity, as well as examine other facets such as gender and ethnicity.
217 Honors course participation at the community college level may provide students with the opportunity to enter
218 into more technical and rigorous fields that have had historical gender disparities, such as the natural sciences
219 and engineering.

220 The differences in ethnicity/race were statistically significant and warrant further examination. Of particular
221 interest is the percentage of Hispanic students who participated in honors which was slightly less than expected
222 whereas the percentage of Black students was higher than expected. As honors courses For the first research
223 question regarding differences in community college honors course participation by gender, the result was not
224 statistically significant, $\chi^2 (1) = 2.45$, $p = .117$. Similar percentages of male and female community college
225 students were enrolled in honors courses. Readers are directed to Table 1 for descriptive statistics regarding
226 participation in honors courses by gender.

227 For the second research question regarding community college honors course participation by student
228 ethnicity/race, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (2) = 95.31$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this difference
229 was .04 (Cramer's V), a below small effect size (Cohen, 1988). As indicated in Table 2, slightly more than 69%
230 of students who participated in honors course were White, which was less than the 72.5% overall percentage of
231 White students in the sample. The percentage of Hispanic students who participated in Honors was slightly less
232 than the overall percentage of Hispanic students in the sample. The percentage of Black students in the overall
233 sample was 11.7% while the percentage of Black students who participated in honors represented almost 16%
234 of all honors participants. Thus, Black students were overrepresented in honors in comparison to the overall
235 sample of Black students by slightly more than 4%. scholarships, that low income students were negatively
236 influenced by honors entrance requirements, even though ethnic diversity was maintained in the population of
237 honors students. Therefore, it may be beneficial to conduct more in-depth inquiry on the composition of students,
238 considering factors such as socio-economic status and parental education levels.

239 In conclusion, readers are urged to be cautious to the degree to which they generalize results from this
240 study. More research studies are needed to determine whether these results are typical for students in individual
241 community colleges. Longitudinal studies may provide stronger empirical evidence regarding the long term
242 benefits of honors college enrollment for diverse populations. Given the documented benefits of honor course
243 participation, educational leaders in community colleges are encouraged to diversify the composition of student
244 enrollment in honors courses to include diversity in areas such as socio-economic status, parental education levels,
and first-time in college status. ^{1 2}

V.

Figure 1:

1

Gender	Participated in Honors n and %age of Total	Did Not Participate in Honors n and %age of Total
Male	(n = 2,831) 8.30%	(n = 31,315) 91.70%

Figure 2: Table 1 :

245

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2

Female(n = 3,778)	8.60%
Ethnicity/Reported in Honors	n and %age of Total
White(n = 3,798)	7.67%
Black(n = 866)	10.86%
Hispanic(n = 843)	7.79%

(n = 40,124)	91.40%
Did Not Participate in Honors	n and %
(n = 45,708)	
92.33%	
(n = 7,111)	
89.14%	
(n = 9,984)	
92.21%	

have fewer students and provide students with the opportunity to develop closer working relationships with faculty, Black and Hispanic students may benefit from taking honors courses as these students historically have lower graduation rates (Bailey et al., 2006).

related to honors education.

cautioned that administrators must be aware that developing policies intended to enhance student success in honors may have the unintended consequence of reinforcing homogeneity in several facets of honors, including various facets of diversity. Illustrating this concern, DeFrank-Cole, Cole, and Garbutt (2009) observed in a study of students receiving

It is vital for administrators to examine
Carnicom
(2013)

Figure 3: Table 2 :

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