Honors College Students' Adjustment Factors and Academic Success: Advising Implications

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We examined first-semester adjustment among students in and out of an honors college because honors college participants receive relatively little attention in the advising literature. As expected, honors college students earned relatively high grades and were associated with high retention rates. Two noncognitive factors predicted these differences: self-confidence and external influences on college choice. In an interesting finding, honors students expressed less self-confidence and placed greater importance on external college-choice factors than their high-achieving peers outside the honors college. Implications for the support of honors students and their peers are discussed.

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A substantial knowledge base of students' transitions to college reveal much about the transitional needs of specific specialized campus populations such as first-generation students (Bradbury & Mather, 2009) and students with mental health concerns (Kitzrow, 2009). However, fewer studies have been focused on the adjustment and academic outcomes of honors college participants, a special population of high-achieving learners grouped into programs on the basis of academic strength (Rinn, 2007). In response to the lack of recent publications, we examined first-year adjustment factors and academic success among honors college students. We specifically explored the effects of noncognitive factors on honors college students' academic outcomes of grades and retention.

Examining Honors College Students

The examination of clearly defined populations determines the accuracy and adequacy of the models used to understand, assess, and design services for students on contemporary campuses and for describing the college experiences of today's diverse learners (Schwitzer, 2009). To this end, a wide range of recent contributions to the student-adjustment literature have focused on specialized populations defined by ethnicity, internationalism, demographic identity, or other defining factors such as those at risk of attrition or with first-generation status. However, to our knowledge, very little research has been conducted to understand the experiences of academically strong students participating in honors colleges. That is, relatively little is known about honors college learners' institutional expectations, adjustment levels, or academic outcomes, not even whether grouping by academic achievement relates to a student's success (Rinn, 2007). On one hand, programs such as modern honors colleges are receiving increased attention as higher education institutions increase efforts to recruit and retain high-achieving and academically gifted students (Rinn & Plucker, 2004). On the other hand, honors colleges also are receiving increased scrutiny and calls for justifying the program contributions to the institution and for demonstrating effective outcomes for students (Lanier, 2008).

College Transition, College Adjustment, and Academic Success

The college transition presents students with challenges that go beyond meeting the demands of college-level academic rigors. To negotiate the transition, students must make academic adjustments to the educational challenges characteristic of the college experience, social adjustments to new interpersonal–societal situations typical of the campus environment and changing pre-college relationships; personal–emotional adjustments by managing one's physical and psychological health; and adjustments to establish a positive association with the college, in general, and with the institution, in particular (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Baker & Siryk, 1984; Beyers & Goosen, 2002; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Schwitzer, 2005).

In unfortunate situations, not all matriculants experience equal success in managing these

multiple first-year transitions. Up to 25% of college students drop out or stop out after their first-year—often because of the influence of the noncognitive factors associated with social difficulties, fragile personal–emotional state, or poorly developed institutional commitment (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Kerr, Johnson, Gans, & Krumrine, 2004; Pickering, Calliote, & McAuliffe, 1992; Pritchard, Wilson, & Yamnitz, 2007; Ryan, 2004).

Furthermore, students who enter college with unrealistically high expectations of the institution and their own abilities to adjust appear to be especially at risk of attrition (Boulter, 2002; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). At the same time, participation in support programs appears to promote resiliency and achievement during the college transition. For instance, even among students experiencing the highest levels of stress while adapting to college life, social support serves protective or ameliorative functions that promote successful transitions to the institution (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Sax, Bryant, & Gilmartin, 2004; Schwitzer, 2005).

Friedlander et al. (2007) reported that students who perceive benefits from social support resources showed improved adjustment over than those who felt relatively unsupported. These researched students who felt supported also demonstrated successful functioning in the college social environment and expressed relatively greater satisfaction with the social aspects of the university experience. First-year seminars and summer bridge, peer mentor, and supportive health and mental health programs have been associated with positive adjustment and college success (Andrade, 2006; Choate & Schwitzer, 2009; Schwitzer, 2005; Schwitzer, Grogan, Kaddoura, & Lambert, 1993; Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998; Strayhorn, 2009; Suzuki, Amrein-Beardsley, & Perry, 2012).

Correspondingly, when honors colleges apply a "student-centered approach to learning" that integrates student affairs and academic affairs approaches, they provide social support for matriculants (Alger, 2015, p. 60). In fact, Young, Story, Tarver, Weinauer, and Keller (2016) reported that, according to honors college participants, experiencing the sense of connectedness and community membership were deemed as critically important benefits of honors college participation. Despite these cited studies, findings on the factors associated with honors colleges and the outcomes of them on student success have been mixed (Spisak & Carter Squires, 2016).

Research Questions

Students experience multiple dimensions of college adjustment, and institutional supports play varying roles in student transitions. For the study presented herein, we examined specific factors associated with honors student matriculation, transition, and success as identified by Rinn (2007) and Rinn and Plucker (2004). Specifically, we looked at first-year, first-semester honors college students and a peer cohort outside the honors college to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. Are factors known to affect adjustment to college the same or different for students who choose to participate in the honors college than those of peers not in the honors college?

RQ2. To what degree do first-year college-adjustment factors predict differences in measured first-semester academic success for students in and out of the honors college?

RQ3. To what degree do first-year college-adjustment factors predict differences in retention into the first-year spring semester for students in and out of the honors college?

Method

Participants and Procedures

This study used a nonexperimental ex post facto design with student data archived between 2007 and 2010 at a single institution. The midsized, urban, research-intensive university enrolls more than 20,000 students annually. Incoming students are, on average, 18 years old with grade-point averages (GPAs) higher than 3.10 (on a 4.00 scale) and average SAT scores higher than 1030. Archival data included the *Transition to College Inventory* (TCI), an assessment instrument administered by the institution to first-year students in the summer prior to matriculation to identify incoming learners at risk for academic challenges (Pickering & Calliotte, 1996; Pickering, Calliotte, Macera, & Zerwas, 2005). Some TCI data were used to assess participants' expected academic, social, personal–emotional, and institutional adjustments. Additional academic data were obtained from university records.

To form comparison samples for use in the study, data from a group of 200 randomly selected first-year honors college students and a group of 200 randomly selected students outside the honors college were created using a medium

effect size of 0.05 at power equal to .80. We determined that an absolute minimum of 128 students with complete scores was needed for the analysis, and we then set out to exceed the minimum requirement; on the basis of Cohen's (1988) longstanding discussion of power analysis, we selected a midlevel effect size between Cohen's recommended high and low extremes. The nonhonors student sample comprised eligible first-year students who were invited to enter the Honors College but declined to participate. We eliminated from the study a few students for whom only partial TCI or incomplete institutional data were available. Of the 393 students for which data were obtained, 197 (50.1%) were enrolled in the Honors College and 196 (49.9%) were not. Among the students making up the data for the random sample, 110 (28.0%) first enrolled in Fall 2007, 117 (29.8%) first enrolled in Fall 2008, 101 (25.7%) first enrolled in Fall 2009, and 65 (16.5%) came from the entering Fall 2010 cohort. Regarding gender, 56.7% identified as female and 43.3% identified as male; 63.1% indicated ethnicity as White, 16.5% as African American, 3.3% as Latina/o, and 3.1% responded as *other*. These proportions reflected the university student composition; however, institutional reporting of the aggregate institutional data did not allow us to describe the overall sample in greater detail or the two groups along the lines of common demographic variables.

Honors College Experience

The institution's Honors College was designated according to the National College Collegiate Honors Council best-practice characteristics for a fully developed honors college (National Collegiate Honors Council, 2014). The Honors College is directed by a college dean and is based on a learning-community design.

Participants in the Honors College can apply to live in honors housing. They complete a designated curriculum and take a required number of designated honors classes, which are not necessarily more difficult than regular classes on the same topic but are taught by selected mentor faculty. The program encourages Honors College students to learn material together. The Honors College students may receive small amounts of financial support for undergraduate research projects, conference travel, and other scholarly activities. Typically, the institution's Honors College participants ranked in the top 10% of their high school class and earned a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher (transfer students are expected to have at least a 3.8 college GPA).

Measures: College Adjustment Factors

Demographic and academic information was obtained from university records for students in and out of the Honors College, including fall GPA and retention status. To measure adjustment factors, we used the TCI, which is a well-established noncognitive measure, designed by Old Dominion University researchers to enhance predictions about first-year college academic performance (Pickering et al., 2005). It is used to evaluate student self-reports of their own attitudes, personality characteristics, pre-college academic behaviors, and expected collegiate performance and engagement. Details about the instrument are found in *Manual for the Transition to College Inventory* (Pickering et al., 2005). More specifically, the measure is used to assess reasons for attending college and for choosing a particular institution, high school senior year experiences, self-ratings of traits and abilities, attitudes about being a college student, and self-predictions of college academic success and involvement.

The TCI has been proven a reliable and valid instrument pertaining to first-year success (Pickering et al., 2005). Furthermore, the TCI has been specifically effective for assessing a student's potential risk for academic difficulty with the institutional population we studied; in other words, the measure was appropriate for the campus we targeted (McGrath & Braunstein, 1997).

The TCI features 115 self-report items. Respondents indicate the level to which they agree that the item describes their situation. Some items featured dichotomous choices such as *applies* or *does not apply to me*. Others featured Likert-type scales such as *very good chance*, *some chance*, or *no chance of applying to me* after matriculation such that higher scores indicate higher predicted academic success (i.e., lower expected academic risk).

Reliability and validity. Through a series of investigations, the TCI demonstrated reliability and internal consistency. Reliability for the measure had been established by completing a factor analysis and identifying nine factors among the 115 items (Pickering et al., 2005). According to Pickering et al. (2005), "While not the traditional measure of internal consistency reliability, the factor analysis was based on correlations among all of the items with each other" (p. 7).

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for TCI factors

Factor	Description	Honors College ($n = 197$)		Not in Honors College ($n = 196$)	
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. College involvement	Extent to which student intends to participate in in- and out-of-class activities and experiences	2.03	0.606	1.99	0.626
2. Influences on college choice	Importance of various external factors, people, and institutional characteristics in college decision	2.08	0.527	1.88	0.597
3. Student role commitment	Extent to which student ascribes to behaviors and attitudes associated with college success	2.07	0.492	2.07	0.527
4. Athletic orientation	Intention to devote significant amount of time to organized sports or personal fitness	2.04	0.575	2.02	0.593
5. Personal and academic concerns	Extent to which student expresses various personal and academic concerns which can interfere with college success	1.96	0.617	1.97	0.524
6. Self-confidence	Student's confidence level in various academic and personal skills and abilities	1.82	0.497	2.17	0.462
7. Institutional commitment	Extent to which student is committed to attending and graduating from selected institution	2.11	0.314	2.15	0.358
8. Socializing orientation	Student's inclination to participate in social activities to the extent and of the type that might negatively affect academic performance	2.00	0.465	2.02	0.453

Note. Factors described by Pickering et al. (2005). Higher scores indicate greater agreement with statements on factors.

Criterion-related validity of the factors was determined via logistic regression, which revealed that five of the nine factors were statistically significant predictors of semester-end academic difficulty. Differentiation was found between students who were academically successful (GPA of 2.00 or higher) and academically unsuccessful (GPA lower than 2.00) at the end of the first semester of college.

Factors. An exploratory factor analysis with the principle axis method and varimax rotation (with a minimum factor loading threshold of 0.40) yielded a factorial model for explaining factors that might be related to academic performance. We were interested in eight of the instrument factors: college involvement, influences on college choice, student role commitment, athletic orientation, personal and academic concerns, self-confidence, institutional commitment, and socializing orientation. The criterion-related validity of the factors was shown, with the TCI being predictive of first-year student challenge, academic difficulty at the end of the first semester, attrition, and graduation—with increasing rates of academic difficulty and negative academic outcomes corresponding to increased risk as identified by TCI scores (Pickering et al., 2005). The definitions of the eight factors examined in this study are presented in Table 1. The data on GPAs and retention rates for both groups of participants are shown in Table 2.

Results

Between-Group Comparison of First-Year Adjustment Factors

Answers to RQ1 were used to compare first-year adjustment factors expressed by students in and out of the Honors College. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess group differences

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for first-semester GPA and percent retention

Variable	Honors College ($n = 197$)	Not in Honors College ($n = 196$)
First-semester GPA	$M = 3.29$ ($SD = 0.732$)	$M = 2.54$ ($SD = 1.07$)
Retention rate	88.3%	78.7%

regarding college adjustment factors. Group membership was the independent variable and the eight TCI factors were the dependent variables. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

As a preliminary step to answering the research questions through the MANOVA data, which were based on the assumption that the two groups would show balanced, equal variances, we conducted analyses to test the homogeneity of variance (as per Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). Specifically, using Levene's test of the equality of the error variances, we found that the assumption of equality of variances was violated. Therefore, according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), we selected a more conservative alpha level to determine significance. When a significance value of .01 was used, Levene's test indicated that the assumption of the equality of the variable was not violated. Furthermore, for prudence, we also conducted Box's test of the equality of the covariance to additionally test for homogeneity of variance. Using Box's *M* assumptions, this test also confirmed that the homogeneity was not violated. The multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) indicated a statistically significant difference between the reports of students in and out of the Honors College on adjustment factors: Wilk's $\lambda = .839$, F (8, 384), $p = 0.000$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$. The effect size indicated that 16.1% of the variance in the self-reports of adjustment (Factors 1–8) could be explained by whether or not a student participates in the Honors College.

The results of the analysis of the dependent variables were taken into consideration separately using a Bonferroni-adjusted α of 0.001. Univariate statistics on data of students in and out of the Honors College showed statistically significant differences for two variables: Factors 2 and 6 (Table 3).

Factor 2 refers to the importance a student places on various external factors, people, and institutional characteristics in making decisions about college attendance and college selection. It was significant: F (1, 391) = 13.05, $p = 0.000$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.032$. The effect size indicated that 3.2% of the variance in the scores was explained by group membership (in or out of the Honors College). Therefore, generally speaking, Honors College students placed greater importance on external factors than did their peers not in the honors program when making their college-choice decisions (Table 1).

Factor 6 refers to the level of self-confidence a student expresses regarding academic and personal skills and abilities associated with college success. We also found that Factor 6 showed statistical significance: F (1, 391) = 49.86, $p = 0.000$; partial $\eta^2 = .113$. The effect size indicated that 11.3% of the variance in scores was explained by group membership (in or out of the Honors College). In an interestingly finding, Honors College students expressed less academic and personal self-confidence that did their peers outside the Honors College (Table 1).

Adjustment Factors as Predictors of Between-Group Differences in First-Semester Grades

We used responses from RQ2 to examined eight college adjustment factors as predictors of between-group differences in actual first-semester academic success. A logistic regression was used to measure the extent to which levels on the eight adjustment factors predicted differences in actual first-semester academic success, with group membership and scores on the eight adjustment factors as independent variables and

Table 3. TCI variables predictive of students in the honors college ($n = 197$) and not in the honors college ($n = 196$)

Dependent Variable	Sum of Square	*df*	Square *M*	*F*	Significance
Factor 2. Influences on college choice	4.07	1	4.07	13.06	0.000
Factor 6. Self-confidence	11.42	1	11.42	49.86	0.000

Note. Higher scores indicated greater agreement on statements about factors.

first-semester GPA as the dependent variable. The full model with all predictors was statistically significant: χ^2 (9, $n = 393$) = 86.61, $p < 0.001$. This results indicates that the model, using the independent variables, can predict first-semester academic success.

A combination of indices of the model's overall fit was examined (as per Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). First, we estimated the proportion of variability in the dependent variable, which was taken into account by all the predictor variables in the equation (including the Cox and Snell R^2 and the Nagelkerke R^2). The model explained between 19.8% (Cox and Snell R^2) and 26.8% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in first-semester GPA. It also correctly classified 71.5% of cases (where success was defined as a GPA of 3.0 or higher).

Second, we used a goodness-of-fit measure to compare actual and predicted cases for the dependent variable. The Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test yielded a χ^2 value that indicated support for the model: χ^2 (8, $N = 393$) = 8.68, $p = 0.37$.

Finally, we used the Wald test to determine whether the predictor variables contributed significantly to the predictive ability of the model. The Wald test indicated that Factor 2, influences on college choice ($p < 0.05$), and group membership ($p = 0.000$), whether in the Honors College or not, reliably predicted differences in first-semester academic success. Summarized logistical regression data on the factors predicting academic success differences are presented in Table 4 (nonsignificant variables are not shown).

Adjustment Factors as Predictors of Between-Group Differences in Retention

We used RQ3 to examine eight college adjustment factors as predictors of between-group differences in retention. We used another logistic regression to measure the extent to which the eight adjustment factors predicted differences in actual first-semester academic success, with group membership and scores on the eight adjustment factors as the independent variables and actual first-year spring-semester retention serving as the dependent variable. We found that the relationship pattern analyzed by the model was not a statistically significant predictor of retention differences: χ^2 (9, $N = 393$) = 11.103, $p > 0.05$.

Discussion

For this study, we looked at factors influencing the college adjustment outcomes of honors college learners in comparison to those of their peers outside the honors college. We extended the existing knowledge about honors college students who make up an underinvestigated population on campus (Rinn, 2007; Rinn & Plucker, 2004) in the face of heightened efforts to implement and evaluate the outcomes of advising-intensive and other retention programs (Donhardt, 2013). First, as expected, first-semester academic outcomes were interpreted as more positive for the Honors College students than for their peers: Honors College students in the cohort had earned a mean first-semester GPA of almost 3.30 and a retention rate into the spring semester of the first year of approximately 88%; their peers had a mean GPA of approximately 2.5 and a retention rate of approximately 79%.

We were also interested in identifying and better understanding those factors that distinguish honors college participants from other new students—especially because honors college participation is typically not mandatory for high-achieving matriculating students. Therefore, we looked at eight noncognitive factors that have been shown to predict first-year academic risk. Noncognitive factors are especially important elements to examine because a substantial accumulation of research has indicated an influence of personal characteristics on college student success. Since Baker and Siryk (1984) and Baker et al. (1985) first introduced their college adjustment model, a convincing body of literature has revealed that factors associated with a student's academic, personal–emotional, social, and institutional adjustment all play a role in their academic success (see, e.g., Beyers & Goosen, 2002 and Schwitzer, 2005).

Therefore, we examined the factors of institutional engagement (college involvement, student role commitment, institutional commitment), social and personal–emotional adjustment (socializing orientation, athletic orientation, personal and academic concerns), and noncognitive academic factors (academic and personal skills, self-confidence, college choice influences). Furthermore, the specific factors we selected to research had been previously shown to have statistical significance and practical implications when used to predict risk of attrition on the campus we studied (Pickering et al., 2005). We found that Honors College participants were distinguishable on the basis of two factors: self-confidence and influences on college choice.

Table 4. Variables predicting between-group differences in first-semester GPA

Variable	B	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Odds Ratio	95% CI
Factor 2: Influences on college choice	0.450	.226	3.962	1	0.047	1.569	2.445
Group: Honors ($n = 197$) vs. nonhonors ($n = 196$)	1.796	.256	49.034	1	0.000	6.023	9.956

Self-confidence and Influences on College Choice: Myth vs. Reality

Honors College participants in our study expressed less self-confidence in the various academic and personal skills and abilities required for college success than did their peers outside the Honors College. In contrast, they placed greater importance on external factors concerning their college choice, including input from important others such parents and family, high school counselors, and college admissions officers as well as descriptive characteristics of the institution, than did their peers. Taken together, these findings seem to provide additional support for previous research indicating a relationship between college expectations, realities, and success.

Baker and Siryk (1984) and Baker et al. (1985) first reported on a phenomenon now commonly referred to as *myth versus reality* pertaining to college adjustment. Specifically, they found that college and university students tend to make such unrealistically high self-evaluations and set such unreasonably high expectations for their collegiate experience at their institution of choice that they often overestimate their academic and personal abilities to adjust to the campus environment; therefore, they fail to adequately adjust and do not pursue the academic and developmental tasks needed for success. In turn, the students who expressed greater overestimation of skills and abilities and very high institutional expectations experienced more first-year challenges than those with a more realistic view of themselves and their college.

Along these lines, in a series of studies with a variety campus populations (e.g., students attending university orientation classes, mental health clients at academic risk, African American or peer mentor program participants, college women with eating concerns, and students in service learning), led by the senior researcher (Switzer) of this research, revealed that maintaining accurate self-appraisals and accurate assessments of institutional supports was a critical factor in student success (see Schwitzer, 2005, for a summary). In each case, either an intensive advising or mental health counseling support program was implemented to ameliorate successfully the risks to which the different populations were most susceptible.

In fact, Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, and Hunsberger (2006) found that learners with accurately prepared expectations tended to demonstrate better personal adjustment and academic achievement than did students with either overly optimistic or profoundly pessimistic expectations of self and the college experience. Smith and Wertlieb (2005) also reported that new students with unrealistically high academic and social–personal expectations had lower first-year GPAs than students with either average or below average expectations. Furthermore, Nadelson, Semmelroth, Martinez, Featherstone, Fuhriman, and Sell (2013) suggested that as their academic achievement increases, incoming students express more reasonable expectations for some aspects of the college experience. Consistent with these previous studies, our findings suggest that honors college students may set more realistic self-expectations for their academic adjustment, and therefore, may be better prepared to utilize various skills and abilities when appropriate and to seek supports when needed to be academically successful. Schwitzer (2005) referred to maintaining such intact self-expectations as *self-cohesion* and reported this self-assessment as an important buffer against adjustment difficulties (p. 32).

Our findings also suggest that honors college learners may set more realistic institutional expectations by relying on rational input from parents and other authorities more than on internal impressions because they tend to choose institutions and honors college participation by following the advice of high school counselors, using rational information from web sites, and seeking the advice of other important people in their lives (Kampfe, Chasek, & Falconer, 2016). Likewise, Hébert and McBee (2007) found that many gifted high school students seek academic environments that meet their intellectual needs.

They pay particular attention to the match between their scholarly abilities and the opportunities for valuable classroom experiences and deeper learning (Nichols & Chang, 2013). Overall, our findings suggest that reliance on nuanced, complex, and accurate expectations of self and the institution contributes to the academic adjustment of honors college students to a greater extent than it does for their peers.

Implications for Advising Practice

Our findings provide evidence confirming the myth versus reality theoretical construct (Baker & Siryk, 1984). Therefore, they can inform advising students both in and out of honors colleges. As Schwitzer (2005) reported, advising and mental health counseling appear to have positive, but somewhat different, effects at the ends of the at-risk continuum.

Honors college students. Specifically, honors college participants show greater levels of self-cohesion; that is, they adapt well and maintain realistic self-confidence levels and reasonable, rational institutional expectations. Therefore, for these students, the honors college structure designed as an intensively supportive, captivating learning community "may serve a boosting or enhancing function" by promoting full use of these learners' abilities and skills and the strengths inherent in their highly cohesive self-factors" (Schwitzer, Robbins, & McGovern, 1993, p. 24; see also Schwitzer, 2005).

Several evidence-based advising practices are indicated for these students. First, advisors should explicitly confirm and encourage honors college students' accurate self-appraisals and evaluations of their environments. To do this, according to the relevant theories, advisors should develop warm interpersonal relationships (or greater connectedness); provide extensive cognitive challenges during advising discussions to encourage students to make their own choices based on thoroughly considered opinions; expose students to diverse ideas and viewpoints; and introduce them to active learning opportunities such as service learning, peer learning, and the like (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). All of these practices are recommended to help students with high levels of self-cohesion, realistic self-appraisals and evaluations of their institutions, and strong reliance on expert authorities—the characteristics found to distinguish Honors College students from some of their peers—continue to thrive, develop cognitively and emotionally, and reach their learning potential (Evans et al., 2010).

Second, advisors should work with classroom faculty members to create honors college courses characterized by faculty–student connectedness, student-peer community, and opportunity for active learning (e.g., in research labs and service learning). We recommend that classrooms provide high levels of instructor–student support, peer community affiliation, and active learning for students with the characteristics we revealed in this study. Furthermore, we contend that academic advisors can help honors college faculty members create such classrooms. In general, we suggest that honors colleges provide programmatic academic and life coaching, supportive peer and faculty mentoring, and active intensive advising opportunities that capitalize on students' highly functional abilities to assess themselves, their campuses, and the resources available to them (Evans et al., 2010; Schwitzer, 2005; Young et al., 2016). In summary, honors college students with the characteristics we uncovered in this study benefit from active intentional use of advising and teaching strategies of engagement and active learning outside and inside the classroom.

Students outside the honors college. Students demonstrating moderate achievement, some with unrealistically high self-confidence in their academic abilities and personal skills and unreasonably inflated or irrational institutional expectation levels, need advising that focuses intentionally on providing assessment and accurate feedback about strengths and relative weaknesses, identifying academic or personal areas of risk, and extensive referral to academic support resources and similar interventions. These proactive strategies "may serve a buffering or an ameliorative function" by helping students leverage their abilities and skills maximally when experiencing the stresses of the college transition (Schwitzer, Robbins et al. 1993, p. 24; see also Schwitzer, 2005, and Schwitzer, Grogan et al., 1993). According to the relevant theories, advisors should use motivational interviewing or other advising strategies borrowed from positive psychology to engage students actively in the academic process; provide structure during discussions and when guiding academic and personal decision making, for example, by teaching rational use of available information; and offer appropriate, nonthreatening challenges to their unrealistic appraisals of self or the college environment.

As for the honors college participants discussed, using motivational or positive psychology approaches to form strong advising relationships, providing structure and mild challenge, and focusing heavily on helping them to learn to make better, more rational and realistically informed choices (Evans et al., 2010) are recommended for students with the characteristics that we found for students at the end of the college-adjustment continuum opposite that of the Honors College participants in our study. In addition, we recommend an advising goal of helping at-risk students to become better resource and help seekers; to do this, discussions about ways to accurately assess one's academic (or personal) situation and to act by taking advantage of available resources should be an intentional component of academic advising with the population at the at-risk end the advising-need spectrum.

In summary, our findings provide further empirical support for differences in student populations. Specifically, they point to differences in student advising needs based on self-functioning as operationalized by expectations of self and the institution.

Limitations and Conclusion

This was a limited study. Although our results were consistent with previous publications, additional research is needed to confirm the factors identified as distinguishing honors college students. Follow-up research should confirm our findings with additional cohorts, at additional institutions and institutional types, and with a greater focus on demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity, and first-generation status. The current study was not designed to distinguish clearly between, on one hand, the effects on first-semester adjustment of the noncognitive factors leading a student to select the honors college and, on the other hand, the effects of program participation. For example, as we described herein, high-cohesion students, such as those who participated in the Honors College program studied, more readily scan their environment for support experiences, which may make them inherently different from their peers. In turn, follow-up studies should attempt to measure the explicit outcomes of evidence-based advising practices in honors colleges as distinct from the influences of factors related to selecting and participating in an honors program.

Although our overall model showed good effects, the effect sizes for the two significant factors were modest. We explored the relatively new territory of honors college first-year adjustment characteristics and encourage additional studies to confirm, expand, or modify our results and their implications to help advisors working with this relatively underexamined campus population.

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