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Honors Participation at a Two-Year Community College: Academic and Student Engagement Outcomes

Amanda Bennett
East Tennessee State University

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Amanda Bennett

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Dr. James Lampley, Chair

Dr. Jill Channing

Dr. Terence Hicks

Dr. Jane Honeycutt

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, comparative study was to compare academic outcomes (final GPA, retention, graduation rates) and student engagement measures of students who enroll in an honors program at a Tennessee community college versus those who were honors-eligible but did not participate in an honors program. Findings will help determine whether or not honors programs are associated with gains in various student outcome and engagement measures.

Archival data at the participating institution were used to explore retention rates, GPA, and graduation rates. The sample for this study included 333 honors students at a community college in Tennessee from 2015 through 2019. To participate in honors, students must obtain a 3.5 or higher high school GPA or a 25 or higher composite ACT score. The sample also included 2,970 ACT and high school GPA matched peers who were eligible to participate in honors but who did not participate. Additionally, Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) survey data were used to explore student engagement measures. Independent-samples t test or a two-way contingency table using crosstabs were utilized to evaluate each of the respective research questions. Findings from this study demonstrate there are significantly improved

academic outcomes and engagement measures for students who participate in honors at the participating community college when compared to eligible nonparticipants.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Daniel, and our children, Cora, Raulston, and Elliot, whose lives give mine purpose.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Originating in England, the Oxford tutorial method expanded to the United States in the late 1800s (Rinn, 2006). The earliest offerings of honors education in the United States were modeled after the Oxford tutorial method and were introduced at Harvard University in 1873, the University of Michigan in 1882, Princeton University in 1905, and Columbia University in 1905. While no singular standard exists to delineate honors education, the commonly accepted ideal was and remains that honors programs offer differentiated curricular and co-curricular experiences to curate increased learning outcomes for high-achieving and high-ability students (Savage, 2019). Characteristics of these inaugural honors programs were specialized curriculum, tutorial and preceptor systems, comprehensive oral examinations, and individualized seminars (Rinn, 2006).

In the early 1920s Frank Aydelotee, former President of Swarthmore College, is credited with the strategy that expanded honors education throughout institutions of higher education in the United States (Cohen, 1966). The rapid growth in enrollment and expansion of higher education post-World War I gave rise to a standardized curriculum that did not account for a student's individual interests or aptitudes. Aydelotee recognized that the brightest students were being disadvantaged by institutions that designed curriculum for the average student (Rinn, 2006). Therefore, Aydelotee created a program that allowed high-achieving students to individualize their studies during their junior and senior years through honors seminars. These largely discussion-based seminars consisted of small groups of students led by a professor to explore original texts and classical documents. Students were graded on a pass/fail basis rather than the standard grading scale (Rinn, 2006).

Over two centuries later, honors education has vastly expanded from these initial offerings. Originally designed to serve students at the most elite institutions, honors education

can be found throughout all institutional classifications with tremendous growth happening within the two-year sector (Scott & Smith, 2016). By 2018, over 1,500 honors programs exist throughout the United States (Smith, 2019).

One of the challenges facing community college honors programs is the presumption by administrators that honors education is elitist and runs counter to the open-access mission of community colleges. Proponents of honors education contend honors programs are not inherently exclusive, but rather create opportunities that fulfill the mission of the community college to serve all students (Engelen-Eigles & Milner, 2014; Kane, 2001). Just as Aydelotee contended a century ago, advocates of community college honors programs insist community colleges should serve the needs of all students, including those who are high achieving.

Enrollment in our nation's community colleges is expanding. Nationally, there are nearly 11 million undergraduates enrolled at four-year institutions and another 5.7 million undergraduates enrolled at community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). While four-year institutions represent the largest enrollment sector, an increasing proportion of students are beginning their introduction to postsecondary education at community colleges. From 2000 to 2018 an additional 5% of high school graduates enrolled in a two-year institution while the percentage of students who enrolled in a four-year institution during this timeframe was not measurably different (NCES, 2020). One likely explanation for the increase in community college preference is affordability. As the cost of higher education has increased, community colleges continue to provide an economic advantage. The average cost of tuition and fees at public, four-year institutions is $9,200 compared to $3,700 for public, two-year institutions. With a difference in price of $5,500 or 148%, community colleges have a clear competitive edge on cost and affordability (NCES, 2020).

As a pioneer in tuition-free college, the higher education landscape in Tennessee has shifted tremendously since the signing of Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect legislation in 2014. In the year following the passage of Tennessee Promise, public high school graduate's enrollment at community colleges increased from 11,795 in 2014 to 16,136 in 2015, and enrollments at the state's technical colleges increased from 1,325 to 2,091. Within that same year, public high school graduate's enrollment at universities declined by 1,472 students. However, the net result was an almost 9% enrollment increase at the state's public colleges with the majority of growth occurring from students enrolling at community colleges (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2019).

Along with shifts in enrollment patterns, additional indicators suggest that the level of academic preparation among community college freshmen in Tennessee is improving. On average, the percentage of students requiring learning support has decreased and composite ACT scores have increased for community colleges in Tennessee. From 2013 to 2018, the mean ACT score for community college students increased from 18.7 to 19.2, and the percent of students requiring learning support decreased from 70.1% to 65.4% (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2019).

The Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect scholarship programs at Tennessee community colleges provide a unique case study for honors education at two-year institutions. With more high-achieving students choosing to start at community colleges, honors education within the state has seen tremendous growth (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2019). Additionally, the Tennessee Board of Regents has endorsed honors education as a high-impact practice that will further expand honors programming at two-year institutions within the state (Tennessee Board of Regents, n.d.b).

In addition to increasing access through these unique scholarship programs, the state is also placing a premium on graduation rates. State appropriations are allocated to each institution based on a comprehensive outcomes-based funding formula model that is in direct alignment with the state's attainment goals (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, n.d.). Simply stated, the demand for accountability has never been greater. The financial health of each institution requires demonstrable gains in student outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Increased assessment of and accountability for honors is to a great extent unchartered territory. For over a century honors programs have existed under an "unquestioned assumption […] that honors provides a better educational experience for high-ability and otherwise talented students" (Cognard-Black, 2019, p. 4). Today's landscape requires honors colleges and programs to demonstrate the value of honors education, and this will be a concern for the foreseeable future. In 2019, the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) published a monograph titled "The Demonstrable Value of Honors Education: New Research Evidence" to highlight the urgency for assessment and accountability for honors education.

There is evidence illustrating higher completion rates for students who participate in honors (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Cosgrove, 2004; Honeycutt, 2017; Keller & Lacy, 2013; Mellow, 2015; Patton et al., 2019; Savage et al., 2014; Shushok, 2006). Even when rigorous methodologies are employed, such as propensity score analyses, logit regression analyses, and probit regression analyses, the research overwhelmingly demonstrates honors participants graduate at higher rates, with higher GPAs, and in less time to degree attainment than equally matched non-honors participants (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Cosgrove, 2004; Honeycutt, 2017; Keller & Lacy, 2013; Mellow, 2015; Patton et al., 2019; Savage et al., 2014; Shushok, 2006).

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, comparative study was to compare academic outcomes (final GPA, retention, graduation rates) and student engagement measures of students who enroll in an honors program at a Tennessee community college versus those who were honors-eligible but did not participate in an honors program. Findings will help determine whether or not honors programs are associated with gains in various student outcome and engagement measures.

Research Questions

I will address the following questions to ascertain the relative value of honors education within the community college sector in the state of Tennessee:

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference in the final GPAs between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the final GPAs between female honors participants and female honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the final GPAs between male honors participants and male honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

Research Question 4: Is there a significant relationship in the first-term, fall to spring retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

Research Question 5: Is there a significant relationship in the two-term, fall to fall retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

Research Question 6: Is there a significant relationship in two-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

Research Question 7: Is there a significant relationship in three-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

Research Question 8: Is there a significant difference in the five dimensions of student engagement (Active and Collaborative Learning; Student Effort; Academic Challenge; Student-Faculty Interaction; and Support for Learners) as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college?

Significance of the Study

Research in honors goes beyond furthering the existing body of knowledge. At its core, much of the research that exists on participation and success rates of honors participants is coupled with a justification for honors existence. This justification crosses all sectors and institutional types, again with community colleges being largely underrepresented in the existing research.

Additionally, research in honors needs to go beyond simply assessing student outcomes without attempting to control for the differentiated inputs. As Bottoms and McCloud (2019) assert, simple comparisons are simply not enough. The notion that better outcomes for honors students is guaranteed fails to consider the diversity among honors students and reinforces stereotypes about honors students. “It is not merely what students bring with them to an honors program that determines their greater success; it is what honors education does for them once they get there” (Bottoms & McCloud, 2019, p. 45). It is imperative for honors research to use rigorous analyses to help isolate the effect honors has on student learning and engagement.

Another important consideration for the significance of this study is honors, on the very nature of its exclusivity, seems to fall outside the mission of community colleges which are

charged with providing access to all students. “Counter-intuitive though it may be – open-access community colleges need programs like honors to fulfill their mission of serving students who have been under-served and are under-represented in higher education” (Mellow, 2015, p. 66). As Honeycutt (2017) described, most low-income students lack the resources to attend the nation’s most prestigious institutions. Providing opportunities for these students to experience the rigor, scholarship, and tight-knit community associated with honors programs further fulfills the mission of providing educational opportunities and access at our country’s community colleges.

Definitions of Terms

In this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Academic Mindset - a framework for understanding a student’s self-perceptions about their academic abilities and intelligence (Farrington et al., 2012).

Belongingness – a person’s sense of having positive, meaningful relationships and connections with others who comprise a community (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Honors Education – in-class and extracurricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education (NCHC, n. d.).

High-Impact Practices (HIPs) – teaching and/or learning practice that yields positive outcomes for students (Kuh, 2008).

Tennessee Promise – last-dollar scholarship program for Tennessee high school graduates which allows students to enroll in any community or technical college within the state of Tennessee tuition-free (Tennessee State Government, n.d.a.).

Tennessee Reconnect – a last-dollar scholarship to qualifying adults pursuing an associate degree or credential at a community college in Tennessee (Tennessee State Government, n.d.a).

Undermatching – a term used to describe the phenomenon of academically-capable and high-achieving students enrolling in less selective colleges and universities (Lowry, 2017).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

My study explores outcomes for participation in an honors program at a community college within the state of Tennessee. While a variety of statistical techniques attempt to control for multiple variables between the honors participants and eligible nonparticipants, there are many non-observable characteristics that cannot be controlled. This limitation is particularly significant because students must self-select to enroll in honors at the participating institution. This study does not provide any analysis as to why some students participate and other eligible students do not participate in honors education.

It is also assumed that the students will respond to the survey instrument honestly and accurately. Students must self-identify as an honors student on the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) survey. This information could be confirmed by a self-reported student identification number. Honors students enroll in both honors and non-honors courses during a given semester. While it is accurate to assume every student who completes a survey within an honors section is an honors student, this method fails to precisely determine who the honors students are in non-honors course sections. Furthermore, eligible nonparticipants cannot be identified on the CCSSE survey. Only comparisons between students who identify as honors participants and the general student body can be made on the CCSSE survey data analysis.

This study is delimited to honors participants and eligible nonparticipants as defined by honors eligibility at the participating community college. Students who were ineligible for honors at the participating institution were excluded from this study. This study is further delimited by the theoretical framework chosen to examine student outcomes. The results of this study may not be generalizable to other groups of honors students or other community colleges.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 includes the introduction, purpose statement, significance of the problem, research questions, definitions of terms, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the current literature that relates to the research questions posed. Chapter 3 contains the methodology for this non-experimental, quantitative, comparative study. Chapter 4 displays the research finding and survey results. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 2. Review of Literature

This chapter will provide an overview of literature to establish a foundation for understanding the role of honors education within the context of American higher education. Particular attention will be paid to the role of honors education at community colleges. This chapter will also explore the historical impetus for establishing honors programs as well as current trends and challenges in honors education. This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive summary of all literature available but does provide research on the characteristics of honors students and an overview of outcomes associated with honors participation.

Among the existing research demonstrating the value of honors education, many researchers appropriately attempt to control for self-selection biases among program participants. It would be insufficient to compare outcomes of honors students with the general student population because of the differences in characteristics between these two groups of students. Honors students inherently possess characteristics positively associated with degree attainment. These variables include, but are not limited to, higher high school GPAs, elevated class rank, and superior standardized test scores (Smith, 2019).

There is evidence illustrating higher completion rates for students who participate in honors (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Cosgrove, 2004; Honeycutt, 2017; Keller & Lacy, 2013; Mellow, 2015; Patton et al., 2019; Savage et al., 2014; Shushok, 2006). Even when rigorous methodologies are employed, such as propensity score analyses, logit regression analyses, and probit regression analyses, the research demonstrates honors participants graduate at higher rates, with higher GPAs, and in less time to degree attainment than equally matched non-honors participants (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Cosgrove, 2004; Honeycutt, 2017; Keller & Lacy, 2013; Mellow, 2015; Patton et al., 2019; Savage et al., 2014; Shushok, 2006).

History of Honors Education

A comprehensive understanding of the origins of honors education in the United States begins at Oxford University in England (Rinn, 2006). From the outset, tutors were a foundational aspect of the University. The role of tutors evolved from serving a primarily social aspect during the 16th century to eventually becoming a component of formalized instruction during the 19th century (Rinn, 2006). During the 1850s, students at Oxford became dissatisfied with large classes and sought out their own personal tutors for a "private hour" for in depth, individualized training (Horn, 2013). Soon after, the University incorporated the tutorial method into pedagogical practice. The primary purpose of the tutor was not to lecture or to provide instruction but rather to challenge students to think creatively about problems and their solutions. "In spite of this inauspicious start, today [the tutorial method] remains a cornerstone of teaching in Oxford and Cambridge" (Horn, 2013, p. 353). Independent work, discussion, and critical thinking formed the basis for the tutorial method and required students to be self-directed and highly motivated.

Through the creation of the Rhodes Scholarship in 1899, American students were introduced to the tutorial method when they received the opportunity to study at Oxford University. Originally designed to promote peace between England, Germany, and the United States, the Rhodes Scholarship transformed higher education within each respective country as the scholars returned to their home countries and implemented the tutorial method in their professional teaching practices. "Between the years 1904 and 1914, more than one-third of all Rhodes Scholars chose academia as a profession" (Rinn, 2006, p. 66). The infusion of the tutorial method in American higher education was an unanticipated but significant outcome of the Rhodes Scholars program.

The first evidence of an adaptation of the tutorial system in the United States was found at Harvard University in 1873, the University of Michigan in 1882, Princeton University in 1905, and Columbia University in 1905. Drawing heavily from the Oxford tutorial method, characteristics of these programs were specialized curriculum, tutorial and preceptor systems, comprehensive oral examinations, and individualized seminars (Rinn, 2006).

Swarthmore College is recognized as being the first university to introduce a formal honors program in the 1920s (Savage, 2019). Frank Aydelotee, former President of Swarthmore College, is credited with the strategy that expanded honors education throughout institutions of higher education in the United States (Cohen, 1966). The rapid growth in enrollment and expansion of higher education post-World War I gave rise to a standardized curriculum that did not account for a student's individual interests or aptitudes. Aydelotee recognized that the brightest students were being disadvantaged by institutions that designed curriculum for the average student (Rinn, 2006). As such, Aydelotee created a program that mirrored the tutorial method and allowed high-achieving students to individualize their studies during their junior and senior years through honors seminars. These seminars consisted of small groups of students led by a professor to explore original texts and classical documents and were largely discussion based. Students were graded on a pass/fail basis rather than the standard grading scale (Rinn, 2006).

Over two centuries later, honors education has vastly expanded from these initial offerings. Honors programs saw rapid expansion after World War II with the impetus being that elite institutions should "not have a monopoly of faculty and student intellect" (Savage, 2019, p. 16). Originally designed to serve students at the most prestigious institutions, honors education can be found throughout all institutional classifications with tremendous growth happening

within the two-year sector (Scott & Smith, 2016). Currently there are over 1,500 honors programs in existence throughout the United States (Smith, 2019).

While there is no singular definition of what honors education is, and honors programs vary widely from institution to institution, honors programs and honors colleges have proliferated to meet the unique needs of high achieving students. Joseph Cohen is credited with founding the first professional organization for honors and its corresponding honors conference in 1957 (Rinn, 2006). The organization was called the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS) and was comprised of 43 people from 27 institutions (Rinn, 2006). The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) was established in 1966 and replaced ICSS (Savage, 2019). Whereas ICSS had been grant-funded, NCHC was member supported (Rinn, 2006). NCHC provides its 600+ members a variety of resources including annual national and regional conferences, research publications, and several interdisciplinary institutes for honors faculty, administrators, and students. Most importantly, NCHC provides a unified voice for honors education (Rinn, 2006).

History of Community Colleges

Access to public postsecondary education in the United States is largely attributable to the Morrill Act of 1862 and the subsequent Morrill Act of 1890. As Thelin (2011) explains, "the [Morrill Act of 1862] established a complex partnership in which the federal government provided incentives for each state to sell distant Western lands, with the states being obliged to use the proceeds to fund advanced instructional programs" (p. 76). The primary goal of the Morrill Act of 1862 was to expand access to agricultural and mechanical education. While imperfect, this federal legislation significantly changed the higher education landscape within the United States. The shift from private to public institutions provided a more egalitarian model of

postsecondary education. It would be decades later when the second Morrill Act of 1890 extended public access to higher education for African Americans and American Indians (Thelin, 2011).

The first community college, originally termed junior college, was founded in 1901 by William Rainy Harper who was the President of the University of Chicago. Harper introduced the junior college model to distinguish lower-division, generalized coursework from upper-division, specialized coursework (Cohen et al., 2014). The objective of the junior college model was to allow students to begin their collegiate studies at the junior college and then transfer to the university after the first two years. This would enable junior colleges to focus on teaching and instruction and allow universities to prioritize research (Drury, 2003).

The junior college concept quickly gained traction throughout the early part of the 20th century. Between 1901 and 1920, over 200 junior colleges were founded and were in operation in 37 of 48 states. A decade later in 1930, the number of junior colleges had more than doubled to a total of 440 institutions and enrolled over 70,000 students (Cohen et al., 2014).

After the Great Depression, when many adults were unemployed, community colleges proliferated as pressures to expand education for the masses grew in the United States. Social mobility was tied to education. As Cohen et al. (2014) described:

> [T]he easily accessible, publicly supported school became an article of American faith, first in the nineteenth century, when responsibility for educating the individual began shifting to the school, and then in the twentieth, when the schools were unwarrantedly expected to relieve society's ills. (p. 3)

A two-track system began to develop in the junior college curriculum (Drury, 2003). Junior colleges continued to provide general education preparation geared to transfer for a course of

study at a university, and vocational and technical education emerged as an adjacent curricular pathway. Providing opportunities for citizens to acquire the skills and training necessary to support the industrial expansion and growing population was a symbiotic solution.

After World War II American colleges and universities became an integral component of post-war production and a peacetime economy (Thelin, 2011). As thousands of servicemembers returned from war, they found themselves unemployed. In 1944, Congress approved an innovative educational program known as the GI Bill of Rights. The GI Bill provided federal tuition assistance and living allowances to veterans who wanted to continue their education. One of the most powerful components of the GI Bill was the provision that allowed the service member autonomy to choose where to enroll and what credential to pursue (Cohen et al., 2014). In order to safeguard against diploma mills, institutions required federal approval to receive funds. "The federal government agreed to accept as a proxy the institutional evaluations that colleges and universities themselves rendered as part of a voluntary accreditation associations" (Thelin, 2011, p. 265). This arrangement gave rise to regional accreditation bodies such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the North Central Association among several others.

After the introduction of the GI Bill, college enrollment across the United States experienced an exponential rise. "By 1950, of the fourteen million eligible veterans, more than two million, or 16 percent, had opted to enroll in postsecondary education as part of the GI Bill" (Thelin, 2011, p. 264). The cost of these enrollments totaled over $5.5 billion and forever changed the landscape of American higher education.

The contributions of the GI Bill not only impacted the number of students who were enrolled in college, but also the demographic composition of the student body (Cohen et al.,

2014). The GI Bill considerably expanded access to higher education for low-income students, adult students, and women--three populations who had not historically participated in postsecondary education (Cohen et al., 2014). However, the GI Bill had a lesser impact on racial equality in higher education. While black veterans were eligible to receive the benefits of the GI Bill, discriminatory admissions practices excluded them from enrolling at many of the nation's institutions (Thelin, 2011).

The National Clearing House (2019) estimated that more than 5 million students enroll in community colleges annually. "Over time the original two-year academic emphasis was supplemented—and sometimes eclipsed—by the inclusion of technical or vocational curriculum" (Thelin, 2011, p. 250). Originally designed as a starting point for baccalaureate education, community colleges have increasingly become places where students enroll to receive industry-specific, technical training (Treat & Barnard, 2012). Because community colleges are embedded within the proximity of the local communities they serve, they inherently improve access to higher education for students within those communities. Because of industry expectations and technological advancements, there are relatively few spaces where people can enter the workforce without some form of post-secondary education or training. This has shifted the burden on acquiring this knowledge and skills from the employers to students. These fields are highly specialized and routinized and frequently do not allow students to continue their education beyond a technical certificate or an associate's degree. Community colleges are increasingly becoming synonymous with workforce development rather than having a focus on transferring to four-year institutions (Treat & Barnard, 2012).

Coupled with this industrial shift is the fact that higher education is increasingly stratified by race and class, with lower-income students and students of color enrolling at community

colleges at higher rates than more affluent and white students (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Treat & Barnard, 2012). While on the surface community colleges are purported to provide social mobility, the reality is most students who enroll at a community college aspire to earn a bachelor's degree but do not achieve this goal (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Treat & Barnard, 2012). According to the National Student Clearing House Research Center (2019), 62% of students who began their studies at two-year institutions were retained from fall to fall compared to 81% at four-year institutions. Additionally, students who began their education at a community college had a 42.2% six-year completion rate compared to a 66.7% rate for students who began their studies at a public, four-year university.

Community Colleges within Tennessee

Tennessee's former Governor Bill Haslam attracted national attention when he focused the state's priorities on higher education. The Governor's *Drive to 55* initiative established the goal that 55% of Tennesseans ages 25 to 64 will possess a post-secondary credential by the year 2025 (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2015). This goal is a substantial increase of the current level of educational attainment in Tennessee which is at 37.85% (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2015).

In alignment with *Drive to 55*, former Governor Haslam proposed substantial investments in higher education, particularly for community colleges, with the Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect scholarship programs. Under these last-dollar scholarship programs, any Tennessee resident who does not possess a post-secondary credential can attend one of the state's community or technical colleges tuition-free (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2015).

In addition to increasing access through these unique scholarship programs, Tennessee is also placing a premium on graduation rates. State appropriations are allocated to each institution

of higher education based on a comprehensive outcomes-based funding formula model which is in direct alignment with the state's attainment goals. Although it is a very sophisticated formula with varying weights placed on a number of variables, the objective is to financially reward colleges and universities that produce the most graduates. The outcomes-based formula has a number of critics who view the state of Tennessee having implemented a funding formula which Carnicom (2013) has described as:

> [creating] a zero sum game, with institutions directly competing against each other for a limited pool of funds. This policy creates a vicious cycle; institutions that admirably provide access to a wide variety of students are penalized if at-risk students do not progress and graduate. (p. 37)

Despite these concerns, graduation rates have increased since the formula's implementation. The Tennessee Board of Regents reported a 13.6% three-year graduation rate in 2010, and the 2015 cohort's rate increased to 25.4% (Siner, 2019).

The Tennessee Board of Regents (n.d.a) has outlined four key priorities for its strategic plan period of 2015-2025. The key priorities are access, student success, quality, and resourcefulness and efficiency. The plan indicators aim to increase credentials by increasing headcount, retention, progression, and graduation rates. Proponents of honors education argue this narrow focus on completion undermines the intent of honors education. "The honors community speaks of learning while politicians and pundits speak of earning – either diplomas or high salaries" (Carnicom, 2013, p. 37). However, with the increased call for accountability in higher education, many see these processes as a permanent fixture in higher education's landscape. "Accountability measures are virtually unavoidable" (Honeycutt, 2017, p. 35). As the budgetary pressures continue to rise, honors administrators need to be equipped to demonstrate

the impact their programs have on the completion rates (Savage, 2019). Particular attention needs to be paid to community colleges as current literature has significant gaps regarding honors participation and outcomes at two-year institutions.

Overview of Honors Nationally

According to Scott and Smith (2016), national data on the number and composition of honors programs throughout the United States is sparse. Beyond what is available through the NCHC membership list and surveys, most of the data that do exist are anecdotal or have been collected through convenience sampling. Scott and Smith examined all not-for-profit institutions listed in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to compile a comprehensive, national list of honors education. Of the 2,550 institutions in their sample, they found nearly 60% offered honors education—12% were classified as "honors colleges" and 88% were classified as "honors programs" according to language on the institutions' websites (Scott & Smith, 2016).

A further examination of Scott and Smith's (2016) study of honors education reveals that only 42% of associates-level colleges offer honors education. Among those that do, 97% are classified as honors programs. Among master's- and doctoral- level institutions, nearly 80% offer honors education. Out of all institutional types, doctoral universities are the most likely to have honors colleges (33%).

Table 1

Honors Membership by Honors Type and Institutional Classification

Institutions with Honors Presence	NCHC Members	Non-Members	Total (n=1503)
Honors Programs			
Associates	171	207	378
Four-Year Subtotal	551	392	943
Baccalaureate	138	191	329
Masters	279	161	440
Doctoral	134	40	174
Honors Program Total	722	599	1321
Honors Colleges			
Associates	6	5	11
Four-Year Subtotal	132	39	171
Baccalaureate	13	6	19
Masters	49	17	66
Doctoral	70	16	86
Honors College Total	138	44	182
Honors Programs/Colleges			
Associates	177	212	389
Four-Year Subtotal	683	431	1114
Baccalaureate	151	197	348
Masters	328	178	506
Doctoral	204	56	260
Total Honors Presence	860	643	1503

(Scott & Smith, 2016, p. 85)

Despite the expansive nature of honors education, empirical research surrounding honors is limited. Rinn and Plucker (2019) conducted a systematic literature review and grouped existing research into two themes: academically talented undergraduates or programming for

gifted college students. Their review included 52 studies from 2012 to 2017. Rinn and Plucker excluded "the handful of articles that were concerned with community college honors programs […] because of the lack of parallel between 2- and 4-year honors programs" (p. 190). Nevertheless, their review is a comprehensive compilation of empirical studies of honors education within the past decade. It provides a framework for exploring outcomes associated with honors education and characteristics associated with honors students.

Under the theme of academically talented undergraduates, the 35 empirical studies Rinn and Plucker (2019) examined identified the following characteristics of high-ability students: perfectionism; self-perceptions; motivation; psychosocial factors related to enrollment, retention, and graduation rates; and psychosocial factors related to excellence gaps. Under the theme of programming for gifted college students, the 17 studies largely focused on the effects of honors programming on student outcomes including: effects on academic outcomes (GPA); effects on retention and graduation rates; effects on cognitive/intellectual outcomes; and effects on social and emotional outcomes.

Characteristics of Honors Programs and Colleges

While honors offerings have increased dramatically over the past century, there is not a uniformity in standards that constitute honors programs and colleges. As stated by NCHC (2017):

> Although no single or definitive honors program model can or should be superimposed on all types of institutions, the National Collegiate Honors Council has identified a number of best practices that are common to successful and fully developed honors programs [and colleges]. (n.p.)

To address the concern of the lack of consistency for evaluating honors, Smith (2015) created an instrument for honors program reviews to provide a quantifiable measure to evaluate honors programs and colleges. Smith's study led to the creation of a 93-item instrument to be used as an evaluative measure in program reviews. The items were developed after conducting a comprehensive literature review and incorporated NCHC's compilation of best practices and fundamental characteristics of fully developed honors programs and colleges.

There are some notable differences between honors programs and honors colleges. Scott and Smith (2016) distinguish some of the most salient characteristics between the two by detailing the survey results from member institutions with the following information:

> Honors colleges compared to honors programs are more likely to have a full-time administrator with a twelve-month appointment who has served longer in the position; dedicated staff carrying out a variety of functions; dedicated faculty teaching honors courses, and more of those faculty; honors housing, living/learning programming and scholarships; a strategic plan, an annual report, an assessment plan, external reviews, and university-based financial audits; and academic space for honors on campus. Institutions are also more likely to expect colleges to conduct alumni affairs, raise funds, and form advisory councils for advancement. Comparing curriculum delivery, colleges are more likely to have departmental honors courses, a service requirement, internships for honors students, and honors courses with an online component. (p. 75)

According to Scott and Smith, less than half of community colleges offer honors education. Among two-year institutions that do offer honors, they are almost exclusively programs rather than colleges. Given the differences between the two types of honors offerings, community

colleges are less likely to have financial support, dedicated faculty and staff, and physical space than four-year institutions.

Faculty Participation in Honors

Most of the research on honors education focuses on student outcomes and student characteristics with relatively little information available on the role of faculty. Miller et al. (2020) examined responses from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement to compare engagement practices among faculty who teach in honors and those who do not. Their study included over 1,400 faculty responses from 15 institutions. Findings from this study indicated that faculty who teach in honors are significantly more likely to promote student engagement as it relates to student-faculty interaction, learning strategies, and collaborative learning (Miller et al., 2020, p. 11). "However, teaching an honors course did not have a statistically significant impact on higher-order learning, reflective and integrative learning, quantitative reasoning, discussions with diverse others, effective teaching practices, quality of interactions or supportive environment scores" (Miller et al., 2020, p. 11). None of the institutions included in their study were community colleges, so insights into faculty at two-year institutions remains limited.

To provide a more comprehensive understanding of who comprises the two-year honors arena, Kisker and Outcolt (2005) administered a survey to community college faculty. The purpose of their study was to examine remedial and honors education at community colleges to discern if there were any notable trends related to who teaches within these dichotomous spaces. Respondents were 1,531 faculty from 114 community colleges. Approximately 5% of faculty surveyed reported they taught at least one honors course in the past year and almost 22% reported they taught at least one remedial course but no honors courses within that same timeframe. Kisker and Outcolt suggested racial differences existed within who teaches remedial

and honors education with African Americans and Native Americans reporting higher instances of teaching remedial education and Asian Americans reporting higher instances of teaching honors. Other significant findings of this study were education levels, years of teaching experience, and scholarly activities of faculty who teach remedial versus those who teach honors. Honors faculty were more likely than their non-honors counterparts to possess a terminal degree, be at a midpoint in their careers, and be engaged in research and publishing.

> Overall, honors instructors seemed more oriented toward four-year institutions, as revealed in their belief that university professors are good sources of teaching advice and their strong views that important ideas in their discipline originate in the university. This orientation toward the university is especially evident in the fact that honors faculty cite pre-baccalaureate transfer and preparation for further formal education as two of the most important functions of the community college. (Kisker & Outcolt, 2005, p. 11)

Conversely, faculty who teach remedial courses were more likely to have had high school teaching experience, view developmental education as an essential responsibility of the community college, and be engaged in more instructional activities and less research activities than their honors counterparts. These findings suggest academically prepared students receive a different educational experience than their remedial counterparts. These findings "might also perpetuate concerns that community college students who are better prepared for college-level work receive a more comprehensive education than those who are under-prepared" (Kisker & Outcolt, 2005, p. 17).

Administrative oversight for honors varies widely across institutional type and honors structure. Among NCHC member institutions, honors colleges are more likely to have a fulltime position charged with overseeing honors than are honors programs (78% versus 22% at four-year

institutions). Only 16% of two-year institutions reported having a fulltime head of honors. (Scott et al., 2017). The same survey found that on average, four-year honors programs have 1.8 full-time staff whereas honors colleges have 7.0 full-time staff. For two-year institutions, the average is 0.9. Notably, honors colleges and programs lack experienced leadership across all institutional classifications and honors designations. Faculty are typically asked to lead honors programs. Over 60% of NCHC member institutions reported honors leadership having some teaching responsibilities in addition to their honors duties. Turnover in honors leadership is staggering. Most honors administrators have served less than three years (Scott & Smith, 2016). This finding is most common at two-year institutions where nearly 55% of honors administrators reported less than 3 years in their positions.

Community College Honors Programs

The 1980s marked a time of great expansion for honors programs across all institutions of higher education. The addition of honors programs at community colleges was initially met with resistance. "The common misconception is that students who choose 2-year schools do so because they are academically deficient or price conscious […] even though community colleges are home to competitive technical and medical programs, academic honors programs, and honor societies" (Lowery, 2016, p. 20). Community colleges, with their open-enrollment missions and access goals of bringing higher education to the masses, did not seem to be a compatible environment to offer selective, elite programs. Engelen-Eigles and Milner (2014) also note community colleges have the erroneous reputation of being the colleges of choice for students who have low academic and career aspirations.

Kane (2001) and Risely (2007) cited numerous obstacles community colleges had to overcome to offer honors curricula. One of the pervasive struggles facing community college

honors programs is the presumption by administrators that honors education is elitist and runs counter to the open-access mission of community colleges. Engelen-Eigles and Milner (2014) claimed there is a congruence between the role of honors education and community colleges' missions. The inherent nature of exclusivity and elitism of honors programs was among the primary barrier to justifying the place for honors education at two-year institutions (Kane, 2001; Risely 2007). Conversely, proponents of honors education contend honors programs did not exclude participants but rather created opportunities that fulfilled the mission of the community college to serve all students. "[T]here was a great disparity in the attention, services, and resources allotted to the remedial student, over the 'able and motivated' student", and honors programs filled the gap (Kane, 2001, p. 33). To serve only the needs of those who were academically underprepared grossly ignored the needs of those who were high achieving.

Rinn (2006) added to the support by comparing honors programming with collegiate athletics. "Like the athlete who receives the best possible training, the academically talented student is now receiving a stronger educational experience through honors programs and honors colleges than he or she would in a college or university at large" (Rinn, 2006, p. 77). While not exclusively referencing community college honors program, Rinn's argument endorses meeting the intellectual needs of high-achieving students at two-year institutions.

Elitist or Access for High Achievers

Hoxby and Avery (2013) asserted that socioeconomic status, not ability or merit, is the primary determinant of whether a student will pursue higher education and ultimately where they will attend college. Honors programs at community colleges offer curricular and co-curricular opportunities that are typically reserved for students enrolled in private, selective institutions. Treat and Barnard (2012) stated:

> Districts that can use honors colleges to attract diversity in terms of underrepresented groups to their colleges— providing a creative curriculum, excellent instruction, additional resources, mentoring, and community—may fulfill the promise of the traditional community college mission by making the transition from the community college to a selective four-year institution less onerous. (p. 711)

It is important to consider who participates in honors programs at colleges and universities. The role of community colleges in the United States continues to provide access to higher education to the country's citizens. While this egalitarian mission seems to conflict with the selective nature of honors participation, many studies have demonstrated the need to serve high-achieving students at community colleges and the respective benefits of those students participating in honors programs (Brimeyer et al., 2014; Honeycutt, 2017; Korah, 2018).

When high-achieving students enroll in less selective colleges and universities it is frequently referred to as undermatching. "Undermatching is a phenomenon where academically capable students […] choose to attend less selective 4-year colleges, where graduation rates are distressingly low, or 2-year colleges, where degree completion and transfer rates are even lower" (Lowry, 2017, p. 19). Undermatching disproportionately impacts low-income students and marginalized student populations (Lowry, 2017). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2019), Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian/Pacific Islanders attend community colleges at higher per capita rates than their white counterparts. Nearly 60% of community college students receive need-based financial aid indicating most community college students are low-income (AACC, 2019).

Hoxby and Avery (2013) used data obtained from the College Board and ACT to explore the college application behaviors and completion rates of low-income, high-achieving students

compared to their more affluent counterparts. The researchers defined high-ability as students who scored within the top 10% on the SAT or ACT and defined low-income as students whose families earned less than $41,472 per year. Hoxby and Avery (2013) defined "achievement-typical behavior" as students who apply to colleges based on their abilities similar to their high-income peers rather than "income-typical behavior" which is defined as applying to less-selective colleges and universities similar to the behaviors as peers within their income level (p. 1). The researchers found most low-income, high-achieving students exhibited income-typical behavior in their college application decisions. The majority, 53%, did not apply to any selective institutions. Only 8% of low-income, high-ability students applied to colleges similarly to their high-income peers meaning they diversified their applications among peer, safety, and reach schools. "The remaining 39% of low-income, high achievers use application strategies that an expert would probably regard as 'odd' meaning that they apply to one extremely selective institution like Harvard and one non-selective school" (Hoxby & Avery, 20013, p. 27). According to Hoxby and Avery, these patterns indicate low-income, high-ability students likely do not have access to guidance or support when they are applying to college.

Among low-income, high-ability students who do apply and who are accepted to selective institutions, they persist and graduate at similar rates as their more affluent counterparts and often without encountering the steep tuition prices that may initially discourage low-income students from attending selective institutions. "High-achieving, low-income students are considered very desirable by selective colleges, private and public, which are eager to make their student bodies socioeconomically diverse without enrolling students who are unprepared for their demanding curricula" (Hoxby & Avery, 2013, p. 5). To that end, many selective colleges

and universities offer generous financial aid packages that significantly reduce or eliminate a low-income student's out-of-pocket expenses.

Lowry (2017) interviewed 19 African American students at an urban community college who met criteria to enroll at more selective institutions. Lowry's study identified two emergent themes as it relates to undermatching of African American students. First, the students had a mindset that they were determined to attend college and saw community college as their only choice after graduating from high school. Second, these students identified family influences as their primary consideration in college choice. Many of the participants stated that their family members encouraged them to attend community college either due to their own experiences at a community college or for financial reasons.

Lowry's (2017) findings support the belief that community colleges have become a mechanism for racial stratification within higher education. Even when controlling for college-readiness, race is correlated with who attends college and who graduates from college. Carnevale & Strohl (2013) revealed that 30% of African American and Hispanic students with a 3.5 or higher high school GPA enroll at a community college compared to 22% of white students who have similar GPAs. Not only are there racial inequities in college enrollment patterns but also in degree-attainment rates. Fifty-seven percent of African American and Hispanic students who score a 1200 on the SAT graduate with an associates or bachelor's degree. For white students, the comparable graduation rate is 77% (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Engelen-Eigles and Milner (2014) posited:

> To disrupt educational stratification and see all students as having potential, [an honors] program must do more than just accept those who already have a track record of academic success; rather, it must include intentional recruitment, mentoring, and

> coordination with initiatives throughout the college that address achievement gaps and meet the needs of underrepresented students. (p. 97-98)

Because students of color or more likely to enroll in a community college than their white peers, community college honors programs can provide a pathway for equity in higher education.

Overview of Community College Survey of Student Engagement

Research has repeatedly shown a positive correlation with student engagement and student learning, retention, and graduation rates. The more involved students are with their faculty, their peers, and the courses they are studying, the more likely they are to persist and graduate (Astin, 1999; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is "specifically designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived good educational practices and what they gain from their college experience" (CCSSE, n.d., n.p.).

Designed by researchers at the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, the survey has been a tool for community college administrators for nearly two decades. Adapted from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that is administered at four-year colleges and universities, the CCSSE is specifically designed for community college student populations. The CCSSE is generally administered in the spring semester to determine experiences of returning students. It is an in-class, paper survey. Courses where the survey will be administered are randomly selected, and sample sizes are based on institutional size. Typically, surveys are administered to between 600 and 1,200 students at participating community colleges. Institutions may elect to oversample their student populations to gain insights about the experiences of specific subpopulations of students (CCSSE, n.d.).

Benchmark Scores

The CCSSE (n.d.) includes questions related to a student's experiences on campus, time spent with academic coursework, and interaction with faculty and peers. These questions and corresponding responses are then organized into benchmark areas. CCSSE benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that focus on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement—and that are positively related to student learning and persistence. The five benchmarks of effective educational practice in community colleges are Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Effort, Academic Challenge, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners (CCSSE, n.d.).

Active and Collaborative Learning Benchmark Score

The Active and Collaborative benchmark score measures the extent in which students participate in class, interact with other students, and extend learning outside of the classroom (McClenney et al., 2007).

Student Effort Benchmark Score

The Student Effort benchmark score measures the extent students spend on-task and preparing for their courses. Additionally, it includes how often students utilize supportive services. The Student Effort benchmark score has consistently been correlated with retention and is the strongest predictor of GPA (McClenney et al., 2007).

Academic Challenge Benchmark Score

The Academic Challenge benchmark score measures the extent students spend engaged with analysis and synthesis with complex materials as well as the rigor of their academic work (McClenney et al., 2007).

Student-Faculty Interaction Benchmark Score

The Student-Faculty Benchmark Score measures the extent students are communicating with their faculty about their academic and career plans as well as their performance and tasks within a given course (McClenney et al., 2007).

Support for Learners Benchmark Score

The Support for Learners Benchmark Score measures students' perceptions about academic advising, counseling, and other supportive services on campus (McClenney et al., 2007).

Academic Mindset

Academic mindset is a framework for understanding a student's self-perceptions about their academic abilities and intelligence. Students with a productive academic mindset believe their abilities are malleable and respond better to academic setbacks than students who have a non-productive mindset (Farrington et al., 2012). According to Farrington et al., individuals with a productive mindset feel like they belong within the academic community, believe that they can improve their performance with practice and additional effort, believe they can be successful, and see the relevance of their coursework to their larger goals. Conversely, non-productive mindset individuals are oriented to believe their abilities are static. They will withdraw when faced with challenges because a struggle reinforces their belief systems that they "are not good at" a particular subject. They frequently do not see the value in coursework as it relates to their goals (Farrington et al., 2012).

The 2018 CCSSE survey included 20 special-focus items related to academic mindset. The items addressed four components of academic mindset: growth vs. fixed mindset, self-efficacy, relevance of academic experience, and sense of belonging. The results of the survey

demonstrated that having a productive mindset resulted in increased engagement across all CCSSE benchmark areas and higher GPAs (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2019).

NSSE, CCSSE, and Honors Education

In an effort to empirically understand the value of honors education, the Research Committee of NCHC has recently created partnerships with its member institutions and the NSSE and CCSSE surveys (Herron & Freeman, 2019). Additionally, there are a few studies that currently use NSSE and CCSSE data to explore engagement measures among honors students. Smeaton and Walsh (2019) explored NSSE data to determine if honors students were more likely to be involved in high-impact practices (HIPs) than their non-honors counterparts. Their study compared the responses of 19 first-year honors students and 102 comparable non-honors students at a public, liberal arts college between 2014 and 2016. The findings revealed that honors students are statistically more likely to participate in the HIPs than their non-honors counterparts. Seventy-three percent of honors students reported participating in one or more HIPs compared to 37% of the non-honors students. The largest concentration for honors HIPs participation was involvement in learning communities. Forty-eight percent of the honors respondents reported currently or planning to participate in a learning community compared to 32% of the non-honors students surveyed.

As part of a wider study on student motivation, engagement, and learning, Buckner et al. (2016) explored responses from the NSSE to determine if there were significant differences in engagement levels between honors and comparable non-honors students. Their targeted sample of honors and non-honors students included a total of 42 students who were administered the NSSE at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. "Although not statistically significant,

honors students reported higher levels for academic challenge, enriching environment, and supportive campus" (Buckner et al., 2016, p. 205). The researchers concluded that a larger sample size would be necessary for further studies.

Unlike the NSSE, the CCSSE has an item related to participation in honors. The survey contains an item for students to indicate if they are currently taking or have ever taken an honors course at their current community college. This allows responses from students who self-report as being honors students to be compared to their non-honors counterparts. One weakness of this question is that it does not differentiate between students who are actively participating in honors versus those who have discontinued their participation. "[L]argescale undergraduate student surveys […] would do well to refine such questions to allow for greater precision in identifying students who are actively participating in honors" (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019, p.150). Despite this shortcoming, this item does allow the reasonable ability to explore engagement differences between honors and non-honors students.

Ross and Roman (2009) used responses from the CCSSE and found significant differences in engagement levels of honors students compared with non-honors students at the same institution. The researchers compared mean scores item by item rather than benchmark scores, and the results indicated honors students are more academically, intellectually, and socially engaged when compared to non-honors students. Honors students reported higher levels of engagement on 29 out of the 34 questions. Alternatively, five items indicated a decrease in engagement among honors students. Honors students were less likely to use e-mail to talk with instructors, solve numerical problems, discuss grades or assignments with instructors, clarify career goals, or talk about career plans with an instructor.

Korah (2018) used a random sample of archival data from the 2014 CCSSE cohort to examine engagement levels of honors students and non-honors students. The sample population included 108,509 students of which approximately 7,000 reported having taken an honors course at their respective community college. Korah found statistically significant differences and higher engagement across all benchmark scores for honors students.

Characteristics of Honors Students

Historically, honors programs have established several admission criteria for program participants, and these requirements vary from institution to institution. The overwhelming majority of honors programs establish a minimum GPA or minimum ACT or SAT score used for evaluation for admission (Smith, 2019). Researchers have suggested that GPA has the greatest predictability of whether a student will persist in honors (Savage et al., 2014). However, just because students meet or exceed the minimum eligibility requirements does not mean they will choose to participate in honors education. According to Furtwengler (2015) most honors-eligible students never enroll in an honors program. Additionally, there is growing pressure to abandon these traditional metrics of qualifying students for honors in favor of more holistic admission criteria (Herron & Freeman, 2019; Medows et al., 2019; Patton et al., 2019). Doing so provides an opportunity to create more equity within honors by eliminating barriers that have been biased against underrepresented minorities such as standardized test scores (Diaz et al., 2019).

Available literature primarily focuses on observable characteristics such as incoming GPA, placement scores on standardized tests, gender, race, ethnicity, and income levels to compare students who participate in honors to those who are honors-eligible but do not participate in honors (Rinn & Plucker, 2019). There are several factors that could influence a student's decision to participate in honors. Students must first have knowledge the programs

exist, and then they must possess the belief and desire to participate, but very few of these influences have been empirically explored.

Psychosocial Factors Related to Enrollment, Retention, and Graduation Rates

Kampfe et al. (2016) explored reasons why students enroll in an honors program and why those students stay in an honors program. Additionally, Kampfe et al. sought to determine whether students became more or less engaged with the honors program as they progressed from freshmen to upperclassmen. Of the 62 honors students who completed their survey, respondents identified having a competitive edge and prestige as being the primary motivators influencing their decision to initially participate in honors. Responses for why students remained in the honors program revealed priority registration and prestige to be the predominate reasons for continued participation. Kampfe et al. also discovered freshman and sophomores were more likely to remain in the honors program due to positive relationships with peers and faculty and specialized advising and programming. These influences became less persuasive during the junior and senior years likely because upperclassmen were more involved with their majors and other campus organizations. Kampfe et al.'s findings may offer support to Campbell and Fuqua's (2008) findings regarding why the majority of students who begin in honors do not graduate with honors. Students are less likely to continue their participation in honors due to competing interests, roles, and responsibilities. Additionally, priority registration may have a depreciating value as students advance in class standing. Upperclassman gain access to earlier registration based on earned hours regardless of honors standing.

Brown et al. (2019) examined the value added of honors programs as it relates to recruitment, retention, and graduation at the University of Mississippi. To address the reality of greater accountability and growing fiscal pressures, the researchers examined the influence the

honors program had on a student's decision to attend the university as well as the impact honors had on their decision to remain at the university and ultimately graduate. To determine to what extent admission to the honors college influenced a student's decision to attend the university, Brown et al. surveyed 1,091 students who had enrolled at the University of Mississippi's honors college between 2012-2015 and had a response rate of nearly 48%. They then used the university's student data system to match survey responses to student records to examine other characteristics related to the respondent's enrollment. Findings suggest the perceived prestige of the honors program significantly impacts a student's decision to attend the university, particularly for high-achieving, out-of-state students. Additionally, the researchers found evidence demonstrating honors participants were retained and graduated at higher rates than their similarly matched peers. Brown et al. conclude:

> Taken together, then, we see the potential value added of honors education in terms of not just the opportunities for intellectual and personal growth, but also as an additional resource for university administrators as they wrestle with the increasingly complex financial realities of higher education. (181)

Particularly for institutions with outcomes-based funding models, investing in honors has the potential to be a strategic move for achieving greater funding metrics and as a result generating a return on investment.

Psychosocial Factors Related to the Excellence Gap

Cuevas et al. (2017) examined academic, psychological, and social factors that contributed to students' well-being and engagement on campus. Findings from this study suggest honors students are less socially connected than their non-honors peers. However, honors

students reported a stronger psychological sense of community (PSC) than their peers. As Cuevas et al. (2017) described:

> Honors students […] reported levels of PSC that were significantly greater than what their peers reported with nearly 81% reporting that they felt proud of their institution, almost 78% reporting that they felt they belonged, nearly 69% agreeing that being a student at their institution filled an important need in their lives, and almost 60% reporting a strong sense of community on their campus. (p. 99)

The researchers elaborate on these findings and suggested honors students who do not have a strong PSC are at a greater risk for leaving the institution. Cuevas et al. (2017) found institutional choice and selectivity also contribute to a student's PSC with students attending their top-choice institution reporting higher PSC levels than students who were attending less-desired institutions.

Similarly, Walton and Cohen (2011) investigated the impact of social belonging on student outcomes over a three-year period. The researchers were particularly interested in whether students who belonged to marginalized groups were more impacted by the social belonging interventions than their non-marginalized peers. The students in the treatment and control groups were college freshmen in their second semester at a selective university. The students in the treatment group were randomly selected and participated in a short workshop of fabricated survey results from upperclassmen. The students discussed the "findings" of this survey to reveal that upperclassmen had reported initial feelings of isolation and homesickness, but these feelings subsided over time as they made friends and moved closer to graduation. The students in the treatment group were then asked to reflect on their own experiences at the university and relate them to the survey findings. The students in the control group were also

given spurious survey results to reflect upon, but the survey findings they were asked to reflect on were related to political attitudes rather than sense of belonging.

The results of the Walton and Cohen (2011) experiment revealed that high-ability African American students in the treatment group showed statistically significant gains related to GPAs when compared to their counterparts.

> [T]he intervention tripled the percentage of African Americans earning postintervention GPAs in the top 25% of their class, as measured by both residual and raw post-intervention GPA, and tended to reduce the percentage of African Americans performing in the bottom 25% of their class on both indices. (Walton & Cohen, 2011, p. 1449)

These findings suggested a strong sense of belonging is tied to academic achievement as it relates to GPA for honors students.

Self-Efficacy Measures Related to Honors Participation

Findings from Multon et al. (1991) found that as many as 14% of a student's academic performance and 12% of a student's persistence is based upon self-efficacy measures rather than ability alone. Additionally, Nichols et al. (2016) found honors participants were more likely than nonparticipants and partial completers to have a favorable attitude towards honors and perceived behavioral control to perform well in honors. These non-observable characteristics may play an important role in who participates in honors, but very little research exists on these topics.

Gender Differences

Nationally, males are less likely to enroll in college, and those who do enroll are less likely to graduate than their female counterparts (NCES, 2020). There are several studies which explore variances in the rates of participation and completion in honors based on gender. Moon (2012) found that qualified students who typically opt out of honors are male, underrepresented

minorities, and first-generation students. Campbell and Fuqua's (2008) study revealed female students were more likely to participate in honors at higher rates as well as complete honors requirements.

These gender differences found in Moon's (2012) and Campbell and Fuqua's (2008) studies are an important consideration. Additionally, gender differences appear to go beyond just rates of participation and graduation. Shushok (2006) highlighted significant gender differences existed when comparing engagement levels of male honors and non-honors students. Male honors students were found to be more engaged with faculty and peers than their non-honors counterparts. Additionally, male honors students reported higher levels of satisfaction in their overall collegiate experience than their non-honors peers. Females, regardless of honors participation, reported similar levels of engagement and satisfaction (Shushok, 2006).

Campbell and Fuqua (2008), Moon (2012), and Shushok's (2006) findings demonstrate gender differences in outcomes for honors students with males benefiting significantly from honors to a greater extent than their female counterparts. However, males are less likely to participate in honors. This disparity may need further research to explore the impacts of honors across gender lines more thoroughly. Perhaps recruitment strategies need to focus more explicitly on males as they seem to report higher gains from participating in honors and less tendency to enroll in honors programs. Additionally, honors program requirements may need to be adjusted to ensure gender differences are not compounded by male-dominated or female-dominated majors as suggested by Savage et al. (2014).

Savage et al.'s (2014) found gender differences in completion rates likely associated with major. In their study, females were only slightly more likely to complete honors requirements than males; the differences observed between male and female completion rates in the Savage et

al. (2014) were not as profound as what Campbell and Fuqua (2008), Moon (2012), and Shushok's (2006) found in their studies. The researchers noted business majors were more likely than nursing, education, and arts & sciences majors to complete honors requirements. Additionally, business majors were more likely to be male than nursing and education majors. Due to program requirements such as clinical rotations and student teaching, the researchers cautioned the role gender appeared to play in their study citing the data were likely skewed based on factors related to chosen major (Savage et al., 2014).

Similar to the Savage et al. (2014) research, Good et al. (2008) conducted a study at a large, research university with undergraduate students in an advanced, male-dominated mathematics course. The researchers provided students in the control group and the treatment group the same calculus exam, but the students in the treatment group were told the exam had been validated to show no gender-bias. That is, males and females were expected to perform equally on the exam. The results of the study were the female students in the treatment group outperformed their female counterparts in the control group and their male counterparts in both the control and treatment groups on the exam. Good et al.'s findings "expand our knowledge of populations that are vulnerable to stereotype threat effects: even women enrolled in the most advanced math courses that prepare students for careers in mathematics and science can experience underperformance due to stereotype threat" (2008, p. 26). The Savage et al. and Good et al. studies empirically showed that gender can influence academic outcomes.

Other studies have revealed individuals within a group can develop an adaptation to stereotype threat. Pronin et al. (2004) explored perseverance when confronted with stereotype threat. The researchers found women who had taken numerous advanced math courses were more likely to disassociate with feminine traits that were negatively associated with success in

math such as being flirtatious or wanting children. However, these same women were not likely to disassociate with feminine traits that were seen as compatible or neutral with success in math such as being nurturing or empathetic. “This adaptation involves a type of selective disidentification [called] *bifurcation* of identity” (Pronin et al., 2004, p. 164). As it relates to honors, identity bifurcation may play a role in why some eligible students do not enroll honors.

Effects of Honors Programs on Student Outcomes

There is no singular definition of success, particularly within an academic setting. Conventionally, attempts to measure academic success are made with conveniently accessible information such as standardized test scores, GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates. While these measures provide quantifiable insight into students’ academic achievements, they are arguably inadequate at assessing qualities that translate to success outside the classroom. Meadows et al. (2019) stated the following:

> [T]hese measures can provide insight into performance in a particular setting, commonly a didactic instructional environment, [but] they do not account for the variety of experiences that mold and shape an individual’s capacity for success. In fact, some educators might argue that these limited measures ignore some of the most important aspects of potential for success, such as, for example, resilience. [Moreover], we posit that college GPA remains a limited measure of a certain type of success and that this measure is not necessarily predictive of success in postgraduate endeavors. (p. 166-167)

Additionally, Meadows et al. (2019) cite equity concerns related to standardized test measures, noting these exams are biased against underrepresented minorities. By limiting access based on test scores and GPAs, higher education further exacerbates inequality among those who are

already disadvantaged. The researchers used the Learning Partnership Model that revealed that GPA is not the most reliable indicator of learning but was rather an indicator of engagement.

Despite being insufficient, most studies examine student success within the limitations of observable student characteristics such as GPA, retention rates, and graduation rates. This limitation does not preclude research findings. Instead it underscores that these measures are only a subset of student success and may be biased against racial and ethnic minorities. Other measures including cognitive, intellectual, social, and emotional outcomes are also important considerations when examining the benefits of honors and other educational experiences.

Retention and Graduation Rates in Honors

Campbell and Fuqua's (2008) research explored what some within the honors profession refer to as "honors' dirty little secret", referring to the fact that only a small fraction of students who begin in honors complete the honors requirements. In their longitudinal study conducted over five years at a large, Midwestern university, Campbell and Fuqua (2008) found only 18% of the 336 freshmen who began in honors completed the honors requirements in order to graduate with honors distinction. When these completers were compared with the partial and non-completers, variables such as high school GPA, class rank, first-semester college GPA, gender, and housing assignment all influenced whether or not an honors student was predicted to complete the honors requirements. Those who enter honors with higher GPAs and associated class rank are more likely to complete. Similarly those who live on-campus within an honors living-learning community are also more likely to complete (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008).

There is a moderate body of literature that exists that reports improved outcomes for honors students. Cosgrove's (2004) findings were consistent with these long-established improved outcomes for honors participants. In addition to comparing honors completers and

honors-eligible nonparticipants, Cosgrove also included partial completers. While the honors completers had higher outcomes, the partial completers did not have any significant gains from their exposure to honors.

Shushok (2006) found retention rates among freshmen returning for their second year at four-year universities were significantly improved for honors participants when compared with similarly matched nonparticipants. However, by year four, the gains associated with retention rates among honors students had virtually disappeared. This finding is likely attributable to students being further invested in their degrees and less likely to dropout, but it is notable, nevertheless. Keeping students retained within an honors program could help overall retention rates. However, the vast majority of honors-eligible students never enroll either for lack of interest or lack of knowledge of the opportunities (Furtwengler, 2015). Among those who enroll, most never complete the requirements (Cosgrove, 2004).

Completing the honors requirements is not the only point of consideration when examining completion rates. Perhaps more important are the overall graduation rates of program participants. A number of studies have demonstrated higher graduation rates among honors program completers (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Cosgrove, 2004; Keller & Lacy, 2013; Mellow, 2015; Savage et al., 2014; Shushok, 2006). Additionally Honeycutt (2017) provided similar results for honors students at a Tennessee community college. In addition to honors participants having significantly higher graduation rates, Honeycutt found other variables positively associated with degree attainment among program participants including higher grades in a first-year writing course and higher cumulative GPAs after the first semester and at graduation. There were no significant differences in fall-to-fall retention rates or number of semesters to graduation.

Transfer Success

Phillips (2004) examined to what extent participation in community college honors programs lessened the impacts of transfer shock among 77 community college transfers to Sam Houston State University (SHSU). The sample included 37 students who had participated in an honors program at their respective community college prior to transferring and an additional 40 transfer students who had not participated in honors prior to transferring. Both groups of students had an average GPA of 3.6 prior to transferring. Phillips found both groups of students experienced a drop in GPA during the first semester. However, findings from this study demonstrated that the transfer students who had participated in honors had a statistically significant higher GPA after the first semester at SHSU when compared to the non-honors transfer students. The transfer honors students achieved a 3.52 GPA while the non-honors transfers obtained a 3.22 GPA after the first semester. Phillips (2004) concluded that participation in community college honors programs lessened transfer shock.

Cognitive and Intellectual Outcomes

Differences between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants exist beyond many of the observable characteristics typically studied. Carnicom and Clump (2004) studied cognitive differences between these two populations of students. The researchers administered the Inventory of Learning Processes (ILP) to Marymount University students. They found honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants scored differently on the “Deep Processing” scale of the ILP instrument. Carnicom and Clump (2004) asserted honors students learn differently their non-honors counterparts.

Theoretical Framework

Research in honors requires focusing on student outcomes, and it also necessitates attempting to control for the inherent, differentiated inputs that exist between the general student body and those who are eligible to participate in honors. As Bottoms and McCloud (2019) asserted, simple comparisons are not enough. It is important for honors research to use appropriate analyses to help isolate the effect honors has on student learning and engagement. Research has repeatedly shown a positive correlation with student engagement and student learning, retention, and graduation rates. The more involved students are with their faculty, their peers, and the courses they are studying, the more likely they are to persist and graduate (Astin, 1999; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). The following theoretical frameworks will help guide the research questions in this study.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Astin's (1999) involvement theory postulates the more time and energy students dedicate to their academic purists the more likely they are to achieve their goals. This theory explicitly states that time is finite resource, and faculty, staff, and administrators must be mindful of the responsibilities and interests that are competing for a student's time. Community colleges are at an inherent disadvantage for promoting student involvement because of the transient characteristics of the students and faculty. Community college students are more likely to be commuters, and faculty are more likely to be part-time. The deficit of time students and faculty spend on campus between two-year and four-year institutions contribute to less opportunities for involvement. In regard to honors programs, Astin (1999) stated:

> Students who participate in honors programs gain substantially in interpersonal self-esteem, intellectual self-esteem, and artistic interests. They are more likely than other

> students to persist in college and to aspire to graduate and professional degrees. Honors participation is positively related to student satisfaction in three areas—quality of the science program, closeness to faculty, and quality of instruction-and negatively related to satisfaction with friendships and with the institution's academic reputation. These findings suggest that honors participation enhances faculty-student relationships but may isolate students from their peers. (p. 525)

The advantage of this simple yet comprehensive approach to student involvement is that it focuses attention on how the institutional characteristics and constructs either support or detract from opportunities for students to spend time involved with their campus, academics, faculty, and peers. As was mentioned with honors programs, increasing involvement in some areas (student-faculty interaction) may diminish involvement in other areas (student-peer interaction).

Chickering and Gamson's Principles of Good Practice

Chickering and Gamson (1987) identified the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. These practices are intended to provide not only faculty and administrators with guidelines to use to improve teaching and learning but also emphasize the responsibility of students to contribute to improving practice. Additionally, legislative entities share in the responsibility by "encouraging sound planning, setting priorities, mandating standards, and reviewing and approving programs" (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). These sound educational practices are grounded in research and include:

1. Encouraging contact between students and faculty
2. Developing reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. Using active learning techniques
4. Providing prompt feedback

5. Emphasizing time on task
6. Communicating high expectations
7. Respecting diverse talents and ways of learning (p. 5)

The seven practices are useful in providing a framework for all teaching and learning on college campuses both inside and outside the classroom. Fundamental to this theoretical framework is that collaboration is not only required of students but also for faculty, staff, and administrators to achieve the goals of undergraduate education.

Summary

Most research in honors education has historically examined students and programs at four-year institutions. Despite tremendous growth over the past two decades, community college honors programs have not been extensively examined. Among the research that currently exists on the topic of honors education, honors participation is positively correlated with improved academic and engagement outcomes. Characteristics of honors programs are closely aligned with environmental factors identified in Astin's (1999) Student Involvement Theory and mirror many of the elements of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) Principles of Good Practice. Both theories emphasize student engagement as a mechanism for improving outcomes.

Chapter 3. Research Method

There is strong evidence illustrating higher completion rates for students who participate in honors. Even when rigorous methodologies are employed such as propensity score analyses, logit regression analyses, and probit regression analyses, the research demonstrates honors participants graduate at higher rates with higher GPAs and in less time to degree attainment than equally matched non-honors participants (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Cosgrove, 2004; Honeycutt, 2017; Keller & Lacy, 2013; Mellow, 2015; Savage et al., 2014; Shushok, 2006). In the current landscape of accountably, particularly in Tennessee, this evidence could translate into a financial windfall for colleges and universities that support honors programs.

Honors administrators need to be equipped to justify the impact their programs have on the completion rates, not simply demonstrating the outputs without fully exploring the inputs. Particular attention needs to be paid to community colleges as the current literature has significant gaps regarding honors participation at two-year institutions. Because of the Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect scholarship programs Tennessee community colleges provide a unique case study for honors education at two-year institutions. With more high-achieving students choosing to start their college careers at community colleges, honors education within the state has seen tremendous growth. Additionally, the Tennessee Board of Regents has endorsed honors education as a high-impact practice that will further expand honors programming at two-year institutions within the state.

In a systematic review of available literature for honors education, Rinn & Plucker (2019) identified 52 empirical studies from 2002-2017. “[Thirty-five studies] fell into the broad theme of characteristics and experiences of high-ability college students and 17 fell into the broad theme of effects of honors programming on student outcomes” (Rinn & Plucker, 2019, p. 205).

Among the 17 studies that explored the effects of honors programming on student outcomes, 14 employed quantitative methodology.

None of the studies included in Rinn and Plucker's review were conducted at community colleges. Given the differences that exist between two-year and four-year institutions and their students, researchers are cautioned not to draw comparisons between these distinct populations (Marti, 2009; Rinn & Plucker, 2006) This gap in the literature demonstrates a growing need for research to examine the effects of honors programming at community colleges.

Ross and Roman (2009) used responses from the CCSSE and found significant differences in engagement levels of honors students compared with non-honors students at the same institution. Korah (2018) used a random sample of archival data from the 2014 CCSSE cohort to examine engagement levels of honors students and non-honors students. Korah found statistically significant differences and higher engagement across all benchmark scores for honors students.

My non-experimental quantitative comparative study was a comparison of outcomes of students who enroll in an honors program at a Tennessee community college versus those who were honors-eligible but did not participate in an honors program. Participants and nonparticipants were closely matched based on ACT and GPA scores. Findings will help determine whether honors programs are associated with gains in various student outcome and engagement measures at the participating community college.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

To compare the outcomes of honors students and non-honors students at a Tennessee community college, the following research questions guided the study.

Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference in the final GPAs between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o1: There is no significant difference in the final GPAs between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference in the final GPAs between female honors participants and female honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o2: There is no significant difference in the final GPAs between female honors participants and female honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference in the final GPAs between male honors participants and male honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o3: There is no significant difference in the final GPAs between male honors participants and male honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

Research Question 4

Is there a significant relationship in the first-term, fall to spring retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o4: There is no significant relationship in the first-term, fall to spring retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

Research Question 5

Is there a significant relationship in the two-term, fall to fall retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o5: There is no significant relationship in the two-term, fall to fall retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

Research Question 6

Is there a significant relationship in two-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o6: There is no significant relationship in two-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

Research Question 7

Is there a significant relationship in three-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o7: There is no significant relationship in three-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

Research Question 8

Is there a significant difference in the five dimensions of student engagement (Active and Collaborative Learning; Student Effort; Academic Challenge; Student-Faculty Interaction; and

Support for Learners) as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college?

H_o8_1: There is no significant difference in the Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark student engagement scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

H_o8_2: There is no significant difference in the Student Effort benchmark student engagement scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

H_o8_3: There is no significant difference in the Academic Challenge benchmark student engagement scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

H_o8_4: There is no significant difference in the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark student engagement scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

H_o8_5: There is no significant difference in the Support for Learners benchmark student engagement scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

Instrumentation

Archival data at the participating institution were used to explore retention rates, GPAs, and graduation rates. Additionally, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) survey data were used to explore student engagement measures. In partnership with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that is administered at four-year institutions, the CCSSE was created in 2001 to specifically explore student engagement at community colleges. The survey was developed by researchers at the University of Texas at Austin and shares many of the same questions as the NSSE (Marti, 2009). The CCSSE has been extensively studied and found to be valid and reliable. "Evaluation of Cronbach's alpha values showed that there was generally strong consistency in the underlying construct being measured within a factor, though some alpha values did not exceed the gold standard of .70." (Marti, 2009, p. 11). Reliability measures demonstrate "a high degree of consistency between first and second survey administrations" among respondents (Marti, 2009, p. 12).

Student engagement data were collected from surveys administered at the participating community college by the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin. A full report summarizing findings was sent to the community college as well as individual survey responses for further exploration. The CCSSE measures student engagement by asking students to report how often they contribute to classroom discussions, communicate with faculty both inside and outside of class, utilize campus support services, and participate in learning communities. Additionally, students were asked to report the intensity of academic challenge they experience, the amount of reading they encounter in their coursework, and perception of student support.

Sample

The sample for this study included 333 honors students at a community college in Tennessee from 2015 through 2019. To participate in honors, students must obtain a 3.5 or higher high school GPA or a 25 or higher composite ACT score. The sample also included a group of 2,970 ACT and high school GPA matched peers who were eligible to participate in honors but who did not participate. Matching by ACT or high school GPA was used to control for variability between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants.

For the CCSSE data, a total of 833 students completed the survey. Ninety-five were honors students and 738 were non-honors students. Courses where the survey was administered were randomly selected by the Center for Community College Student Engagement. In addition to the randomly selected courses, the participating institution oversampled honors course sections to yield a sufficient honors-sample population for comparison. Oversampling the honors sections in addition to the standard, random sample allowed for the institution to obtain sufficient participation among honors students for comparison with their non-honors counterparts.

Data Collection

Archival data were collected between 2015 and 2019 at a mid-size community college in Tennessee. The researcher relied on the college's Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning (IERP) office to identify honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants. Archival data available through the participating community college's IERP office included GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates among honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants. My purpose was to assess whether honors participants had better success measures (retention, graduation rates, and GPAs) than their nonparticipant counterparts.

In addition to the archival data, CCSSE data were analyzed to evaluate student engagement measures. The CCSSE was administered at the participating community college during the spring 2019 semester. The paper surveys were administered in-class, and the survey was not announced to participants prior to administration. Participation in the survey was voluntary and responses were confidential. The survey administrators were responsible for administering, collecting, and returning the surveys. Prior to administering the survey, each administrator read a script of the procedures, instructions, and notice of voluntary participation. Students were required to be 18 years or older in order to complete the survey. At no time did the researcher have access to student identifiable information.

Data Analysis

Either an independent-sample t test or a two-way contingency table using crosstabs, as appropriate, was utilized to evaluate each of the research questions. Independent-samples t tests are used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between two independent groups. Most researchers use a p value of < 0.05 to refer to a statistically significant finding. This translates to a 5% chance of concluding a relationship exists when in reality there is no statistically significant relationship.

Research questions 1, 2, 3, and 8 were analyzed with independent-samples t tests to compare means of honors participants and eligible nonparticipants for the following areas of student success outcomes:

1. Final GPAs between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college;
2. Final GPAs between female honors participants and female honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college;

3. Final GPAs between male honors participants and male honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college; and
4. Student engagement scores (Active and Collaborative Learning; Student Effort; Academic Challenge; Student-Faculty Interaction; and Support for Learners) as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

Independent-samples t tests were used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants as it relates to final GPA. Benchmark scores from the CCSSE were compared between the two independent groups (honors and non-honors) to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the honors and non-honors students as it relates to five dimensions of the survey (Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Effort, Academic Challenge, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners).

Research questions 4, 5, 6, and 7, were analyzed using a two-way contingency table using crosstabs to explore the relationships between the following categorical variables:

1. First-term, fall to spring retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants with similar ACT scores at the participating college;
2. Two-term, fall to fall retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college;
3. Two-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college; and
4. Three-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

Chapter 4. Findings

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, comparative study was to compare academic outcomes (final GPA, retention, and graduation rates) and student engagement benchmark scores of students who enroll in an honors program at a Tennessee community college versus those who were honors-eligible but did not participate in an honors program. This chapter presents the data analyses and findings for each of the research questions.

Archival data were collected between 2015 and 2019 at the participating community college. The researcher relied on the participating college's Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning (IERP) office to identify honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants. Archival data available through the participating community college's IERP office included GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates among honors participants (n = 333) and eligible nonparticipants (n = 2,970). In addition to the archival data, Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data were analyzed to evaluate student engagement benchmark measures. The CCSSE was administered at the participating community college during the spring 2019 semester. A total of 833 students participated in the CCSSE. The survey data include responses from 95 honors students.

Independent-samples t tests were conducted to determine if there was a significant relationship between honors participation and final GPAs as well as student engagement benchmark scores. Additionally, two-way contingency tables analyses were conducted to evaluate if there were significant relationships between honors participation and retention and graduation rates.

Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference in the final GPAs between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o1: There is no significant difference in the final GPAs between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean final GPA of students enrolled in the honors program differed significantly from the mean final GPA of honors-eligible students who did not participate in the honors program at the target community college. Students' final GPA was the test variable, and the grouping variable was honors student (yes or no). The Levene's test for equality of variances was significant ($p < .001$) so equal variances were not assumed. The test was significant, $t(289.66) = 7.31$, $p < .001$. Therefore, H_o1 was rejected. The effect size for this analysis indicated a medium effect size ($d = .58$). Students enrolled in the honors program ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .30$) had significantly higher GPAs than honors-eligible students who were not enrolled in the honors program ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .45$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .16 to .27. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 2. Figure 1 shows the GPA distributions for the two groups.

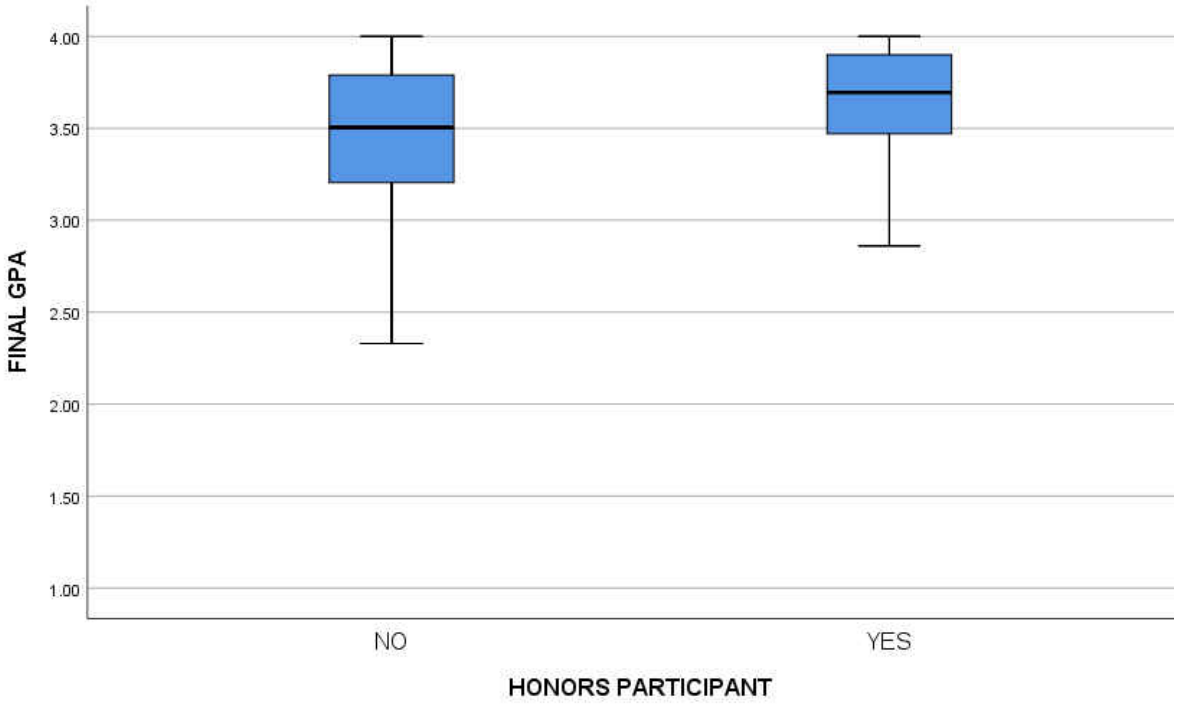
Table 2

GPAs of Honors Participants and Eligible Nonparticipants

Honors	N	Mean	SD	GPA Range
Yes	152	3.66	.30	2.4 – 4.0
No	813	3.44	.45	2.0 – 4.0

Figure 1

GPAs for Honors Participants and Honors-Eligible Nonparticipants



Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference in the final GPAs between female honors participants and female honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o2: There is no significant difference in the final GPAs between female honors participants and female honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean final GPA of female students enrolled in the honors program differed significantly from the mean final GPA of female honors-eligible students who did not participate in the honors program at the target community college. Students' final GPA was the test variable, and the grouping variable was honors student (yes or no). The Levene's test for equality of variances was significant ($p < .001$) so equal variances not assumed. The test was significant, $t(204.33) = -6.20$, $p < .001$. Therefore,

H_o1 was rejected. The effect size for this analysis indicated a medium effect size (d = .58). Female students enrolled in the honors program (*M* = 3.65, *SD* = .27) had significantly higher GPAs than honors-eligible female students who were not enrolled in the honors program (*M* = 3.44, *SD* = .43). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -0.27 to -0.14. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 3. Figure 2 shows the GPA distributions for the two groups.

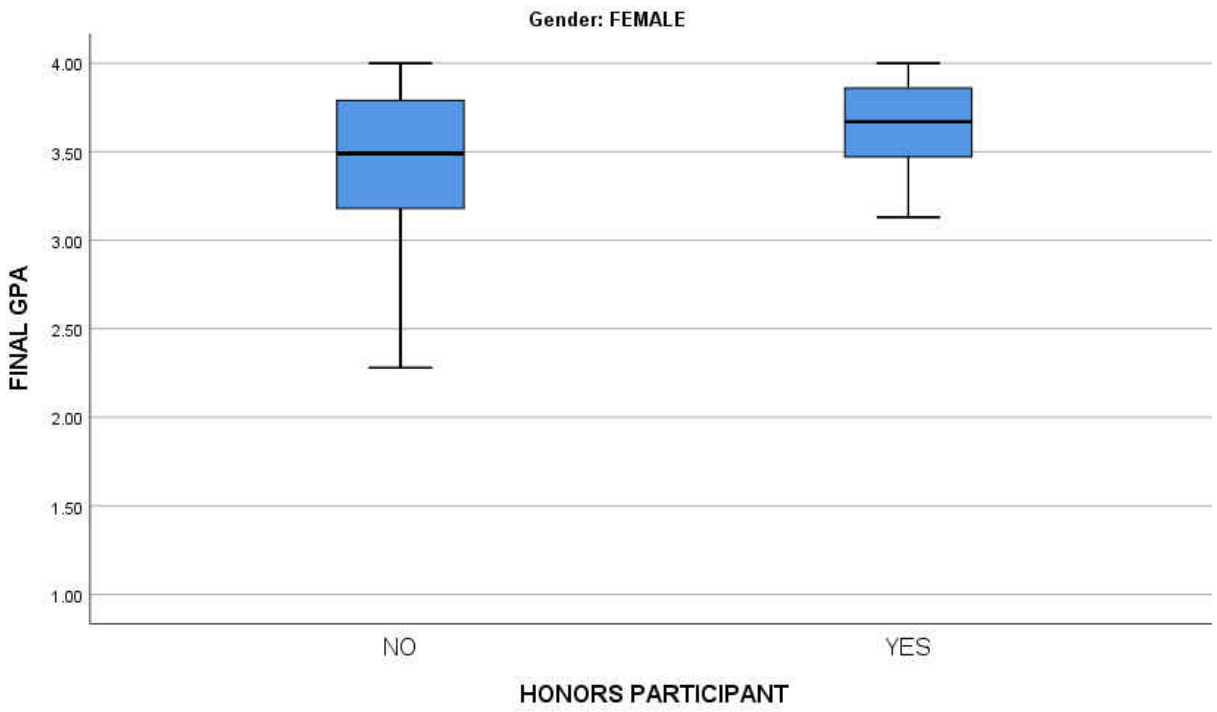
Table 3

GPAs of Female Honors Participants and Eligible Female Nonparticipants

Honors	N	Mean	SD	GPA Range
Yes	101	3.65	.27	2.7 – 4.0
No	556	3.44	.43	2.0 – 4.0

Figure 2

GPAs for Female Honors Participants and Honors-Eligible Female Nonparticipants



Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference in the final GPAs between male honors participants and male honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o2: There is no significant difference in the final GPAs between male honors participants and male honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean final GPA of male students enrolled in the honors program differed significantly from the mean final GPA of male honors-eligible students who did not participate in the honors program at the target community college. Students' final GPA was the test variable, and the group variable was honors student (yes or no). The Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant (p =.13) so equal variances assumed. The test was significant, t(306) = -3.31, *p*=.001. Therefore, H_o1 was

rejected. The effect size for this analysis indicated a medium effect size (d = .54). Male students enrolled in the honors program (*M* = 3.67, *SD* = .36) had significantly higher GPAs than honors-eligible students who were not enrolled in the honors program (*M* = 3.44, *SD* = .48). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -0.37 to -0.94. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 4. Figure 3 shows the GPA distributions for the two groups.

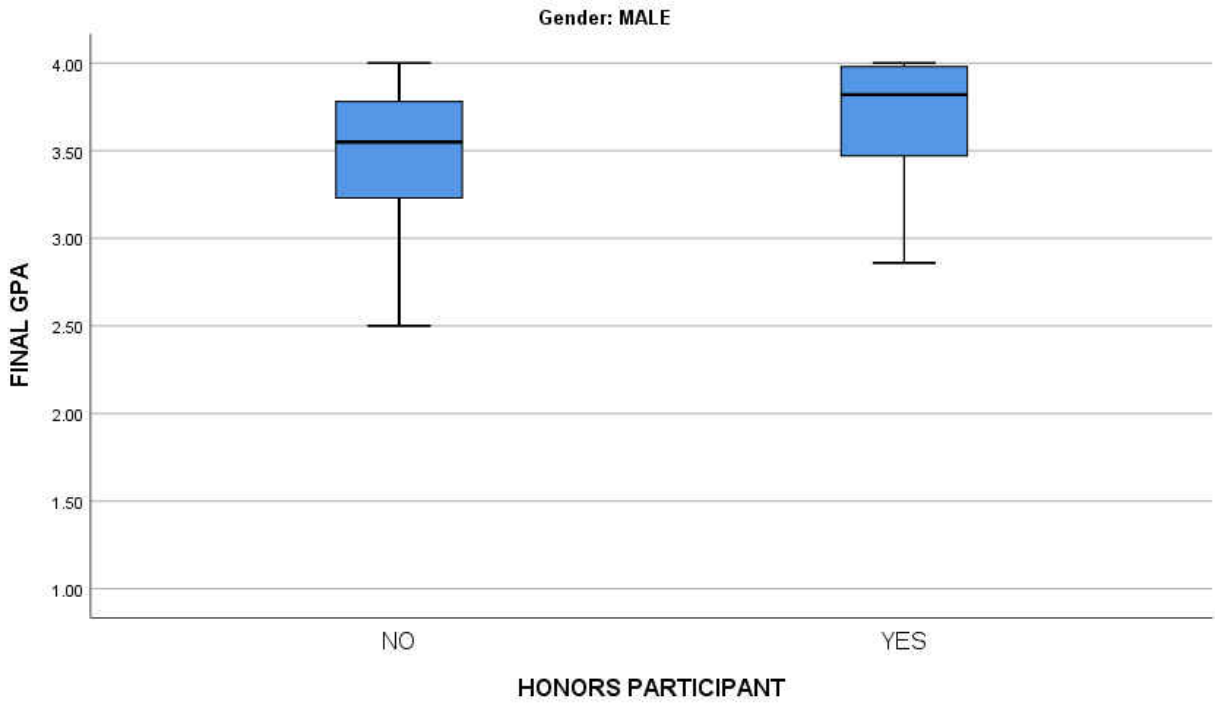
Table 4

GPAs of Male Honors Participants and Eligible Male Nonparticipants

Honors	N	Mean	SD	GPA Range
Yes	51	3.67	.36	2.4 – 4.0
No	257	3.44	.48	2.2 – 4.0

Figure 3

GPA Differences between Male Honors Participants and Male Honors-Eligible Nonparticipants



Research Question 4

Is there a significant relationship in the first-term, fall to spring retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o4: There is no significant relationship in the first-term, fall to spring retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether students who participated in the honors program were retained at significantly different rates than students who were honors-eligible but did not participate in the honors program. The two variables were first-term retention (yes or no) and honors participant (yes or no). Honors participation and first-

term retention were found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 3908) = 60.82$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .13. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Honors participants were significantly more likely to be retained, fall to spring, than honors-eligible nonparticipants. See Table 5 for means for each group.

Table 5

First-Term Retention Rate by Honors Participation

Retained First-Term	Honors Participant	Nonparticipant	Overall Mean
Yes	90.7%	72.1%	73.9%
No	9.3%	27.9%	26.1%

Research Question 5

Is there a significant relationship in the two-term, fall to fall retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o5: There is no significant relationship in the two-term, fall to fall retention rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether students who participated in the honors program were retained at significantly different rates than students who were honors-eligible but did not participate in the honors program. The two variables were fall to fall retention (yes or no) and honors participant (yes or no). Honors participation and fall to fall retention were found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2 (1, N = 3908) = 55.27$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .12. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Honors participants were significantly more likely to be retained, fall to fall, than honors-eligible nonparticipants. See Table 6 for means for each group.

Table 6

Fall to Fall Retention Rate by Honors Participation

Retained First Year	Honors Participant	Nonparticipant	Overall Mean
Yes	71.0%	50.9%	52.8%
No	29.0%	49.1%	47.2%

Research Question 6

Is there a significant relationship in two-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o6: There is no significant relationship in two-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether students who participated in the honors program had a significantly different in two-year graduation rate than students who were honors-eligible but did not participate in the honors program. The two variables were two-year graduation (yes or no) and honors participant (yes or no). Honors participation and two-year graduation rates were found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 (1, N =2622) = 52.22, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .14. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Honors participants were significantly more likely to graduate within two years than honors-eligible nonparticipants. See Table 7 for means for each group.

Table 7

Two-Year Graduation Rate by Honors Participation

Graduated by Year Two	Honors Participant	Nonparticipant	Overall Mean
Yes	37.0%	18.2%	20.1%
No	63.0%	81.8%	79.9%

Research Question 7

Is there a significant relationship in three-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college?

H_o7: There is no significant relationship in three-year graduation rates between honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants at the participating college.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether students who participated in the honors program had a significantly different three-year graduation rate than students who were honors-eligible but did not participate in the honors program. The two variables were three-year graduation (yes or no) and honors participant (yes or no). Honors participation and three-year graduation rates were found to be significantly related, Pearson χ^2 (1, N =1882) = 45.01, $p < .001$, Cramer's V = .16. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Honors participants were significantly more likely to graduate within three years than honors-eligible nonparticipants. See Table 8 for means for each group.

Table 8

Three-Year Graduation Rate by Honors Participation

Graduated by Year Three	Honors Participant	Nonparticipant	Overall Mean
Yes	61.1%	36.3%	38.8%
No	38.9%	63.7%	61.2%

Research Question 8

Is there a significant difference in the five dimensions of student engagement (Active and Collaborative Learning; Student Effort; Academic Challenge; Student-Faculty Interaction; and Support for Learners) as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college?

H_o8_1: There is no significant difference in the Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark student engagement scores of students enrolled in the honors program differed significantly from the mean Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark student engagement scores of the general student body at the target community college. The Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark student engagement score was test variable, and the grouping variable was honors student (yes or no). The Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant ($p = .49$) so equal variances were assumed. The test was significant, $t(831) = -6.67$, $p < .001$. Therefore, H_o8_1 was rejected. The effect size for this analysis indicated a medium effect size ($d = .73$). Students enrolled in the honors program ($M = .51$, $SD = .17$) had

significantly higher Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark student engagement scores than the general student body (M = .39, SD = .16). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -0.16 to -0.08. Table 9 reports means and standard deviations.

Table 9

Active and Collaborative Learning Benchmark Score by Honors Participation

Honors Participant	N	M	SD
Yes	95	.51	.17
No	738	.39	.16

H_o8_2: There is no significant difference in the Student Effort benchmark scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean Student Effort benchmark student engagement scores of students enrolled in the honors program differed significantly from the mean Student Effort benchmark student engagement scores of the general student body at the target community college. The Student Effort benchmark student engagement score was test variable, and the grouping variable was honors student (yes or no). The Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant (p = .32) so equal variances were assumed. The test was significant, t(831) = -3.78, $p < .001$. Therefore, H_o8_2 was rejected. The effect size for this analysis indicated a small effect size (d = .41). Students enrolled in the honors program (M = .51, SD = .15) had significantly higher Student Effort benchmark student engagement scores than the general student body (M = .44, SD = .16). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.1 to -0.03. Table 10 reports means and standard deviations.

Table 10

Student Effort Benchmark Score by Honors Participation

Honors Participant	N	M	SD
Yes	95	.51	.15
No	738	.44	.16

H_o8_3: There is no significant difference in the Academic Challenge benchmark scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean Academic Challenge benchmark student engagement scores of students enrolled in the honors program differed significantly from the mean Academic Challenge benchmark student engagement scores of the general student body at the target community college. The Academic Challenge benchmark student engagement score was test variable, and the grouping variable was honors student (yes or no). The Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant ($p = .26$) so equal variances were assumed. The test was significant, $t(831) = -3.33$, $p = .001$. Therefore, H_o8_3 was rejected. The effect size for this analysis indicated a small effect size ($d = .36$). Students enrolled in the honors program ($M = .67$, $SD = .17$) had significantly higher Academic Challenge benchmark student engagement scores than the general student body ($M = .61$, $SD = .16$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.09 to -.02. Table 11 reports means and standard deviations.

Table 11

Academic Challenge Benchmark Score by Honors Participation

Honors Participant	N	M	SD
Yes	95	.67	.17
No	738	.61	.16

H_o8_4: There is no significant difference in the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark student engagement scores of students enrolled in the honors program differed significantly from the mean Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark student engagement scores of the general student body at the target community college. The Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark student engagement score was test variable, and the grouping variable was honors student (yes or no). The Levene's test for equality of variances was significant ($p = .04$) so equal variances were not assumed. The test was significant, $t(113.19) = -3.64$, $p < .001$. Therefore, H_o8_4 was rejected. The effect size for this analysis indicated a small effect size ($d = .44$). Students enrolled in the honors program ($M = .55$, $SD = .22$) had significantly higher Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark student engagement scores than the general student body ($M = .46$, $SD = .19$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.13 to -.04. Table 12 reports means and standard deviations.

Table 12

Student-Faculty Interaction Benchmark Score by Honors Participation

Honors Participant	N	M	SD
Yes	95	.55	.22
No	738	.46	.19

H_o8_5: There is no significant difference in the Support for Learners benchmark scores as measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement between honors participants and the general student body at the participating college.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean Support for Learners benchmark student engagement scores of students enrolled in the honors program differed significantly from the mean Support for Learners benchmark student engagement scores of the general student body at the target community college. The Support for Learners benchmark student engagement score was test variable, and the grouping variable was honors student (yes or no). The Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant ($p = .92$) so equal variances were assumed. The test was significant, $t(831) = -4.45$, $p < .001$. Therefore, H_o8_5 was rejected. The effect size for this analysis indicated a medium effect size ($d = .5$). Students enrolled in the honors program ($M = .55$, $SD = .19$) had significantly higher Support for Learners benchmark student engagement scores than the general student body ($M = .46$, $SD = .19$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.13 to -.05. Table 13 reports means and standard deviations.

Table 13

Support for Learners Benchmark Score by Honors Participation

Honors Participant	N	M	SD
Yes	95	.55	.19
No	738	.46	.19

Chapter 5. Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, comparative study was to compare academic outcomes (final GPA, retention, and graduation rates) and student engagement benchmark scores of students who enroll in an honors program at a Tennessee community college versus students who were honors-eligible but did not participate in an honors program. The researcher analyzed quantitative data from the participating community college's student records database as well as benchmark scores from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. Students were categorized into one of two groups for analysis based on honors participation. For the analyses of academic outcomes, students were categorized as either honors participants or honors-eligible nonparticipants. For the student engagement measures, students were categorized as either honors participants or nonparticipants. Findings from this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge of whether honors programs are associated with gains in various student outcomes and engagement measures specifically at a two-year institution.

Summary

Final GPAs among honors participants and eligible nonparticipants were addressed in Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. Research Question 1 addressed the final GPA among all honors participants and honors-eligible nonparticipants. Final GPAs were significantly higher among honors participants than eligible nonparticipants ($p < .001$). The mean cumulative final GPA for honors participants was 3.66 compared to 3.44 for honors-eligible nonparticipants.

Campbell and Fuqua (2008), Moon (2012), and Shushok's (2006) findings demonstrated gender differences in outcomes for honors students with males benefiting significantly from honors participation to a greater extent than their female counterparts. However, males are less

likely to participate in honors. Research Questions 2 and 3 in the present study desegregated the data based on gender to determine if there were GPA differences between female participants and female nonparticipants and male participants and male nonparticipants. Final GPAs were significantly higher among female honors participants than female eligible nonparticipants ($p < .001$). The mean cumulative final GPA for female honors participants was 3.66 compared to 3.44 for female eligible nonparticipants. Also, final GPAs were significantly higher among male honors participants than male eligible nonparticipants ($p = .001$). The mean cumulative final GPA for male honors participants was 3.67 compared to 3.43 for male eligible nonparticipants.

Research Questions 4 and 5 addressed retention rates between honors participants and eligible nonparticipants. Research Question 4 examined the first-term, fall to spring retention rates. Findings were significant ($p < .001$). Honors participants were nearly 20% more likely to be retained than their eligible nonparticipant counterparts. First-term retention among honors students was 90.7% compared to 72.1% percent for eligible nonparticipants.

Two-term, fall to fall retention rates were examined in Research Question 4. Findings were similar to the first-term retention rates explored in Research Question 3. Honors students are significantly more likely to be retained than are eligible nonparticipants ($p < .001$). After the second term, 71% of honors students were retained while only half of eligible nonparticipants were retained.

The gender-based findings in my research are consistent with other research on retention rates of honors students primarily conducted at four-year institutions (Brown et al., 2019; Shushok, 2006). Shushok (2006) found retention rates among freshmen returning for their second year at four-year universities were significantly improved for honors participants when compared with similarly matched nonparticipants. However, by year four, the gains associated

with retention rates among honors students had virtually disappeared. Conversely, Honeycutt (2017) found that honors students were more likely to be retained but did not find a significant difference in fall-to-fall retention rates among honors participants and eligible nonparticipants at a community college.

Research Questions 6 and 7 addressed graduation rates, two-year and three-year rates respectively. The two-year graduation rate for honors participants was twice that of eligible nonparticipants. These findings were significant ($p < .001$). Students who participated in honors had a 37% two-year graduation rate compared to an 18.2% graduation rate of honors-eligible nonparticipants. The overall two-year graduation rate of the participating community college during this same timeframe was just below 10%.

The three-year graduation rates were also significantly higher for honors participants than eligible nonparticipants ($p < .001$). Honors participants had a three-year graduation rate of 61.1% compared to 36.3% for honors-eligible nonparticipants. During this same timeframe, the participating community colleges' three-year graduation rate was slightly over 20%.

Numerous studies have demonstrated higher graduation rates for honors participants when closely matched with honors-eligible nonparticipants (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Cosgrove, 2004; Honeycutt, 2017; Keller & Lacy, 2013; Mellow, 2015; Savage et al., 2014; Shushok, 2006). The findings in my study are consistent with existing research regarding higher graduation rates for honors students.

Student engagement is positively correlated with student learning, retention, and graduation rates. The more involved students are with their faculty, their peers, and the courses they are studying, the more likely they are to persist and graduate (Astin, 1999; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). The Community College Survey of

Student Engagement (CCSSE) benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that focus on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement—and that are positively related to student learning and persistence.

Research Question 8 included the five dimensions of student engagement as measured by the CCSSE. Each of the five dimensions of student engagement (Active and Collaborative Learning; Student Effort; Academic Challenge; Student-Faculty Interaction; and Support for Learners) were significantly higher for honors participants than the general student body. The Active and Collaborative Learning benchmark score for honors students was .51 compared to .39 for nonparticipants ($p < .001$). The Student Effort benchmark score for honors students was .51 compared to .44 for nonparticipants. ($p < .001$). The Academic Challenge benchmark score was .67 for honors students compared to .61 for nonparticipants ($p = .001$). The Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark score for honors students was .55 compared to .46 for nonparticipants ($p < .001$). The Support for Learners benchmark score for honors students was .55 compared to .46 for nonparticipants ($p < .001$).

Although they used item scores rather than benchmark scores, Ross and Roman (2009) found significant differences in engagement levels of honors students compared with non-honors students on 29 out of the 34 questions on the CCSSE. Similarly, Korah (2018) found statistically significant differences and higher engagement across all benchmark scores for honors students compared to non-honors students in the 2014 cohort. Findings from my study are consistent with other research findings that correlate honors participation with higher levels of student engagement.

Conclusions

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, comparative study was to compare academic outcomes (final GPA, retention, graduation rates) and student engagement measures of students who enroll in an honors program at a Tennessee community college versus those who were honors-eligible but did not participate in an honors program. The findings demonstrate honors programs are associated with gains in various student outcome and engagement measures.

While no single analysis is perfect, the researcher attempted to control for differentiated inputs by carefully matching honors participants and nonparticipants based on GPA and ACT scores. Expanding the research questions to include data regarding student engagement between honors participants and nonparticipants attempts to control for the differences in outcomes among these student populations. Improved outcomes for honors participants are likely influenced by increased student engagement through more opportunities for active and collaborative learning, greater student effort, increased academic challenge, frequent student-faculty interaction, and improved support for learners.

The major findings from this study include the following statistically significant results regarding participation in honors education at a two-year community college:

1. Honors participants, regardless of gender, graduate with significantly higher final GPAs than honors-eligible nonparticipants.
2. Honors participants have higher first-term and two-term retention rates than honors-eligible nonparticipants.
3. Honors participants have higher two-year and three-year graduation rates than honors-eligible nonparticipants.

4. Honors participants demonstrated higher student engagement scores across all five benchmark measures on the CCSSE.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings from my study demonstrate there are significantly higher academic outcomes and engagement measure scores for students who participate in an honors program at the participating community college when compared to honors-eligible nonparticipants. Community college honors programs are less likely to have financial support, dedicated faculty and staff, and physical space than four-year institutions. Therefore, the findings from my study reveal a relative return on investment for honors programs at two-year institutions. Brown et al. (2019) concluded:

> Taken together, then, we see the potential value added of honors education in terms of not just the opportunities for intellectual and personal growth, but also as an additional resource for university administrators as they wrestle with the increasingly complex financial realities of higher education. (p. 181)

Because of greater calls for accountability, honors colleges and programs need to demonstrate the value of honors education, and this will be a concern for the foreseeable future. The findings from this and other studies demonstrate improved outcomes, success, and engagement measures for honors participants which are not only beneficial for the student but also the bottom line of the institution.

While much of the existing literature focuses on improved success outcomes for honors participants, the research also exposes some weaknesses that honors administrators should address. Most significantly is increasing honors participation among eligible students. Of particular importance is addressing gender disparities among honors participation as males

participate at significantly lower rates than their female counterparts (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Moon, 2012; and Shushok, 2006). Additionally, honors administrators should address the relatively low retention and completion rates within honors programs; with so few students enrolling and even fewer students completing, honors education is at risk unless these participation rates are improved.

Recommendations for Further Research

There is a need to expand the current body of knowledge relative to honors education to include more research examining community college honors programs. Two-year institutions are a unique but powerful sector within higher education, and there are huge gaps within the literature addressing two-year institutions and their students. One of the limitations of this study is that it was conducted at one community college. For greater generalizability it would be beneficial to replicate this study at other two-year institutions. Additional recommendations for future research are outlined below:

1. Examine what factors influence a student's decision to participate in honors and if these characteristics have any impact on outcomes associated with honors participation. The majority of honors-eligible students do not participate in honors programs. Because of the positive correlation between honors participation and increased outcome and engagement scores, it would be beneficial to explore whether there are self-efficacy differences between students who participate in honors and those who are eligible but do not participate;
2. Investigate why honors participation rates vary widely based on gender. Males are less likely to participate in honors than are females. This disparity suggests further

research may need to explore the impacts of honors across gender lines more thoroughly;

3. Examine the honors participation rates and success outcomes for students of color. Research has shown racial minorities are more likely to enroll at community colleges and less likely to participate in honors than their white counterparts. Evaluating honors participation and outcomes by race could further the understandings of equity gaps in higher education and within honors education;
4. Expand the definition of student success. My study explored student success as is measured by GPA, retention, graduation, and student engagement. Future studies could broaden the definition of student success to determine if there are gains among honors students that persist in other areas including transfer rates, future enrollment in graduate and/or professional programs, civic engagement, and career satisfaction.
5. Evaluate whether participation in honors leads to a greater sense of social belonging on community college campuses. The research that currently demonstrates a positive correlation between social belonging and GPA. It would be of value to explore to what extent honors programs engender a sense of community and belonging particularly at two-year institutions; and
6. Explore the factors that contribute to a student starting but not completing an honors program. With a significant number of students who begin in honors failing to complete their honors requirements, the role of honors may be incongruent with other curricular factors. More research is needed to determine what are the contributing causes of student attrition within honors programs.

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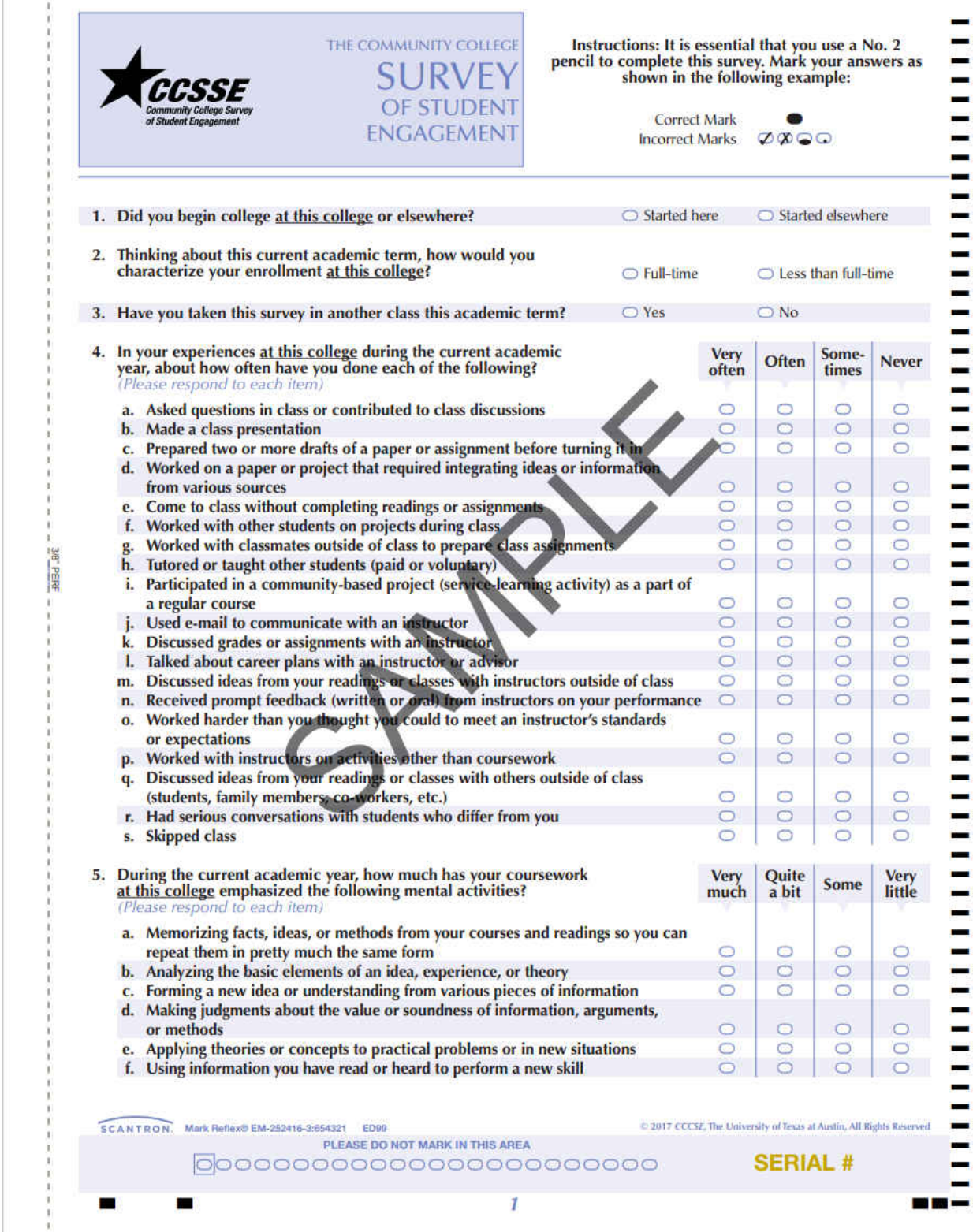

CCSSE Community College Survey of Student Engagement

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Instructions: It is essential that you use a No. 2 pencil to complete this survey. Mark your answers as shown in the following example:

Correct Mark ●
Incorrect Marks ✓ ✗ ◒ ◔

1. Did you begin college at this college or elsewhere?	○ Started here	○ Started elsewhere
2. Thinking about this current academic term, how would you characterize your enrollment at this college?	○ Full-time	○ Less than full-time
3. Have you taken this survey in another class this academic term?	○ Yes	○ No

4. In your experiences at this college during the current academic year, about how often have you done each of the following? *(Please respond to each item)*	Very often	Often	Some-times	Never
a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	○	○	○	○
b. Made a class presentation	○	○	○	○
c. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	○	○	○	○
d. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	○	○	○	○
e. Come to class without completing readings or assignments	○	○	○	○
f. Worked with other students on projects during class	○	○	○	○
g. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	○	○	○	○
h. Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	○	○	○	○
i. Participated in a community-based project (service-learning activity) as a part of a regular course	○	○	○	○
j. Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	○	○	○	○
k. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	○	○	○	○
l. Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor	○	○	○	○
m. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class	○	○	○	○
n. Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from instructors on your performance	○	○	○	○
o. Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	○	○	○	○
p. Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework	○	○	○	○
q. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)	○	○	○	○
r. Had serious conversations with students who differ from you	○	○	○	○
s. Skipped class	○	○	○	○

5. During the current academic year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities? *(Please respond to each item)*	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
a. Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	○	○	○	○
b. Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory	○	○	○	○
c. Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information	○	○	○	○
d. Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	○	○	○	○
e. Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	○	○	○	○
f. Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill	○	○	○	○

SAMPLE

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PLEASE DO NOT MARK IN THIS AREA

SERIAL #

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6. During the current academic year, how much reading and writing have you done <u>at this college</u>? *(Please respond to each item)*

	None	1–4	5–10	11–20	More than 20
a. Number of assigned textbooks, manuals, books, or packets of course readings	○	○	○	○	○
b. Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment	○	○	○	○	○
c. Number of written papers or reports of any length	○	○	○	○	○

7. Mark the response that best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current academic year have challenged you to do your best work <u>at this college</u>.

Extremely challenging ⑦ ⑥ ⑤ ④ ③ ② ① Extremely easy

8. Which of the following have you done, or are you currently doing <u>at this college</u>? *(Please respond to each item)*

	Yes	No
a. Internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment	○	○
b. An English course taught specifically for students whose first language is not English (ESL, ESOL)	○	○
c. Developmental/remedial reading course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)	○	○
d. Developmental/remedial writing course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)	○	○
e. Developmental/remedial math course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.)	○	○
f. Honors course	○	○

9. How much does <u>this college</u> emphasize the following? *(Please respond to each item)*

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
a. Encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying	○	○	○	○
b. Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college	○	○	○	○
c. Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	○	○	○	○
d. Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	○	○	○	○
e. Providing the support you need to thrive socially	○	○	○	○
f. Providing the financial support you need to afford your education	○	○	○	○

10. About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following? *(Please respond to each item)*

	None	1–5	6–10	11–20	21–30	More than 30
a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, doing homework, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○
b. Working for pay	○	○	○	○	○	○
c. Participating in college-sponsored activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, intramural sports, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○
d. Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○
e. Commuting to and from classes	○	○	○	○	○	○

11. How much has your experience <u>at this college</u> contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? *(Please respond to each item)*

	Very much	Quite a bit	Some	Very little
a. Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills	○	○	○	○
b. Writing clearly and effectively	○	○	○	○
c. Speaking clearly and effectively	○	○	○	○
d. Thinking critically and analytically	○	○	○	○
e. Solving numerical problems	○	○	○	○
f. Working effectively with others	○	○	○	○
g. Learning effectively on your own	○	○	○	○
h. Developing clearer career goals	○	○	○	○
i. Gaining information about career opportunities	○	○	○	○

FOLD

12. This section has three parts. Please answer all three parts, indicating (1) how often you have used the following services during the current academic year, (2) how satisfied you are with the services, and (3) how important the services are to you at this college. *(Please respond to each item)*

	(1) Frequency of Use				(2) Satisfaction				(3) Importance		
	5 or more times	2–4 times	1 time	Never	Very	Some-what	Not at all	N.A.	Very	Some-what	Not at all
a. Academic advising/planning	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
b. Career counseling	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
c. Job placement assistance	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
d. Peer or other tutoring	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
e. Skill labs (writing, math, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
f. Child care	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
g. Financial aid advising	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
h. Computer lab	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
i. Student organizations	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
j. Transfer advising/planning	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
k. Library resources and services	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
l. Services for students with disabilities	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
m. Services for active military and veterans	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

13. During the current academic term at this college, I completed registration before the first class session(s).

- ○ Yes; I was registered for all of my courses before the first class session(s)
- ○ Mostly; I was registered for most of my courses before the first class session(s)
- ○ Partly; I was registered for some of my courses before the first class session(s)
- ○ No; I was not registered for any of my courses before the first class session(s)

14. The one response that best describes my experience with orientation when I first came to this college is:

- ○ I took part in an online orientation prior to the beginning of classes
- ○ I attended an on-campus orientation prior to the beginning of classes
- ○ I enrolled in an orientation course as part of my course schedule during my first academic term
- ○ I was not aware of a college orientation
- ○ I was unable to participate in orientation due to scheduling or other issues

15. During my first academic year at this college, I participated in a first-year experience program.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

16. During my first academic term at this college, I participated in an organized learning community (a formal program in which groups of students take two or more classes together).

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

17. During my first academic term at this college, I participated in a student success course (a course that teaches the skills needed to succeed in college).

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

18. I was told that I should enroll in a developmental/remedial course (also referred to as Basic Skills, College Prep, etc.) in my first academic term at this college, and I...

- ○ Did enroll in more than one of these courses
- ○ Did enroll in one of these courses
- ○ Did not enroll in any of these courses
- ○ Not applicable

.38" PERF

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SERIAL # PLEASE DO NOT MARK IN THIS AREA

19. **During the current academic term at this college, my instructors clearly explained a class attendance policy that specified how many classes I could miss without a penalty.**
- ○ All of my instructors explained a class attendance policy
- ○ Most of my instructors explained a class attendance policy
- ○ Some of my instructors explained a class attendance policy
- ○ None of my instructors explained a class attendance policy

20. **Before the end of my first academic term at this college, an advisor helped me develop an academic plan (a personalized plan with a defined sequence of courses for completing a college certificate or degree and/or for transferring to a 4-year college or university).**
- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I'm still in my first academic term; I have not yet developed an academic plan

21. **Someone at this college contacts me if I am struggling with my studies to help me get the assistance I need.**
- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Not applicable

22. **During the current academic year at this college, I have participated in supplemental instruction/supplemental learning (extra class sessions with the instructor or an experienced student).**
- ○ Never
- ○ Less than 1 time a week
- ○ 1–2 times a week
- ○ 3–4 times a week
- ○ More than 4 times a week

23. **How likely is it that the following issues would cause you to withdraw from class or from this college?** *(Please respond to each item)*

	Very likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Not likely
a. Working full-time	○	○	○	○
b. Caring for dependents	○	○	○	○
c. Academically unprepared	○	○	○	○
d. Lack of finances	○	○	○	○
e. Transfer to a 4-year college or university	○	○	○	○

	Extremely	Quite a bit	Somewhat	Not very
24. How supportive are your friends of your attending this college?	○	○	○	○
25. How supportive is your immediate family of your attending this college?	○	○	○	○

26. **Indicate which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this college.** *(Please respond to each item)*

	Yes	No
a. Complete a certificate program	○	○
b. Obtain an associate degree	○	○
c. Transfer to a 4-year college or university	○	○
d. Obtain or update job-related skills	○	○
e. Change careers	○	○
f. Self-improvement/personal enjoyment	○	○

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SERIAL #

27. Indicate which of the following are sources you use to pay for your tuition at this college. *(Please respond to each item)*

	Major source	Minor source	Not a source
a. My own income/savings	○	○	○
b. Income/savings from family	○	○	○
c. Employer contributions	○	○	○
d. Active military or veteran benefits	○	○	○
e. Grants	○	○	○
f. Scholarships	○	○	○
g. Student loans (bank, etc.)	○	○	○
h. Public assistance	○	○	○

28. When do you plan to take classes at this college again?
- ○ I will accomplish my goal(s) during this academic term and will not be returning
- ○ I have no current plan to return
- ○ Within the next 12 months
- ○ Uncertain

29. At this college, in what range is your overall college grade point average (GPA)?
- ○ A
- ○ B
- ○ C
- ○ D or lower
- ○ I do not have a GPA at this college

30. In what range was your overall high school grade point average (GPA)?
- ○ A
- ○ B
- ○ C
- ○ D or lower
- ○ I do not remember

31. When do you most frequently take classes at this college? *(Mark only one)*
- ○ Day classes (morning or afternoon)
- ○ Evening classes
- ○ Weekend classes

32. During the current academic term, how many classes are you taking... *(Please respond to each item)*

	None	1	2	3	4	5 or more
a. Face-to-face (a class in which all instruction is face-to-face in a classroom)	○	○	○	○	○	○
b. Online (a class in which all instruction is online)	○	○	○	○	○	○
c. Hybrid (a class that is a mixture of face-to-face and online instruction)	○	○	○	○	○	○

33. How many total credit hours have you earned at this college, not counting the courses you are currently taking this academic term?
- ○ None
- ○ 1–14 credits
- ○ 15–29 credits
- ○ 30–44 credits
- ○ 45–60 credits
- ○ Over 60 credits

FOLD

34. **How many total academic terms have you been enrolled at this college?**
- ○ This is my first academic term
- ○ This is my second academic term
- ○ This is my third or fourth academic term
- ○ This is my fifth or sixth academic term
- ○ I have been enrolled more than six academic terms

35. **Would you recommend this college to a friend or family member?**
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

36. **How would you evaluate your overall educational experience at this college?**
- ○ Excellent
- ○ Good
- ○ Fair
- ○ Poor

37. **Do you have children who live with you and depend on you for their care?**
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

38. **Mark your age group.**
- ○ Under 18
- ○ 18–19
- ○ 20–21
- ○ 22–24
- ○ 25–29
- ○ 30–39
- ○ 40–49
- ○ 50–64
- ○ 65+

39. **Your gender identity:**
- ○ Man
- ○ Woman
- ○ Other
- ○ I prefer not to respond

	Yes	No
40. **Are you married?**	○	○
41. **Is English your native (first) language?**	○	○
42. **Are you a current or former member of the U.S. Armed Forces, Reserves, or National Guard?**	○	○
43. **Are you an international student or non-resident alien?**	○	○
44. **Are you a student-athlete on a team sponsored by this college's athletics department?**	○	○

45. **What is your racial or ethnic identification?** *(Mark all that apply)*
- ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ○ Asian
- ○ Black or African American
- ○ Hispanic or Latino
- ○ Native Hawaiian
- ○ Pacific Islander (non-Native Hawaiian)
- ○ White
- ○ Other
- ○ I prefer not to respond

3/8" PERF

46. What is the highest academic credential you have earned? *(Mark only one)*

- ○ None
- ○ GED
- ○ High school diploma
- ○ Vocational/technical certificate
- ○ Associate degree
- ○ Bachelor's degree
- ○ Master's/doctoral/professional degree

47. Who in your family has attended at least some college? *(Mark all that apply)*

- ○ Mother
- ○ Father
- ○ Brother/Sister
- ○ Child
- ○ Spouse/Partner
- ○ Legal Guardian
- ○ No one

Additional Items
(Please respond to these items if requested)

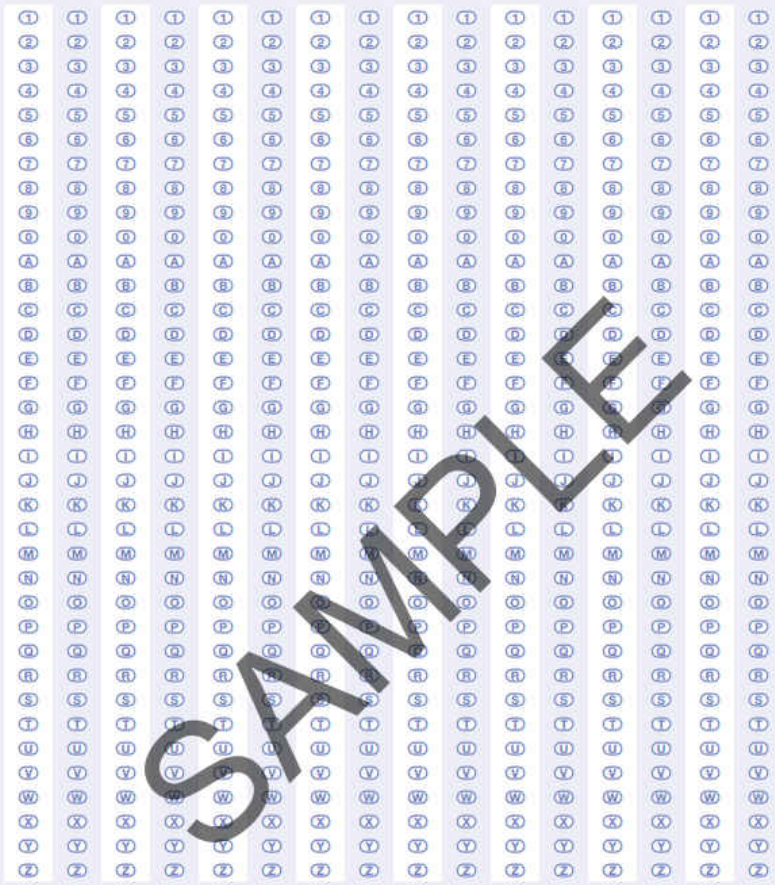
1.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	11.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ
2.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	12.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ
3.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	13.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ
4.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	14.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ
5.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	15.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ
6.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	16.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ
7.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	17.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ
8.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	18.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ
9.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	19.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ
10.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ	20.	Ⓐ	Ⓑ	Ⓒ	Ⓓ	Ⓔ

Using the list provided, please fill in the bubbles that correspond to the code indicating your program, major, or pathway of study. In the top row, indicate the first number in the program code. In the bottom row, indicate the second number in the program code.

⓪	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	
⓪	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	

Please provide your student identification number by filling in the corresponding bubbles. For example, in the first column, indicate the first number or letter in your student ID number, and so forth. Please do not enter your social security number. (OPTIONAL)

(Please begin here)



Thank you for sharing your views.

PLEASE DO NOT MARK IN THIS AREA

SERIAL #

3/8" PERF

VITA

AMANDA BENNETT

Education:	Ed.D. Educational Leadership East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2021
	Graduate Certificate in Community College Leadership, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2017
	M.Ed. College Student Affairs Administration, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, 2005
	B.A. Sociology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, 2003
	A.A. Psychology, Dalton State College, Dalton, Georgia, 2002
Professional Experience:	Interim Vice President of Student Affairs, Chattanooga State Community College, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 2021-Current
	Director of Honors and Leadership Education, Chattanooga State Community College, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 2015-2019
	Specialist of Engineering Technology, Chattanooga State Community College, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 2011-2015
	Academic Advisor, Chattanooga State Community College, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 2006-2011
	Assistant Director of Advising, Dalton State College, Dalton, Georgia, 2005-2006
	Graduate Assistant, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, 2003-2005