



# Are Faculty who Teach Honors Courses Really More Engaging?

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**FSSE**

faculty survey of  
student engagement





# ABSTRACT

This study presents findings from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), comparing various engagement-related practices between faculty who teach honors courses and those who do not. Along with core FSSE items, this study uses responses from 1,487 faculty members at 15 institutions on two experimental items about teaching honors courses. A series of OLS regression analyses suggest that faculty who teach honors courses are more engaging in the areas of student-faculty interaction, learning strategies, and collaborative learning. Additional analyses for high-impact practices also suggest that faculty who teach honors courses are more likely to work with undergraduates on research, and to think that it is important for students to participate in learning communities, study abroad, and research with faculty.



# HONORS STUDENTS

- Most research focuses on the student experience
- Shushok (2006) found that although GPA did not differ between honors and non-honors students, honors students had more interactions with faculty and other students



# HONORS STUDENTS

- Seifert et al. (2007) found that honors students had more exposure to several best practices during their first year of college
- Miller & Dumford (in press) suggest that honors students are more likely to be engaged in some, but not all, aspects of the college experience, and that these patterns can differ by class level



# HONORS FACULTY

- Not many studies of honors faculty provide cross-comparison to non-honors faculty
- Daily (2016) suggests honors faculty are highly motivated and supportive of their students



# HONORS FACULTY

- Research on faculty role in honors programs is largely focused on teaching strategies (e.g.; Johnson et al., 2011; Szasz, 2017)
- Dean and Jendzurski (2012) found that teaching effectiveness improved after creating a process for recognizing honors faculty



# RESEARCH QUESTION

- This study uses data from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) to compare various aspects of engagement between faculty who teach honors courses and those who do not
  - *Are faculty who teach honors courses more or less likely to encourage and support various aspects of student engagement and participation in high-impact practices?*



# DATA SOURCE

- Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)
- In 2016, a subsample of 1,487 faculty at 15 institutions received an experimental item set that included two items on teaching honors courses
- Combined with Engagement Indicator scores, High-Impact Practice items, and demographic information from the core FSSE survey



# SAMPLE

- Subset of FSSE institutions, selected by random assignment; mirrored the overall national landscape when looking at size, Carnegie classification, and control
- 46% men and 76% White
- <2% non-US citizens
- 25% full professors, 24% associate professors, 22% assistant professors, 16% full-time lecturers/instructors, 13% part-time lecturers/instructors



# HONORS COURSE ITEMS

- A) Is your selected course section part of an honors program or honors college at your institution?**
- B) Thinking about all of the course sections you are teaching or have taught during this academic year, have any of them been part of an honors program or honors college at your institution?**
- *No*
  - *Yes*
  - *Not applicable, to my knowledge my institution does not have an honors program or college*



# FSSE ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS

- Higher-Order Learning
- Reflective & Integrative Learning
- Learning Strategies
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Collaborative Learning
- Discussions with Diverse Others
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Effective Teaching Practices
- Quality of Interactions
- Supportive Environment



# FSSE HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES

*Participation in:*

- Working with undergraduates on research
- Supervising internships/field experiences

*Rate importance of:*

- Internship/field experience
- Formal leadership role
- Learning community
- Study abroad
- Working with faculty on research
- Culminating senior experience
- Service-learning



# METHODS

## OLS regression models (17 total)

- Each of 10 EIs and 7 HIPs as DV
- Controlling for faculty and institutional characteristics known to relate to engagement and work experiences
- All categorical variables were dummy-coded
- Flag for teaching honors courses was entered as second step of model to examine unique variance
- Multicollinearity check: all VIF values below 5

2 additional chi-square analyses to look at HIP supervision



# OLS INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

## Faculty demographics

Gender  
Race/Ethnicity  
U.S. citizenship  
Doctorate-earned status  
Job rank  
Discipline of appointment  
Age  
Number of years teaching

## Institutional context

Locale  
Enrollment size  
Barron's selectivity  
Control (public/private)

**\*Flag for Honors Course item**



# OLS RESULTS

DV Engagement Indicator	$\beta$ (Honors)	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>
Higher-Order Learning	0.040	0.072***
Reflective & Integrative Learning	0.049	0.266***
Quantitative Reasoning	0.047	0.278***
Learning Strategies	0.072*	0.026**
Collaborative Learning	0.065*	0.046***
Discussions with Diverse Others	0.029	0.121***
Student-Faculty Interaction	0.141***	0.127***
Effective Teaching Practices	0.021	0.103***
Quality of Interactions	0.017	0.104***
Supportive Environment	0.007	0.136***

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$



# OLS RESULTS

DV HIP IMPORTANCE	$\beta$ (Honors)	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>
Internship or field experience	0.036	0.109***
Formal leadership role	0.041	0.083***
Learning community	0.069*	0.097***
Study abroad	0.085**	0.149***
Working with faculty on research	0.063*	0.102***
Culminating senior experience	0.050	0.060***
Service-learning	0.046	0.143***

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$



# CHI-SQUARE RESULTS

HIP SUPERVISION	$\chi^2$ values	Cramer's V (Effect size)
Worked with undergraduates on research	38.671***	0.162
Supervised internships or field experience	1.413	0.031

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$



# DISCUSSION

Faculty who teach honors courses are more engaging in areas of student-faculty interaction, learning strategies, and collaborative learning

- Smaller class sizes for honors courses may facilitate more interaction and group work
- Similar to findings of previous research (Daily, 2016; Shushok, 2006)
- Learning strategies finding less intuitive, might otherwise assume honors students already have well-developed study skills



# DISCUSSION

Faculty teaching honors courses are more likely to think that it is important for students to participate in learning communities, study abroad, and research with faculty

- Recognize gains made by students in guided research, able to witness progress firsthand
- Also more likely to work with undergraduates on research



# DISCUSSION

- Effect of teaching honors courses is NOT statistically significant in many of the models
- Surprising but somewhat promising from perspective that ALL college students can benefit from these types of engagement
- Some non-significant findings for honors faculty may be due to impact of major field or more global assessments of the student experience



# LIMITATIONS

- Self-selection for institutions
- Self-selection for faculty respondents
- Self-reported data
- Only data from 15 institutions
- Low explained variance and small effect sizes
- Correlational, not causal design



# CONCLUSIONS

- Study provides further evidence for increased encouragement of several aspects of student engagement among honors faculty
- Important to measure the effectiveness of honors colleges, in terms of both faculty perceptions and student outcomes, rather than simply assuming they are superior
- These assessments can play a role in programming enhancements and resource allocation for honors colleges



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