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Motivation in Honors Advising

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CHAPTER THREE

Motivation in Honors Advising

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Academic advisors face a number of unique challenges when advising honors students. Past research on advising has attempted to respond to challenges through approaches like developmental advising (Crookston, 1972) and appreciative advising (Bloom et al., 2008). A relatively novel way, however, of advising in the honors context may enhance these approaches. This new approach involves a deeper understanding of motivation, which is what moves people into action or inhibits them from moving into action. Motivation has been studied in various contexts, and researchers have collected data that support the importance of motivation for an individual's

success and well-being (Dweck et al., 2014; Farrington et al., 2012). For example, growth mindset—the belief that one's intelligence and abilities are not fixed and can grow through effort—has been shown to positively affect student success in the classroom (Dweck, 2006). Growth mindset interventions have also shown positive effects in addressing inequities in educational outcomes (Paunesku et al., 2015). Although the importance of motivation for gifted students has been investigated in K-12 education (e.g., Makel et al., 2015), motivation and its relationship to academic success and well-being lack extensive study in the context of university honors education. Developing an empirical understanding of student motivation would be particularly useful for advisors working with honors students because they could apply this knowledge of motivation in their day-to-day work to improve student success and well-being, which are the ultimate goals of quality academic advising. Given the potential of student motivation interventions for addressing inequities, this process would also help in recruiting and retaining honors students from traditionally underserved populations as well as facilitating their success.

Although a number of factors under the umbrella of motivation are relevant to student success and well-being, a framework exists that effectively synthesizes and packages these factors and is easily understandable to practitioners: the expectancy-value-cost model of motivation (Barron & Hulleman, 2015; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). One way to define these three elements of the model is to frame them in terms of the questions with which they are associated. Expectancy addresses this question: "Can students do the task?" Expectancy encompasses students' beliefs about their abilities and their confidence in successfully accomplishing a particular endeavor. An example of expectancy is a success experience, which is when students personally succeed or witness someone in a similar position succeed in a specific task; these circumstances increase their belief in their own ability to do the task (Bandura, 1997). Value asks a different question: "Do students want to do the task?" Value covers students' beliefs about the worth of an activity in terms of the value that it provides. An example of a factor of motivation within value is intrinsic value, which is when students participate in a

certain activity because the activity itself is enjoyable to them (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Finally, cost addresses the final question: "Are there barriers preventing students from having time, energy, or resources for engaging in the task?" Although students may be confident in themselves to do a task and see great value in it, certain factors can still inhibit them from doing so. An example of a cost factor is the effort and time needed for other competing demands that students are engaged in (e.g., working and going to college at the same time), which can occur even when students have high expectancy and see great value in pursuing an honors degree (Flake et al., 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic introduced and exposed various sources of cost for students and advisors alike. These sources of cost manifest themselves structurally in the form of students lacking access to food, housing, and/or a reliable internet connection and motivationally in the form of increased uncertainty about belonging because of an inability to interact with peers and instructors as closely as they would in a face-to-face learning environment. (More examples of expectancy, value, and cost can be found in Tables 1, 2, and 3.)

HONORS ADVISING AND STUDENT MOTIVATION

This chapter proposes that each element in the expectancy-value-cost framework plays an important role in informing academic advising in an honors context throughout students' undergraduate careers, just as it plays an important role for academic advisors' own motivation in their work. For example, expectancy can shape the experience of prospective students who wonder if they have the aptitude for honors work. In terms of value, honors students may struggle to see the relevance of various honors courses to their career goals and aspirations. Lastly, honors students may face cost barriers that prevent them from engaging with and succeeding in honors. An example of these barriers are feelings of missing out on valued alternatives and negative emotional states associated with challenging honors coursework.

As every academic advisor has observed, students encounter a range of challenges impacting their motivation, such as poor academic performance, competing curricular and co-curricular interests, external factors related to personal relationships, or mental health and wellness issues. To date, limited studies address advising issues that are specific and common to honors students. Although we have strong intuitions of what an honors student looks like based on experience, recent work has begun to present a student profile based on quantitative data (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019). Part of the challenge in discussing common academic, interpersonal, and psychological characteristics is recognizing distinct differences between subsets of students who are likely to enroll in an honors program or college.

Because there is no one kind of honors student (Cross et al., 2018), we present several honors advising scenarios that are

TABLE 1. SOURCES OF EXPECTANCY

Label	Sources of Expectancy	Students Are More Likely to Experience Higher Expectancy When:
E1	Ability	They have a high level of ability and/or skill in an activity.
E2	Growth Mindset	They believe that their effort and strategy use will lead to learning.
E3	Success Experiences	They are successful at an activity or watch similar others succeed.
E4	Improvement Experiences	They experience growth in an activity.
E5	Authentic Encouragement	Others communicate that students can succeed (rather than doubt or suggest they can't succeed).
E6	Goal Setting	An activity is broken down into smaller, short-term goals that will help accomplish a bigger, long-term goal.
E7	Clear Expectation	They know what is expected of them for an activity.
E8	Appropriate Challenge	The difficulty of the activity matches students' skill levels.
E9	Feedback	They receive feedback that is specific (rather than general) and task-focused (rather than ability-focused).
E10	Support	They are appropriately supported in completing an activity and know where they can seek help.

Note: Adapted from Christopher Hulleman et al. (2016), from the Motivation Research Institute (2020) at James Madison University.

common in our program and likely recognizable to practitioners elsewhere. In each example, we apply the expectancy-value-cost (EVC) framework to diagnose the problem and formulate interventions. Particularly for honors programs and colleges that require significant research or creative endeavor, such as ours, understanding the expectancy-value-cost model of motivation can help with mentoring students through a process that demands high levels of expectancy and value while potentially also carrying a high cost.

TABLE 2. SOURCES OF VALUE

Label	Sources of Value	Students Are More Likely to Experience Higher Value When:
V1	Intrinsic Value	An activity is personally interesting and enjoyable.
V2	Situational Interest	An activity is designed to "catch" their interest in a given situation (e.g., using variety, novelty, demonstrations, activities).
V3	Utility Value	An activity is perceived to be useful and relevant.
V4	Identity Value	An activity affirms an important aspect of who they are and is something they want to be good at.
V5	Prosocial & Communal Value	An activity allows them to make a difference in the world or a difference for their family and friends.
V6	Context & Rationale	They understand what the purpose and meaning of an activity is.
V7	Enthusiastic Models	They interact with teachers and students who are enthusiastic and passionate about learning.
V8	Autonomy	They feel a sense of choice and control.
V9	Competence	They engage in activities that help them grow and improve.
V10	Belonging	They experience meaningful relationships and connections with others (e.g., student-to-student and student-to-instructor).
V11	Extrinsic Value	They receive external rewards and incentives for learning (but be careful: extrinsic rewards for learning can undermine students' development of intrinsic interest and overall quality of work).

Note: Adapted from Christopher Hulleman et al. (2016), from the Motivation Research Institute (2020) at James Madison University.

After reading each scenario below, we challenge readers to pause and identify the specific motivational issue that the student is facing (expectancy, value, or cost) and how they would advise the student based on that identification. Then, we offer our interpretation through an EVC lens. We also include three reference tables that are adapted from Christopher Hulleman et al. (2016), who comprehensively review different sources that promote or undermine expectancy, value, and cost (see Tables 1, 2, and 3, respectively). In our interpretation of each scenario, we also include references to specific sources of expectancy, value, and cost from Tables 1, 2, and 3 in parentheses. Feel free to refer to these

TABLE 3. Sources of Cost

Label	Sources of Cost	Students Are More Likely to Experience Higher Cost When:
C1	Effort & Time Needed for the Activity	The effort and time required by an activity becomes too much.
C2	Competing Activities	They have too many other activities competing for their time and energy.
C3	Loss of Valued Alternatives	They feel like the learning activity is not worth their time compared to other things they might do.
C4	Psychological Reactions	They feel negative emotions toward an activity (e.g., anxiety, stress).
C5	Identity-Related Threats	They worry about a perceived stigma associated with their identity (e.g., stereotype threat due to race or gender).
C6	Belonging Uncertainty	They feel unsure if they fit in a social or academic setting.
C7	Physical Reactions	They lack physical energy or are physically uncomfortable when doing an activity (e.g., tired, sick).
C8	Scarcity	They lack key resources (e.g., food, shelter, money) or have the perception of lacking key resources that distract them from doing an activity

Note: Adapted from Christopher Hulleman et al. (2016), from the Motivation Research Institute (2020) at James Madison University.

tables when completing the exercise. This exercise is intended to allow readers to immediately roleplay and experience the benefits of applying the expectancy-value-cost model in their practice.

Scenario 1

David is a first-year student in his fourth week of classes. He comes to the advising office distraught, reporting that he studies constantly, feels burnt out, and thinks his work is not good enough to make A grades in his classes. He has not received grades for any assignments in any of his classes. He says he received straight A's in high school.

Grade anxiety and perfectionism are common characteristics of honors students (Cross et al., 2018; Long & Lange, 2002). For first-year students transitioning not just to college coursework but to the heightened expectations of an honors program or college, these characteristics can manifest in ways that impact sources of expectancy. David's experience of academic success in high school is not translating to his college experience. He is working hard but thinks his courses are more difficult than what his academic background has prepared him for (E8). Moreover, he has yet to experience success in this new environment that could instill confidence that he can succeed at the college level (E3).

An advising interaction with David could reinforce the notion that he does possess the necessary background and skills to perform well in his courses (E5). He fits the profile of a successful honors student and should feel confident in that. And given that he has yet to receive any graded feedback on his work, encouragement to take a wait-and-see approach could help contextualize his situation (E8). In the event that David does not perform to his expectations on some early assignments, an advisor could acknowledge that adapting to college-level academic work is a challenging process for many honors students (E10). His grades can certainly improve through continued hard work and effort (E2). Encouraging a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) could help him to overcome challenges now and in the future (Yeager et al., 2016).

Scenario 2

Louis is in his first semester, majoring in biology with a prepharmacy concentration. He comes from a wealthy suburban community and chose pharmacy early in high school as his future career. He is discovering, however, that he dislikes his science classes. He does not find them interesting and is second-guessing his choice of major and career. This doubt is causing an identity crisis for him. Louis has always envisioned his future self as a pharmacist, and he is experiencing significant anxiety about who he is and where he belongs. He is also worried about his career prospects. His favorite classes in high school were government and Spanish, but he worries about a loss of prestige back home should he pursue these fields. He feels trapped between the narrow expectations of his family and community and his own personal interests.

Honors students often bring social and familial expectations for career success with them to college. They are high achievers whose success may be valued in the context of delimited expectations regarding major and career. Louis is discovering significant value and cost issues regarding major and career selection. He clearly does not find intrinsic value in his current courses; they neither interest nor engage him in any significant way (V1). In considering alternatives, however, he faces limitations related to the identity value he places on certain majors (V4) and the perceived external identity costs to choosing them (C5). He fears that selecting a course of study more closely aligned with his intrinsic interests will not promote an identity that he, or those close to him, will value. Knowing this, an advisor could address his identity value by promoting government and Spanish as disciplines worthy of study, using examples of former students in those majors who have had success in college and beyond (E3 and V4). An advisor could also draw out his own values and draw connections to them within these potential majors (V2 and V3). One could also attempt to uncoil the major/career knot by deemphasizing the importance of major choice in future career success, again using examples. Finally, the advisor could try to reduce the identity cost by encouraging Louis to focus on himself and not others (C5).

Scenario 3

Kirsten is a first-year honors student from a rural part of the state. Neither of her parents attended college. She is excelling in her courses, making straight A's. She is confident academically and has already made important connections with professors in her major and is developing future research interests. Still, she is struggling to find her place in a campus community that seems dominated by wealthier students from the suburbs, and this feeling is particularly acute within her honors living learning community. She has friends and she is not unhappy, but she feels like a fish out of water and has a difficult time identifying with many of her peers. She wonders whether this place is right for her.

Lack of diversity within honors programs and colleges is gaining recognition as a serious problem. Recent data indicate significant homogeneity among honors populations, with noticeable underrepresentation of Latinx/Hispanic and Black/African American students and, especially, first-generation and low-income students (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2019). On the whole, honors communities are likely to be whiter and wealthier than the rest of campus. For students from diverse backgrounds, this tendency can lead to uncertainty about belonging or fitting in with their honors peers (C6 and V10); this uncertainty may, in turn, negatively affect academic performance and health. In Kirsten's case, she is succeeding in the classroom and connecting with faculty, but the social environment of our honors college is causing her to consider other options. The honors college is at risk of losing an excellent student.

An advising intervention could start to normalize her feelings of belonging uncertainty by explaining that many students initially struggle with issues of fitting in and that this struggle is usually temporary (C6). As she grows into her college experience, she will find her own communities of belonging. An advisor could then ask her to recount examples of times when she has felt valued and made positive connections to others, especially academically and with professors (V5), and boost those experiences as valid and important (Harackiewicz et al., 2014). Finally, the advisor could ask Kirsten about her interests outside of academics and help her to

identify individuals and groups that might share or support these interests. Helping her find her people on campus can amplify her sense of belonging at the university and reduce the likelihood that she will leave (V10).

Scenario 4

Gabriela is a second-year student. She excels in her courses. She is deeply engaged in honors and has high expectations for her education. She cannot decide what she wants to major in and worries that she will be limited if she has to choose only one discipline. Her interests are broad. She is a strong-willed individual who seeks the intellectual freedom to pursue her own course of study; however, she needs to pick a focus soon in order to graduate on time.

Multipotentiality—the interest in and ability to excel in multiple fields—is a common characteristic of honors students. This characteristic can make choosing academic programs of study particularly fraught for some students (Carduner et al., 2011). When students are faced with the large number of opportunities open to them, multipotentiality can manifest in a genuine inability for students to select a major. For a student like Gabriela, it can also lead to resentment at the limitations placed on her intellectual curiosity.

Using an EVC framework, an honors advisor could help Gabriela, first, by addressing the low level of value she places on individual fields and disciplines of study. After diving deeper into the particular classes she has enjoyed and identifying three or four possible majors or minors, or several combinations of these, an advisor could help Gabriela gain a stronger appreciation of the utility value (V3) of each program by discussing the breadth of possibilities available in each one. She may not fully understand the nuances of certain majors, so using a course catalog to look closely at subfields and course topics could help her realize that the limitation she attributes to major selection is less real than imagined. A deeper understanding of the academic disciplines most closely aligned to her interests could also increase her autonomy (V8), giving her a stronger sense of control over her decisions and diminishing the feeling that she must give up some interests (C3).

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that choosing a major is not necessarily a life-changing decision and that a person with her aptitude and curiosity will have opportunities to pursue multiple interests over the course of her life (Sells, 2023).

Scenario 5

Reggie is a second-semester sophomore. He has an ambitious academic program with two majors, two minors, and honors. He loves his classes and is committed to his studies. He is enrolled in 18 credit hours this semester. He also has leadership roles in two student organizations and a job. Four weeks into the semester, he is feeling overwhelmed by his workload.

Most honors advisors will recognize a student like Reggie: ambitious and driven to succeed, strengths and interests in several fields, strong work ethic, welcomes challenge, and engaged in multiple co-curricular activities. He wants to do it all and, as a result, has overcommitted himself. The related costs of too much work (C1) and too many competing activities (C2) are taking a toll on Reggie. An advising response could begin by cataloguing how much time he commits to each activity and then asking him to indicate which activities he feels are the most essential to his current and future well-being. Are there ways he can scale back on the non-essentials while still making meaningful progress in a number of areas? If he is determined to stick with all of these commitments, then a focus on increasing his confidence could be a high-leverage approach. His advisor could ask him to identify where he is being supported to succeed in each of these areas (E10) and to articulate why he believes that his skills will meet the challenges associated with each activity (E8). Goal-setting exercises (E6) could also increase Reggie's overall confidence. Working to set incremental goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time bound, and tied to long-term future plans can raise his confidence in his ability to manage a heavy workload on a daily and weekly basis, especially at such an early stage in his life (Huang et al., 2017; O'Neil & Conzemius, 2006).

Scenario 6

Laura is a junior political science and pre-law student. Her number one goal in college is to achieve summa cum laude, a distinction based on GPA. She worries about taking on the challenge of an honors thesis because it might negatively affect her grades, and she needs to spend time studying for the LSAT. She plans to apply to law school next year.

Honors programs and colleges often attract students so focused on grades and career goals that they avoid taking on risky, or perceived-to-be-risky, activities (Freyman, 2005). Students often perceive an honors thesis or capstone in this way: time-consuming; high expectations from professors; a distraction from other, more important activities; and a threat to their GPA. While a thesis undoubtedly requires commitment, hard work, and time management, students like Laura misunderstand the fundamental expectancies, values, and costs associated with it. An advisor could help Laura gain a clearer expectation (E7) of the thesis by explaining the scope and scale of the project and the process required to complete it. With a better understanding of the task, she may realize that it is more manageable than she had thought. Laura also needs to value the activity itself. Explaining the utility (V3) of a thesis in the context of her career plans for law school (V6) might help her appreciate its significance to her future. Drawing on examples of pre-law students whose theses paved the way for future success in law school could help (E3). Finally, with a better understanding of how expectancy and value connect to a thesis, Laura may be able to mitigate the cost factor. Rather than viewing the thesis as a non-relevant activity that will prevent her from focusing on more important things, she can see it as fundamentally in alignment with her goals and, with appropriate planning and time management, not as a threat to her GPA or preparation for the LSAT (C3).

IMPLICATIONS FOR HONORS ADVISING

We propose that the EVC model can serve as a useful framework for advisors to connect and understand the motivational issues

affecting honors students. It provides a common language for discussing common problems both within our own honors programs and colleges and, potentially, across institutions. For new advisors, EVC can be a useful tool for introducing challenges and opportunities that they are likely to encounter when they begin working with students. For experienced advisors, this framework can help with diagnosing issues that may be especially prevalent among honors students and in our programs. If we notice, for example, recurring issues with growth mindset, utility value, and belonging uncertainty among our students, then we can develop specific advising strategies and interventions to help them to move forward. As referenced earlier, various motivational interventions exist that will support students' growth mindset, utility value, and belonging. These interventions are associated with improved academic and well-being outcomes for students, along with addressing inequities in supporting the academic outcomes of traditionally underserved students in higher education (Cronin et al., 2021).

Beyond the immediacy of working individually with students, EVC could be incorporated into program-level advising initiatives. For example, EVC assessment surveys could be administered at key points during a student's career. These surveys would provide valuable information about individual students, perhaps serving as an early warning system for students who need immediate attention. They would also aggregate data about the needs of students as a group. These surveys also present an opportunity for programs to disaggregate their data by different student groups, allowing them to see if there are differences in students' experiences based on their different group identities. Indeed, one of the most promising applications of EVC is as a programmatic assessment tool.

Finally, EVC also can play an important role in understanding and addressing the motivation of academic advisors. For example, in terms of expectancy, honors advisors may lack critical training to help them feel that they can support their students. In terms of value, honors advisors may want more autonomy in supporting their students or in trying out more creative solutions. In terms of cost, honors advisors may have too many competing demands on their

time because they often balance administrative roles and teaching on top of their individual work with the many students they serve, which Philip L. Frana (2023) highlights in this monograph.

CONCLUSION

Equipping advisors with a motivation toolbox to be used in regular interactions with prospective and current students, including formal office visits, open houses, and sidewalk conversations, makes our advising interactions more purposeful and relevant. Introducing honors motivation in advising encounters and first-year experience courses will help students gain a better sense of who they are both individually and as a group. This approach also helps students to be curious about finding their purpose, vocation, ideas, and curricula. The EVC model allows honors advisors to understand and help students more quickly. It also promotes self-assessment, reflection, and action planning by the students.

Future directions for our work involve program-level changes that can be pursued in honors advising, curriculum planning, and assessment. By observing advising trends through the EVC framework, we can better understand common characteristics among the honors students enrolled in our universities, diagnose structural impediments in honors, and then make data-driven improvements. Advising is a prime way to navigate diffuse interests and coordinate values across program elements. We can help high-performing students develop optimal motivation while simultaneously developing maps and tools to measure learning outcomes and student success. We can help students better see the value we are providing to them today and in the future. Moreover, advising may ultimately drive grassroots efforts at program-level innovation.

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