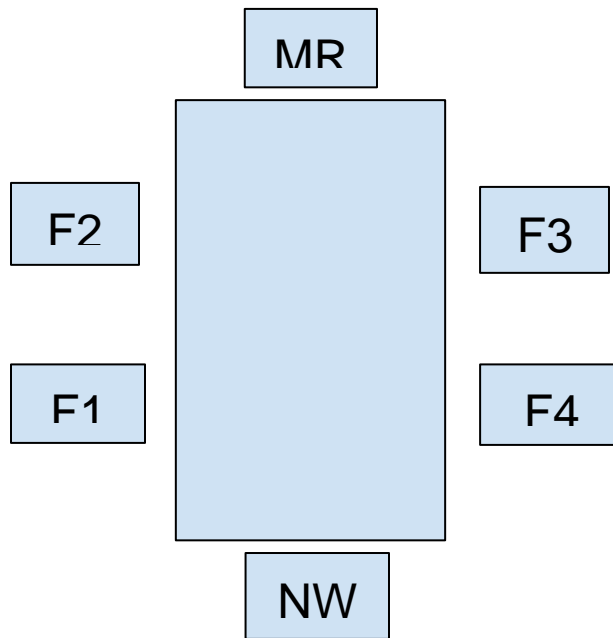


Focus Group Report

Facilitators: Megan Roessler and Natalie Wilson
Client: WSU Honors Department
October 22, 2019 12:00 p.m.



Group Demographics:

Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Age Range	Major	Year	Honors Type	# of Semesters in Honors	# of Honors Classes Taken
Female	Latina	17-20	Intl Business/Econ	Sophomore	Dept	2 - 3	4 +
Female	White	31-40	Psychology	Junior	Dept	0 - 1	1
Female	White	31-40	History	Senior	Gen, Uni, Dept	5+	4+
Female	White	31-40	Health Prom/History	Junior	Gen, Uni	5+	4+

Group Climate:

The climate for the focus group was friendly and relaxed. The participants were social and willing to share their opinions. There were four total participants in the group, all were female. The group members and lunch arrived late resulting in the focus group beginning fifteen minutes past the planned start time. F1 participated the least and F3 contributed the most. F2 and F4 contributed equally.

Questions and Probes:

Q1. What did you think Honors was about before joining?

F2: Assumed the classes were going to be more intense than the typical general ed. knew they were going to be smaller classes with more interaction with the Professor, and that sounded exciting.

F3: Knew that the students would be top students with high grades. Taking these classes, not just for major but for personal growth.

F1: "I didn't know if it was something you had to be invited to". As a returning student to Weber from many years ago, described herself as ignorant. "I didn't really know what it was, and if it existed, and what it was beyond Departmental."

F4: "I thought that the classes would be harder. We don't take any tests, we just do a final project, and I like that."

1a. How has your perception changed?

F4: "I love the program, and we have lots of opportunities." Would encourage others to take. "Go for it!"

F2: Thought they were just obligatory classes that had to be crossed off. A pleasant surprise. "I enjoy the Honors classes more than most of my classes."

1b. What do you think it is about those classes that you enjoy more?

F2: The people in those classes want to be there. Lower risk of getting stuck in group projects with those who don't contribute. More trust.

F3: Agreed with F2, Honors students want to be there.

F1: Conversation is more stimulating, people contribute more. You don't feel like a "know it all" when you engage in class.

F4: Different classes not offered in normal requirements.

F3: The intelligence of the professors is noticed. "Not just an instructor, not just a second job." Will receive "something special" from honors classes. Instructors are open minded. Came in with one mindset, left with new ideas. "Honors classes helped me develop the skills to be more open minded." Students were above average, none dropped the classes. More reading. Not hard, just time consuming as an ESL student. No tests, made class more enjoyable.

Q2. How did you find out about the Honors program?

F2: Looked at the website. "I mapped out my plan for Honors, based off of the catalog". It took 8 years for them to come to college. Well planned. Met with Honors advisors several times; Marilyn who is gone now, and Megan. Did research.

F3: My Sister-in-Law went to Weber State, and when I came to America, she told me to try Honors. Started with ESL classes. Shared a story about a friend who wanted to take honors classes but advisor had discouraged against because she was an ESL student.

F1: Still doesn't know much about Honors. Requirements, GPA. As a junior, just found out about Departmental Honors last semester.

F2: Suggested F1 talk to Megan. The rest of the group agreed.

F4: Signed up at the block party at the beginning of the school year. Did well in high school, thought it should be the same in college. Friends with high GPAs didn't know about it, wishes it was more visible. Advisor tried to tell her not to take Honors since she was an ESL student.

F3: Easy to miss on the website, could make it more visible when you view your department page and registration pages. Need to advertise honors more. Show students why it is cool to be an honors classes. Classes change all of the time so maybe just some general advertisements where many people will see.

F2: "Had I not done my own legwork it wouldn't have popped up on anyone's radar."

F1: General advisors are very ignorant, neither general nor major advisor ever mentioned it.

F4: General advisors should notify those with high GPA's. Scholarships and opportunities.

F2: "I think the advisors may be key to getting the word out." Should provide flyers. The class changes every semester but they can still advertise.

F4: If a student takes the time to meet with an advisor, they should be told about Honors if they qualify.

F2: Advisors are also professors and may be forgetting because they have a lot going on.

Q3. You have told us a lot about your positive experiences, have you had any negative experiences with the honors classrooms or professors?

F2: I did, but it worked out in the end. It was more of a temporary negative.

3a. Tell me about that.

F2: Since the classes are so different, expectations are hard to communicate. Grading is tricky for papers. If this is the first time a teacher is teaching the class, because they just designed it, they don't know what they are looking for in the papers and then the student doesn't know what the teacher wants. When the papers are graded, they can't exactly explain why they got that grade on the paper. Frustrating when finals are coming, need to know why grades are the way they are so they can better prepare for finals. New classes can be a learning process for professors. Another time, two professors taught a class together. Jokingly referred to it as "the dueling professors." Did speak to Megan about issues. Always reinventing the wheel and teaching new classes sometimes comes with problems.

F1: I've only had one honors class and it has been great.

F4: The classes fill up really quick (only allow 15 students into an Honors class) and sometimes it's really hard to get a spot in the Honors classes (especially being a Junior, and Seniors get priority), and it has put me behind in my Associates degree.

F3: Nothing negative, was nervous at first about being "smart enough" the professor was always willing to stay late and give feedback. Smaller classes helped with this. Felt challenged in a positive way.

Q4. How do you usually view the Honors course offerings? (Catalog, registration portal, website, ask Megan, friends, etc).

F4: "I talk to Megan!"

F2: They will email or post a blurb about each class on the Honors page, with a brief description of the classes a few weeks before registration. They also print them out.

F4: Doesn't look at the list. Takes what is available, only option.

4a. And is that because of senior priority?

F4: "Yeah, and the maximum number of students is only like fifteen."

F3: Looks for an email from Megan. Looks on honors webpage as well. It usually starts with Megan. Also Honors classes for study abroad. Can receive \$1000 scholarship if study abroad is paired with Honors classes, should be advertised.

Q5. Do you have any feedback related to diversity and/or inclusion in the Honors program?

F2: In upper division classes right now, Honors classes link to rest of University. Have met people from all over, ESL, etc. Wonderful people. Wouldn't have met if it wasn't for honors?

5a. How can the Honors program, and/or center be more inclusive?

F2: The department does an excellent job with this

F4: Agreed. Including professors.

F3: Felt as though the multi-cultural center wasn't for them, did not fit in to specific demographic and couldn't apply for scholarships. Found comfort in the Honors classes and department, lounge areas. Feels comfortable and welcome.

F1: "Welcoming" would be the best word to describe it.

F3: Megan helped with everything, gives great advice "took me by the hand."

Q6. What other improvements would you like to see in the Honors program?

F4: Would like to see Honors classes offered at Davis Campus.

F2: More upper division honors classes that go along with major. Will bring more students. Some students may not pursue honors for this reason.

F3: Agreed.

I. Summary:

In conclusion there were four main themes that were discussed in the focus group.

1. Advisors are key

Everyone in the focus group concluded that the key to having other people know about the Honors program needs to start with the general advisors. The advisors rarely if ever per the group even mentioned the Honors program as an option, or even gave details about the program. Some group members gave examples of friends who were from different countries (ESL) or their own stories of meeting with general advisors. When they brought the topic up of Honors, the general advisors deterred them from doing it, and therefore the students had a bad taste about the program. The advisors just told them to focus on general classes.

Another element the group discussed, was if the students qualify for the Honors program, the advisors should contact them regarding this opportunity. The students did recognize that the advisors were busy, and that this probably was not the forefront of priorities.

2. More visibility

There was a lot of confusion within the group of what was required in order to get into the program, especially what was required for each type of Honors. Each member signed up to the program in different ways, whether that was by word of mouth from previous Honors students, their own research, or by the summer block party. The group wanted more visibility to the program in advertising, either on campus by flyers and on the website. The students wanted the

program to be made more popular, so that other students could enjoy the benefits that the program has to offer.

3. Pride in the program

Each student had great things to say about Honors, and especially the help from Megan Moulding. They loved the opportunities that the program offers; scholarships, travel abroad opportunities, fun classes with the top students in the classes. You could feel a sense of pride in themselves, and in the program to be a part of. Female 4 vocalized this excitement, by saying that she loved it, and encouraged other students to enroll.

4. Improvements

Other than the general advisors to make a change in the way they approach this topic with students, and future students, the focus group had some suggestions for the program. Some of these ideas were: broaden the classes to reach other campuses such as the Davis campus, possibly adding more spots to the classes, so that more students can enroll in the Honors classes, resulting in students not being set back in their degrees, and offering more upper division classes, that correspond with their major.

II. Summary:

1. Visibility and Advisement: There is a need for better advertising and visibility for Honors. Each of the focus group members reported doing their own research into Honors prior to becoming Honors students. When the students shared their own positive experiences they would mention how they wished other students knew about the opportunities. The group suggested better marketing through printed materials and improved communication from general advisors. The participants expressed frustration with the lack of advising regarding Honors and believe that the general advisors are the “key” in distributing Honors information to qualified students.

2. ESL Students: Although there was positive feedback related to diversity and inclusion throughout the Honors departments, including classrooms and professors, there seems to be an issue with general advisement of ESL students. Two out of the four participants were ESL students and reported that they or someone else they knew had been discouraged from participating in Honors because they were ESL. When the ESL students requested information from general advisors, they were told Honors wasn’t for them.

3. Pride: The participants expressed feelings of pride surrounding their involvement with Honors and believe that Honors is something special. They feel that they are receiving high quality teaching and classroom experiences that they would not otherwise get with the standard university courses. Smaller class sizes and individualized instruction were clear benefits to Honors classes. Additionally, the participants feel a sense of trust and belonging among other Honors students.