The Perceived Benefits of the Honors Program through the Perspectives of Current Students, Recent Graduates and Over-5-Year Alumni

Introduction
Over 450 first-year students join the ISU Honors Program every year and about half of them major in the College of Engineering. The number of Engineering students who complete the program and graduate with Honors is about 15-20 per semester. That dropout rate is alarmingly low. The reasons why students do not persist have been studied before, but this study shifted to focus on the benefits of the program to students in Engineering. The goals of the study were:
- To determine whether there is a difference in mindset between students in the program and students who graduate from the program based upon time for reflection or more life experiences.
- To educate current students about the benefits of the Honors Program.

Methods
- Short survey to three different respondent groups highlighting the benefits of the Honors Program
- Undergraduates: 26 respondents in their second or third year of an Engineering curriculum
- Recent Graduates: 9 respondents who graduated with Honors in the College of Engineering within the last year
- 5-Year Alumni: 7 respondents who graduated with Honors in the College of Engineering 5 years ago

Data

Figure 1. Percentage of students who identified the above domains as the benefits of the Honors Program in the short answer question “What do you think are the benefits of Honors?”

Figure 2. Percentage of respondents who, from a list, selected the above domains as experiences they received from the Honors Program.

Figure 3. Average value of rankings of selected benefits of the Honors Program with 1 being the lowest level of importance in their college career and 10 being the highest. Respondents were asked to rank only those benefits that they selected based on the above figure. All values are statistically insignificant differences except for the personal growth domain.

Figure 4. Percentage of respondents who replied yes or no to whether the benefits of the Honors Program outweigh the costs.

Figure 5. Average ranking of how much respondents attributed their success at ISU to the Honors Program. The ranking ranged from 1 (representing none) and 5 (representing all).

Conclusion
- Without any prompting, undergraduates cited the tangible benefits of housing and priority registration, while alumni mentioned more intrinsic benefits of Honors.
- When selecting benefits from the list provided, alumni tended to value academic benefits slightly more than do current students.
- The Honors community and research opportunities seem to be what Honors students and alumni value the most.
- Most respondents agree that benefits received from the Honors Program outweigh the costs, but some interpreted that as remaining in the program not graduating with it.
- On average, respondents said that they attribute 40% of their collegiate success to the Honors Program.

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Sources