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# Honors Retention: The Persistence of Juniors and Seniors in the Honors Program Through Examination of Commitment to Completion of Honors Thesis

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Honors Retention:

The Persistence of Juniors and Seniors in the Honors Program  
Through Examination of Commitment to Completion of Honors Thesis

Amy Holland

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### Abstract

The goal of the Honors Program is to engage intellectually stimulated students in a unique, challenging experience culminating in the writing of an undergraduate thesis, a piece of scholarly work. The four elements to the mission of the Honors Program include challenging academics, a scholarly environment, a supportive community, and on-campus engagement. This study conducted a qualitative assessment of the Honors Program through written questionnaires and oral interviews of ten juniors or seniors either completing an Honors Thesis or not committed to the Thesis. This research did not find significant differences between these two groups due in part to small sample size. Implications for future research include determination of the influence of personal factors on completion of the thesis since this study suggests that programmatic components did not determine whether a student decides to complete the study. Participants' testimony provides next steps for the Honors Program including frank feedback about their experiences within the Program.

### The Persistence of Honors Juniors and Seniors in the Honors Program

This study seeks to examine the reasons why students in the Honors Program at the University of Connecticut choose to remain in the program as they move toward completion of the Honors Thesis. For designation as an Honors Scholar upon graduation, students must meet certain requirements including twelve “Honors” credits in their Honors major and completion of a piece of scholarly work, as approved by the major department. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are differences in major and departmental support for the Thesis which leads to a divergence in persistence of students within “traditional” fields (business, engineering, natural sciences) compared to those in other disciplines (social sciences, humanities, fine arts) with those in traditional fields pursuing a thesis at greater rates than other disciplines.

The purpose of the Honors Program is to challenge and reward the most intellectually stimulated students to achieve a higher level of scholarly success. The mission statement listed on the Program website is as such:

Our mission is to provide the richest possible collegiate experience to intellectually-gifted and highly-motivated undergraduate students by promoting

- Challenging academics for high-achieving students
- A personalized collegiate environment
- A community designed for individual, social, and cultural development
- Engagement and leadership beyond the classroom. (Honors Program, 2012)

If individuals in particular sectors are failing to complete the program, is this a success? We have gifted and talented students who are losing opportunity to succeed due to unequal treatment in the program. Although scientific disciplines require support and resources, other disciplines

deserve a fair proportion of support, as well. The question of differential treatment will be addressed through interviews of current students.

This study looks at each of the aspects of the mission statement: academics, environment, community, and engagement to see whether differences occur between those who are committed to completing an Honors Thesis and those who are not planning to complete it. For example, does participation in Honors activities lead to greater likelihood of committing to completion of the Thesis? This includes involvement in Honors-related extracurricular activities or living in an Honors Community. Or, are those who have a close relationship with a faculty member through research more likely to commit to completion? The goals of the study are to create qualitative data on the phenomenon of persistence in the Honors Program which have not previously been collected. Recently, the Honors Office has begun a quantitative assessment of similar hypotheses; this research is not a direct accompaniment to that study, but hopes to complement it with personalized feedback from current students.

### *Current Research*

The topic of student retention is popular in the literature today from the perspective of the types of students who succeed or fail. There is a large quantity of research on achievement motivation as it relates to college students, especially in the gifted population (Neumeister, 2004; Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007; Siegle, Da Via Rubenstein, Pollard, Romey, 2009). Little research has been conducted in recent years on the supports in place to retain different kinds of Honors students outside of the natural sciences. What does exist focuses on the general student with little information on the academic focus of the student (Gottfried, 2005; Hebert, 2007;

Campbell, 2008). The present study examines the persistence of students toward completion of the Honors Thesis as it designates completion of an advanced course regimen and academic load.

Previous research studies express the importance for participation in undergraduate research (Cooley, Garcia, and Hughes, 2008; Campbell, 2008; Bernal, 2003). Cooley, Garcia, and Hughes (2008) outline the five ways that research can be incorporated into an undergraduate's academic life: research methods course or in-class research projects, upper-level research class to conduct professor's research, paid undergraduate research assistantships, unpaid research volunteerism, and the thesis which may be a topic of the student's choice or a piece of the professor's research. Positives and negatives are shared for each of these options, suggesting that resource allocation in this way is a decision to be made in collaboration with other methods of increasing students' sense of community with the program.

Tinto's theory of student departure (as cited in Campbell, 2008) states that whether a student persists in college is dependent on his or her level of involvement on-campus and in academia. Campbell argues that although Tinto's theory is focused on the university setting on a macro level, the theory applies because Honors programs exist as a smaller version of a university with their own structures, policies, and culture. Honors persistence is dependent on the level of social and academic involvement of the student in such pursuits as active academic performances, close relationships with faculty and staff, participation in on-campus activities, and positive peer-group interactions (Campbell, 2008). Bernal (2003) emphasizes this same point, stressing that students need fostering of academic research goals through creative mentoring by faculty in order to develop from gifted children to gifted adults. This study will examine students' participation in these categories of involvement as well as observe whether persistence rates differ based on academic discipline of the student.

*Honors Scholar Process*

To earn Honors Scholar designation upon graduation at the University of Connecticut, the student must complete 12 credits of “Honors” coursework, enroll in a thesis preparation course within the major, create a piece of scholarly work (i.e. the thesis), as well as meet any specific departmental requirements. Throughout the student’s enrollment, he or she must maintain a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.4 on a scale of 4.0. The Sophomore Certificate is a designation on the undergraduate transcript which communicates that the student completed 18 credits of Honors including one Honors Core Course, attended a series of Honors-sanctioned events, and attended one thesis preparation workshop. It was designed to be a voluntary program (it does not affect the ability to earn Honors Scholar designation) to increase involvement and investment in the Honors Community. Honors credits used toward the Sophomore Certificate cannot be applied to graduation, increasing the total number of Honors credits to 30. It also serves as a halfway-there point for most students as the ceremony is the fall of the fifth semester, only 18 months before most of those students will graduate.

**Method***Participants*

As this study sought to examine the persistence of students in the Honors Program toward completion of the Thesis, all students who had never been a member or who dropped out (willingly or due to academic reasons) before completing the Sophomore Certificate were excluded from the study. Although some students choose to just complete the last two years of thesis work, this study focuses on students who entered as Honors students in order to examine

the retention of students over the undergraduate career. This exclusion of students who joined the Program later allows the inclusion of the Sophomore Certificate into this study. One student who joined the Program too late to complete the Thesis is included for context because she shared this information after the data collection was completed.

Students from all majors, academic colleges, gender or ethnicities were eligible. The participants included ten volunteers: four males and six females consisting of two Kinesiology majors, two social sciences majors, three hard sciences majors, one business major, and two animal science majors. Seven identify as working to complete an Honors Thesis and three identify as not completing or not yet sure if completing an Honors Thesis. Participants were not rewarded; however, many participants shared that their personal motivation was curiosity and wanting their experience to be heard so the act of participating was emotionally rewarding.

### *Materials*

The study consisted of a three-page written questionnaire and a six-question oral questionnaire. Oral interviews were recorded with a Voice Recorder application on the researcher's smartphone. Interviews were immediately emailed off of the phone to be stored on a separate, password-protected USB drive and deleted from the phone. All electronic data were stored on this USB drive and all paper data (written questionnaires and oral questionnaire forms on which the researcher took notes) were kept by the student researcher at all times to protect confidentiality.

The written questionnaire served to collect objective, quantitative data on the attainment of the Honors Program's goals surrounding academics, environment, community, and engagement. Most questions were closed-ended involving "check one," "choose all that apply"



or yes/no. Some questions were Likert-scale whereas others asked participants to list the number of times/semesters they engaged in particular activities like courses, extra-curricular involvement, or research.

The questions about the participants' majors, schools (e.g. School of Engineering), when they joined the Honors Program, whether they completed a Sophomore Certificate, and post-graduate educational plans served to gain demographic knowledge in order to understand the academic paths present in the sample. Bernal (2003) suggests that identified intellectually gifted children need the recognition of continued exclusion from the general population through an Honors Program. The questions "What were your reasons for joining the Program?" and "What motivated you to stay in the Program?" targeted this information. Campbell (2008) continues that identifying as an Honors student, especially after receiving an invitation, creates a sense of pride and a positive effect on self-image.

Three questions focused on the "Community" goal of the Honors mission statement. Campbell (2008) found that 58% of the students who began college in an Honors residence hall completed an honors award versus only 32% of the students who did not live in Honors housing. For this reason, participation in Honors Living-Learning Communities as well as Honors-centric organizations is important for persistence and retention. The question "In which of the following Honors Communities (if any) did you live?" and "What Honors activities, if any, were you involved in? How long do/did each of these involvements continue?" included all possible options for Honors-affiliated housing or involvement as well as the opportunity to mark "Other" on the activities question. Participants were instructed to check off all that applied. In addition, a sense of community can be measured through categorization of close friends. "Select the category in which most of your close friends from UConn fit" included possible responses of "In

the Honors Program,” “Were in the Program, but dropped out,” and “Never been in the Program.” Villella (1996) focuses on the effect of involvement on grade point average, yet it mentions that social group identification impacts the behavior of the individual in the group. If the majority of close friends belong in a non-Honors category, this may influence the participant.

Siegle et al. (2010) found that students question their ability and competence (i.e. their intellectual prowess) when faced with a task which requires unusual exertion of effort. When faced with this challenge, some respond with self-handicapping or learned helplessness behaviors which inhibit future success. To measure whether there is a relationship between academic challenge and failing to complete the Honors Thesis, questions 10-13 ask participants to rate on a Likert scale how difficult converted and designated courses were (1 “Not at all challenging” to 10 “Extremely challenging”) in Freshman and Sophomore versus Junior and Senior years. In addition, the written questionnaire collected the number of total designated versus converted Honors courses and number of these courses used toward the Junior/Senior requirements (instead of the Sophomore Certificate) to see whether this impacted completion of the Thesis.

Research plays a significant part in many Honors students’ preparation for committing a Thesis. Many departments require participation in research methods and/or thesis preparation courses before receiving credit for writing the thesis. Dichotomous questions were asked for these three items (research methods course, thesis preparation course, involvement in undergraduate research). Kiley (2009) suggests that quality of research experience is impacted by supervision and mentorship time with experienced professionals (professors, yet in this case, perhaps graduate students). This study asked participants to provide percentages for time spent in interactions with the professor, a graduate student, other research assistants, or by themselves in

order to gauge this opportunity for quality time. Cooley, Garcia, and Hughes (2008) shows that simple participation may not be enough to produce the positive effects. Faculty investment, opportunity for paid experience, and a directed focus for research begot the most results (Cooley et al, 2008). The question “For what reasons did you start [research]?” lists all reasons and asks participants to check off all that apply. The list was created through conversations with current students and an option for “Other” was included in case participants wished to share additional reasons.

The purpose of the oral questionnaire was to gather qualitative information on the experience of these Honors students in order to interpret meaning behind the quantitative data gathered from the written questionnaire. The first two questions rephrased information on the written questionnaire: “What were your reasons for joining the Program?” and “What made you want to stay in the Program?” Almost all of the participants simply restated what they circled on the written questionnaire, yet it added tone to their decision and allowed them to expand upon why. The next question (“What made you doubt staying in the Program?”) acknowledged that many of the participants may not yet be fully committed to graduating with Honors (by completing the Thesis) and permitted all participants to give a well-rounded assessment of both sides. The next two questions more distinctly examined the goals of the Honors Program by asking “What personal and academic factors made it easy and feasible [or created hesitancy, in the next question] to complete an Honors Thesis?” The last question, “Do you have any last comments about your experience in the Honors Program?” was open-ended with the intention of discovering the areas of most interest to the particular participant. Follow-up information included “Please feel free to discuss any aspect of the Program you would like; there is truly no

right or wrong answer.” All participants shared additional information and this constituted the largest proportion of the audio recordings for most participants.

### *Methods*

Students were recruited in two ways: email from the Honors academic advisors and/or email from a peer. All of the Honors advisors received the same message (see Appendix) asking for information to be forwarded to any students they felt were representative of an Honors student working on a thesis. The peer email (see Appendix) was the same for both groups (committed and not committed to completion, respectively). The names of all the Honors Advisors were collected via departmental websites and the spreadsheet provided on the Honors Program website (Honors Program, 2011). Each received an individual email (“Form for Honors Advisors”) in mid-January. Peers were sent the “Form for Peers” email in mid-January. Interviews were scheduled for February and March until such time as the groups contained a representative mix of majors, genders, and years in school (Junior vs. Senior).

To avoid potential bias, individuals who the investigators knew personally were not interviewed; rather, these individuals were requested to send the peer email to their friends and acquaintances if they felt comfortable. Although this investigation was performed with the consent of the Honors Program, the investigators decided not to recruit participants through the Honors Program in order to decrease potential bias and to create a higher level of comfort for potential participants. In addition, emails from the Honors Program asking for research participants are frequent, thus tend to be deleted and not read; a personalized email from a faculty advisor or peer led to a higher return rate. The majority (70%) of the participants heard

about this study from their advisor. The other participants were recruited by peers and word-of-mouth referral from previous participants.

The emails asked individuals to contact the student investigator by email or phone for more information. At that time, they could choose to schedule an appointment for an interview. The interviews were held in various conference rooms within one building. This building houses upperclassmen in Honors and is a known building to most Honors students. If an individual scheduled an appointment which he or she missed due to temporary illness, weather conditions, or other unforeseen reason, but expressed interest in still participating, he or she was given the opportunity to reschedule the interview. If an individual missed his or her appointment for any reason and did not contact the investigators, it was interpreted that the individual no longer wished to participate in the study. One participant needed to reschedule twice, but all who requested more information completed the interview process.

Each interview began by acquiring written consent through the consent form and reminding the student that the interview would be audio-recorded to aid with note-taking. If at this time, the individual chose to no longer participate in the study, the participant session ended and no data was recorded. If the participant chose to proceed, the participant was given his or her ID code and informed that it would serve in lieu of his or her real name for the duration of the study. Once the interview began, the participant could choose not to answer any question(s) he or she chose not to answer, yet all other data was recorded under this ID code. Each participant was given a written questionnaire and informed that this would serve as a worksheet to help the student focus his or her thoughts. Once it was completed, an oral interview was conducted reiterating many of the questions on the written component and asking the individual to expand upon certain sections to clarify or expound upon a certain answer. See Appendix for the written

questionnaire as well as the list of questions asked or re-asked orally. The written questionnaire took most participants less than fifteen minutes to complete. The length of the oral interview was dependent on the length of the participant's answers, thus it ranged from seven to fifteen minutes. Although participants were instructed the interview may last 30-60 minutes, none lasted longer than 40 minutes. Participants' names were not recorded in any part of the data collection process and were not tied to the identification code in any way.

### **Results**

The status (completing or not) of the ten participants as well as gender and major are listed below along with their pseudonym (assigned for the purpose of describing participants with no attachment to real names):

- Anna, Female, Junior, Molecular & Cellular Biology, completing thesis
- Brian, Male, Senior, Chemistry, completing thesis
- Chauncey, Male, Senior, Animal Science, completing thesis
- Darren, Male, Junior, Exercise Science, completing thesis
- Elisha, Female, Senior, Psychology, not completing thesis
- Fritz, Male, Junior, Athletic Training, not sure if completing thesis
- Greta, Female, Junior, Nutritional Sciences, completing thesis
- Hannah, Female, Senior, Marketing, completing thesis
- Isabel, Female, Senior, Molecular & Cellular Biology, completing thesis
- Jenna, Female, Junior, Animal Science, not completing thesis

#### *Analysis by Category of Question*

##### What Were Your Reasons for Joining?

All participants listed one of the reasons for joining as "They invited me" with none listing "A friend suggested it" and only one (who is not completing a thesis) saying "An advisor or teacher or instructor suggested it." Six said "It made UConn a better option" (one out of the three that are not completing and five out of the seven that are completing it).

#### What Motivated You to Stay In?

Parents motivated only two participants (both are completing the Thesis). Friends motivated three (all completing). "Being a top achiever and competitive" motivated all but two (one who is completing it and one who is not). "Getting to enroll in classes earlier" motivated all but one (who is not completing a thesis). "Being able to live in Honors Communities" motivated two (both who are completing it). "Getting to choose housing earlier" motivated three. Four listed additional comments (all are completing a thesis): One said, "Preparation for graduate school/professional studies"; two mentioned it "looks good on résumé" and one mentioned "more research opportunities."

#### In Which Honors Housing Communities Did You Live?

All but one lived in freshmen housing, but only half of the remaining nine continued past first-year (four out of the seven completing a thesis and one of the two not completing a thesis that lived in the First Year Honors Community). Only three continued to a third year and all three stayed in the same Community as the year previous.

#### Did You Earn Sophomore Certificate?

Half of the participants completed a Sophomore Certificate. Those that did not included two of the three not completing a thesis and three of the seven who are completing it.

#### In What Honors Activities Were You Involved?

Participants chose from the following options, marking all that applied: Honors Council, HIPS (Honors Initiative for Prospective Students), PATH (Peer Allies Through Honors), Career Services Honors Events, Lunch Bunch, Lecture Lecture, and Other. Involvement in Honors was limited to Honors Council (four of the ten participants, all of which are completing a thesis; two of which participated for more than two semesters) and Career Services (seven of the ten participants, six of the seven completing a thesis and one of the three who is not). No participants checked off Last Lecture series, PATH and HIPS only had one participant each and Lunch Bunch had only two (all of which are completing a thesis). Of the three not completing a thesis, only one participated in any Honors activities. It should be noted, however, that involvement in Honors is correlated with those who completed a Sophomore Certificate. In order to receive the Sophomore Certificate, students must partake in "Honors Events" which include the Lunch Bunch series, the Last Lecture series, certain Honors Council events, and other initiatives. Only one of the four who did not complete the Sophomore Certificate was involved in Honors activities. Greta (completing a thesis) is highly involved in Honors Council and did HIPS for 2 semesters. Jenna (not completing thesis) completed the Sophomore Certificate without Honors involvement. She did not mark any other Honors involvement in the "Other" category so it is not known what events she used to fulfill this program.

#### Outside Involvement

It is difficult to define what constitutes "engagement" in community so the researcher decided to use number of organizations in which the participant is a member and/or a leader. With this criteria, those who are completing the thesis are less likely to be involved in general campus initiatives than those who are not. This study computed the weighted average of involvement wherein leadership was seen as twice as twice the commitment (time, energy) as a



membership. One unit of work equals five hours so that participants who work more than five hours are measured as more than one unit. In this way, someone that is a member in one organization (1.0 involvement unit), a leader in another organization (2.0 units), and works eight hours each week (1.6 units) has an involvement score of 4.6. A pattern exists between involvement score and commitment to the Thesis wherein there is a sizable difference between category averages. The average score of someone completing a thesis is 5.1 whereas the average score for someone not completing a thesis is 7.5.

### Course Difficulty

Only six participants converted any courses; four converted courses for Freshmen/Sophomore years whereas five converted courses in Junior/Senior years, with an overlap of three participants who converted courses for both categories. All three who are not doing the Thesis have converted some courses. This suggests that although these individuals do not plan to complete the Thesis, continuation of designation as “Honors” is desired or else they would have stopped converting courses. All participants have taken some designated courses with one person not taking any in Freshmen/Sophomore years (not completing the Thesis) and three not taking any in Junior/Senior years (two not completing the Thesis, one which is).

The differences between the two categories (Completing versus Not Completing) is not significant as the range of difficult for all ten participants is too large. The mean challenge level is 5.9 for all participants. This is just above the halfway point (5.5 on a 1-10 Likert scale). The modes are 4, 5 and 6 with four participants for each value. It is interesting that courses are not rated as that challenging. When examining the number of designated and converted Honors courses, the experiences of the participants vary widely. The range for the designated courses is 1-13 and the range for the converted courses is 0-7.

### Thesis Prep Course

Although five (three of the seven completing a thesis and two of the three not completing) knew of a research course in their major, only three took it (two of the three completing and one of the two not completing). Only two participants knew of a thesis preparation course in their major and both are completing the thesis.

### Why Undergraduate Research

All are conducting undergraduate research although none of the majors require it and none receive pay. None said their advisor or best friend recommended research. Six of the seven completing the thesis said they are doing research in order to do the thesis (none of the individuals who are not completing it listed this). All but one (who is completing a thesis) is doing research because they liked the focus of the professor, four of which took a class with that professor. Four (all completing a thesis) are doing it because they knew they wanted to do research before coming to college. Three of the people completing a thesis said they are doing it because Honors recommended research experience. Three listed additional reasons: both Animal Science majors (one completing, one not completing a Thesis) look to gain experience for veterinary school and one participant took introductory biology and decided to get involved in research.

### Knew Wanted Thesis

Only four of the ten participants knew they wanted to do a Thesis when they joined the Program. All four are committed to completing a thesis.

### Percentage of Time in Lab

Participants' time in the research laboratory was split into four categories: with the professor, with a graduate student, with other research assistants, or alone. See Table 1 for more

information. The mean time with a professor and time with other research assistants serve as the minority of the time (11% and 13% respectively). When split into the categories of Completing versus Not Completing, the percentages changed, but with a professor or other research assistants are still the smallest categories of time. The average time spent with a graduate student is 31.5% for all participants, yet 29.286% for those completing and 36.667% for those who are not. Time spent alone in the research lab was 44.5% for all participants, 50% for those completing, and 31.667% for those not completing. The difference between these two groups is not significant as the sample size is too small.

### Friends

Four of the ten participants identify that most of their friends are in the Program (all completing thesis, one did not complete Sophomore Certificate). The other six checked off that none of their friends are in the Program.

### Continuing Education

All ten participants have goals for higher education. The sample included none pursuing a law degree, two pursuing a Master's, four pursuing a Ph.D., two pursuing M.D./Ph.D., one pursuing a D.V.M, and one pursuing D.V.M/Ph.D. All are pursuing the terminal degree in their fields.

### *Goal 1: Challenging Academics*

#### Challenge of Coursework

The challenge of coursework, especially that which was required for the Sophomore Certificate, caused some to doubt staying in the Program. Fritz phrased as, “the whole fact that

Honors courses have hurt my GPA, even though they're not applied to my major." He shared a more strongly worded viewpoint later in the interview:

I think the Honors Program here is a little too restrictive. Mandating courses and that amount, I found that since day 1 I've been prescribed a program that I can't deviate from if I want to graduate with Honors, even moreso than a typical student, my time is precious and I don't think it's the best education the university can provide. Actually, I feel that my education from the general university was downgraded because I was in the Honors Program and I restricted to taking certain Honors courses outside of my major.

As a Kinesiology major, Fritz is responsible for a minimum of 15 hours each week in clinical which only count for two credits. For him, this was a major deterrent.

Other participants shared his sentiments that their major was not well-accommodated by the Honors curriculum. Greta responded to the same question of "What made you doubt staying in the Program" in the following way: "Probably the fact that I'm not very good at my science classes so I get poor grades in that and it makes me doubt if I'm good enough to be in the program. I also have friends who are science majors who dropped out because it's too hard." She also added that as a College of Agriculture and Natural Resources major, all of her courses need to be converted because there are few designated Honors courses. This means that she must perform additional work (to earn the Conversion), putting a strain on her full course load.

As previously mentioned, half of the participants earned a Sophomore Certificate. This included only four of the seven committed to completing an Honors Thesis as well as one who is not completing a Thesis. Darren, one of the individuals who did not work towards the Sophomore Certificate, explained that his focus was on earning the Honors Scholar.

I find the Sophomore Certificate kind of ambiguous and useless. It's not anything but to have another little line on your resume which means nothing compared to graduating with Honors. I didn't get it because one of the courses that I took was a 2000-and-above level course and if you use it towards Sophomore Honors, you can't use it to your graduating

Honors and why would I waste this hard course that I did well in on my Sophomore Honors when I can use it to graduate? The Honors Events are kind of interesting, but I never took the time to go to them because I knew I wasn't getting it. I was more concerned with Honors Scholar.

For Darren, the emphasis was on the final prize: designation on the degree itself, not on this more socially-directed initiative. His logic about saving a difficult course for the Honors Scholar requirements was echoed by other participants. When prompted for more information about her Honors experience in freshman and sophomore year, Hannah shared that "I really was not involved at all other than the classes and what was needed to graduate with the degree." Again, for these individuals, they decided not to divide their efforts into two different sub-programs, but rather maintain attention on the ultimate goal.

Not all of the feedback regarding the Sophomore Certificate was negative. Jenna said, "I knew it – my goal is to go to vet school – I knew it would look good to vet schools. The requirements for the Sophomore weren't, honestly, that difficult so it was kind of easy. The required, Core course fit easily within the Content Areas [general education requirements] so it wasn't hard to fill that." For some majors, it is much easier to find room in the academic schedule for Honors courses than for other fields of study. Isabel agreed that the Honors Core course was a valuable academic endeavor. "I had such a great experience in that class because it was a roomful of people who weren't necessarily experts in the topic we were discussing, but the professor sort of made you experts by the end of it. We went so in depth and covered so many different disciplines; it was just a fantastic experience, I would take another one of those Core Courses if I could."

In response to the question of what academic factors made it easy and feasible to complete the Honors Thesis, Elisha expanded beyond the structure of the first two years and talked about earning Honors credits in general. “It was easier in the sense that... you could do any 2000-level or higher courses to convert and in general the faculty members were really open to conversions. And then I did run into some problems where people didn’t want to convert, but I just did graduate courses instead so it was pretty easy to meet Honors program requirements.” Elisha faced some difficulty, yet did not allow this to cause her insurmountable frustration – instead, she turned it into an opportunity to achieve even more than required.

### Research Experience

All ten participants are involved in undergraduate research. Those who are completing the Thesis spend more time working independently whereas those who are not completing the Thesis are more evenly split among the categories of “with a professor,” “with a graduate student,” and “with another research assistant.” The research methods course and/or thesis preparation course is not standard among majors or colleges. For example, the Psychology major’s “thesis preparation” course is credits for independent study while writing the thesis whereas the Human Development & Family Studies major mandates a small-group class which facilitates the writing process. Although this research study did not delve deeply into major breakdown of differential treatment, those who did report the opportunity for and encouragement to take advantage of preparation courses seemed to have little effect on the persistence of the students since most students did not even know if it existed.

*Goal 2: Personalized Collegiate Environment*Expectations

The promise of a personalized collegiate environment is one of the main marketing tools for the Honors Program. All ten participants reported that the invitation to the Honors Program influenced the decision to accept admission to the University. Brian explained that “I was offered to join the Honors Program in addition to my admission to UConn and it helped make [the University] a more attractive choice. It separated me from, what I thought would be the majority of students and it gave me an incentive to come be part of the Honors Program at [this institution].” Honors adds an upper echelon for those like Greta who was “in a bunch of Honors classes in high school and I’ve always been in the gifted program so I liked being ‘higher up’ I guess.” It is a continuation of status for the most academically motivated.

Some accepted the offer as a tool for even further education. Chauncey has applied to schools of veterinary medicine and required an institution offering both an Honors Program and animal facilities, both of which this institution has. He added that: “In considering Honors, I wanted a program that elevated the academic level. Most schools of veterinary medicine take in academic rigor in their candidates. By being an Honors student, I could have a higher level of academic achievement and make it easier for me to tackle the coursework at the next level.” Honors was a strategic step towards a larger goal.

For some, the decision to stay was more about never making the decision to leave. Fritz said, “I was accepted when I was accepted to the school and I never decided to opt-out.” Hannah agreed and added “I was admitted when I was invited to [this institution]. They told me I had been accepted into it even though I hadn’t applied to it and getting whatever benefits are associated with it.” Isabel expressed the same sentiment more distinctly: “Mainly because I got

the letter upon acceptance to the University that I was admitted to the Honors Program so I figured why not. It was probably my main reason for coming to the University, too. Without those enrichment opportunities that came with it, I wouldn't have picked it." For many members, the mere invitation to be "better than" is enough to warrant acceptance of the offer.

Others were more intentional in their decision-making. Darren had a multifaceted explanation:

I was accepted when I applied from high school and I didn't see any reason to turn it down so I thought it would be a good opportunity to have certain advantages like earlier pick-time for housing and things like that and other potential classes so I figured why not give it a shot and see if I can handle it. And I'd heard that [this college] is kind of big and it's hard to build relationships with professors, so I thought that would be a good shot to make me feel like I was part of a smaller community and have access to professors that I wouldn't otherwise have access to.

He assessed the benefits of accepting the offer and deemed it a positive opportunity of which he wanted to take advantage. Darren's feelings toward these offers will be discussed later in this section.

Elisha is the individual who did not accept the Honors invitation until her sophomore year. Her experience was a little different. "It was because of more, I got invited and I kind of didn't want to do it at first because it was too much work. I talked to my advisor about it and I'd definitely get in no matter what. Then my friends told me you get all these different perks and you don't really need to do the thesis and graduate with honors, you still get the perks even if you don't do the thesis." Her late admittance means that she was able to hear from current students who experience this "personalized environment" and ask their opinions. She continued that:



I was just in it. It wasn't like it was visible or stigmatizing, I didn't really have to do extra until thesis. What's the point of dropping out after getting in? It's more work to drop out than just stay in. [...] I never really had any doubts staying in, I just wasn't sure if I want to do a thesis. One of my friends who graduated last year, he was super-smart, and he was in the Honors Program throughout the undergraduate career, but he ended up not doing a thesis because he didn't like research. Even though he decided not to do the thesis, he still got all the perks, so I never really had any doubts about being in the program.

Perhaps this inside knowledge skewed her perspective as she readily admitted that she knew how to trick the system and receive the perks without doing the work of completing a thesis.

### Relationship with the University

As mentioned above, Elisha experienced some difficulty acquiring conversion of courses to "Honors" credits. The conversion process is relatively unstructured as it encourages a collaborative relationship between the instructor and the student to decide the appropriate method to enriching the scholarship within the course. Many instructors will adopt a "standard" method of converting their courses, yet this may not always fit with the students' needs and interests. Greta admitted that "Academically, I don't think I've had much experience [with Honors] because I usually convert all my classes because College of Ag doesn't really offer anything 'Honors' so I don't have many other Honors students in my classes." She credits this as a restrictive influence which downgrades her overall experience.

In a contrary way, Greta continued to add "I do like that when you tell a faculty member or other that you're in Honors, they all of a sudden really like you. I tried to get into one class my second semester and the professor wouldn't let me. I emailed him the third semester and said I was in Honors and he said 'oh sure, come right in!' Oh, that's all I had to say! [laughs]." It is a battle within even the same person whether Honors facilitates or complicates the relationship with instructors.

Isabel appreciates the opening of doors to research opportunities which are not normally available to undergraduate students.

I definitely think that the Honors Program gave me opportunities that I wouldn't have if I wasn't in Honors. Specifically, the lab I'm in does not take non-Honors students for undergraduate research and I think even if it's not the case in other labs, it makes professors trust you a bit more because they know you're committed, they know you have to write a thesis so you're committed to research. It communicates you're excited about learning and you don't have to explain, you just say you're in the Honors Program and it's assumed.

Without Honors, she would not have entered the laboratory in which she has gained so much knowledge and experience. She credits this with her advanced scientific writing skills which secured her not only research grants, but also a spot at a prestigious Ph.D. program this fall.

Darren challenged the notion that Honors makes getting involved in academic research easier although he does encourage early and deep involvement in research because "getting to know professors and knowing what's going on on-campus and in research labs makes you realize there's a lot of great stuff happening here." Although he is committed to completing the Honors Thesis, he admits, "Maybe if I hadn't finished a lot of my pre-Med courses, I would've been really worried about all the work to do. I want to take the MCATs and maybe the GREs and graduate testing feels more important than writing a thesis which can take up a fair amount of time. Sometimes you need to make these decisions and I wouldn't pick thesis." He admires the "cutting edge material" which he learns from the laboratory of his research advisor and looks forward to the completion of his Thesis, yet he listed several reasons why he feels it would be understandable not to follow-through on this assertion.

*Goal 3: Community of Individual, Social, and Cultural Development*Honors Living-Learning Communities

As previously mentioned, although nine lived in the First-Year Community, only five continued to the second year and only three continued to a third. The official drop-out rate from Honors Housing is difficult to gauge as supply is lower than demand. Often, the upperclassmen housing fills up before the housing selection process is over. For this reason and others, the Honors Program recently acquired additional Honors Housing in a different residence hall area. Two of the three participants who continued to a third year are currently juniors and have spent both of their last two years (First Year Community then this Community for a total of three years) in the new Community. The other individual has spent his last three years in the upperclassmen Community. That being said, none of the participants spoke about Communities other than the First-Year and Sophomore Communities so speculation cannot be made about the other two.

Honors Communities are a controversial topic as some have very positive feelings while others have equally negative opinions. Brian explains that, “The Honors community (the living communities) was less than desirable most of the time and didn’t quite improve on the whole Honors experience in terms of academics.” He continued,

The whole Honors community didn’t really seem like one because they were short on students, for one, and the themes for the year and the meetings to put on these events, they felt so empty, and they didn’t really have any backing or purpose by the students. [...] In general, but focusing on the living learning communities, because you restrict certain aspects of the college experience by throwing people of very certain mindsets that differ, that doesn’t mesh to make something cohesive. For example, my sophomore year, I did not have a roommate, despite that I had a roommate, because he spent the entire time in his girlfriend’s room... friends down the hall partied like crazy – it didn’t feel like an Honors community.

When prompted what he thinks an Honors Community should have felt like he added: “It could have all these aspects I just listed, but it should also have some sort of functional, academic aspect which with the exception of the New York Times being provided to us every day, there’s almost none. You’d be pretty lucky if you ran into someone who didn’t want to keep to themselves and actually wanted to have an intellectual conversation.” Brian chose to leave the Honors Communities after his sophomore year, but continues to live with Honors students on-campus.

For all that Brian did not enjoy his Honors Communities experiences, there are others that felt it offered the right mixture of academics and socialization. Chauncey shared, “... the individuals that I met in that community – diverse, but mostly the sciences – but having people with similar lifestyles and vibe, most of these people have stayed together living in the Honors Communities and still stays in contact with each other. [...] having that community of people just to hang out with, see on a regular basis, in addition to people in your major, was sort of a nice benefit.” For him, it created a social environment which supported him as he navigated his undergraduate experience.

Interestingly, the relationships built during this First-Year Community experience are not self-identified as continuing in importance as the undergraduate career continues. Only four of the ten participants identified that most of their friends are in the Honors Program. None of the participants said that most of their friends were in the Program, but have since dropped out. The other six noted that most of their friends were never in the Program. This may mean that those who drop out of the Program simultaneously drop out of the Community. It may also mean that those who drop out drop out together and the collective was not able to be reached through these survey methods.

### Honors Involvement

Involvement in Honors activities may include participation in Honors-specific groups like the Honors Council (a student council), PATH (Peer Allies Through Honors, first-year mentoring), and HIPS (Honors Initiative for Prospective Students, hosting of potential students). It may also include attendance at events like the Lunch Bunch or Last Lecture series as well as events orchestrated through collaboration of the Honors Office with the Department of Career Services. Some get directly involved and use the opportunities to expand on leadership skills. Greta said, “I’m on the Honors Council since I got here. I’ve certainly enjoyed that and I’ve gotten close to a lot of people and it’s allowed me to get close to faculty which I’m not very used to.... [As clarification,] I got to know the Honors Staff very well, not as much faculty.”

However, there are others like Brian, who felt that there were more meaningful opportunities elsewhere: “... honestly, there’s a reason I never went to Honors Council because I never thought it did anything useful, despite the fact I dated two people who were involved with it and they tried to tell me multiple times what they actually do, yet never once did I actually take the time to go because I always felt there was something more important to do.” Sentiments like Brian’s are why involvement in Honors is not mandatory, rather highly encouraged.

Although participation in the Honors Community is less intentional after the first year (when students have the opportunity to leave the Living-Learning Communities), at least periodic involvement is guaranteed through the Sophomore Certificate. This is met with mixed reactions:

Fritz: I think [Honors Events] are stupid. It’s not relevant whatsoever to my education. I’m going to one tonight – I have absolutely no interest in it! But it’s what’s being offered to me.

Jenna: I definitely think my favorite Honors events to go to were the ones where they would show movies. There was one where they did this about invisible children in Uganda and that was really great. It was one of those Honors Events where writing that paper afterwards was really easy to do whereas there were others where I didn't know what to write because I really didn't learn anything. The Honors Events that were more cultural were more interesting.

Overall, students felt that the Events were not tailored to their interests. This varied between individuals with some expressing frustration at bias toward social sciences and liberal arts whereas others (the liberal arts students) frustrated at the skew toward the hard sciences and business.

Regardless of Honors Events, some students still wish there was more of an intellectual community among Honors students. Chauncey explains, "There's not a lot of crossover between different communities. Perhaps round-table discussions or presentations of research. I know that there's a Frontiers of Undergraduate Research, but for me that will come at the end of my academic career so perhaps more inclusion in the sophomore and junior years." As a result of the voluntary nature of the Sophomore Certificate, students can freely choose to be passive members of the Honors Community with minimal involvement.

#### *Goal 4: Engagement and Leadership Beyond the Classroom*

Eight of the ten participants engaged in leadership positions on-campus. This included pre-professional societies, academic and social fraternities and sororities, peer mentoring organizations, athletic groups, cultural associations, and community service initiatives. There is no typical Honors student involvement.

Darren explained that his on-campus leadership involvement may impinge upon his time available for research and the Thesis. "As part of being the Honors program, no, but being

involved in other things on campus like leadership positions which take up a lot of time, take precedence over doing the thesis. But by the time I do the thesis, which will be my senior year, I guess I'll step down from all the leadership positions and that'll make more time – I hope! [laughs].” As a junior, the Thesis still exists in the hypothetical frame of mind. He is hopeful to have the opportunity to do both, yet he foresees personal sacrifices.

Cody's testimony answers this question with a logical explanation that the Thesis:

is a lot of personal challenges, particularly when you think of spending time with friends and family as well as going to class, some things need to be given up in pursuit of that. This may be a deterrent to other students, but I know in the long term by completing a thesis and having that publication – not only the thesis, but an original article published with me as the first author will be to ultimate benefit in my future career.

His focus is on the farther future than Darren's currently lies. Isabel also mentioned personal sacrifices by joking that her and her friends used to worry that the only time they would be able to hang out together is if they planned “thesis-writing parties.”

#### Not Involved in Leadership

Anna neither worked nor held a leadership position though she was the member of two different organizations. She focuses all of her time on research and academics. Hannah chose not to seek an executive role on-campus because she sought social stimulation through participation in athletics and her own social groups. These two women would both be classified as low on engagement and leadership, yet are also a juxtaposition of Honors students: Anna is so academically-driven that she has no time for social involvement whereas Hannah balances her time between doing well in courses and outside social engagements.

Anna: I am very driven. I've stayed in research for, this is my fourth semester, I'll have a lot of work done by the time I graduate. I'm just very committed to writing the thesis and making contribution to the professor's research that I'm working under.

Hannah: I would say I wasn't really an active participant in the Honors Program for the majority of my time. I was in Buckley freshmen year so I didn't get the whole Honors Community so much because we were the overflow and only two floors. ... there weren't a lot of people to be involved with [so] I never had all my friends in it. [...] I really was not involved at all other than the classes and what was needed to graduate with the degree.

Neither identified regrets for not getting more involved and both are completing the Honors Thesis.

### Part-Time Work

Eight of the ten participants work part-time while attending classes. Some stated that this only lasted a few semesters before coursework became too difficult to balance the multiple priorities. Others have worked part-time for their entire undergraduate career thus far. For the purpose of this research, the type of work was not qualitatively assessed to compare the relative challenge level. Future research may delve into this and other distractions to student success.

### **Discussion**

These ten participants reflected both between-group and within-group differences. All shared the experience of accepting the invitation to join the Honors Program out of curiosity and the belief that "why not?" and continued (for however long, in some cases) due to no reason not to drop out. They all also participate or have participated in undergraduate research and all demonstrated enthusiasm for the lessons learned in this highly academic atmosphere. Opinions differed on Honors courses, especially the Honors Core courses, with some establishing strong positive feelings whereas others felt they missed the mark. While some students thrived under the challenging academic course load, others worried about their cumulative grade point averages (for applications to further education or for persistence in the Honors Program), and



still others distanced themselves from this stress in the first two years in order to focus exclusively on the Honors Scholar designation.

### *Issues in Survey Instrument*

The written and oral questionnaires were completed in full by all participants with no missing data. Most participants had difficulty with the same questions (10-13) on the written questionnaire. As the researcher administered the survey to more than half of total participants (60%) before realizing the difficulty was universal, it was decided not to edit the instrument, but rather to continue to explain the questions orally to all participants so that each received the same treatment.

The first two questions (10-11) involved writing a number from the Likert scale provided to note the challenge level of particular courses from “Not at all challenging” to “Extremely Challenging.” Instead of marking the challenge level for Freshmen & Sophomore courses versus Junior & Senior courses, most circled a number on the scale and moved forward to the next question. Fortunately, the first two participants realized their error and alerted the researcher. Future participants received an oral recitation of the written instructions to “write a number from the scale below for each 2-year period.” This alleviated the issue.

The second two questions (12-13) required listing the number of courses taken in Freshmen & Sophomore versus Junior & Senior years. Again, the first two participants erroneously listed number of credits instead of courses; however, both notified the researcher. Oral recitation of written instructions was provided for all future participants. With these slight modifications, there were few issues.

*Limitations to this Study*Representativeness of Sample

Data collection was complicated by reliance on potential participants contacting the student researcher directly. The researcher sent the email to all Honors Advisors individually and received a strong response of 26 advisors agreeing to forward the request to their students. This led to six appointments within the next week. Unfortunately, this method did not beget a representative sample of the Honors Program population. The email to peers served the purpose of publicizing the thesis topic, yet as most that self-identify as not completing a thesis drop out of the Honors Community, it was more difficult than anticipated to recruit a sample which appropriately mirrored those who were committed to completing a Thesis.

The scale of this research study necessitated a small sample of ten participants to represent the hundreds of juniors and seniors enrolled in the Honors Program. If repeated, more time would need to be committed to recruiting efforts in order to provide a sample size of at least 15-20. That being said, the ten participants represent a diverse range of majors, commitment levels, sex, and year in college. The academic fields of study not captured in this sample include engineering, fine arts, and humanities. Due to the requirement for potential participants to contact the student researcher directly (and not be recruited by the researcher herself), it was difficult to control the demographics of volunteers. Future researchers may decide to use a more directed quota system in order to recruit a more representative sample.

Honors Student as Researcher

The Honors student as researcher situation increased the comfort level of the participants as it guaranteed understanding of terms and procedures. For example, when Hannah shared her

experience in the “overflow” of the First Year Honors Community, the student researcher (who lived in the main Community during this same cohort) did not need a definition. The limitation of a shared vocabulary is the possibility for taking information for granted. It is possible that through the assumption of shared norms and beliefs, the researcher missed unique variations to these commonalities.

The researcher believes that the benefits of investigator as trusted ally outweigh the potential for in-group biases. Individuals with whom the student researcher had previous close relationships were excluded from the participant pool (these individuals were used as the peer group which administered the recruiting email to their peers). The student researcher avoided language which reflected dismissive camaraderie. This is defined as language which truncated the participant’s answer to a question due to assumed knowledge of what the participant was trying to say. This could include phrases like “don’t worry, I get it” or “you don’t need to explain.” Students were allowed to continue with explanations until they felt satisfied with their answers. At times, participants acted with hesitancy and prompts were administered like “Is there anything else you would like to share?” or “Can you go into more detail about your last statement?”

#### *Additional Comments*

It needs to be noted that the research for this thesis was conducted concurrent with proposed changes to the Program, to take effective with the incoming cohort of Honors students. It is believed that the basic requirements to graduate with Honors will not change; rather the manner in which information is presented will be updated to better meet student concerns. So far, the Honors Office created a handout about the Thesis which lays out requirements and

expectations. This researcher hopes that these initiatives will ameliorate much of the negative feelings expressed by subjects during data collection.

Based on the ten interviews, this research suggests that the differences between those who complete the thesis requirement and those who do not may be a personal characteristic like determination, not programmatic factors. All of the participants who are committed to completing the Thesis shared the same level of negativity towards aspects of the Honors Program. One participant who is completing the Thesis had the longest interview due to his commitment to sharing all of the ways that he feels Honors could improve. Though unfeasible to share all of his testimony in this report, many of his suggestions may be communicated to the Honors Program through his Senior Survey or similar methods.

Due to its scope as an undergraduate thesis, this study did not examine personal characteristics like self-efficacy or an inventory of stressful life events. A literature review of this topic suggests that these two variables may have a strong relationship with persistence of Honors students to complete program goals. This study chose to focus on self-reported “personal and academic factors” which either made the Thesis easy and feasible or more difficult to complete. Future research may combine these two efforts (program as well as personal information) in order to provide a more holistic view of student experience. This information could be used to tailor program initiatives like housing, extra-curricular activities, and relationship with academic departments to increase student success.

The Honors Program’s four goals – challenging academics, a personalized environment, a community focused on personal development, and engagement and leadership beyond the classroom – are ingrained in their programmatic initiatives. The main difficulty in assessing

whether these goals are met is how to determine “success.” Is success retaining members throughout the four years? Or, is success the number of completed Theses, thus the number who graduate with Honors? If answering the first question, it can conclusively be judged from this sample that they succeed in all goals as all ten participants are currently enrolled in the Honors Program and do not plan to officially drop off of the roster. However, if measuring success by number of First Year Honors students who persevere to graduate with the Honors designation after four-six years, this assessment cannot make a conclusive judgment as it does not speak to graduates. It cannot be judged solely from this study whether the seven who self-identify as completing the Thesis will succeed and, conversely, it is possible juniors who self-identify as not completing a Thesis will change their minds and graduate with Honors. This student did.

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**Table 1**

Percentage of Time in Research Laboratory by Thesis Commitment			
Time in Lab	Total	Doing Thesis	Not Doing Thesis
With Professor	11.000	9.286	15.000
With Graduate Student	31.500	29.286	36.667
With Other Research Assistants	13.000	11.429	16.667
By Yourself	44.500	50.000	31.667

**Appendix A**

Written Questionnaire on Experiences in Honors

1. What is your major and school?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
2. When did you join the Honors program? *Circle the letter of the answer which applies to you:*
  - a. When admitted to the school
  - b. Before Sophomore year and completed a Soph. Certificate
  - c. Before Sophomore year and did not complete a Soph. Certificate
  - d. Before Junior year
  - e. Before Senior year
  
3. What were your reasons for joining the Program? *If any of these reasons apply to you, please check them off. Otherwise, please mark "Other" with your reason:*
  - a. They invited me
  - b. Made UConn a better option
  - c. A friend suggested it
  - d. An advisor or teacher or instructor suggested it
  - e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What motivated you to stay in the Program? *Please check all that apply.*
  - a. My parents
  - b. My friends are in the Program
  - c. Being a top-achiever and competitive
  - d. Getting to enroll in classes earlier
  - e. Being able to live in Honors Communities
  - f. Getting to choose housing earlier
  - g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Did you complete a Sophomore Certificate? (*circle one*)    Yes            No
  
6. In which of the following Honors Communities (if any) did you live? *Check off all that apply:*
  - a. Shippee/Buckley (First Year Community)
  - b. Brock (Second Year Community)
  - c. Connecticut Commons
  - d. Wilson
  - e. In one or more of the areas as a Resident Assistant
  - f. None of the Above
  
7. What Honors activities, if any, were you involved in? How long do/did each of these involvements continue? *Next to each activity below, write the number of semesters for each or "0" if not involved. Put a check if you attended a few times, but were not actively involved.*
  - a. Honors Council: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. HIPS: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. PATH: \_\_\_\_\_

For the options below, mark how many times you attended these events:

- d. Career Services/Honors Events: \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Lunch Bunch: \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Last Lecture: \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
8. What other involvement in student activities have you had on-campus? Please list organizations with a designation of either “member” or “leader” for each as well as number of semesters involved.

9. Do you work while enrolled in classes? (*circle one*)    Yes    No
- a. If so, for how many hours per week? \_\_\_\_\_

10. In your experience, how intellectually challenging are the courses you converted to Honors? (write a number from the scale below for each 2-year period).

*Not at all challenging*      1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10  
*Extremely Challenging*

- a. Freshman & Sophomore courses \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_ check here if you did not convert any courses
- b. Junior & Senior courses \_\_\_\_\_

11. In your experience, how intellectually challenging are the designated Honors courses or sections?

*Not at all challenging* 1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10 *Extremely Challenging*

- a. Freshman & Sophomore courses \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Junior & Senior courses \_\_\_\_\_

12. How many designated Honors courses and Converted Honors courses have or will you have taken by graduation?

- a. Designated Honors Courses: \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Honors Converted Courses: \_\_\_\_\_

13. How many of these courses are towards your Junior/Senior requirements and not used toward Sophomore Certificate?

- a. Designated Honors Courses: \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Honors Converted Courses: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Was there an option for taking a Research Methods course in your major? (*circle one*) Yes    No  
 I do not know

- a. If so, did you enroll in it? (*circle one*)    Yes    No

15. Did you enroll in a Thesis Preparation course in your major? (*circle one*)    Yes    No

16. Are you involved, or have you been involved, in undergraduate research? (circle one) Yes No
- a. When did you start? Circle the semester number that you joined: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
- b. For what reasons did you start? Check off all options that apply to you:
- i. It is required for my major
  - ii. My department promotes getting involved
  - iii. Work study
  - iv. I get paid for it
  - v. I knew I wanted to before going to college
  - vi. I was interested in the research focus of the particular professor
  - vii. I took a class with the professor
  - viii. My advisor/instructor recommended it
  - ix. My friend recommended it
  - x. Because the Honors Program recommended it
  - xi. To work on my Thesis
  - xii. Other (please write a short explanation):
- c. Did you know you wanted to complete a Thesis when you joined the Honors Program? (circle one) Yes No
- d. Of the time you spent doing research, please assign approximate percentages for time spent in the following interactions:
- i. \_\_\_\_\_ % With the professor
  - ii. \_\_\_\_\_ % With a graduate student
  - iii. \_\_\_\_\_ % With only other research assistants
  - iv. \_\_\_\_\_ % By yourself
17. Select the category in which most of your close friends from UConn fit: (check one)
- a. In the Honors Program
  - b. Were in the Program, but dropped out
  - c. Never been in the Program
18. After graduating from UConn, do you plan to continue your education? (circle one) Yes No
- a. If yes, to what level or degree? \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**Oral Questionnaire on Experiences in Honors

I will now be asking you additional questions to get at your subjective experience as an Honors student. You have the ability to choose not to answer any question you do not want to answer. I ask that you refrain from using any identifiable information such as names (both your own and that of peers, faculty, and staff) in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. I will begin by stating your ID code and the date and time so that this recording can be attached to your written questionnaire.

1. What were your reasons for joining the Honors Program?
2. What made you want to stay in the Program?
3. What made you doubt staying in the Program?
4. What personal and academic factors made it easy and feasible to complete an Honors Thesis?
5. What personal and academic factors created hesitancy to complete an Honors Thesis?
6. Do you have any last comments about your experience in the Honors Program?

**Appendix C**

Email to Honors Advisors:

Subject Line: Request for Participants for Honors Thesis

Dear Dr. [Name of Honors Advisor]:

My name is Amy Holland and I am an undergraduate completing my Honors Thesis on the persistence of juniors and seniors toward completion of their own Honors Theses. This email is to request your aid recruiting students who are committed to completion of their thesis. This may include any juniors or seniors in your department (including advisees or pupils) who you feel can speak to their experiences as an Honors student. The interview will take 30-60 minutes of their time including the completion of a written questionnaire. All participant information will be kept anonymous and confidential. Interested students can contact me at Amy.Holland@uconn.edu or (203)313-0774 for more information.

Thank you for your assistance.

Respectfully,

Amy Holland

**Appendix D**

Email to Peers:

Subject Line: Request for Participants for Honors Thesis

Dear [Name of Peer]:

My name is Amy Holland and I am an undergraduate completing my Honors Thesis on the persistence of juniors and seniors toward completion of their own Honors Theses. This email is to request your aid recruiting students who are currently or were previously enrolled in the Honors Program who you believe can speak to their experiences as an Honors student. I am interviewing two groups of individuals: those who are committed to completion of a thesis and those who are uncommitted and/or are no longer pursuing an Honors degree. I require a diverse group of participants from a variety of majors and academic colleges. The interview will take 30-60 minutes of their time including the completion of a written questionnaire. All participant information will be kept anonymous and confidential. Interested students can contact me at Amy.Holland@uconn.edu or (203)313-0774 for more information.

Thank you for your assistance.

Respectfully,

Amy Holland