



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE HONORS STUDENTS' NEEDS: DEVELOPING A PROCESS FOR FACULTY CHANGE TO ENHANCE STUDENT SUCCESS

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INTRODUCTION

- Honors programs are thought to promote active learning, engage students in undergraduate research, and provide capstone experiences (Siegfried, 2001).
- The University of Arkansas established a campus wide Honors Program for high achieving students in 2002, and The Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences (Bumpers College) began participating in 2003.
- Originally, the Bumpers College Honors Program offered a 12 credit hour program to students, mainly consisting of one credit hour courses.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

- As the Bumpers College Honors program was created in 2003, periodic assessment and adaptation allows for the program to evolve to meet current students' needs.
- Assessing students' perceptions of the program, current levels of support, and potential areas of improvement encourage proactive program modification.
- The following question was raised? What are the current practices in the Bumpers College Honors Program, and how do these practices accommodate or deter student success?

PURPOSE

- The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine students' perceptions of the Bumpers College Honors Program as a means of better understanding students' needs.
- In Fall of 2016, a survey was administered to current students enrolled in the Bumpers College Honors Program to assess areas of improvement in an effort to modify the existing program.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- Honors programs are designed to “add quality to the academic mission of their host institutions by promoting the highest intellectual standards” (Bottoms & Gutgold, 2016, p. 4).
- An emphasis on program structure and organization is needed to combat student procrastination, minimize risk, and increase accessibility (Siegfried, 2001).
- Various forms of support are suggested to provide students with a successful honors experience, particularly in providing faculty and peer mentoring, discipline specific thesis guides, and thesis oriented coursework (Gutgold & Rogers, 2016).

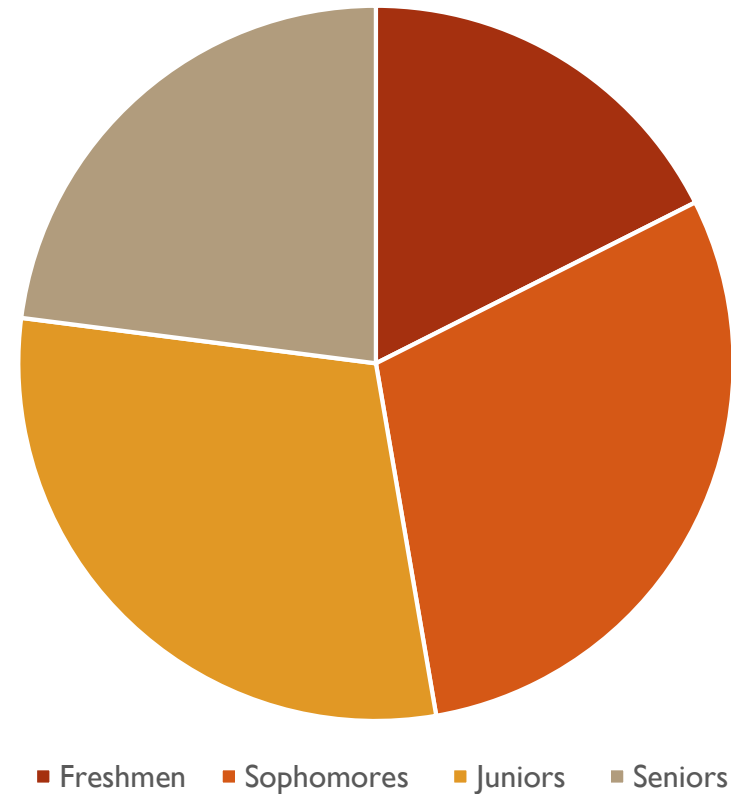
METHODOLOGY

- An electronic survey was designed to assess students' needs and administered to all students enrolled in the Bumpers College Honors Program in 2016.
- Census sampling was utilized in order to gather feedback from the entire Bumpers College Honors Program student base.
- The instrument was assessed for face and content validity by the Bumpers College Honors Program faculty committee, comprised of a representative from each academic unit in the College.
- $N = 149$
- A 66% response rate was obtained.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- Participants included:
 - 17.57% freshmen
 - 29.73% sophomores
 - 29.73% juniors
 - 22.97% seniors

Participant Classification



RESULTS: INITIAL PERCEPTIONS

- Students enrolled in the Bumpers College Honors Program are currently required to complete 15 credit hours of coursework and complete a thesis.
- The majority of student participants intended to complete their honors curriculum (96%).
- The data revealed a disparity between the level of support students experienced from the University of Arkansas Honors Program, their academic department, and faculty thesis mentor.
- Overall, students felt more supported by the Honors Program than the Bumpers College Honors Program.

RESULTS

Overall opinions of the Bumpers College Honors Program

Statement	Very High	Above Average	Average	Fair	Poor	NA
<i>Honors courses available at the U of A</i>	16.30	38.80	30.60	9.20	3.10	2.00
<i>Honors courses available in Bumpers College</i>	12.20	11.20	37.80	27.60	7.10	4.10
<i>Honors courses available in my major's department</i>	7.1	9.20	13.30	31.60	30.60	8.20
<i>Overall quality of honors curriculum</i>	20.40	33.70	32.70	10.20		3.10
<i>Overall quality of honors level teaching faculty</i>	34.70	36.70	18.40	4.10	1.00	5.10
<i>Depth of interactions with faculty</i>	34.70	33.70	20.40	7.10	2.00	2.00
<i>Funding opportunities from the Honors College for research</i>	25.50	37.80	17.30	5.10	3.10	11.20
<i>Funding opportunities from the Bumpers College for research/creative projects</i>	21.40	33.70	26.50	5.10	1.00	12.20
<i>Funding opportunities from the Honors College for study abroad</i>	38.80	29.60	12.20	6.10	5.10	8.20
<i>Funding opportunities from the Bumpers College for study abroad</i>	27.60	27.60	19.40	11.20	5.10	9.20
<i>Scholarships available</i>	20.40	36.70	17.30	16.30	6.10	3.10

RESULTS

Overall opinions of the Bumpers College Honors Program, continued

Statement	Very High	Above Average	Average	Fair	Poor	NA
<i>Faculty incentives to work with honors students</i>	12.20	27.60	27.60	10.20	5.10	17.30
<i>Research opportunities available</i>	36.70	34.70	18.40	4.10	1.00	5.10
<i>Assistance from the Honors College finding a mentor</i>	18.40	21.40	22.40	13.30	12.20	12.20
<i>Assistance from the Honors College developing a thesis idea</i>	9.20	22.40	16.30	19.40	7.10	25.50
<i>Assistance from the Honors College conducting your research</i>	11.20	19.40	17.30	11.20	5.10	35.70
<i>Assistance from the Honors College writing your thesis</i>	11.20	14.30	19.40	14.30	4.10	36.70
<i>Bumpers College assistance finding a mentor</i>	21.40	22.40	25.50	11.20	7.10	12.20
<i>Bumpers College assistance developing a thesis idea</i>	17.30	26.50	15.30	12.20	5.10	23.50
<i>Bumpers College assistance conducting your research</i>	16.30	22.40	13.30	9.20	3.10	35.70
<i>Bumpers College assistance writing your thesis</i>	14.30	20.40	15.30	10.20	3.10	36.70
<i>Bumpers College assistance completing your required program forms</i>	28.60	19.40	21.40	5.10	8.20	17.30
<i>Research assistance available from your major's department</i>	21.40	21.40	21.0	9.20	4.10	22.40
<i>Research assistance available from your mentor</i>	28.60	24.50	13.30	7.10	1.00	25.50
<i>Overall experience</i>	21.40	41.80	22.40	9.20	2.00	3.10
Total	100.00					

RESULTS: PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Participation in professional development

Statement	NA	Interested	No help	Informal	Formal College	Formal Univ.
<i>SURF Funding</i>	44.90	33.70	10.70	2.55	3.50	3.05
<i>Bumpers College project funding</i>	42.90	28.10	7.60	10.37	7.77	3.17
<i>Honors College research funding support</i>	44.90	27.50	8.70	9.53	5.93	3.33
<i>UA study abroad funding</i>	34.70	14.80	14.30	15.28	12.78	8.23
<i>Honors College airline grant</i>	43.90	21.40	15.30	7.43	10.53	1.33
<i>Honors College travel grant (study abroad)</i>	37.80	20.40	13.30	10.53	13.03	4.93
<i>Honors College intl. research grant</i>	51.00	22.40	11.20	9.70	5.60	0
<i>Honors program forms</i>	32.70	18.90	10.20	19.22	4.42	3.37
<i>Generating a poster from your project</i>	61.20	17.30	11.20	5.60	3.00	1.50
<i>Preparing articles for publication</i>	62.20	16.80	10.20	5.43	3.33	1.83
<i>Thesis content</i>	49.00	15.80	8.20	17.01	10.92	1.17
<i>Thesis formatting</i>	53.10	16.30	7.10	10.53	11.03	1.83
<i>Thesis writing</i>	53.10	17.30	7.10	10.87	10.37	1.17
<i>Others?</i>	81.60	9.20	5.10	3.10	1.00	0

RESULTS

Participation in professional development

<i>Response</i>	<i>f</i>
<i>Yes, I took the orientation course.</i>	28.06
<i>Yes, my academic adviser met with me.</i>	21.45
<i>No, no one has discussed how to complete the program with me</i>	19.73
<i>Yes, someone in my department met with me.</i>	17.65
<i>Yes, someone in the Honors College met with me.</i>	7.99
<i>I don't remember.</i>	4.10
Total	100.00

RESULTS: AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

- More than half of respondents (56.3%) reported that the university had above average honors coursework as opposed to 24.5% in the agricultural college.
- Students desired an increased amount of honors courses available by major area and department.
- One of the areas of improvement illuminated in the data was the nearly 20% of students who had not yet been briefed regarding program expectations.

CONCLUSIONS

- Overall, students were satisfied with the quality of the teaching faculty, mentoring, and their experience in the Bumpers College Honors Program.
- Students indicated an awareness of opportunities for mentoring, funding, and study abroad within the Bumpers College Honors Program
- Although students expressed interest in pursuing opportunities, many of the respondents selected not applicable, suggesting they were not in the stage of their program in which mentoring, study abroad, or research experiences were pertinent.

CONCLUSIONS

- Students were slightly *less* satisfied with the quality of honors level coursework in the agricultural college than in the overall honors college, indicative of an area to further assess and improve upon.
- The lack of support reported may reflect the experiences of junior and senior level students who entered the program prior to the establishment of structured guidelines and benchmarks, which may be addressed through further research, as newer students progress through the program.
- The disparity in responses may be alleviated by the implementation and continuation of the honors orientation and research methods courses.

STUDENT CENTERED PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS

- In response to student feedback, the following modifications were made to the honors program:
 - Expanded thesis guidelines were uploaded to the Bumpers College website.
 - An annotated APA style sample thesis was provided for students to use as a visual aid.
 - Additional major specific thesis courses were added to the program.
 - In order to combat procrastination and conflicting information, a timeline was developed for students to follow year by year.
 - A required orientation course and peer mentor program was created to educate incoming honors students about program requirements, which may lessen the amount of students who did not meet with any faculty or staff about program expectations.

FACULTY CENTERED PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS

- Program modifications were also set into place to aid honors faculty:
 - A proposal development and research methods courses was added to efficiently introduce honors students to the research process.
 - Additional student forms were put in place to better organize the tracking of honors students.
 - An outstanding thesis mentor award was established to recognize faculty for their dedication to the students and program.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

- The researchers recommend further assessment of the efficacy of the Bumpers College Honors Program as the program grows.
- While the program is young, it is experiencing a yearly increase in growth, increasing the need for longitudinal evaluation.
- The addition of structured guidelines as well as faculty and peer based mentoring programs is supported by the literature.
- Expansion of honors courses available within major specific areas will provide students with a diverse learning experience.



QUESTIONS?