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Racism within the Honors College

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Racism within the Honors College

Abstract

Students of color have been advocating for a change within the Honors College for many years. Student leaders of the club *Honors Students of Color Board* or HSOCB collaborated with Faculty to release a climate survey in Spring of 2022. The purpose of the survey was to gather data on the differences in experiences of students within the honors program, primarily focusing on race. The results found that students of color are more likely to consider leaving Honors due to feeling isolated or unwelcome than white students. The results also found that students of color feel as though they need to work harder to be valued equally.

Introduction

To give some background on my research, I want to explain how the honors college works on paper and what the experience is like for me as a person of color. To start, I will explain the curriculum requirements, then the honors community (including Edens) and the honors advisory board.

Curriculum

Honors is a program that students apply for before coming to Western Washington University (WWU). Once a student is attending WWU, they cannot join the program. The curriculum for honors is fairly simple. There are 4 elements.

To begin, there is the first-year sequence. During the first-year sequence, students learn about premodernity (103), modernity (104) and post modernity (105/106). These three classes are to be taken in order your first year of college. They fulfill some General University Requirements (GURs). The first two classes of the sequence are Western classes, the third class is the choice of the student. There are classes that are western focus and non-western focus, which satisfies different GURs. During Fall quarter freshman year, there is a large class called 101. The curriculum for this class has changed over the years but personally I believe the main purpose is to build community for the first-year students.

Next is the colloquium requirements. Students must take two colloquium classes, which are smaller class sizes which replace large 101 classes. For example, instead of taking psychology 101, you can take the honors psychology course, which fills the same requirements. The only difference with these classes are the class sizes. Two colloquiums are required to graduate with Honors.

The last class requirements are seminars. Each student is required to take two seminars*. Seminars are taught by any professor on campus. Any professor is allowed to submit a proposal to the Honors Advisory Board (discussed further later) which chooses which seminars will be taught the following year. These seminars can range across any subject like classes regarding BIPOC focused teaching/education to seminars on volcanos and geology. Each seminar is worth 3 credits.

The final requirement is the Senior Capstone project. This is a very open-ended project and could be almost anything a student desires. Each student must choose an advisor and create a project that can stand on its own (all senior capstones are published on Cedar)

*Unless the student did running start, then they take four seminars instead of two colloquium and two seminars

Community

One of the ways that Honors Program draw in students is advocating that honors provides a tight, hardworking community. On their banner on the WWU website, it says that Honors is “*A tight-knit community of students who are looking to get the most out of their college experience.*” (WWU Honors College). Part of the way that Honors attempts to provide community is through Honors affinity housing. The Honors College affinity housing is located in the Edens dorms. The Honors dorms are known as some of the best on campus, with tall ceiling’s and suite style bathrooms. Because first years Honors students live on campus, students are very immersed in the College. Two or three of a first-years classes are within Honors, along with living in Honors makes students completely immersed in the community.

Honors Advisory Board

The original intention of The Honors board was to decide which seminars would be chosen for the next school year. The honors board has transitioned into a new, more private entity that makes decisions about the Honors College. The change in the responsibilities of the Honors College first started when the HSOC* demands were released. That is when Scott Linneman, the director of the Honors College started using the Advisory Board for other discissions that affect the Honors College. The advisory board is described on the website as:

The Honors Advisory Board is composed of faculty from Western's colleges and current Honors students to advise Honors leadership. This includes curricular and programmatic changes and

upper-division seminar selection. Advisory Board members support the advancement of Honors College departmental goals as well as Western's mission and strategic goals.

It is unclear exactly which decisions the advisory board is used for since meetings are private.

There are limited notes available on the website starting in Fall 2022. The board is made up of 15 members, 5 of which are students. There are two members of honors staff: Tristen Goldman and Scott Linemann. The remaining 8 are faculty from around campus across different departments.

For more information regarding the official information on the Honors Advisory Board, visit the Honors website advisory board page: <https://honors.wvu.edu/honors-advisory-board>

Honors Students of Color

Honors Students of Color or HSOC was founded in 2019 by Silvia Leija. The need for this club was apparent by the environment that was created in Honors. This club started as a space for students of color to discuss their experiences. HSOC has been a way for students of color to connect with each other and share their experiences along with information on which classes and professors to take and more importantly not to take. After the first two years, HSOC had decided to release a formal list of demands to support students of color. The 10 demands are as follows:

EVERYTHING BELOW MUST BE DONE WITH HSOC PARTNERSHIP AND APPROVAL. This does not mean projects are taken away from us or dropped only onto our shoulders. These are partnerships where HSOC should feel heard and

treated as equals in discussions. The process of starting each demand must begin by the end of Spring 2022.

- 1. Ending the usage of the N word by non-Black students, staff, faculty, and administration in the Honors Program. There must be repercussions for those who violate this.*
- 2. Hiring another staff member that HSOC can go to who deals specifically with DEI and student of color retention in the program with a paid student assistant (who has experience in DEI). The hiring committee must include HSOC members and mentors.*
- 3. More faculty and staff of color (who teach classes about race, not white professors). The hiring and/or selection committee must include HSOC members and mentors.*
- 4. Financial reparations: Annual scholarships for Honors students of color, more HSOC funding, and DEI development and community building retreats akin to Honors Prologue.*
- 5. Honors student of color affinity housing in Edens Hall.*
- 6. A racial and accessibility climate survey in consultation with HSOC.*
- 7. Public access to retention and dropout rates for students of color in the program.*
- 8. Curriculum reform: An analysis of the first-year sequence's efficacy in terms of cultural sensitivity and student satisfaction with an emphasis on Black and Indigenous student of color experiences. In addition, updating the Honors curriculum from less racist/Eurocentric to more anti-racist content that challenges white-dominant narratives.*

9. *Designated permanent student of color positions on Honors Board (at least 2).*
10. *Immediate demand: A reporting system in Honors for students of color experiencing microaggressions and racism. There must be ways in place for them to not take a certain professor, move out of a roommate situation, change an advisor, or any other actions they need immediately if something does happen (while working on longer term goals).*

There must be consistent communication with HSOC and quarterly checkpoints. If we do not receive any communication, we will assume nothing is being done and will take retribution.

For more information on the experiences of students of color in HSOC and how these students demand honors should be fixed read the full demands.

Another program that came out of the HSOC was the Peer Mentorship Program. This program came directly from students of color, was 100% built by students for students. This is an important fact to remember for the coming years of Honors. This program has a goal of supporting underrepresented students particularly students of color. This program allows for one-on-one mentorship which helps guide first years during their transition to Honors in a particularly white and elitist space.

Methods

To analyze our results, we used Excel. To begin, we had to categorize the data in racial categories since we are focusing on race in our analysis. The data was originally from two separate surveys (further elaborates on in Discussion). Because of this, we had to combine our data for our racial

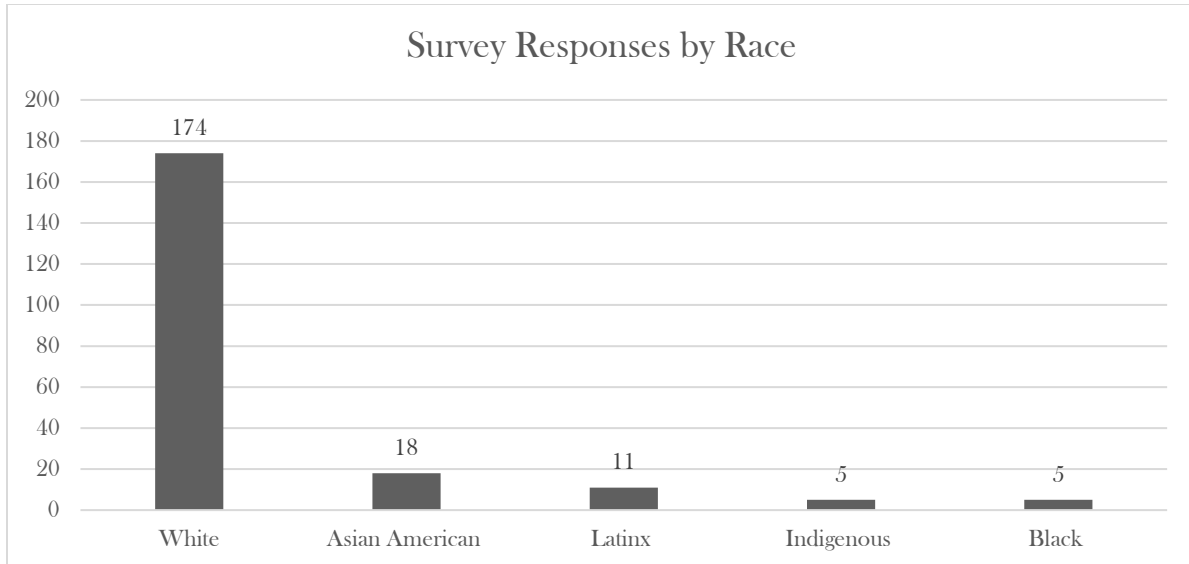
classification and for our research questions. Initially, we had 5 different racial categories: White, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous, and Black. We assigned each race a number to organize our racial data. Due to a low number of students of color, we had to combine our racial categories into two groups, BIPOC and White students. Originally, I wanted to organize the data into 3 categories: Black and Indigenous, Students of color, and white students. Unfortunately, this would not be statistically significant due to the lack of Black and Indigenous honors students. We categorized our responses from mixed race students with their non-white racial category, prioritizing black and indigenous identities. We also had to combine other non-white racial categories together, including Pakistani and middle eastern students in the Asian category. Once the racial data was combined, we focused on two survey questions: *I have considered leaving Honors because I felt isolated or unwelcome* and *I have to work harder to be valued equally*. To analyze this, we categorized the responses into two categories, Disagree/Neutral and Agree. We received 188 responses to our two focus questions. We were then able to create a table that compared the students in the two racial categories compared to their answers of either agreeing or disagreeing/neutral responses, then we found the percentages for the two racial categories: White and Students of Color. We did this by multiplying the racial category we are looking to find times the number of students who agree or disagree divided by the total.

$$\# \text{race} * \text{disagree or agree} / \text{total}$$

Using these percentages, we created a graph to visualize the differences between the answers of students of color and answers of white students. We then used this same method to analyze the responses to the statement *I have to work harder to be valued equally*. Using chi squared tests, we were able to find the statistical significance of our data.

Results

We had 213 total responses to our survey sent out Spring 2022. We had 174 responses from white students, 18 responses from Asian American students, 11 Latinx students, 5 Indigenous students and 5 Black student responses.



After categorizing everyone's answers by race, we focused on two of our survey answers.

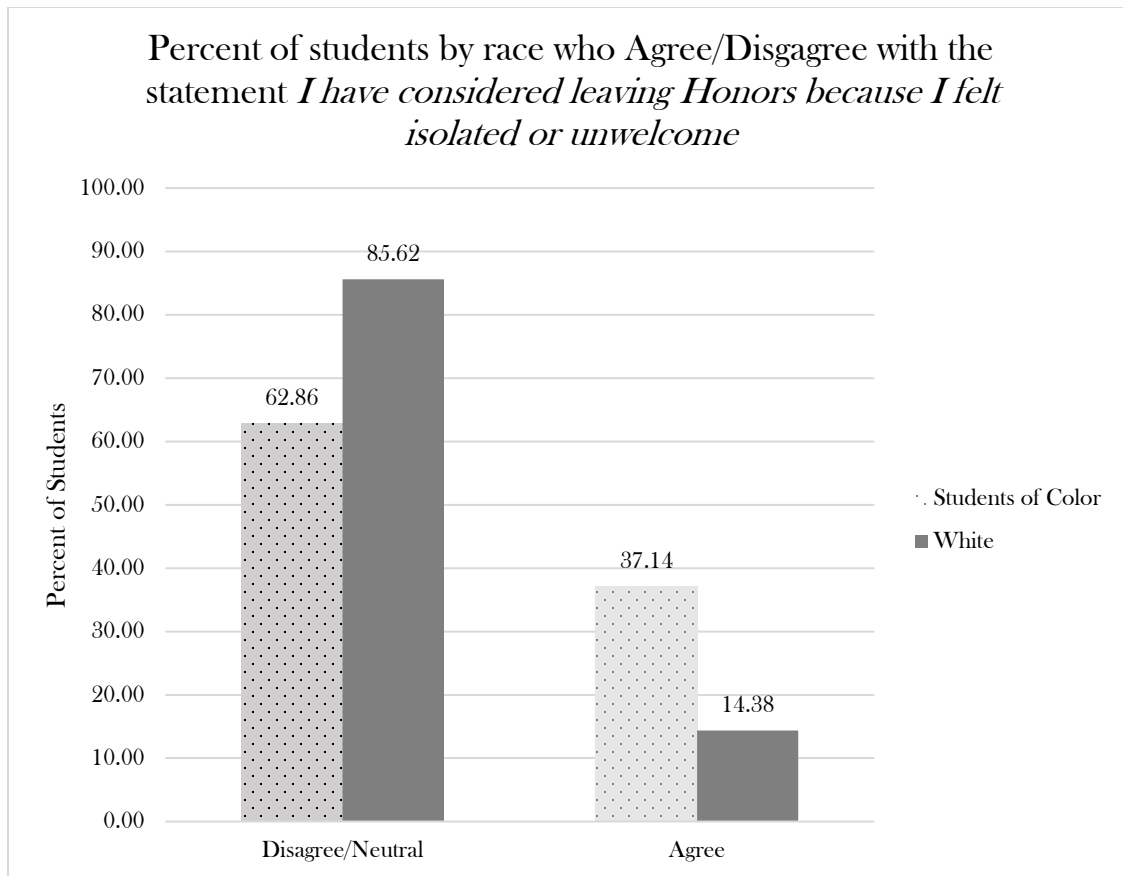
I have considered leaving Honors because I felt isolated or unwelcome

	Disagree/Neutral	Agree	Total
White	131	22	153
Asian American	11	5	16
Latinx	6	4	10
Indigenous	3	2	5
Black	2	2	4

Total	153	35	188
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For the question *I have considered leaving Honors because I felt isolated or unwelcome*, we started by splitting up the answers by race and agree or disagree. Because of the low number of students of color in each category, we then compiled the data into two groups. We found that 37.14% of students of color agree that they have considered leaving Honors because they felt isolated or unwelcome. 62.86% of students of color disagree or feel neutral to the statement. As for white students, 14.38% agree with the statement *I have considered leaving Honors because I felt isolated or unwelcome* while 85.62% of students disagree or feel neutral to the statement.

<i>I have considered leaving Honors because I felt isolated or unwelcome</i>	Disagree/Neutral	Agree	
Students of Color	62.86	37.14	
White	85.62	14.38	

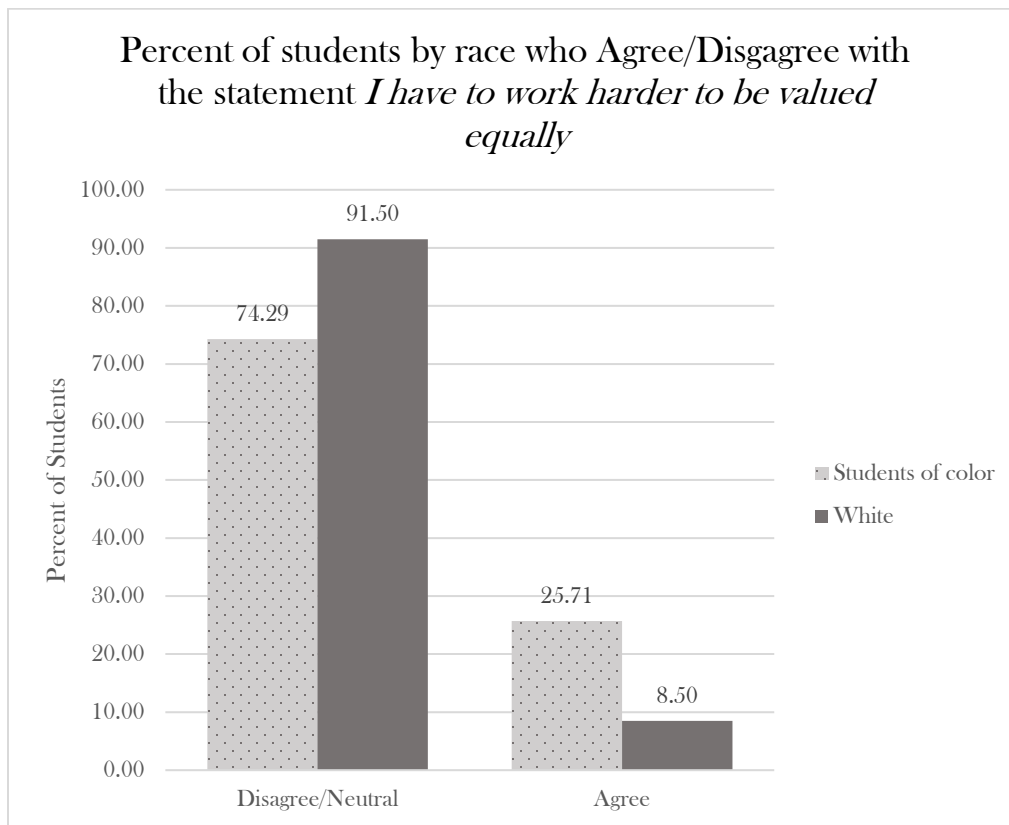


Our second research question is *I have to work harder to be valued equally*. Again, we had a total of 188 students answer this question.

<i>I have to work harder to be valued equally</i>	Disagree/Neutral	Agree	Total
White	140	13	153
Asian American	13	3	16
Latinx	8	2	10
Indigenous	3	2	5
Black	2	2	4
Total	166	22	188

25.71% of students of color agree with the statement *I have to work harder to be valued equally* and 74.29% of students of color disagree or feel neutral to the statement. 8.50% of white students agree whereas 91.50% disagree or feel neutral.

<i>I have to work harder to be valued equally</i>	Disagree/Neutral	Agree
Students of color	74.29	25.71
White	91.50	8.50



Racial Disparities in Experiences of Students within the Honors College

By Zoe Pais

“I wish this program was one in which no student would have to question their place within it.”

Introduction

Students of color have been advocating for a change within the Honors College for many years. Student leaders of the club Honors Students of Color Board collaborated with Faculty to release a climate survey in Spring of 2022. The purpose of the survey was to gather data on the differences in experiences of students within the Honors College, primarily focusing on race.

Methods

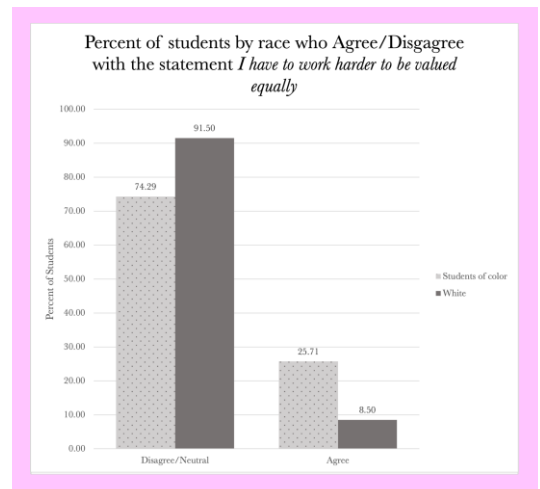
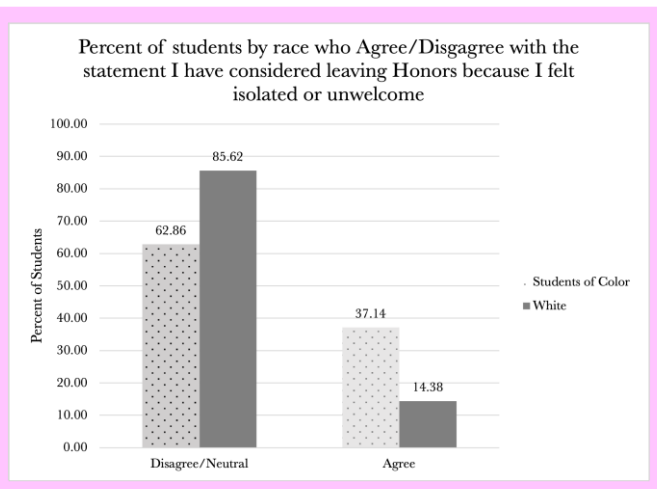
Initially, we had 6 different racial categories: white, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous, Black, and Multiracial. Due to a low number of students of color, we had to combine our racial categories into two groups, students of color and white students. We examined race by two other variables: *I have considered leaving Honors because I felt isolated or unwelcome* and *I have to work harder to be valued equally*; these variables were categorized into Disagree/ Neutral and Agree. The sample size is 188. We used the chi square test to analyze the data by race.

Results

37% of students of color in Honors agree with the statement *I have considered leaving Honors because I felt isolated or unwelcome* compared to 14% of white students. 26% of students of color agree with the statement *I have to work harder to be valued equally* compared to 9% of white students. These differences were statistically significant.

Discussion

- Two surveys were released and thus data had to be compiled differently.
- The climate survey should be conducted every year to further understand the experiences of marginalized students
- Changes need to be made in the Honors College to reduce these discrepancies
- This research is not intended to promote recruitment or retention of students of color in Honors



Discussion

Our main findings in this research come down to the same thing: students of color do not feel supported in the honors college. The next question is what do we do next? We now have this research that shows there are discrepancies between the experiences of white students and those of students of color. How do we change the Honors College to be a safe and welcoming place for students of color? My ultimate recommendation to truly make the college safer for students of color is to disband the Honors College.

Disbanding the honors college

The purpose of the honors college is to provide students with a well-rounded education. Because there is no curriculum, the honors college provides very little to students. My experience with the first-year sequence left much to desire. I learned so little that I could take on to other classes or to my personal life. The students who have access to even applying to the program are people who, first, have the social capital to know how to find the program before going to college (you must apply to the program before starting university) and second, students who were able to take AP classes and participate in IB programs. These advanced classes and programs are made for students who have the time and resources to succeed. When programs like this are created, it is important to think about who it is made for, who is this program serving and who is it hurting.

Here is a summary of my main thoughts of the findings:

- Read the demands to understand what the honors college should do to support people of color.
- This research should not be used for recruitment or retention of students of color.
- For further information on the experiences of students of color, look at the following projects and articles:
 - o *Speaking My Truth Voices and Portraits of Honors Students of Color* by Leah Kerbs on WWU Honors Cedar
 - o *An Indigenous Reckoning* by Jay Robles on YouTube
 - o *We Walk in Different Worlds* by Olivia Dong on WWU Honors Cedar
 - o *After experiencing racism at Western, students of color demand change* by Simone Higashi on The Front
 - o *Support Honors Students of Color (HSOC) Demands* on Change.org

Sources:

<https://honors.wvu.edu/>

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