

When Isomorphism Fails: Structural Barriers to a Community College

Honors Program

by

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ABSTRACT

The number of community college honors programs has significantly increased since the 1980s. This study analyzes qualitative data collected from employee, student, and faculty participants associated with a community college honors program in the western United States during the months of April 2011 and January-March 2012. Using a theoretical framework derived from literature on Institutional Isomorphism and Academic Capitalism, this work explores the motivations behind the creation of a community college honors program, the implementation of the program, and the program's effects on the micro-level experiences of those affiliated. The data analysis reveals that the motivations for the incorporation and continuation of the Honors Program are driven by hopes of improving the college's reputation and attracting new funding sources for its academic programs. These findings are consistent with arguments about Institutional Isomorphism and Academic Capitalism. However, consistent with literature on program implementation, I identified barriers in the form of staff and student perceptions that impede Honor's program conformity to ideal standards. I refer to this finding as "incomplete isomorphism."

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have been an integral part of the American higher education system for more than a century. 40 percent of first-time freshmen entering postsecondary education begin at the community college (American Association of Community Colleges 2012). Although originally structured as the first two years of a university education, the community colleges today offer a range of educational courses including general education/transfer, occupational, remedial and non-credit continuing education. The community college often prides itself on being the “people’s college” with an open-enrollment policy. It is an institution that accepts all students regardless of academic background or preparedness. The average age for a community college student is 29 years old and two-thirds of those attending two-year institutions attend part-time (American Association of Community Colleges 2012). 36 percent of those enrolled at the community college are minority students and 17 percent are single parents. Additionally, 39 percent of first-generation college students begin at the community college (American Association of Community Colleges 2012). The community colleges are institutions that accept students often needing additional support and flexibility.

For the community colleges, historical changes have caused a variation in student composition. Starting in the 1970s, the community colleges witnessed a rise of students needing developmental coursework. To relieve the burden from the four-year institutions, the community colleges absorbed the majority of underprepared college students, increasing the number of courses offered in remedial reading, English and math (Cohen and Brawer 2008: 292). Across the United States, 44 percent of first-time community college students enroll in between one and three developmental courses (Attewell et al. 2006).

The 1980s also saw a growth of honors programs/colleges at both four-year institutions and community colleges. However, the rise of the community college honors program reflects a newer phenomenon compared to four-year institutions. Long (2002) used data collected in 1999 to assess institutional characteristics of schools that offer honors programs or colleges. The average honors program at a four-year institution was 17 years old compared to 11 years old at a community college.

The escalation in the number of honors programs at community colleges may serve to counter the loss of institutional legitimacy resulting from the absorption of students needing remedial education. A decrease of direct institutional funding from the federal government

resulted in an increase in competition for student enrollment at all postsecondary educational levels (Slaughter and Leslie 1997). Honors programs may have been implemented in two-year institutions to stay competitive and attract prospective students (Long 2002). Honors programs and often accompanying fee-waivers or scholarships help entice students to enroll at particular institutions. In the community colleges, remedial education and honors programs are frequently operated alongside but separate from general education/transfer and occupational programs. The proliferation of programs targeted to specialized student populations may be indicative of broader organizational and structural changes in the community colleges brought about by instabilities in funding and student composition.

Since the community colleges enroll a large portion of the U.S. undergraduate student population (44 percent), organizational shifts in community colleges impact significant numbers of the college student population as well as substantial numbers of employees and the wider community served by these institutions (American Association of Community Colleges 2012). Thus, such shifts warrant further investigation. This study aimed to explore one program geared towards a specialized community college student population: honors programs. I considered the extent to which the rise of honors programs

in two-year institutions exemplifies organizational change including mission shift and structure. Literature on this and related educational trends argues that a decrease in direct institutional government funding has contributed to a rise in competition for undergraduate student enrollment. These trends have been characterized by educational policy analysts Slaughter and Leslie (1997) as “academic capitalism.” The later adoption of community college honors programs compared to four-year institutions is also reflective of another trend prominently discussed in organizational sociology referred to as “institutional isomorphism,” or institutions’ shift of organizational structure and/or goals to replicate organizations that hold greater societal legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

I was interested in the extent and perceived impact of these trends in community colleges. Using one community college as a case study, this research investigated the Honors Program’s stated purpose and design, as well as the subjective experiences of honors students and college staff. Using institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism theories as a conceptual framework for grasping the larger context of these changes, I gathered data to assess the perceived effects of these trends. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews of students and employees. The goal of the student interviews was to gain

a deeper understanding of motivations behind their engaging in a community college honors program and to explore how students perceive the program. The aim of faculty and staff interviews was to assess employee perceptions of the motivation, mission and structure of the Honors Program and their interpretations of how students experience the program.

In addition to the semi-structured interview approach, I also collected data from archival documents regarding the college's Honors Program. Information came from public websites, brochures and material found on blank student applications. The purpose of this non-obtrusive data collection was to analyze formal information put forth by college district publications about the honors program. Formal and published information differ from interview data received from individuals familiar with the program in a confidential setting. It is important to analyze these documents to evaluate what the college district intends the public to know about the Honors Program mission, goals and structure. Information gathered from these published sources was compared and contrasted with information gathered from interviews.

This work is presented in six chapters. Chapter two establishes the historical context, focusing on trends contributing to the rise of

honors programs in two-year institutions. In chapter three, the two-part conceptual framework used to drive this investigation, academic capitalism and institutional isomorphism, is expanded on. Chapter four details the methodology, including the research questions, data, research site, researcher's background and methods of data analysis. The study's results, which relate to the two-part conceptual framework and also, emergent findings are found in chapter five. The concluding chapter six discusses contributions this research makes to the literature, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The aim of this chapter is to explain historical changes within the community colleges that may have led to organizational shifts of structures and goals. Changes in student composition, institutional funding, and emphasis on student completion of courses and degrees coincide with two phenomena in higher education: the rise of honors programs and the shift from needs-based financial aid to merit-based financial aid. This chapter is divided into two subsections: Community Colleges, and Honors Programs and Merit-Based Financial Aid; and establishes a background to further explain the trends connected to the proliferation of honors programs in two-year institutions.

Community Colleges

A variety of social and historical factors can be attributed to the expansion of American community colleges during the 20th century. The most general element was an increased societal demand for education at all levels (Cohen and Braver 2008:31). The G.I. Bill, the baby boom, and industrial demand for skilled workers facilitated the need for greater access to postsecondary education. Two-year institutions became available to absorb the masses of students requesting higher education; a demand that the four-year institutions were unable or unwilling to accommodate (Cohen and Braver 2008:27-

31). Formerly known as “junior colleges,” two-year institutions initially functioned as an extension of secondary schooling and the equivalent of the first two-years of an undergraduate education. This structure enabled the four-year institutions to focus on upper-division and graduate studies (Dougherty 1994).

Changes in the workforce and the civil rights and women’s movements brought a new diverse population to community college campuses. The Federal Vocational Education Act of 1963 encouraged two-year colleges to create programs with less emphasis on general education and more emphasis on specific job skills and workforce training (Cohen and Brawer 2008:245). Educational goals also shifted to serve a comprehensive agenda with divisions devoted to remedial and non-credit continuing education. The community college moved from an institution concentrated on undergraduate transfer education to a more wide-ranging agenda serving a variety of the public’s educational needs (Cohen and Brawer 2008:22-35).

During the 1960s, the community colleges’ focus was on offering access and opportunity to a broader population. Starting in the late 1970s, the community colleges mission shifted towards an agenda of excellence and academic quality (Behrendt1984; Byrne 1990).

Behrendt (1984) suggests this shift in goals resulted from a decrease in

funding for education at all levels. The decreased funding impacted student support services, lessening the amount of assistance provided to students to help them progress successfully through programs. This decline in support existed in both K-12 and postsecondary education levels and resulted in an increased emphasis on the quality of programs.

During the 1980s, educational institutions were faced with a dilemma: creating equal access and opportunity for an inclusive student population and coping with the decreased support and funding from taxes. This conflict may have been overcome by an increased emphasis on the superiority of educational services provided, one example being the rise and development of honors programs (Behrendt 1984). In 2003, approximately half of community colleges offered honors programs, an increase of about 50 percent from the prior decade (Beck 2003).

The community colleges have struggled with two competing agendas: serving the diverse needs of the public and maintaining legitimacy as a quality postsecondary educational institution. This conflict results from balancing the original mission of the “junior college” to duplicate the first two years of a university education and the obligation of the comprehensive community college to offer an

“open door” to anyone who can benefit from the instruction offered. The rise and implementation of community college honors programs may assist with multiple collegiate purposes: serving the needs of a high-ability student population and the enhancement of the community college image as an institution that can offer greater academic quality. The heightening of the community college image may increase their legitimacy, which then ensures continued funding and institutional survival.

Honors Programs and Merit-based Financial Aid

This section explores the growth of community college honors programs, a trend that occurs simultaneously with a change in the nature of student-based financial aid. In the 1980s, need-based financial aid which was prevalent in earlier decades became increasingly replaced by merit-based financial aid (Slaughter and Leslie 1997). Since honors programs are often accompanied by a scholarship or fee waiver, this is a development that may have contributed to the expansion of honors programs. The change from offering need-based to merit-based financial aid can be linked to increased competition for high-ability undergraduate students, which may impact how institutions are ranked, and the goal shift from equal access to quality education (Baum and Schwartz 1988; Long 2002;

Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Such arguments are part of a larger framework that has been used to characterize many of the changes in college and university organizations in recent years.

In *Academic Capitalism Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University*, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) trace the escalation of market-like behaviors in academia to a reduction in the amount of government funding to institutions¹. This decline in funding causes many postsecondary educational institutions to seek alternative revenue sources, such as private sector commercial partnerships and non-university funded grants, in addition to increased student enrollment and tuition hikes. This heightened competition for student registration may be correlated with the implementation of merit-based financial aid. Competition for student registration could be linked to enrollment-driven funding formulas; which incentivize institutions to sustain enrollment and increase their revenues (Behrendt 1984).

However, it is often not enough to have students in seats; it is also important to have students who complete coursework and degrees. The percentage of American adults with postsecondary credentials is not keeping pace with other industrialized nations. Therefore, in 2010,

¹ Reduction in direct institutional funding also coincides with the Bayh-Dole Act, adopted in 1980, that authorized universities to accumulate patents founded on faculty's research, gain profit from these patents, and shift from conception/innovation to manufacturing (Slaughter and Rhoades 1993).

President Barack Obama stated that a goal for postsecondary education in the United States is to have the highest percentage of college degree holders in the world (Mullin 2010). This new completion agenda, which potentially is tied to institutional funding, increases the competition for students that will enroll in an institution and stay enrolled until graduation. This recent agenda is a further incentive for two-year institutions to attract high-quality students likely to complete degrees and/or transfer.

The 1970s and the 1980s also saw an increase in students underprepared for college-level work. Many societal factors have been attributed to this decline in academic ability including television, a decreased appreciation for authority and the importance of the “written word,” the upsurge of non-native English speakers and a decline in educational anticipations and requirements at all points of schooling (Cohen and Brawer 2008:284). To relieve the burden from the universities, the community colleges assumed most of the responsibility for delivering remedial education to students who could not place into college-level courses. The community college population that needed remedial coursework became inflated, with about 44 percent of first-time community college students registering in between one and three developmental courses (Attewell et al. 2006).

In an effort to preserve legitimacy, most colleges segregated remedial coursework from transfer and occupational education (Cohen and Brawer 2008:301). The rise of community college honors programs, also in the 1980s, may have been an avenue for community colleges to raise their societal legitimacy after incorporating so many underprepared college students. Few studies have evaluated the link between honors programs, funding and the maintenance of legitimacy in the community colleges. The following chapter introduces the two concepts used as a framework to direct this research, institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism.

Chapter 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework that was used to drive this research was the assimilation of two different but related perspectives: academic capitalism and institutional isomorphism. The theory of academic capitalism refers to academia's adoption of organizational behaviors usually found in the private sector. These behaviors can include an emphasis on enhancing revenues, cost-cutting and competition (Slaughter and Leslie 1997). Trends in academic capitalism, specifically competition for student enrollment and subsequent funding may lead to institutional isomorphism. This is demonstrated by the community college inclusion of honors programs soon after the rise of honors programs in the four-year institutions (Long 2002). The next sections will further explore the academic capitalism and institutional isomorphism frameworks used to direct this investigation.

Academic Capitalism

Slaughter and Leslie (1997) describe the shifts in the nature of academic work during the late 20th century. Academics have traditionally held a privileged position separate from the capitalist market. In previous eras, research was conducted on the basis of

acquiring knowledge for the advancement of society. The 1980s witnessed a turning point in academia's relationship to the marketplace. Disciplines that were closer to the market and the development of new technologies received more rewards from the universities because of the external funding available to those fields. Basic research became increasingly replaced by market-driven research because of concerns that the United States was falling behind in innovation and intellectual property.

Preceding the adoption of the Bayh-Dole Act² of 1980, university faculty were involved with aspects of the commercial sector. However, the approval of this specific legislation allowed universities, small businesses and non-profit organizations the intellectual property control of new innovations. This act further encourages universities to engage in research that can be patented and capitalized on (Slaughter and Rhoades 1993). This new incentive places more emphasis on the parts of university mission focused on research and development and less on lower-division instruction which is not research focused. Thus, the Bayh-Dole Act indirectly places more pressure on community colleges to attract and enroll high-potential university bound students needing to complete first two-years of an undergraduate education.

² This act is also referred to as the Patent and Trademark Law Amendments Act.

An additional change was in the nature and amounts of government funding. Institutions witnessed a shift from receiving block grants disbursed directly to the institution to giving students the power with student financial aid. This shift put students in more of a consumer role, triggering increased competition between colleges and universities for student enrollment. To heighten this competition, colleges and universities are now ranked in reports like *The U.S. World News and Report*, a system that orders postsecondary educational institutions based on performance and value to parent/student consumers (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004).

An example of community colleges engaging in behaviors previously found in the private sector is the increased recruiting of high-ability international students. Non-US citizens now comprise six percent of community college enrollments (American Association of Community Colleges 2012). These students pay a higher tuition compared to their counterparts that pay in-state tuition. In some instances, international students pay more than ten times the tuition amount of students paying in-state tuition (Golden 2002).

One avenue that may be indicative of increased market-like behavior in the community colleges, specifically competition, is the use of merit-based financial aid to recruit high-ability students that may

have otherwise gone to a four-year institution (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). In addition, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) argue that merit-based financial aid is more prevalent in second-tier institutions and used as an effort to “purchase” high-ability students. Since community colleges are fighting for social legitimacy and funding tied to student enrollment, the implementation of honors programs and merit-based financial aid would be a reasonable option. The next segment will explore how community college trends towards academic capitalism may also be reflective of what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe as institutional isomorphism.

Institutional Isomorphism

The study of institutional isomorphism comes from a theoretical approach to organizations referred to as the new institutionalism. This approach centers on the study of linkages between organizational patterns and social structural context (Powell 2007). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe institutional isomorphism as the organizational change that occurs when smaller or less-respected institutions shift their structures to resemble more established and legitimized organizations. Institutions do not always change their structure because it is more efficient but instead do so in an effort to gain more legitimacy in society. One of the predictors of isomorphic change is

financial uncertainty and goal ambiguity (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). During the last several decades, the community colleges have witnessed a change in student demographics, which have impacted the types of courses and programs offered. During a time when the community colleges are going through changes of mission and structure, honors programs, also found in four-year institutions, may be the force that regains the community colleges' societal legitimacy and subsequent funding. In an institution formerly geared towards access and opportunity, the community college honors program mimics the selective admissions processes of the four-year institution.

Societal legitimacy is important for an institution because it ensures survival (Meyer and Rowan 1977). A college degree is valuable because society recognizes it as meaning something, a confirmation of a potential worker's minimum skills and abilities. In order for colleges to maintain legitimacy and continue to enroll students, they must deliver on the promise that a degree or certificate from their institution will enable a desired position in the workforce. Since many colleges are funded based on an enrollment-equation, there is an emphasis to maintain legitimacy to keep students enrolled and thus sustain funding (Behrendt 1984).

Meyer and Rowan (1969) describe the charter of educational institutions as a “wider social definition of the products of the school.” Educational institutions that are chartered to grant higher status to their graduates have more of an impact on the future of their students. As a mechanism to attract students, schools offer prestige and must be able to deliver on the success of their students. In order for individuals to enroll, students must believe the institution has influence and that its charter is socially accepted (Meyer and Rowan 1969). The charter of the community college may have changed as a result of adopting honors programs, leading to increased institutional legitimacy and enhanced outcomes for its graduates.

Chapters two and three expand on the historical context and conceptual framework used to drive this research. Chapter four delves into the specifics of the research questions, data, research site, analysis methods, and the researcher’s background.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Previous research has focused on the effectiveness and satisfaction of students and employees involved with community college honors programs (Bulakowski and Townsend 1995; Crooks and Haag 2004; Floyd and Halloway 2006) and institutional traits of community colleges that offer honors programs (Outcalt 1999). However, few research studies have looked at the role of funding, institutional legitimacy and competition in the development and proliferation of community college honors programs. This research intended to address this gap in the literature. The particular research question used to direct this investigation was “What are the observed motives that explain the adoption of honors programs by community colleges?” Secondary questions were “How do students and employees perceive community college honors programs?” and “What are the perceived intended or unintended impacts of community college honors programs on students, staff, faculty and administrators?”

Data

Because the research questions were aiming to gather information regarding experiences and perceptions, a qualitative interview approach was most appropriate. In the social sciences, there

is often a “quantitative” and “qualitative” dichotomy that refers to the orientation of research methods. Quantitative methods encompass the calculations and measures of variables or populations, while qualitative methods “refer to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” (Berg 2009:3). According to Berg (2009), “Clearly, certain experiences cannot be meaningfully expressed by numbers.” The aim of the study was to gain information about the motives, perceptions and experiences of those impacted by community college honors programs. Thus, an interview approach was most appropriate.

This investigation draws upon interview data collected from 20 participants, who, within the last ten years, have worked or participated in the WSCC Honors Program. Interview data was collected in April 2011 and January-March 2012. Interviews were tape recorded and conducted in a range of settings, depending on the location and preference of the participant. Employee interviews were held in the office of their employment, while student interviews were held in the college’s library, local coffee shops or restaurants. The interview locales were chosen based on accessibility and preference of participants. Student interview respondents included one current honors student, four students who successfully completed four

semesters within the Honors Program, two students who lost Honors Program eligibility but remained enrolled at the college, and one student placed on academic probation due to not meeting honors eligibility requirements the first semester. The employee respondents were comprised of six faculty members, five college employees³ and one administrator.

Participants were selected based on purposive sampling using criterion centered on their particular role within the Honors Program (Berg 2009). Employee respondents were selected based on their position within the college, familiarity with the Honors Program, length of employment and kinds of responsibilities assigned. In order for employees to participate in this research, they must have had some knowledge or experience with the Honors Program organization, procedures, courses, implementation or students. Student respondents were selected based on the length of time within the program, level of success, and position within their higher-education career. In order for students to participate in this research, they must have completed at least one semester in WSCC's Honors Program. Participants were identified and recruited using three techniques: 1) the researcher's

³ Employee participants included one current and one previous support staff member from the Honors Program, one employee from the college's testing center, one employee from WSCC general advising, and one staff member from the WSCC recruitment department.

professional contacts; 2) through presentations in WSCC honors option courses; and 3) snowball sampling through participant recommendations.

A framework drawn from institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism perspectives was used to lead this research and aided in the development of interview questions. The research questions were also kept in the forefront during the creation of the questions and with follow-up inquiries and probes. During the semi-structured interviews, employees were asked about the programs' design, functions, organization, curriculum, requirements, recruitment and experiences with students. Students were asked questions relating to socio-demographic, choices surrounding the decision to attend the college and participate in the Honors Program, and details about their experience at the community college and with the Honors Program. Interviews ranged from sixteen to fifty-seven minutes in length, depending on level of detail in the responses. Although the questions used in the interview schedules were structured and sequential, the interviews allowed for some flexibility and for new topics and probes to emerge. The employee and student interview schedules are found in the appendix.

A second source of data analysis was the publications, website content and documents put forth by the district and the WSCC Honors

Program. This information was primarily used in gathering official information on the program's entrance qualifications, eligibility, requirements, curriculum and goals. Public information regarding the WSCC Honors Program was compared and contrasted to interview data gathered in a non-public setting.

Research Site

Information was drawn from documents and interviews from a community college located in the western United States (from this time onward denoted as Western Sky Community College – WSCC). WSCC is part of a large multi-college district in a highly-populated metropolitan area that serves more than 250,000 students annually. The district's colleges are mostly publicly funded, with student tuition and fees making up approximately 15 percent of the district's revenue in fiscal year 2010-2011 (District Website 2012).⁴

WSCC is a multi-campus institution that serves more than 19,000 students annually and employs over eight-hundred personnel, full-time and adjunct faculty members. The college's enrollment is steadily increasing and presently experiencing an estimated 12 percent enrollment growth. According to 2010 data sourced from the college's institutional research website, the college serves a more traditional

⁴ Western Sky Community College - WSCC - is used as a pseudonym. Information about WSCC and the district the college resides in was obtained through the district and college websites, which will not be sourced to protect anonymity.

student population, with 70.7 percent between the ages of 15 and 24 and 63.5 percent of students attending courses during the day. An estimated 61.7 percent of the student population is Caucasian and 52.1 percent of the student population is female. WSCC has a relatively low graduation rate compared to community colleges nationally. In 2010, 13.3 percent of degree-seeking students received a degree from the institution within three years, compared to a 29 percent graduation rate of degree-seeking students nationally.

WSCC's district implemented the Honors Program in the academic year 1981-1982. Although WSCC was established in 1985 as an extension site of another community college in the district and later independently accredited in 1992. Although the Honors Program is district-wide and shares the same eligibility requirements and funding options, each individual college is responsible for the operations of its own Honors Program. Although formal publication of the program's history, origins and design could not be found, the district's website did provide goals that each college in the district adheres to:

1. To encourage, foster and contribute to a climate of excellence both in the colleges and in the surrounding community;

2. To encourage students to strive to achieve the maximum benefit from the educational services provided by the district's community colleges;
3. To recognize and reward the talent and motivation of outstanding community college students and faculty;
4. To promote a sense of scholarship and community among program participants and with the colleges;
5. To serve as a source of innovation and testing for new methodologies and services that may be extended to a greater number of students; and
6. To raise awareness of the high quality and variety of educational services offered by the district's community colleges.

The program is associated with a community college honors society, Phi Theta Kappa, and offers a series of speaker forums related to an annual topic, honors courses and honors scholarships. Students also have the opportunity to receive an honors designation on their transcripts and graduate with a special honors distinction.

The Honors Program is funded using a fixed amount plus a figure based on a student enrollment equation. An administrator that oversees the Honors Program at WSCC, provided a proposed budget for the college's honors program for fall 2012 through spring 2014. The

budget allocates a base amount to fund administrative support of \$15,000 and an enrollment allocation based on enrollment average (average number of program participants for fall 2009, 2010 and 2011) multiplied by the average cost per student (\$84.87).

The Honors Program is comprised of two sub-programs that offer a merit-based scholarship for participation. The Smith Grant is presented to students who ranked in the top 15 percent of their North Central Association accredited county high school or charter school during their sixth, seventh, or eighth semester in high school or received appropriate scores on the course placement test. This scholarship is targeted to students who are fresh out of secondary schooling (usually ages 18-20) and covers up to 15 credit hours of semester tuition and the student enrollment fee for four semesters. Students must attend semesters consecutively and to maintain this scholarship, students are required to complete at least twelve credits of 100-level or above coursework, complete at least one honors course per semester with a “C” grade or higher and maintain a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.25⁵ or above.

The Brookes Subsidy is awarded to continuing students who have achieved twelve district credits of 100-level or above courses and have attained a cumulative GPA of 3.25 or higher. Students do not

⁵ GPA calculated out of a four-point scale.

need to participate in the honors program each consecutive semester to take advantage of this subsidy, nor is there a minimum credit hour requirement per semester. There are also no secondary schooling or age constraints with participation in the Brookes Subsidy. In order to maintain eligibility as a Brookes Subsidy student, one must achieve a minimum 3.25 cumulative GPA and a grade of “C” or better in designated honors class. The Brookes Subsidy offers students assistance on a sliding scale based on credit hour enrollment and does not have a limit as to how many semesters a student can participate.

At WSCC, curriculum that satisfies the honors class requirement follows two formats: honors option classes and honors only classes⁶. Students who are receiving the Smith Grant are usually required to take honors only classes their freshman fall semester. These classes are generally taught by experienced faculty in general education disciplines that will fit most students’ program of study. The honors project is built into the syllabus and the project topic and type is uniform for all students. The honors only classes may advance through curriculum at a faster pace compared to non-honors courses.

The honors option courses are open to both honors and non-honors students. Continuing Smith Grant students are able to enroll in honors option courses their second, third and fourth semesters. The

⁶ These classes were often referred to by participants as “cohort courses.”

Brookes Subsidy students are permitted to enroll their first semester in the Honors Program and throughout their tenure in the program. The syllabi is the same for all students, except the honors students have an additional project worth between ten and 20 percent of their overall course grade. These projects require reading, writing, and presentation and call for approximately 16 additional hours of work to complete. Honors students and faculty work together to develop a suitable topic based on class material and student interest.

Aligning with the growth of the college's enrollment, the college's Honors Program has witnessed an increase in participation during recent academic years. Drawing from data provided by a WSCC staff member, Honors Program enrollment numbers increased from 245 total students in fall 2006 to 537 total students in fall 2011. Participant speculations on the rise in enrollment range from the tuition hikes at the state's four-year institutions, the recent economic climate making the community college more attractive to prospective college students and the general development of the suburban area in which the college resides.

Researcher's Background

Because the position of researcher is central in any investigation, it is important that I explain my previous employment

background at the research site. As a staff member, I worked closely with the WSCC Honors Program from March 2009 to August 2010. My experience with the program stimulated my curiosity regarding the origins, functions, and missions of community college honors programs and the experiences of students, faculty and employees participating in these types of programs. My former status as a staff member facilitated my access to the research site and participants.

The researcher/participant relationship is dynamic and created with the input of both verbal and non-verbal communication. There has been discussion of how the insider or outsider statuses of researchers may impact the outcomes of an investigation. Insider status refers to the sharing of traits, understandings, or familiarities with participants (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). My previous insider status as a former employee allowed me more of an understanding of the community college culture and my knowledge of Honors Program procedures aided in the interview dialog process and the building of rapport, especially with employees. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that my previous familiarity with some of the research participants, along with my other individual traits (i.e. gender, age, race, *etcetera*) may have been reflected in the results of the interview data, making respondents more candid about their experiences in some cases, or less

willing to discuss some issues out of concern that I might know individuals referenced. However, researchers increasingly argue that the researcher-respondent dynamics always shape the interview experience to at least some degree

Analysis

In order to analyze the interviews for themes, Charmaz's (2006) methods discussion of grounded theory coding were utilized. Grounded theory coding is a two-part process comprised of early line-by-line coding and subsequent focused coding of the most regularly appearing initial codes. The focused coding then helps to categorize and consolidate vast amounts of material (Charmaz 2006). I used both inductive and deductive approaches when identifying germane themes. Berg (2009) describes an inductive approach as engaging oneself in the content to pinpoint categories that seem meaningful to the creator. A deductive approach begins with a version of a categorical structure influenced by a theoretical framework and the content is then used to assess hypotheses. To aid in coding, an initial set of themes based on the institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism theories were constructed but analysis also left room for unanticipated themes to emerge. These emergent themes, extended on in chapter six, include

barriers to Honors Program implementation and a phenomenon referred to as “incomplete isomorphism.”

Once focused thematic coding was used to develop the most relevant and repeated themes, research memos were created for each subgroup of participants (i.e. successful and unsuccessful students, faculty, college staff, *etcetera*). Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) describe memo-making as “free-writing,” an on-going process of writing and analyzing which may help reduce writer’s block. This memo-making process elaborates on information provided by a code and is the first step between linking ideas with a theoretical argument. Reoccurring themes found in the research memos were used, developed and analyzed as the main findings of this investigation. In effort to verify reliability, research memos and interview summaries were presented to the investigator’s thesis chair for agreement on identifiable codes and themes.

The initial intent of this research project was to use a theoretical framework of institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism theories to establish a context to identify macro-level processes that affect organizational changes in a community college and to examine the ways in which the everyday micro-level experiences of students, staff, and faculty in the honor’s program might be linked to these

contextual changes. Themes consistent with the institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism theories were found in the data, along with emergent themes surrounding implementation issues and a phenomenon referred to as “incomplete isomorphism.” These themes will be presented and discussed further in the subsequent section.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS

Analysis of the interview data revealed evidence of both institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism in the motivation for the college to implement and maintain an honors program. The Honors Program helps to deliver an image of attracting high quality students and faculty, as well as offering curriculum with academic excellence and rigor. According to employee respondents, the WSCC Honors Program curriculum was modeled after the local state university's Honors College curriculum. Recently, in addition to the curriculum model, the WSCC Honors Program has proposed an initiative of pre-registration for Honors students; the rationale being that other college and university honors programs offer this feature. The alignment of the WSCC Honors Program structure, curriculum and program benefits with the state university's Honors College is indicative of institutional isomorphism. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), "Organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful." In this instance, it is rational for WSCC to model a new honors program after a thriving and established state university Honors College.

When an institution is also facing financial uncertainty, institutional isomorphism is likely to occur (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Presently, in higher education, competition for student tuition dollars and public funding is fierce. In this climate, it is rational for a less-legitimized organization to replicate established programs. Legitimacy is tied to funding and funding is tied to survival. In addition to institutional isomorphism, academic capitalism appeared as a means to secure financial backing. Through the Honors Program, WSCC exhibited behaviors found in an entrepreneurial culture, such as competition for students, recruitment and cost-cutting on a limited budget (Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004).

The Honors Program provides the college with a perceived enhanced image and an avenue for recruitment and competition, which contributes to institutional legitimacy and funding. The following sections will more fully document the aspects of institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism as motivating forces for the formation and maintenance of the Honors Program.

Institutional Isomorphism

Regardless of the benefits the Honors Program brings to the college, many respondents felt that WSCC implemented an honors program simply because other post-secondary educational institutions

offered similar programs. The following participant accounts detailed how implementing a community college honors program is a rational choice in an environment where other higher education institutions offer honors program. To not have an honors program would be considered unreasonable. A faculty honors coordinator stated, “I think part of it [why the college implemented an honors program] is a lot of the colleges and universities across the nation had honors programs.” Even if institutions’ motivations to adopt more legitimized organizational structures or practices are largely ceremonial, they will still be afforded the same legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan 1977). The existence of an honors program, regardless of the quality or efficiency, legitimizes a college because successful and established higher-education institutions have already offered these programs.

One administrator described how even though he recognizes the program has problems, it is better to have a flawed program than to have no program. The rational choice for the college to maintain an honors program is to stay competitive and attractive to students. He stated, “I think to the extent that there’s a tradition in higher education, we’ll have an honors program, because, and I know this isn’t a good reason, but to not have it is going to be a bigger issue. Just

because we're in a competitive environment and students have a choice.”

A faculty member assumed that all colleges offered honors program. When asked why she speculated the college implemented the Honors Program, she responded with, “Other colleges don't [offer Honors Programs]? The above quotes demonstrate that the offering of an honors program because other higher education institutions also offer honors programs is consistent with institutional isomorphism. Even if program quality is lacking, the presence of an honors program is rational in a post-secondary education climate of competition and ranking.

Alignment with university honors.

Respondents indicated that the WSCC honors program curriculum was influenced by the honors college, hereafter referred to as Calvington Honors College (CHC), at the local state university. The CHC enrolls over 3,500 students, with over 1,000 National Merit, National Hispanic, and National Achievement Scholars. CHC offers a brand new dormitory for on-campus residents and an average of 15 to one student to faculty ratio in honors classes. Similar to the requirements at CHC, the honors courses involve critical reading,

writing and discussion and require a faculty and student contract for the mandatory honors project.

Modeling the new WSCC honors program curriculum after CHC, an established and successful program is consistent with DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) predictors of institutional isomorphism. The authors state, "We contend that, in most situations, reliance on established, legitimated procedures enhances organizational legitimacy and survival characteristics." The newer WSCC Honors Program, modeled after a legitimized university Honors College, aids in achieving the program legitimacy.

When asked if the WSCC program was modeled after an existing honors program, a faculty Honors Coordinator explained:

....I know it's been said several times that we tried to model our methods here at WSCC to the CHC. So, I think that the district looked very carefully at the universities and their honors programs and then most likely established their program looking at the university models.

One faculty member advocated the importance of WSCC's Honors Program being *more* aligned with CHC.

I wish that the honors program was consistent across the district in its requirements and its alignment with Calvington Honors College. I think that that would be beneficial for all concerned, that students would have the sense of what it means to be an honors student, that it's a verb, it's not a noun, you are an honors student, and have that be something they could see,

and there could be documentation, this is what it's like at Calvinton Honors College, this is what it's like here.

Recently, in addition to the alignment of structure of WSCC's Honors Program to the CHC, new initiatives have been recommended to offer benefits specifically to Honors Program students. One initiative that has already been implemented is the position of a designated advisor to the Honors Program, a position found at CHC but not across the district's other community colleges. Honors faculty coordinators have suggested early registration specifically for honors students, a benefit an administrator suggested can be found at some universities.

We've had a very recent discussion, meaning this week, about a proposal to set aside a pre-, pre-registration for honor students ...Now, they admitted that it's a common practice in university settings, that if you're in an honors college or you're in an honors program, you can select your classes and set up your class schedule in advance of even other returning students.

An established state university honors college played a role in the shaping of the WSCC Honors Program structure and curriculum. In line with the theory of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), it is rational for a less established organization to adopt the institutional procedures and structuring of legitimated institutions. In this case, the emerging WSCC Honors Program aligned with the reputable CHC. Respondents see the WSCC structural alliance with the CHC as beneficial and push for even more consistent alignment. After the initial structuring of the WSCC Honors Program,

new program initiatives that are consistent with university offerings have continued to be recommended.

A second theme very evident in findings was the link between the honor's program, image, and funding. This theme ties well to the academic capitalism arguments. This section details aspects of academic capitalism apparent in the data: competition for student enrollment, specifically FTSE, enhanced institutional image as an avenue to increase enrollment, and subsequent recruitment strategies.

Academic Capitalism

Traditionally, community colleges did not have to compete with other higher-education institutions for student enrollment. The expansion of proprietary schools and the change in the nature of funding from block grants directly to institutions to student financial aid, facilitated competition for student tuition dollars (Dougherty 2002; Levin 2005; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Furthermore, recruitment of students for WSCC is important because of the district's "Enrollment Growth Funding" program. This model compensates colleges for each full-time student equivalent (FTSE) attained above the previous year's inventoried FTSE. Money gained from Enrollment Growth Funding goes to support a variety of college activities, including the hiring of new residential (full-time) and adjunct (part-

time) faculty and improved educational support. The recruitment and enrollment of students is important to sustaining college growth and funding.

In addition, the higher-performing students are attractive to post-secondary education institutions and may be an additional source of competition. This is partly due to a higher education culture based on meritocracy and academic excellence and the recent emphasis on the completion agenda (Mullin 2010; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). This can be seen by a transition from need-based to merit-based financial aid during recent decades (Baum and Schwartz 1988). Another aspect warranting competition for these talented students is their generally high socioeconomic backgrounds and ability to pay higher tuition. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) describes these types of students as being in a “buyer’s market” and in order for less-prestigious institutions to compete for these high-ability students, they resort to “purchasing” students with scholarships and other forms of merit-based financial aid. The following sections document how WSCC faces a competitive environment and how the Honors Program is seen as an important source of marketing and recruiting for WSCC.

Competition and recruitment.

Most employee respondents acknowledged that the Honors Program, particularly with the Smith Grant, is an effective way to target and recruit graduating high school seniors and recent high school graduates. The Smith Grant is particularly attractive to incoming freshmen because it covers up to 15 semester credit hours plus the student enrollment fee for four consecutive semesters. This type of scholarship is enticing to students facing tuition hikes at the four-year institutions. WSCC actively recruits high school seniors from the area's feeder high schools by sending letters and applications to students who may qualify. In addition, WSCC recruiters give presentations and workshops at the local high schools, where the Honors Program and Smith Grant are mentioned as potential options.

An employee in the college's testing center described how the scholarship portion of the Honors Program is a marketing tool used to appeal to students' good economic sense. Not only is the university expensive but the community college will pay students who qualify to attend the college and meet the Honors Program requirements.

In my opinion, I think it's a great marketing tool. I think it's a great way to recruit. I'm not saying that students wouldn't naturally come to the community college, but, I think it's a really good way to say, "Oh, two years at the community college paid for. You can go to the state university, but, it's going to cost you a lot more. We're willing to give you money to be here

as long as you meet your side of the bargain.” I think of it as a marketing tool. We’ve always rewarded academics, so, why not do it in that way?

The coordinator of student recruitment describes how the Honors Program may attract students who would normally go to the university but gives community college a second look because of the amount of scholarship money presented. Students who may qualify for a partial scholarship at the university may qualify for the Smith Grant at WSCC. Fully covered tuition at WSCC could be appealing to a student who received partially covered tuition at the university. This quote demonstrates how a high-performing student, who may not have considered community college an option earlier, is giving the college a second thought because of the grant money offered by the Honors Program.

Students that are going to go to university on a full ride scholarship, four year scholarship, are likely to go. But the students that are earning maybe partial scholarships as well, and are eligible for the Smith Grant through high school rank or placement testing, I see those students may be giving community college a second thought

Interviews with student respondents confirmed that the Honors Program, and particularly the Smith Grant, was an effective recruiting method and played a role in the decision to come to community college and participate in the Honors Program. Out of eight students interviewed, five indicated that they came to the community college

because of the Smith Grant. Out of the three students who specified that they would have come to WSCC regardless of the Smith Grant, two stated that they would have not participated in the Honors Program without the financial incentive. Based on the student interview data, if the Honors Program and attached merit-based financial aid is a means to attract students to the community college, it is succeeding.

One student who graduated from WSCC's honors program and has since transferred to the local state university recognized that bringing students similar to herself to the community college is a major benefit of the Honors Program to WSCC. She said, "I believe that it brings students like me who otherwise would have gone to the university right away had I not gotten my scholarship to a community college."

Employee respondents discussed competition for student enrollment between the college and the university and between the district's community colleges. An Honors Program staff member described the tension between the local state university and WSCC because the two institutions are vying for the same pool of students, the students procuring the first two years of undergraduate enrollment. She stated, "Oh, there's definitely competition [between

the community college and the university]. I think there's animosity there. I know that both look at each other as competitors for the same pool of students; they see each other as poaching on their students."

An administrator spoke on competition experienced between the local community colleges because of the funding model based on student enrollment growth.

I know that there's competition [between the colleges] not just for honor students. Maybe it's a little presumptuous to say because of the funding model, but, I'll say, due in part to the funding model, we have an incentive, all of the colleges in the district do, to grow on a year-to-year basis. That's a factor in seeing eventual growth in our base budgets. And, so, as long as that's a factor, I believe to some extent there will be competition for students.

Image.

Respondent comments indicate that a motivation behind establishing the WSCC Honors Program was to enhance the image of the college. Enhancing the college's image may be an effort to attract high-ability students who will complete degrees and/or transfer to a four-year institution. The completion agenda set by President Barack Obama⁷ is incentivizing higher education institutions towards these achievement goals. By enhancing the college's image, high-performing students, who may not have previously considered a community

⁷ For more information, see Mullin 2010.

college, may now consider the community college as an option. This boosted image aids in two intuitional goals: raising the college's FTSE and increasing the number of high-ability students likely to finish degrees and/or transfer. This is increasingly important with a move towards performance-based funding; a funding option that awards institutions based on measures of graduation rates, course completion rates, the number of non-traditional students *etcetera* (Harnisch 2011).

Because of the open admissions policy and low-cost of the community college, many participants suggested that the public perceives two-year institutions as holding less validity than four-year institutions. One faculty member recounted having to defend her reasoning behind teaching at a community college.

I have so many people that are like, 'So, you *just* teach at a community college? You *just* do this. Why do you teach there instead of at a university? Don't you want to be at a university?' I'm always like, 'Hell, no.' Because I get to teach. I get to do what I get paid to do.

Faculty members who chose to work at the community college felt the need to defend their positions and the curriculum against those who perceive the two-year institution as lower-status compared to four-year institutions. A faculty member explained that although the community college is not the same as a university, the curriculum should be just as rigorous. She described, "It's the idea of academic

rigor and often I think inappropriately, incorrectly, the community college is not as hard, it may not be as hard, but, it should be as rigorous.”

Honors programs are used as an avenue to facilitate change in public perceptions by attracting high-quality students.

...It seems to be an interesting evolution as community colleges have tried to elevate the status of their honors programs, and maybe, in some respects, emulate what some of the community college faculty and administrators were familiar with in the university setting, more as a recruiting tool or incentive to get above average, if not excellent students at the community college, and overcome the public perception that community college is the second chance college, or the college of the average student, or the student who couldn't get into the university and saw the community college as their last resort.” (administrator)

Because of the equal-access mission of the community college, WSCC has little control over the composition of its student population. A faculty honors coordinator suggested that since the college offers remedial education, the Honors Program provides a needed balance. If the college delivers academic services to the underprepared sector of the student population, the well-prepared sector needs services too. She explained, “You want a balance. As much as developmental education is important to get the students ready for the university, it's also important to have the other end of the spectrum, the students who are motivated and wish to be challenged.”

To conclude this subsection, the motivations behind the WSCC and the district it resides in to offer an honors program are connected to the conceptual framework derived from the institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism perspectives. From a survival standpoint, the incentives behind the WSCC incorporation of an Honors Program are strong. From respondent viewpoints, the open-enrollment policies of the majority of community college programs encourage public perception that community colleges hold less legitimacy compared to their four-year counterparts. The Honors Program, with its selective admissions criteria and subsidies, attracts higher-performing students that may have otherwise attended a university. These students provide the college with two benefits: an enhanced institutional image and higher student enrollment. Legitimacy and enrollment aid in funding measures and ensure continued existence.

The economic climate in higher education also contributes to the motivation behind Honors Program. When in the past, recruitment and enrollment was not as much of an issue for community colleges, the rise of proprietary schools and the changes in how institutions are funded contribute to an environment of competition (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). The Honors Program and attached merit-based

financial aid help WSCC remain competitive and attractive to prospective students. Student interviews demonstrated that the Honors Program and Smith Grant are effective marketing strategies and played a role in decisions to come to WSCC over a state university.

It is the intention of the Honors Program to aid in enhancing the image of the college by attracting excellent students and facilitating change in public perception. In addition, the Honors Program provides a perception of balance, a representation of one particular side of the academic spectrum and the separation of the high-ability students from other student populations. This enhanced image may attract high-performing students likely to complete degrees; an aspect important for both ranking, potential shifts to performance-based funding, and recruitment to fulfill FTSE efforts. The following section explores the emergent theme revealed in interview data, how a lack of funding and consistency impeded the Honors Program implementation.

“Concern about the implementation of programs stems from the recognition that policies cannot be understood in isolation from the means of their execution“(Elmore 1978). The Honors Program was conceptualized and applied at the district-level and anticipated to be carried out at the college level without the resources necessary to fulfill the stated program objectives. The following sections specify how

implementation issues, specifically funding and a lack of consistency across the district's honors programs and courses, affected participant experiences in the Honors Program. These barriers to implementation contribute to the concept referred to as "incomplete isomorphism", expanded upon later in this chapter.

Implementation

In 1956, Harold Lasswell suggested policy implementation was a necessary step in the policy process and entered the term into the public policy vocabulary (deLeon and deLeon 2002). However, it was not until the 1970s that implementation studies significantly flourished. According to deLeon and deLeon (2002), three generations of implementation policy studies have dominated the field: case studies focusing on the definition of a policy and its execution; empirical studies comparing top-down versus bottom-up orientations to implementation; and recognition of the complexities to implementation among various agencies and a push towards encouraging the discipline to be more scientific.

To expand on the barriers to implementation evident in the interview data, terms borrowed from the second generation of implementation studies will be explored, specifically the top-down strategy and what Michael Lipsky (1983) terms "street-level

bureaucrats”. Top-down approaches to implementation refer to policy being conceptualized and enforced at the “top” and carried out by “agents” in compliance with policy goals (Barrett 2004). These agents are referred to by Michael Lipsky (1983) as “street-level bureaucrats”, those who interact with the community’s citizens to enforce the laws and policies implemented by the top-tier. Street-level bureaucrats can include individuals like police officers, social workers, and welfare staff and are important to policy implementation because the success or failure of a policy relies on the individuals carrying-out the implementation (Lipsky 1983).

Although the implementation of the Honors Program was not a public policy, it was an objective conceptualized at the district-level and passed onto the individual colleges to operate and maintain. The faculty and staff are the street-level bureaucrats, those responsible to carry out the objectives of the district-wide Honors Program. Faculty and staff were stretched to accommodate a growing base of honors students on limited resources, hindering the stated goals of the program. This coincides with the Weatherley and Lipsky (1977) investigation of the implementation of Massachusetts’s Chapter 766, the pioneering state special education law. These researchers found that personnel responsible for carrying out the law put forth

considerable effort but a dearth in resources and staff prevented the possibility of all the components required to be implemented properly. A lack of available resources was also responsible for the goals of the district Honors Program not being completely realized at the research site.

Funding.

Motivations behind the development of the WSCC Honors Program are apparent. The student-enrollment funding climate and the college's search for legitimacy are strong incentives for the college to incorporate and uphold an Honors Program. However, faculty, employee and student respondents expressed frustrations and concerns regarding the incomplete implementation of the Honors Program, largely due to funding restrictions. Because the college is working on a limited budget, there are many departments and college activities vying for money and competition is strong. This lack of resources posed barriers to the implementation of the major principles identified as part of the CC honor's program (edit this but see what I am doing?)

One faculty honors coordinator described how the Honors Program has been in need of support and, because enrollment is up, the department will see more money from the district in the upcoming

fiscal year. However, this respondent's optimism for college approval of an additional support staff member was minimal.

Well, we've been dying for the last two years, needing more help and not getting it. So now we'll, in July, finally get it. But, we have a lot of issues, like getting priority registration, trying to get more buy in and more support. We've been trying to get the college to support a half-time or three-quarters time person with the budget, but, with the economy the way it is, I don't think we're going to get it.

An Honors Program staff member expressed frustration regarding the lack of a full-time position designated to assist the Honors Program. Currently, the assistant position is part-time and is capped out at nineteen hours per week. The respondent indicated that because the program aids in the generation of FTSE, which is tied to college funding, the program deserves further institutional support.

I'd also like to see the assistant position for honors become a full-time, board approved position, because it's impossible to get the entire job done in nineteen hours, which is the time allotted. Nineteen hours per week for the assistant position. I think they [the college] award enough funding for the students. But, I don't believe that they support the honors program as a department. And, I do believe we are a very valuable department because, again, we bring in a lot of FTSE, which is, despite what people say, the goal of any college.

Three students suggested program recommendations that included earlier notification of ineligibility and additional communication from the Honors Program. Both recommendations could be accommodated by an increase in support staff. One student lamented that if he had been notified earlier of being in danger of

losing his grant, he would have been able to apply for other forms of financial aid. Currently he is paying for his tuition out of pocket. A successful fourth semester honors student recommended earlier reach-out for struggling participants in the program. This student suggested having a program staff member conduct periodic grade checks on students and distribute notifications if students are in danger of ineligibility. Although this type of reach-out would be difficult to accomplish on the limited Honors Program staff hours, a WSCC employee indicated that this practice is executed by the athletics department on campus.

Faculty experiences of working with students in the Honors Program were generally favorable, but some faculty indicated that funding issues impacted their honors class sizes and development of student honors projects. In addition, there are no monetary incentives for faculty members to teach honors option or honors only courses. An administrator described incentivizing faculty to teach honors students as “arm twisting.” Honors faculty members devote additional time to meeting with students outside of class, designing a project, and grading the additional work. This Honors faculty member described how the inflated class size was proving to be too overwhelming.

So, I had an all honors class with 38 students in it. Okay, that’s crazy, because it is a lot more work. And, so, I started saying,

wait a minute, finally, I've been teaching honors courses now for eight or nine years, and I finally told them, I can't do this anymore. I'm so sorry. But, the time it takes me to grade all their work and all the additional work, thirty-eight kids, I just can't do it. I'm so sorry. Well, they started looking into that and the national rules are seventeen [per honors class], and in our district, they're twenty.

One faculty coordinator for the Honors Program stated that although she receives release time from teaching a full course load to coordinate the Honors Program, the tasks placed on her by the program are plentiful and time consuming. She described often having to leave teaching-related duties to the weekend. The following student participant picked up on the overwhelmed feelings of some faculty members she worked with as an honors student. She described the faculty as being "burdened" and lacking time for honors projects.

Many of the professors that I took for the additional honors credits were a great help. Some were not, though. They seemed to be a little burdened by the extra work that it took to have an honors student in their class. And some of them didn't have the time to spend with me on the additional projects and it did make things more difficult.

Due to the time and energy required to create individualized honors projects for each student in honors only classes, faculty members often assigned the same honors project to all students in the class. This student participant stated how he was surprised the honors project was already created for him.

I was a little bewildered on the side that I have to do a project based on what my teacher wanted me to do, not on my interests, not on my own major. I think that was what the biggest surprise was, because, I thought it was what I wanted to do, what my own venture was, my goal.

Another student complained that he did not appreciate completing the honors project mandated by the instructor. He stated, “There was a mandatory honors project that we had to turn in by a certain date. I didn’t enjoy doing it; it was something stupid, it really was.”

The shortage of incentives for faculty to teach also contributed to a lack of honors classes. This often resulted in student panic because of the program requirement that each student is required to complete and pass one honors course each semester. An Honors Program staff member recognizes that this is an issue but there is little a program employee can do about the shortage of willing professors to teach honors courses.

I’d like to see more honors classes. Some seem to fly a lot easier than others. So, with those that are popular like Sociology 101, English 101, English 102, I’d like to see more of those classes for honors. However, we have an issue with not enough teachers and so forth; so, we can only offer what we can.

In conclusion, an emergent theme, barriers to implementation, was evident in interviews with staff, faculty and student interviews. Analysis of the data showed that funding-related implementation

barriers are a source of frustration for the student, staff and faculty member respondents affiliated with WSCC's Honors Program. Even though the Honor Program brings in FTSE, those associated with the program expressed concerns over a lack of institutional support. For example, the shortage of hours devoted to the program's support staff resulted in student complaints over a lack of communication and reach-out for students in danger of losing their program eligibility.

In addition, faculty members experienced no financial motivations to teach honors students, even though doing so increased their work load. Because of the higher than average cap in honors class enrollment, one faculty member contemplated no longer teaching honors courses. To avoid the time and energy required to individualize student projects, faculty members who taught honors only courses often incorporated mass standardized honors project for students. In lieu of standardized projects, student respondents described the desire to work on projects tailored to their interests. Implementation issues due to a lack of funding resulted in several undesirable participant experiences.

A shortage in funding may also be connected to inconsistencies in honors course requirements internally within WSCC and between the colleges in the district. The Honors Program was implemented at

the district-level but lacked the appropriate resources to fulfill the stated objectives at the college-level. Because resources are limited and it was shown to be difficult to motivate faculty to participate in the Honors Program, it is not surprising that there was little enforcement of the uniformity of project standards between WSCC honors courses. Also, the lack of enforcement of honors project consistencies between the colleges in the district is understandable given the time and funds it would require to have personnel enforce consistency between the colleges. Evidence of these inconsistencies is further elaborated in the following subsection.

Inconsistency.

Faculty and student participants discussed the lack of consistency found in curriculum within WSCC honors classes and within college Honors Programs throughout the district. This variance in course structure resulted in a diversity of student experiences regarding the value of their honors classes. One faculty member suggested that because of the discrepancy in curriculum between colleges, students were able to “shop” and select the college with the easiest program requirements. The same faculty member and former coordinator of the Honors Program also recounted the awkward position she felt placed in because professors held a lot of freedom

regarding the structuring of student honors projects. She stated, “There’s a lot of leeway, which is really wonderful. But, as a coordinator, it was very hard when contracts came in, and they’re our colleagues, so we can’t send it back really and say, ‘Well, Professor So and So, I’m sorry, but that’s not really enough.’”

In one student’s account, “Every instructor is free to develop whatever project, paper, whatever they want for an honors project, and that can make for an inconsistent program in general.” Student honors projects included the writing of a traditional research paper, tutoring and mentoring other community college students, working on planning committees for conferences, and creating websites *among others*. An Honors Program graduate recalled that the most impactful honors project she did was not even related to her psychology major.

Actually, the best honors project I did was in a chemistry class. I was the first WSCC student to do an honors chemistry class, and, I ended up having to teach chemistry. So, that sort of project, where you actually have the students teaching, at least for me with my learning style, it increased my learning. It made it more meaningful, and, that’s the stuff I remember. I can’t even remember my psychology projects that I did for honors.

Participant accounts demonstrated that there was little force regulating consistency of honors projects internally within the college and between the colleges in the district. A former faculty coordinator discussed the conflicting feelings she experienced when telling her

faculty peers that their projects were not up to appropriate standards of rigor. Because an administrator described recruiting faculty to teach honors as “arm twisting,” it is logical that rigid project standards would not be placed on instructors that are willing to participate in the program. According to one respondent, inconsistency between the WSCC Honors Program and other district community college honors programs allowed students to wade through curriculum requirements and choose a college with lax requirements. This could potentially hurt WSCC’s FTSE if college honors project requirements influence potential students’ college choice. Inconsistency in the honors curriculum affected student experiences as well, with some honors projects providing more value than others. An unanticipated theme, hurdles to implementation, was apparent throughout the interview data. Particularly, issues regarding a need for additional funding and inconsistency in curriculum requirements emerged as barriers to the execution of the WSCC Honors Program.

Incomplete Isomorphism

Financial uncertainty and aspirations to enhance institutional status are grounds for institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Although the data suggested that isomorphic tendencies were present in the motivations to create the WSCC Honors Program, the

isomorphism was incomplete due to a lack of resources contributing to obstacles in implementation and student perceptions of the program as primarily serving the purpose of a scholarship, instead of the promotion of rigor and learning. Student interviews revealed that negative observations of the Honors Program facilitated attitudes that the Honors Program primarily served economic needs of students, not fulfilling the non-material objectives set forth by the program's formalized goals. This may also be connected to the perception that the community college still holds a lower-status compared to the four-year institution, contributing to student attitudes that a community college honors program may not afford students the same non-economic rewards (i.e. enhanced learning, transcript benefits, internship opportunities, *etcetera*) that a university honors program could.

The goals set forth by the district's Honors Program are concerned with promoting and rewarding excellence, inspiring students to take full advantage of district benefits, developing an environment of scholarship, creating and testing novel methodologies and services, and enhancing the colleges' image by increasing consciousness of the academic services provided by the district.

Data collected from a faculty honors coordinator revealed that the WSCC Honors Program was aiming to attract students who

participated for internal motivations, such as the desire for scholarship and academic rigor. This participant shares the recruiting pitch she would make to a potential student, emphasizing non-monetary rewards.

I would say that if they're very interested in their school classes, they like going to school, and they did very well in high school, and they're very proud of their record, that they might want to consider attending a community college where they could continue to be motivated and challenged and take their college basic courses and also earn at the same time, honors recognition ...It shows that they have proven themselves as very good students. And, then for that, if they make the mark and come in, well, guess what, the college district will reward you for that with some tuition funding. But, I would not sell the money first.

Despite the intention to attract students who participate in the Honors Program for non-economic reasons, interviews with students indicated that the primary incentive for participating in the Honors Program was monetary. Only one student respondent considered continued participation if economic assistance was not provided.

The goal of creating an image of a prestigious program was not recognized in student responses. This student professed that being in the CHC would afford him more status than being in WSCC's Honors Program. He states, "I would say, if you were to tell someone you were a Calvinton honor student, they would go, 'You're really smart.' But, I feel like if you said, 'Oh, I'm an honor student at community college,'

they'd go, 'So, you're a normal college student. Okay. Cool.' This student account demonstrates the perceived low-status the community college still holds compared to four-year institutions. The doubling of Honors Program enrollment numbers from fall 2006 to fall 2011 show that recruitment efforts are effective. However, the objectives of attracting students who participate for intrinsic motivations and the enhancing of the community college image did not manifest as clearly in the data. This may be connected to a general motivation for students to attend community college: to save money on tuition, not necessarily to be challenged academically.

As documented in the previous section, implementation barriers due to a dearth of funding and consistency in courses impeded institutional isomorphism, specifically with modeling aspects of the program after CHC. The Honors College at the local state university is able to offer students a new honors dormitory with a dining hall, an array of honors classes, internships, research, and study abroad opportunities. At the CHC, students pay \$500 a semester to be a part of the college, a fee that goes to the enhancement of the CHC experience. Though many Honors College students receive merit-based scholarships, participation in the Honors College is not directly associated with economic subsidies. In comparison, WSCC must

incentivize students with economic benefits, while CHC attracts students with the college's reputation and prestige.

The fact that WSCC incentivizes students to be a part of the Honors Program with economic resources coincides with McPherson and Schapiro's (1998) findings that less prestigious post-secondary institutions often "buy" high-performing students with merit-based scholarships. While funding is going directly to students, there is a lack of financial backing of the employees and faculty participating in the program. This deficiency in resources resulted in a shortage of faculty willing to teach honors courses because of high-enrollment caps and no monetary compensation for the extra workload. When faculty were willing to teach honors only courses, non-customizable projects were often assigned to students en masse. For students that wanted to work on a project more aligned with their interests or career goals, this resulted in frustration. Faculty apprehension to participate in the Honors Program was noticed by student participants, who at times, perceived faculty as lacking time or being burdened by their projects.

One student, frustrated by the lack of honors only courses, suggested that the program could increase credibility if this was remedied. Regarding honors option or mixed enrollment courses, one student stated, "If you are going to be in honors, make it an honors

class, don't make it, "Oh, it's English with a couple smart kids in it. There you go." Make it a class worth taking; give it something that will make you want to be an honors student." This suggestion was also made by faculty and employee participants but administration shared reservations about being able to create honors-only sections with the relatively small student base the college serves now.

...because if we say, well, let's go to the honors section route, we still have the question of a reasonable array of classes, finding teachers, and now we're beginning to hear that it's more likely for us to find the teachers if we would be willing to limit those sections to maybe 15, 17 students. Well, there are challenges there, too, because, I think I could make an argument to have an array of classes that are small like that if we had a bigger enrollment base than we have right now.

Economic concerns constrain implementation of employee, faculty and student recommendations for Honors Program improvement. Implementation issues involving a lack of funding and enforcement of consistency result in incomplete isomorphism and the undermining of the community college honors experience. This can be seen in a shortage of available faculty willing to teach honors classes, the distribution of bulk honors projects, student perceptions that faculty members are burdened by honors projects, the diversity in student honors class experiences, and student complaints over a lack of communication from the program. WSCC is succeeding in offering subsidies that attract new students and raise FTSE but the goals of

enhancing scholarship and student learning outcomes are less obviously met. The Honors Program was conceptualized at the top but the lack of resources impeded administrative follow-through and street-level personnel from carrying out the Honors Program's published goals (Lipsky 1983). Contrary to the promotion of non-economic incentives for student program participation, students are participating primarily for economic reasons. The Honors Program and particularly the Smith Grant may succeed in the goal of attracting prospective community college students but the inadequate implementation results in a lack of commitment to the program on the part of students and staff. These improvements may further raise program and institutional legitimacy and may increase the positive experiences of those connected to the program.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

This investigation utilized a two-part conceptual framework drawn from two related but separate perspectives: institutional isomorphism and academic capitalism, to examine the perceived motives behind a community college honors program and how students, staff, faculty and administrators perceive the program. Using information published by Western Sky Community College and the district the college resides in, and qualitative data obtained through interviews with 20 participants, findings consistent with the two-part conceptual framework were evident, along with the discovery of two emergent themes: barriers to implementation and a new concept termed “incomplete isomorphism.”

Through analysis of interview data, evidence consistent with institutional isomorphism was demonstrated through the WSCC modeling of honors project content and curriculum requirements to the local state university’s honors college, Calvington Honors College. In addition, program benefits such as a designated academic advisor and pre-registration for honors students, found at CHC and other university honors colleges, have been or are proposed to be incorporated into the WSCC Honors program. Participant data revealed that the honors program was executed because other post-

secondary educational institutions offered these programs; it would be considered irrational to not offer an honors program in a field where having such a program is the norm.

Through the WSCC Honors Program, interview data revealed indication of activities associated with academic capitalism, including competition for student enrollment, recruitment and attempts to enhance institutional image. Participants suggested that the Honors Program, especially with the Smith Grant, was used as an avenue to recruit students who will attend full-time at the college. Interviews with personnel in the recruiting department indicated that the college actively recruits students using the Honors Program and scholarship money through high school presentations, workshops and mailers. Employees were in consensus that the Honors Program and its monetary assistance was an effective recruiting tool of new high school graduates and interviews with students confirmed that this recruiting method was effective.

An additional intention of the Honors Program, tied to the enhancement of institutional image, was also consistent with an academic capitalism framework. In recent years, recruitment efforts at post-secondary educational institutions have shifted to target high-ability students who will complete courses and degrees. This recruiting

emphasis may be connected to the completion agenda, set-forth by the Obama administration, and increased discourse surrounding a shift to performance-based institutional funding. According to respondent data, the Honors Program serves to enhance institutional image, aiding in the counteraction of public perceptions that the community college is of lower-status compared to four-year institutions. The shift in attitudes surrounding the community college image may serve to attract academically talented students who may have otherwise overlooked the possibility of attending a two-year institution.

In addition to themes consistent with the conceptual framework, two emergent and related themes were discovered in the interview data: barriers to implementation and incomplete isomorphism. The implementation of the Honors Program is consistent with a “top-down” orientation cited in implementation studies (Barrett 2004). This strategy refers to a policy, or in this case a program, conceptualized/executed at a high level in the organization and expected to be carried out by street-level agents (Lipsky 1980). In the case of the Honors Program, the design and goals of the program were created at the district-level and projected to be accomplished at the college-level, specifically through faculty and staff members. However,

a lack of necessary resources and consistency obstructed the formal objectives set-forth by the district which were not fully met at WSCC.

Barriers to implementation, along with negative student perceptions of the Honors Program, contribute to a term coined “incomplete isomorphism.” Although the WSCC’s Honors Program intention is to mimic the procedures at CHC, hurdles to program implementation prevent isomorphism from being entirely achieved. Also, negative student perceptions, contributed to by barriers to implementation and the low-status the community college holds compared to four-year institutions, prevents students from viewing the scholarship as more than an economic benefit. According to faculty and staff respondents, the goal of Honors Program recruitment is to attract students who will participate in the Honors Program for non-economic reasons but student participant interview data revealed that monetary subsidies was the driving force behind student program participation. Incomplete isomorphism is represented by negative participant responses ranging from complaints of faculty workload and class sizes to student criticisms of a lack of communication from the program.

This work contributes to the literature on the perceived motives behind community college honors programs and how these programs affect the experiences of students, staff, faculty and administrators

associated with community college honors programs. Although community college research has increased during recent decades, in chapter nine of *The American Community College*, Cohen and Brawer (2008) discuss the lack of research conducted on the community colleges historically. In Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991; 2005) *How College Affects Students*, out of the 3,000 reports cited, less than 50 incorporated community college student statistics. This shortage of research is disconcerting due to the sheer numbers of students that pass through the doors of two-year institutions. Community colleges are unique from four-year institutions because of their open-enrollment policy and multi-faceted mission. Many students choose to attend two-year institutions because four-year institutions do not fit their particular lifestyle, work or educational needs. Within the community colleges, organizational changes and program implementation have impacts that influence students, employees, administrators and community members.

According to research conducted by Sallie Mae (2011), there has been a recent increase in the community college population of students enrolling from high-income families⁸. In the 2009-2010 academic year, 12 percent of students coming from high-income families attended two-year public institutions. During the 2010-2011 academic year, this

⁸ High-income refers to annual earnings of \$100,000 or higher.

percentage increased to 22 percent. This shift in enrollment also coincides with a reduction in matriculation at four-year institutions, shifting from 56 percent in 2009-2010 to 48 percent in 2011-2012 (Chen 2012). In addition to the tuition increases at four-year institutions, community colleges are implementing initiatives, such as honors programs and the community college baccalaureate, to remain competitive and attract students (Jacobs 2012). Reflecting this trend, WSCC showed enrollment growth in overall student enrollment and in the Honors Program.

The community college student composition may be changing to include more students from high-income backgrounds but public perceptions of two-year institutions are not rising as quickly. This is exemplified by faculty defending their decisions behind teaching at a community college and students participating in the Honors Program primarily for economic motives and not for prestige or academic rigor. One administrator explained how the inability for the college to be selective slows the shifting of public awareness: “I don’t think that public perception or student perception changes as quickly as we’d like. The one advantage that we’ll never have is the ability to be selective.”

As the community college student population changes to include more students of middle to high socioeconomic status, programs

targeted to this population may increase. This study provides evidence that program implementation influences the experiences of those individuals involved and should not be ignored. If the WSCC Honors Program's goal is to attract FTSE, the program is accomplishing that objective. However, in order for the college to achieve the specific published goals set forth by the district, implementation of the program needs to be reevaluated.

Along with the work of Meyer and Rowan (1977), the concept of institutional isomorphism is an influential perspective contributing to the school of thought in organizational sociology designated new-institutionalism (Powell 2007). The concept of institutional isomorphism expands on the observation that organizations have become increasingly homogenous in structure (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) original article titled "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields", the concept of institutional isomorphism was not empirically tested but has since been cited over 19,000 times in scholarly work⁹. To my knowledge, institutional isomorphism applied to two-year institutions to explain the adoption of honors programs is unprecedented. Also, the term "incomplete isomorphism" used to describe the WSCC's desire for isomorphism with CHC but the

⁹ In 2012, using the academic search engine "Google Scholar."

inability to totally achieve isomorphism because of inadequate implementation and negative student perceptions is an innovative contribution to this group of literature.

Furthermore, the focus of academic capitalism has been generally geared towards the explanation of entrepreneurial behaviors at four-year institutions. Applying this term to two-year institutions builds on this growing body of literature and will continue to be important with the evolution of institutional funding models. Using a framework including academic capitalism to aid in the explanation of the observed motivations behind honors programs in two-year institutions is an additional novel contribution to scholarly work on the subject.

Limitations

Data used in this research was drawn from one community college in a large multi-college district in a highly-populated metropolitan area and may not be representative of community college honors programs across the United States. Also, I could not identify participant employees who were employed at WSCC at the time of the Honors Program inception. Therefore, employee responses regarding the original motivations for the program are based on theories. Due to regional and funding differences that may impact the organizational

structures of two-year institutions, investigating honors programs across a wider range of community colleges may be beneficial.

Future Research

In addition to investigating a broader array of community college honors programs, research focused on similar initiatives that may enhance community colleges' institutional legitimacy and increase enrollment will contribute to this collection of knowledge. These types of initiatives could include community college honor societies, such as Phi Theta Kappa, and the community college baccalaureate degree.

This research solely focused on an honors program found in a two-year institution, and research may benefit from investigating the motivations and implementation of honors programs or colleges across four-year institutions. Although the establishment of honors programs is relatively newer at community colleges compared to four-year institutions, honors programs at four-year institutions also rose during the 1980s (Long 2002). There are differences in structure and funding between community colleges and four-year institutions. Comparing and contrasting results found in this study to research conducted on four-year institutions may further expand the knowledge of how implementation of honors programs or colleges affect the experiences of those affiliated

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APPENDIX
EMPLOYEE AND STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

EMPLOYEE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Thank you for taking time to answer my questions. The purpose of this portion of the research project is to gather Western Sky Community College employee's knowledge/perceptions of the origins and functions of the current Honors Program structure (i.e. mission, marketing, target population, program requirements, honors course curriculum, program benefits). Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is okay for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential and all identifiers will be removed from your interview data. I was hoping to tape-record you, is that alright? If not, I would be happy to take hand-written notes instead. During your interview, if you wish to mention another third-party person, please do not use names.

Employee Information

Let's talk a little bit about you, please.

- a. How long have you been working for WSCC?*
- b. How long have you been working with the Honors Program?*
- c. Have you held any other positions on campus or within the district? If so, where?*
- d. In your role with the Honors Program, do you work any other departments? If so, which departments?*
- e. In your role with the Honors Program, could you describe some of the regular tasks you're responsible for?*

Design

- 1. Was the program modeled after an existing honors program?*
 - a. If not, how was the program designed?*

2. *Do you feel other honors programs should be modeled after WSCC?*
3. *How were entrance requirements determined?*
4. *How were eligibility requirements determined?*
5. *What would you change, if anything, about the current program structure? (i.e. entrance qualifications, program requirements, curriculum, and student services)?*
6. *What aspects of the Honor's Program structure are working well for students, employees or both?*

Functions

1. *Why do you think WSCC implemented an honors program?*
2. *How would you describe the Honors Programs missions and goals?*
 - a. *Does the Honors Program meet these missions and goals?*
3. *What benefits do you feel the Honors Program brings to the colleges?*
4. *How important is it for the college to have many honors students?*
5. *Has the district published any papers on the Honors Program or presented at any conferences?*

6. *Does the Honors Program have any partnerships with the local universities?*

Recruitment

1. *Does WSCC actively recruit students for the Honors Program?*
 - a. *If so, please tell me about the recruitment process.*
2. *What's the Honors Program target population?*
3. *In general recruitment sessions for the colleges, is the Honors Program mentioned?*
4. *How is the Honors Program enrollment compared to previous years? Up, down, stable?*
 - a. *Follow up if the answer is up or down: What factors do you think account for the changes in enrollment?*
5. *If you were recruiting students to participate in the Honors Program, what would you tell them?*

Curriculum

1. *Can you describe how the Honors Program curriculum differs from non-honors program curriculum?*
2. *How do students choose their honors classes?*
3. *How do employees select which classes are offered for honors credit?*

4. *What are the incentives for faculty to teach honors courses?*
5. *Are honors classes offered in all the academic disciplines the college offers?*
6. *What types of classes are most likely to be honors?*
7. *Could you tell me about honors classes in occupational programs, please?*

Students

1. *In your opinion, do honors students generally differ (i.e. college preparedness, academic commitment, family background) from non-honors students?*
 - a. *Do these students differ depending on if they are receiving the Brookes Subsidy compared to the Smith Grant?*
2. *What is your experience with parents of honors students? Are parents generally involved in the honors program enrollment process?*
3. *In your experience, does Honors Program participation aid in a smoother transition to a four-year institution?*
 - a. *If yes, what aspects of the program aids in this transition?*
4. *Why do you think students participate in the Honors Program?*
5. *What are the benefits the Honors Program offers to students?*

6. *In regards to students, are there are any costs to Honors Program participation?*
7. *Could you tell me about any student factors that aid in Honors Program retention (i.e. personal, financial, social, and familial)?*
8. *Could you tell me student factors that hinder Honors Program retention (i.e. personal. financial, social, and familial)?*

Eligibility

1. *Could you please tell me how students maintain eligibility in the Honors Program?*
2. *In your experience, do students have difficulty meeting these requirements?*
 - a. *If so, which requirement(s) is(are) most challenging for students to meet?*
3. *After losing eligibility, may students re-enter the Honors Program?*
4. *In your experience, which barriers to Honors Program success do students face most often?*
5. *What suggestions could you give to aid in student retention in the Honors Program?*

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Thank you for taking time to answer my questions. The purpose of this portion of the research project is to gather Western Sky Community College Honors Program students' knowledge/perceptions of the origins and functions of the current Honors Program structure (i.e. mission, marketing, target population, program requirements, honors course curriculum, program benefits). Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is okay for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential and all identifiers will be removed from your interview data. I was hoping to tape-record you, is that alright? If not, I would be happy to take handwritten notes instead. During your interview, if you wish to mention another third-party person, please do not use names.

Student Information

Please tell me a little bit about you.

- 1. If I may ask, what is your age?*
- 2. How many semesters have you been an honors program participant?*
- 3. Are you a first generation college student?*
- 4. Could you tell me about your high school experience, please?*
 - a. Did you graduate from a public/private/charter high school?*
 - b. If not, were you home schooled?*
 - c. If not, did you obtain your GED?*

5. *Academically speaking, what kind of student were you in high school?*
 - a. *Did you participate in honors in high school?*
6. *Do you enjoy being in college?*
 - a. *What aspects of college life do you enjoy the most?*
 - b. *What aspects of college life do you dislike the most?*
7. *Do you intend to transfer to a four-year institution?*
 - a. *If so, which four-year institution?*
 - b. *Do you feel the Honors Program will better prepare you for a four-year institution?*
 - c. *If so, do you intend to participate in an honors program at a four-year institution?*

General Community College

1. *Why did you decide to attend this particular college?*
2. *Did you apply to any other postsecondary educational institutions?*
3. *Did your parents play a role in your college choice?*
4. *Did your friends play a role in your college choice?*
5. *Do you feel you made the right decision to attend this college?*
6. *What aspects about community college works well for you?*

7. *Do you feel you made the right decision to attend a community college, compared to working after high school or attending a different type of postsecondary educational institution?*

Honors Program Participation

1. *Did you come to the community college with the intention of participating in the Honors Program?*
2. *Did anyone else influence you to participate in the Honors Program (i.e. friends, family members or high school counselors)?*
3. *What are the main reason(s) you decided to participate in the Honors Program?*
4. *Did a specific person tell you about the Honors Program?*
 - a. *If so, who was this person?*
5. *What do you gain from Honors Program participation?*
6. *Are there any unexpected costs associated with participating in the Honors Program (i.e. course work load, events that require mandatory attendance etc.)?*

Honors Program Structure

1. *So far, what is your overall impression of the Honors Program?*

2. *What benefits do you feel the Honors Program brings to the college(s)?*
3. *What about the Honors Program structure works well for you (i.e. student services, curriculum, and eligibility requirements)?*
4. *What about the Honors Program structure, if anything, would you change (i.e. student services, curriculum, and eligibility requirements)?*
5. *Do you feel you made the right choice to participate in the Honors Program?*

Curriculum

1. *What is your program of study?*
 - a. *If undecided, is there a major you're leaning towards?*
2. *How did you choose your honors course?*
3. *Is your honors course related to your program of study?*
4. *How does your honors course curriculum differ from your non-honors course curriculum?*
5. *How does honors faculty differ from non-honors faculty?*
6. *As part of the WSCC Honors Program, have you attended any student honors conferences?*

Eligibility

1. *How did you qualify for the Honors Program?*
2. *Are you concerned with the possibility of losing your eligibility?*
3. *If you lose your scholarship eligibility, will you stay enrolled in the college?*
4. *What barriers interfere with your success in the Honors Program?*
5. *What factors contribute to your success in the Honors Program?*
6. *How important is it that you maintain good standing in the Honors Program?*