

RECIPE FOR AN OUTSTANDING HONORS PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this research was to compare and contrast the practices of Honors Programs throughout the California State University system. From February 14th through February 24th, 2007, an email survey was conducted of all CSU Honors Program directors. The directors were asked questions about their current program offerings, as well as their successes and failures in the past. This data will be used in fundraising efforts and in guiding future program expansion for Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's Honors Program and will be distributed to other interested directors.

The survey was sent via email to all eighteen honors program directors in the 2006-2007 CSU Honors Consortium and received nine responses. In addition, answers to certain questions were obtained from the programs' websites. As promised when the survey was distributed, in order to protect program privacy, responses will not be identified by school name in this report, except Cal Poly SLO, which conducted the survey.

The Cal Poly SLO Honors Program sends a very special "thank you" to the directors of each of the following Honors Programs since their timely participation in this survey was crucial for this paper – Bakersfield, Chico, Fresno, Northridge, Cal Poly Pomona, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco and Stanislaus.

NOTES TO THE READER

Responses may be compared to guidelines established by the National Collegiate Honors Council, which can be viewed at:

<http://www.nchchonors.org/basic.htm>.

In schools that offer a General Education Honors Program in addition to independent honors programs in the majors, the data in this report refers only to the General Education program enrollment.

In a few places, certain features are correlated with program success. For purposes of this report, “success” is defined as diverse opportunities for students, strong retention rates, strong student satisfaction, and a positive image on campus.

This report will be updated as more data is collected, so survey submissions are still welcome from those directors who have not yet replied.

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ADMINISTRATION

Is the director full-time or part-time?

The vast majority of program directors are half-time. Of those who responded to the survey, one director is full-time and one program has no director at all.

In that case, the Director of Undergraduate Studies is responsible for the program and a part-time directorship is in the planning stages.

Comparing these responses to their corresponding answers later in

the survey, the data suggest that director time is correlated with program success. This is not surprising, but neither does it imply causality. Programs with greater resources can afford a full-time director and that director’s focused time and attention in turn contribute to the program’s success. Each school

For program growth to be successful, director time and administrative support must be expanded in proportion to the program.

has to decide how much director time can be justified for the individual program, but it seems clear that if a program wants to expand significantly, director time must expand as well. A program that overextends its human resources will not endure in the long run.

To whom does the director report?

Most directors report to the Dean or Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies. One reports to the Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and only two report directly to the Provost.

The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) advises that the “honors director should report to the chief academic officer of the institution,” usually the Provost. This is clearly not the trend among CSU Honors Programs.

Having the director report as high up the chain of command as possible, ideally to the Provost, can increase program visibility.

As with director time, the seniority of the office to which the director reports seems to be correlated with program success. This is logical, since the higher up the command chain the director reports, the more likely the

Honors Program is to have positive visibility among campus administration and therefore to receive their support. This becomes even more important as programs expand. In order to receive the financial, academic, and administrative support required to sustain a large program, the director must report to an office whose authority is proportional to the program’s size.

How many support personnel do you have?

Most programs have at least one full-time administrative assistant and many have a few part-time student assistants as well. Again, this staffing is generally correlated to program size and success. Funding for these positions seems to come primarily from the program budget, although some are funded directly by the University, which makes them subject to budget cuts. Other programs, especially those with more limited financial

Look for creative and inexpensive ways to fulfill administrative staffing needs, such as utilizing work-study students or offering community service hours or honors course credit.

resources, find creative ways to staff their offices, such as offering the position to work-study students or splitting a 3/4-time director position into a half-time director and quarter-time assistant director.

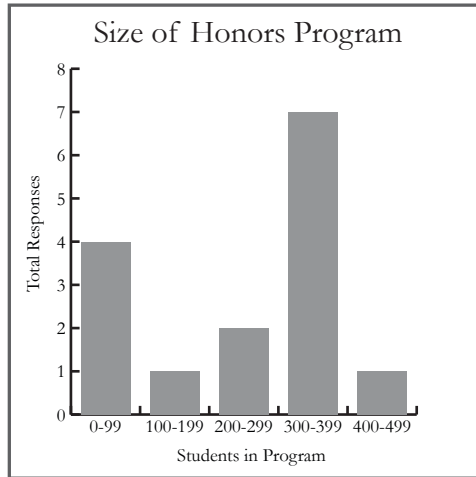
Is there a channel for students to have a voice in the program?

All but one of the programs surveyed has some kind of student voice and the one exception is presently undergoing some renovation and will undoubtedly include such a voice in the future. Each program has its own communication channel – from a simple open-door policy with the director to a formal student advisory board – and each program seems content with its solution.

ENROLLMENT

Approximately how many students are in the program?

Honors Programs range in size from 50 to 450 with the majority forming two clusters – one around 50 and one around 350. There is no apparent correlation between program enrollment and program success, student satisfaction, or student social connection. Program size appears to be limited only by resources and interest in most cases, although some programs' structure necessitates limits. For example, some programs have an "honors track" that allows students to take a set



series of honors courses for the first two years to fulfill their general education requirements and this track can only have a certain number of seats per year.

Approximately what fraction of your applicants do you accept?

About half of the programs accept 90-100% of applicants every year, rejecting only those who do not qualify. Other programs limit their enrollment to

a certain number and thus, admit only the top fraction of their applicants (in some cases as little as 10%). These differences may be due, at least in part, to recruiting patterns – actively recruiting only qualified students means that nearly all applicants will be accepted.

There is no apparent correlation between applicant acceptance rates and program success, student satisfaction, or student social connection. In some cases, so many applications are received every year that the program could not realistically support itself if all applicants were accepted. In others, the honors program is an important recruiting tool for the University and thus, students enticed by the Honors Program must be reasonably certain of their admission to the program in order to choose that University.

What are the admission requirements for freshmen?

Every Honors Program looks at high school GPA and/or SAT scores (or corresponding ACT scores) to select incoming freshmen. Many also require letters of recommendation, lists of extracurricular activities, or interviews. In some

Admission requirements must be tailored to the individual campus. The average program admits less than 5% of the freshman class.

cases, a high SAT score is allowed to override a non-qualifying GPA, and most programs offer an appeals process for students whose scores disqualify them but who feel that they have special circumstances that

warrant consideration. The average minimum requirements are a 3.5 GPA and 1130 SAT (on a 1600 scale), although this varies widely.

A common concern in conversations about Honors Programs is where to set the bar – too high and deserving students are excluded, but too low and the program loses its significance. Each program has to tailor its entrance requirements to its particular student population, because a 3.7 high school GPA, for example, would include very few freshmen on some campuses, but could include half of the freshman class on another. Most programs admit less than 5% of the freshman class, although some choose to go as high as 14%.

Can students transfer into the program after their freshman year?

Most programs do admit transfer students, provided the students still need enough general education classes to fulfill the program requirements. The exceptions to this are the programs in which honors students follow a set track for all their general education honors classes, in which case transfer students would have to repeat most of their transferred courses. However, even when transfer students are not allowed to formally join the Honors Program, qualified students are often encouraged to take honors courses for their upper-division course requirements where applicable.

Admission for transfer students is usually based on college GPA, regardless of whether they are transferring from another school or simply choosing to join the Honors Program after one or two years on the same campus. The average required GPA is 3.4 for all transferable college coursework. Most programs reduce the number of required honors courses for transfer students based on the assumption that these students have already completed much of their general education work and would thus have difficulty selecting enough appropriate honors classes if held to the same standards as freshmen.

How many of your students successfully graduate with honors?

Many directors do not have data on this subject, and among those who do, the answers vary widely. One reports “very few,” while others are as high as 90%. One campus has 80% of its students complete their general education requirements in the program, but then only 50-60% stay the final year and complete the capstone project.

Why do students expend the effort to apply to the Honors Program and take honors courses for a few terms, only to drop out of the program before achieving their objectives? Are they dis-

satisfied with their experience? Are they unable to meet the academic requirements? Are they uncertain of their purpose for being in the program and therefore unmotivated to put forth the extra work? The reasons for declin-

Tracking program data, including student satisfaction and enrollment by class, can help identify problems and allow everyone’s investment in the honors experience to reach its full potential.

ing enrollment may include these and countless others, and without clear answers, no progress can be made. Therefore, the first step in combating this phenomenon is information. Cal Poly SLO conducted a satisfaction survey of its honors students this year and the primary reason cited for dropping out of the program was a shortage of honors classes. Armed with that data, the program director was able to begin lobbying for increased funding for the program so that more honors classes could be offered.

Granted, a 100% retention rate is unrealistic because some students will reevaluate their priorities or encounter personal challenges, but the Cal Poly study indicates that program drop-outs are preventable in most cases. Tracking program enrollment and student satisfaction can alert directors to the causes of drop-outs, which is the first step in solving the problem. Having both the student and the program invest in the honors experience for the first few years of college, only to abandon the effort part-way through, is like baking a cake, but pulling it out of the oven early. The baking process can be fun and the kitchen will smell good temporarily, but ultimately there will be no cake to eat and the ingredients will have been wasted. Waiting the last few minutes means the difference between a useless pile of half-cooked batter and a delicious cake that can be enjoyed for days to come.

HONORS COURSES

What are the requirements for students to graduate with honors?

Almost all honors programs require a certain GPA (3.3 on average) and a required number of honors classes, mostly in the general education areas, but the nature of these classes varies widely. There seem to be three distinct categories of honors programs:

1. Entirely Honors Contract – Students arrange to get honors credit for a certain number of courses (typically eight) of their choosing by working with their professor to complete an independent project in addition to the normal coursework.
2. Entirely Honors Courses – All students in the program follow a set series of general education courses, covering two years and almost all of

the general education graduation requirements. These courses often follow common themes, are taught by cross-disciplinary teams, allow for more efficient completion of general education requirements, and offer students the chance to become closely acquainted with their fellow honors students. This is not feasible in some schools, especially those that integrate major and general education courses from the beginning, but it has been very successful in the schools that can accommodate it. Indeed, one such program is currently celebrating its 50th anniversary!

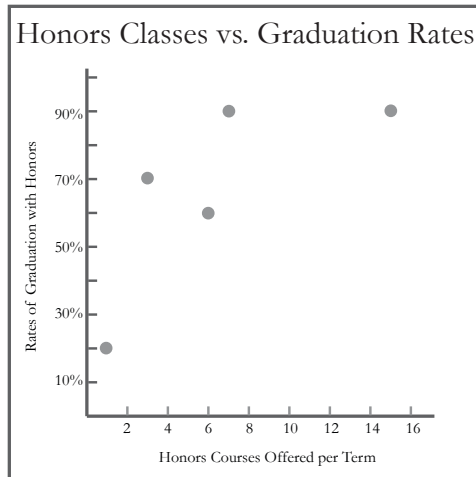
3. Combination – Students may utilize an Honors Contract for a few (typically two) of their honors requirements, then must complete the rest with honors courses, typically in the general education fields. A certain number of undergraduate research projects, study abroad or internship experiences, or other special cases can sometimes be used to fulfill honors course requirements. This is the most common model by far.

About one third of the programs also require a senior project, portfolio, a certain number of community service hours, or other requirements in addition to the GPA and honors courses in order to graduate with honors.

How many honors courses are offered per quarter or semester?

How many honors courses are offered per quarter or semester?

Answers to this question range from one to fifteen with the average falling around five. There is a direct correlation between the number of honors courses offered per term and the rate of students successfully graduating with honors. This demonstrates that even with priority registration (discussed later), there is no substitute for offering enough classes for students to realistically fulfill their requirements on time.



Are your honors courses exclusively for honors students or do you allow blended enrollment?

Programs seem to be split approximately 50/50 on this issue. Most of the blended-enrollment classes are mixed in order to reach enrollment targets if they do not fill with honors students alone, but in most cases these open seats are still restricted to students with high GPAs and/or special permission. None of the programs surveyed allows the open seats to be offered to the school population at large.

Is the program two years or four years?

The two programs that have students follow a set track of general education classes are both two-year programs, but all other honors programs appear to last four years.

What makes your honors classes unique from other classes on campus?

Without exception, Honors Programs try to design their classes to be richer, not harder, with expanded intellectual demands. Programs realize that simply adding more work does not ensure greater learning, and that honors courses that are graded more severely than other courses are not conducive to overall academic success. Honors classes are generally designed to bring top-level students together to facilitate deeper discussions and a more global approach to learning. Some programs even take this so far as to forgo textbooks in favor of primary sources, including classical literature and philosophy. Most programs share similar goals for their students in honors classes, including deeper intellectual challenge, more diverse academic experience, and greater personal responsibility as members of the community.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Does the program include leadership training or opportunities?

Most honors programs do not include any required leadership training or opportunities. A few have optional workshops or presentations, or encourage their students to participate in school-sponsored leadership events, but only

Offering leadership opportunities for honors students, especially opportunities that serve the school, can help answer the question, "How does the Honors Program benefit the campus as a whole?"

one of the nine responses indicates a leadership requirement. This program has the entire sophomore class participate in the Student Leadership & Development Office's Leadership Academy, which includes three kinds of seminars: personal growth, academic growth, and community service.

Discussions with advancement officers indicate that prospective investors are looking for what sets honors students apart from the general student population. Leadership training, even when optional, represents one opportunity for programs to distinguish their students from every other graduate. Leadership is also cross-disciplinary and can be a venue for honors students in different majors to get to know one another, thus providing that elusive social component to the program.

Does the program include any community service?

Most programs do not require community service, although almost all offer students the chance to do it voluntarily. Among those that do require service, the requirement averages about twelve hours per year. In addition, several Honors Programs are linked with the service learning programs on their campuses.

One Honors Program requires twelve hours of community service per year, of which four hours must be service to the program. This is a very creative way to get students more involved in the program and generates 1200 hours of service to the program annually – the equivalent of a full-time position on a nine-month calendar! In the aforementioned Cal Poly student survey, more than one third of students said they had the time and willingness to get more involved in the program, but did not know what opportunities for involvement were available. For programs feeling short on student participation, requiring a few

Community service can bring honors students together, increase student engagement in the program, and increase program visibility on campus.

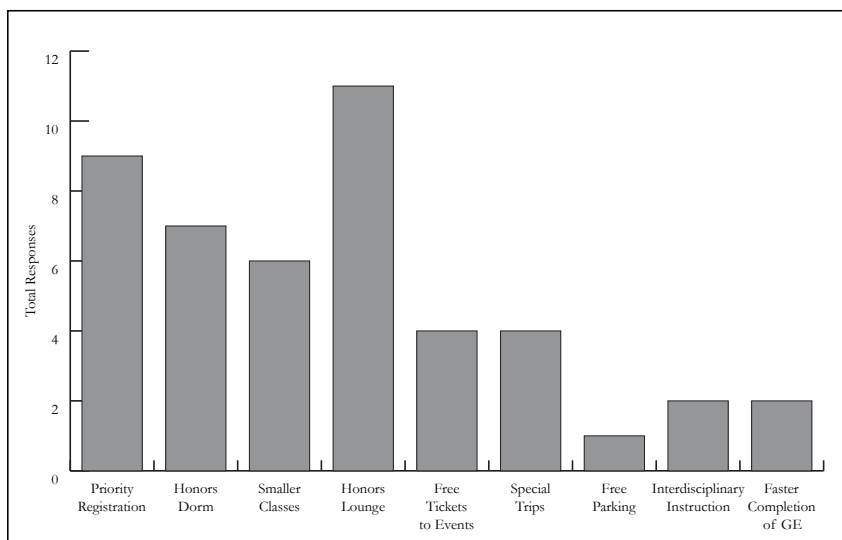
community service hours to be devoted to the program each year can help students overcome “apathy inertia” and see the opportunities to make a difference in their Honors Program.

Does the program include any undergraduate research opportunities?

Most programs do offer some opportunities for optional undergraduate research. About half of these come in the form of a capstone thesis project in the student’s senior year and about half are faculty-directed independent research projects. In some cases, research conducted outside the Honors Program can count as an Honors Contract and thus, earn honors credit. Some research projects, such as those funded by National Science Foundation grants, can also be a source of scholarships for students.

Besides scholarships, what perks or incentives do students receive from participation in the program?

Recognition at graduation and on the student’s transcript and diploma are essentially ubiquitous. In addition, 75% of Honors Programs offer priority registration, 58% offer an honors dorm, and 50% offer smaller classes. There are a variety of other perks as well, including free tickets to campus events, special trips around the state, free parking, interdisciplinary instruction and faster completion of general education requirements.



Do you offer special honors academic advising?

All but one program offer honors academic advising, generally in addition to the student's major advising. In most cases, this honors advisor is an honors professor, although one program has a paid position for a peer mentor to do it. Most directors also have an open-door policy if students have questions. Advising is especially important in programs without a set series of classes and the one program that does not offer advising has had very serious challenges with students not understanding the requirements or choosing their honors courses effectively. On the other end of the spectrum, one program offers honors academic advising, but also helps its students with applications for graduate school, study abroad, national student exchange, internships and professional school.

What attribute of your program is most attractive to freshmen?

For most incoming freshmen, priority registration and a richer academic experience are the key features of the Honors Programs. Access to top-quality professors and a community of like-minded, hard-working students are also important. Finally, scholarships are attractive and participation in an honors program looks good on a resume or transcript, which is something on which incoming freshmen (i.e. graduating high school seniors) are still very focused.

Honors distinction on a resume or transcript may attract many freshmen to the program, but for students to commit to the program for the duration of their college careers, most must find a more meaningful motive for engagement.

Ultimately, however, looking good on a resume or transcript is not enough to keep students engaged in the program over time, so even if this is a key attractor for freshmen, the program must offer other features to encourage long-term student participation.

FINANCIAL DATA

What is your approximate annual budget?

These figures are difficult to compare because they cover so many different expenses, such as salaries, scholarships, courses, and office costs, in any combination. From any angle, however, there is an extremely wide range of budgets across the CSU Honors System. At the top, a few programs have annual budgets of \$250,000 or more, and on the other end, some programs have no regular budget at all. Some schools have endowments to support the entire program, while others have small endowments for scholarship funds. Some directors are paid by their programs, while others are paid by the Office of Undergraduate Studies. Some programs have to fund honors courses out of the program budget, while in other schools, honors courses are funded by the college offering the course. For these reasons, a meaningful comparison is next to impossible, but it is clear that the absence of a stable budget is extremely detrimental (and in some cases, nearly fatal) to a program, whereas a generous, reliable budget facilitates a variety of activities and resources for students, which contributes to the success of the program.

How much of your funding comes from the state and how much comes from private or independent sources?

About 63% of honors programs are entirely state-funded, 25% receive a mix of state and private funds, and 12% are entirely privately funded with all fundraising conducted by the program director.

Who provides your private funding, and are there any limitations on how it can be spent?

Among those who have private funding, all are endowments from philanthropists with connections to the University, usually in exchange for naming rights to the Honors Program. These major endowments range in size, up to \$1,000,000, and carry no restrictions on how to spend the money. Some programs also have small endowments for scholarship funds, which can only be used for student scholarships.

How are your honors courses funded?

Exactly half of responding directors have to fund their own honors courses and half have their courses funded by the respective colleges or departments. Fortunately, most of the directors that have to fund the classes themselves do have larger budgets. There is no apparent correlation between funding source and number of honors courses offered or whether the classes are exclusive or blended.

Do you offer scholarships to your students?

Not every Honors Program has a dedicated scholarship fund, but every program surveyed does have some way of offering scholarships to its top applicants. Often, if the Honors Program does not offer scholarships of its own, a “President’s Scholars” program (or something of similar title) will offer scholarships from the University directly to the highest-achieving students. Approximately half of the Honors Programs do offer automatic scholarships to all honors students, ranging in value from a \$50 book stipend to a grant package worth several thousand dollars per year. All others offer a fixed number of scholarships to a few highly-qualified students per year. There is no apparent correlation between scholarship offerings and the significance of the program in University recruitment or overall student satisfaction. In the Cal Poly student survey, however, many students cited scholarships as one thing that would encourage them to try to remain in the program when they might otherwise drop out.

SOCIAL SCENE

Is there an opportunity for honors students to connect socially?

How “close knit” is your honors community?

Every program has some opportunity for social connection among honors students – parties, retreats, BBQs, dances, and even special trips to national parks or theater productions – and almost all have an honors dorm and an honors student lounge. The degree of student participation in these opportunities varies widely and despite these opportunities many students only really

know the other students in their own class or major. Many directors express frustration with this lack of connection, but it is unknown how students feel about it. Perhaps students have other avenues for social interaction, are too busy to attend many events, or, as is the case with program involvement, are unaware of the opportunities.

If a program is dissatisfied with its social connection factor, a robust honors student lounge (described below) can help significantly, as can an honors-specific dorm. Directors can consult with the Honors Club or send an email survey to all the students in the program to determine student interest in events. Often (throughout most universities, not only in the Honors Programs), students have an opinion but will not express it unless asked, so simply opening that dialog with students about what they would like to see happen in the program can lead to remarkable feedback and positive change.

An honors lounge or honors dorm can facilitate strong social connections among honors students, but opening a dialog with students to find out about their needs is also critical to a program's social success.

How would you describe your honors office or student lounge?

Honors Program offices vary widely, from a single faculty office to a small freestanding building, offering a variety of amenities to students. The most useful of these features seem to be couches and tables for group study, computers with printers, and wireless Internet access. It is also helpful to have the Honors faculty offices located in the same area as the student lounge, but separated by a wall or other barrier. This proximity facilitates communication

An ideal honors student lounge is conducive to both academic and purely social interactions, and should be close to but clearly distinguished from the honors administrative office space.

and relationships between program students and administrators, giving the program a more unified feel while allowing students to use the lounge space without feeling that they are intruding on the office or are being watched.

The data indicate a correlation between the robustness of the student lounge space

and how “close knit” the program students are. The lounge is one of the ways (and in some cases, the only way) for honors students to meet each other outside of class, so making it an inviting and useful space increases the likelihood that students will actually use it to connect with each other. Non-academic resources, such as TVs, DVD players, refrigerators and popcorn can help encourage the space to become a “hang-out” location and not strictly for homework, which is important in the development of deeper relationships among students. If a program is disappointed in its social outcomes, the honors student lounge is one resource to examine.

HONORS EXPERIENCE

To your knowledge, what is the impression of your Honors Program on campus?

Visibility and image vary widely among Honors Programs, but on average, they are positively perceived among those who know of the program. About 33% of the directors say their programs are not well known on campus and about 20% feel their programs have a neutral or varied reputation. Surprisingly, there is no strong correlation between program reputation and program size, but there does seem to be some correlation between reputation and both retention rates and honors courses offered per term.

What have you found to be the most important contributor to your program’s success?

Directors attribute their programs’ success to a variety of factors with nearly equal frequency – recruiting and scholarships to attract high-end students, support from administrators, high-quality instructors and mutually caring interactions between students, faculty, and the director.

What have you found to be the most challenging roadblock to your program’s success?

Not surprisingly, insufficient funding tops this list, although apathy (from both the students and the campus administration and faculty) comes in a close second. Recruiting qualified applicants is third, with one director not-

ing the frequent discrepancy between a student's grades and test scores from high school and their actual ability to perform at a college level. Unfortunately, most of these challenges are not easily fixed. Fundraising is challenging for public schools and apathy is a problem around the world.

Some progress can be made, however! When faculty members are resistant to the program, directors can meet with them to try to determine the source of the resistance and see what can be done to address their concerns. If campus administrators are not aware of the program, a student-led public

Successful Honors Programs invariably have strong support networks and positive visibility on campus, so these attributes are key elements of any growth plan.

relations group can help create promotional materials and increase program visibility on campus. This type of project could count as an honors course or community service hours. If students seem disinterested in the course material, it may prove worthwhile to communicate with the honors student body

about which courses they would like to see the program offer or what they would like to see done differently with the honors courses already offered to make them more interesting.

What mistakes would you suggest that other programs not repeat?

The most common responses to this question address neglecting the program's support network on campus. In addition to ensuring that any outgoing personnel are replaced in a timely manner for a smooth transition, the formation of a dedicated honors committee appears to be critical to the program's success. This committee should include campus administrators, faculty from different departments, and usually a few students from different majors. Without this cross-disciplinary support and the political and financial power it brings, a program will have tremendous difficulty surviving, let alone thriving. Having this positive engagement in the Honors Program from people in different areas of University life contributes to the program's positive image on campus. It also facilitates "networking" on behalf of the program, which can be critical in negotiations for funding and faculty release time.

Similarly, one director strongly cautioned against depending on adjunct faculty to run the program because it creates tremendous uncertainty from quarter to quarter about who is going to be available to teach which courses. Also, adjunct funding is one of the first things a campus cuts, so in case of any kind of budget crisis (as is a nearly constant condition in public universities) the Honors Program is left wondering how to find teachers for the following quarter.

Finally, directors advised that programs tailor their requirements to what students can and will reasonably complete. This generally means focusing honors courses in the general education areas and taking care not to add significantly to students' units required for graduation. This is not simply a matter of student laziness, but of student time and financial necessity to graduate on time. The Cal Poly student survey indicated that, if faced with the dilemma of graduating on time or graduating with honors, most students will choose the former. Therefore, programs dissatisfied with their retention rates should look at how many students are able to completely fulfill their honors graduation requirements with general education classes and how many are having to go out of their way to satisfy the program requirements. More smoothly integrating honors courses into students' schedules can help more students remain in the program and successfully graduate with honors.

Most students will elect to graduate on time over graduating with honors, given the choice.

How important is the Honors Program in recruiting students to your University?

The importance of the Honors Program in recruiting students varies from campus to campus, but it plays at least some role in every case. Even when campuses identify themselves as largely “commuter schools,” and thus not very focused on research or other typically “honors” features, the existence of an honors program allows them to recruit local high-achieving students who might otherwise have gone elsewhere for college.

In general, how satisfied are students with their honors experience?

Of the nine responses, five are “very” or “extremely” satisfied, three are “somewhat” satisfied, and one is neutral. Two programs cite the need for more honors classes as a primary reason for their lower satisfaction rating. This relatively high degree of satisfaction across the board is extremely encouraging, and is a tremendous compliment to the program administrators because it means that despite all the challenges of insufficient funding and absent faculty support, the programs are succeeding and students are gleaning a positive benefit from their honors experiences!

CONCLUSION

Overall, despite extremely challenging financial and campus political circumstances in many cases, the CSU Honors System appears to be accomplishing its central objective – to offer intellectual enrichment to top students. Students and directors agree that there are aspects that could be improved, but in the discussion of possible change, the present level of success should never be overlooked. It represents a tremendous accomplishment on the part of program administrators, faculty, and students, all of whom should be congratulated for their dedication and perseverance with limited resources.

The most common challenges facing Honors Programs are a lack of funding and a sense of apathy on the part of the students, faculty and administration. Raising awareness about the program among faculty and administrators can help combat this apathy, as can collecting clear student feedback about what would make them more engaged in the program.

Program admission requirements must be tailored to the individual campus, but most programs choose to admit less than 5% of the freshman class. As students continue in the program, enrollment tends to drop steadily in each class, until the program drop-outs outnumber the program graduates in some cases. This represents a tremendous waste of resources by both the students and the program, so investigating and correcting the causes of drop-outs is one of the most beneficial steps a program can take when looking to expand or improve its offerings.

An honors student lounge, honors dorm, and honors social events can provide venues for students to connect with one another socially. Leadership and community service opportunities can also contribute to this goal, while increasing program visibility on campus and providing students with valuable hands-on experience. Honors distinction on a resume or transcript may attract many freshmen to the program, but there must be deeper motivation for student engagement if students are to remain in the program and care about its success.

There are three main kinds of honors programs – exclusively honors contract, exclusively honors courses, or a combination. Which system is most applicable depends on the school's existing academic structure and the program's resources, but in general, students tend to find greater satisfaction in honors courses than in honors contracts. There is a direct correlation between the number of honors courses offered per term and students' rates of successfully graduating with honors. Even a program with all other beneficial elements in place cannot succeed if its students cannot get the classes they need. Finally, it is vital that these courses accomplish their goals without delaying student graduation.

Although program design varies with each campus's unique population and needs, there are common ingredients in most programs' recipes – smaller classes, close faculty contact, and a richer University experience. These are worthy goals, but can be difficult to measure, so it is critical that student feedback (preferably anonymous feedback to encourage honesty) be collected at regular intervals. This feedback must cover two subjects: first, is the program accomplishing its goals; second, do the program administrators and students agree on what those goals should be? When everyone in the program is working toward the same vision, it becomes much easier to utilize resources efficiently and ensure a positive outcome for all involved.

THE RECIPE

Recipe for an Outstanding Honors Program

Ingredients:

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 cup honors courses | 8 oz. support network |
| 2 tbsp. social connection | 1 cup stable budget |
| 4 tbsp. administrative personnel | 16 oz. student feedback |

Directions:

- Review the program's offerings and student satisfaction ratings.
- Evaluate where there might be room to improve.
- Choose a few key improvements on which to focus first.
- Investigate what is required to make those happen.
- Propose an action plan.
- Execute the plan.

