

Office of Academic Planning and Assessment

Assessment Mini-Grant

Honors College Admission and Retention Assessment

Dr. Maria Alexander Holmes

Final Report

Section 1. How were the mini-grant funds utilized?

The funds were used to hire a senior student assistant to work with Dr. Holmes to collect, analyze, design graphs, and report honors college student demographics and student records data. The student assisted Dr. Holmes with tasks to organize and systematically collect and record student data. NCHC best practices for assessment were consulted as guidelines for methods and analysis. Additional internal programs were developed to analyze data and generate meaningful reports and charts. An assessment data log was kept each month.

Section 2. What were your successes? Were there any difficulties?

The assessment project was successful in reaching our goal to improve Honors College admission and retention practices. The project was helpful in developing a sustainable system for collecting application data and student demographics leading to a more in-depth analysis of success indicators for honors college graduates at SHSU. In addition to important factors such as SAT and GPA data, we compared differences in gender, high school rank and high school graduating class size for first time freshmen (FTF) in the Honors College. The comparisons were helpful for measuring academic success and persistence and for developing policy recommendations and guidelines for Honors College admissions practices.

Based on the results, we were able to confirm that our eligibility requirements of top 10% and SAT 1200 or ACT 27 are useful in predicting student “fit” for academic success. One unexpected result was the lower rate of success for FTF male honors students. Our hypothesis that FTF high school rank was the best indicator for successful completion of the honors requirements was consistent with the data. This led to one of the most interesting percentages: 60% of the students who ranked higher than 8.5% graduated with Honors, while only 43% of the students who ranked lower than 8.5% graduated with Honors. This measurement supported our expedited application review process. These assessments were

useful for honors admissions policy review by the Honors Council faculty members.

The difficulties were inconsistent data collection internally in the Honors College office. Application files and data collection had been maintained by different staff and student assistants from year to year and were inconsistent. Also challenging was the minimal data analysis and reporting that we received from the university. Consequently, we were not able to look at 10 years of data as planned, and instead, we analyzed five years. Improvements have been achieved and we now receive an Honors/Non-Honors tracking report each year. This report aids in tracking retention and graduation rates for honors students and reports first generation, ethnicity, and transfer student demographics data.

With these reports we are now monitoring the academic success of different populations of honors college students, in particular ethnically diverse and first generation students. We were surprised to discover the relatively large number of at risk students in the honors college. In 2015, 41% of the honors student population were identified as first generation. Likewise, 40% of FTF were identified as first generation. We discovered that fewer male students are applying to the Honors College and fewer male students are successfully completing the requirements to graduate with honors. In 2011, 36% of FTF male students graduated with honors compared to 52.5% of FTF female honors students who graduated with honors. By contrast, this gender graduation gap was smaller in previous years. In 2007, FTF female success rate was 73.7% compared to FTF male success rate of 75%. Overall for academic years 2008 to 2012, average SAT scores of FTF Honors College graduates were consistent, ranging from 1230 to 1216. Similarly, average SHSU GPA of Honors College graduates were consistent across five academic years, 2008-2012.

Section 3. What next steps will be taken to build upon these experiences?

Now that we are aware of the diversity of students in the Honors College, we are more deliberate and intentionally attentive to providing academic advising, specific programs, and additional resources that will benefit each sub-population as well as the traditional student in the Honors College.

Additionally, we seek ways to continuously improve maintenance of our student records and data collection process. As a result of this assessment project, we plan three initiatives:

1. Additional Academic Advisor: Dean Bell will appoint Assistant Dean Tracy Bilsing to assist with advising honors students each semester. Associate Dean Patrick Lewis and Associate Dean Maria

Holmes will continue their academic advising responsibility.

2. Honors Freshman Learning Community: Dr. Holmes will submit a proposal for an Honors Freshman Learning Community designed to assist first generation and ethnically diverse students in transitioning successfully into the university and in becoming fully engaged in the Honors College.
3. Additional Staff Member: Dean Bell will request an additional full time staff member to assist with maintaining student records and consistent data collection that will result in a continuous closed-loop assessment and evaluation process that can be replicated each year.