

The Road Less Traveled: The Achievement Gap in College and Differences by Parents'  
Education, Gender, and Race

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## **Introduction**

Humans have long appreciated the value of education. Education, through its well-rounding of students, is considered the gift that keeps on giving. Acquiring an education allows one to have more opportunities, including increased human capital and the ability to make more money. People in high achieving programs (e.g. honors programs) typically continue their education (e.g. grad school), which also increases one's chances for more human capital and higher money earnings. Thus, it is not surprising that an even greater name has been given to this "gift"—the great equalizer. However, whether education puts everyone on the same playing field is debatable. Social factors challenge whether everyone gets to enjoy the benefits of education equally. In this analysis, I would like to understand how different social factors influence the experience one has at the collegiate level – specifically, looking at students in honors programs and those who are not involved in these programs – to have a better understanding of the university achievement gap.

Data was gathered for this study via interviews with appropriate personnel overseeing the honors programs and with a group of students from the university who are and are not participants in honors program. I will consider numerous factors that may influence one's participation in honors programs at the university level. The literature should assess the implications of this research because it will allow all students to be considered when thinking about what's in the best interest of all students. Lastly, information specifically on academic achievement at the university level has been widely studied; however, research on completion in honors program is limited. Thus, more research should be done to consider this topic specifically. I hypothesize that race, gender, working with a professor, and working for pay will impact one's participation in an honors program. Success for my project will determine if the factors examined provide an accurate analysis of what may be encouraging or deterring some students to participate in honors program.

## **Review of Related Literature**

Before understanding the social factors that may contribute to one's decision to participate in an honors program or not, it is important to understand how social factors influence the educational experience one can have, in general. Research and history has shown that certain factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) allow some students to be at an advantage, while serving as a disadvantage to others. To provide further analysis, we will explore each of these topics separately.

### **Race**

It has long been established that race may negatively or positively impact one's quality of life. Research has indicated that whites typically excel in academic spaces compared to their black and Hispanic counterparts. According to Potter and Morris (2016), these differences can be visualized as early as when children begin school via test scores on reading and math assessments. Potter and Morris (2016) stated, "white children tend to score higher than their black and Hispanic peers across multiple academic domains (e.g., math and reading), and the gaps between very young children tend to expand with time." Researchers have attributed the existence of the achievement gap to numerous factors such as, poverty, student background, geography, and other factors. Potter and Morris believe that family and schooling experiences account for the differences that are experienced racially. This is relevant to my research because family and schooling experiences are examined in a different context in my research. I will be considering parent income as a part of the family experience. Also, I will be considering kinds of schooling experiences (e.g. work with a professor) that may help to understand one's decision to participate in honors or not. These findings allow one to see just how important it is to understand the achievement gap and adequately address how to prevent it from continuing to widen into college.

Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) state that though “aspirations to attend college has increased for all ethnic and racial groups, the number of African American students who obtained their degree had not risen a significant amount. In 2005, only 17.8 percent of African American young adults had earned a bachelor's degree. Latino students lag in both college attendance and completion. In 2005, less than one-third of Latino young adults had attended some college.” Researchers believe that this disparity exists due to the lack of college readiness. This research provides evidence that though more young people are acknowledging their desire to attend college, fewer minority students are obtaining their degree. It is relevant to the current research because one can reason that if minority students are not completing their degrees, it would not be possible to complete an honors program. It's also relevant because predictor variables that researchers examine related to honors correlate directly with college readiness. Exploring these problems and what factors are causing it has plagued those interested in this topic. However, what is clear is that minority students are disadvantaged early in their primary years and the problem continues even as they attempt to matriculate into a college setting. Race is a social construct that has important implications for one's opportunity to receive the education they deserve and want to give themselves.

### **Gender**

Along with race, gender is another social construct that can impact one's life experiences when it's time to obtain an education. For decades, in our history of education, the college experience was a male experience. Males dominated the classroom and obtained more degrees until recently. The narrative has shifted and women are starting to earn more degrees than their male counterparts. Researchers have been investigating the causes of this education shift between

the genders. An article entitled “The Growing Female Advantage in College Completion: The Role of Family Background and Academic Achievement” provides suggestions for why this may be.

According to Buchmann and DiPrette (2006), who acquired their information from the American Sociological Association (ASA), men obtained most of the degrees awarded in 1960 and years following until 1982 when women began to receive more degrees than them. Specifically, “black women earn 67 percent of the degrees awarded, Hispanics earn 61 percent, Native Americans obtain 61 percent, Asians receive 54 percent, and whites earn 57 percent.” According to the article, this gap is prevalent across all racial and ethnic groups. These researchers are the first to explore why this change has occurred. They hypothesize “that the change stems from a combination of declining gender discrimination and women’s growing interest in possessing autonomous resources by which they can pursue opportunities in both the labor and marriage markets while protecting themselves against adversity in both realms.” These hypotheses align directly with the changing of the times. Women are now allowed to have employment and educational opportunities that they weren’t allowed to have in decades past. For this reason, women have been able to advance in various sectors of life. This factor is relevant to my own research because I am considering gender as an independent variable in my analysis of honors participation. If women are attending and graduating college more than their male counterparts, I expect that they will also show up in numbers in honors programs. Lastly, directly related to opportunities for the genders is the next factor that can potentially influence the academic gap in universities – socioeconomic status (SES).

### **Socioeconomic Status (SES).**

The relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement has been explored in a variety of contexts. From the research findings, support for both sides exist and mixed findings have been shown. Some researchers report that SES doesn’t impact the achievement gap

while others disagree. I will explore the findings of each. Also, it is critical to stop and explore the multiple ways to measure SES. For the purposes of the studies found, researchers used level of education attainment and amount of income at varying levels to determine the correlation between socioeconomic status and academic achievement.

According to Lam (2014), the correlation between SES and academic achievement seems to exist. “Specifically, Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Guim and Smith (1998) found that ‘Children in families with incomes less than one-half of the poverty line were found to score between 6 and 13 points lower on the various standardized tests’ (p.408). Secondly, the gradient between socioeconomic status and academic performance does not exhibit a monotonic effect.” The first part of this research is compatible with other findings because those with less education typically have less access to resources that will allow them to excel academically. However, the second part of this evidence is particularly interesting because it allows one to see that the impact that socioeconomic status may have on academic achievement isn’t definite. We cannot definitively state its effects, but researchers can conclude that there may a correlation of some kind. This is relevant to the current research because SES will be evaluated in terms of parents’ income. Parents’ income is being evaluated to see if it correlates with participation or non-participation in an honors program.

From this review about what social factors contribute to the academic achievement gap in colleges and universities, researchers may now be in a better position to advocate for those who are negatively impacted by it. Though there has been evidence of the achievement gap through and across cultures, research on this topic needs to continue and be explored in greater depth. Also, once these topics are understood, research should be extended to those who participate in honors programs and those who do not. It is arguable that participation in honors or lack thereof is a type

of achievement gap. Thus, when the factors that are related to widening of the achievement gap in honors programs are explored in true depth, not only will the field of social science advance, but perhaps the lives of those who suffer from the gap will too.

### **Review of Related Research in Honors**

Honors programs, sometimes known as honor colleges, are well-known components of the university life. Through these programs, students complete advanced coursework, interact in smaller classes, develop positive rapport with professors and similar peers, and receive recognition after their program is completed. Interestingly, research finds that though the existence of honors programs at the university level are well-known, research on completion in honors is limited. Several researchers who have studied this topic have indicated this point. According to Cosgrove (2004), “despite the proliferation in the number of honors programs, they are a relatively unstudied aspect of higher education.” Moreover, when honors research is conducted, researchers do not differentiate students by those who have completed their honors work and those who have not. We will explore the factors that researchers have examined when considering participation and completion in honors.

### **Predictor Variables of Honors Participation**

Before we can understand what factors contribute to participation in honors, we must first understand the variables that researchers have stated predict participation in honors programs. Researchers have examined high school achievement tests, such as the SAT and ACT to predict one’s matriculation in an honors programs. Other high school factors examined include high school GPA and high school rank. Factors assessing one’s ability to perform at a collegiate level, such as first-semester GPA and cumulative GPA, have also been examined as predictor variables. Lastly, socially-constructed variables, such as gender have been included in the list.

Fuqua and Campbell (2008) found that the “high school GPA, high school class rank, first-semester college GPA, gender, and initial housing assignment (honors housing or other) were the strongest predictor variables for participation and persistence in honors programs.” Some of these same results were echoed in McKay’s (2009) research when he examined SAT, high school GPA, gender, ethnicity, and entrance year. McKay (2009) stated that high school GPA was the strongest predictor of honors completion, but gender was also a strong correlate of completion.

My research will add to the existing body of knowledge that is available regarding honors participation. It is significant because it examines factors that researchers have determined as predictor variables (e.g. gender, cumulative GPA), but it also accounts for other experiences that one can have at the collegiate level that may influence participation (e.g. working for pay, working with a professor). This is significantly different from research that has been conducted about honors in the past because it does not begin by looking at high school predictor variables, but instead asks students to account for their experiences in college. Lastly, the research doesn’t look at completion in honors, but the social factors that encourage participation or non-participation in the beginning.

### **Background on Honors at UNCG**

First, to understand the significance of this research, one should understand the various honors program at UNCG. Three types of honor programs exist for some of the best and brightest students the university has. These programs are International Honors, Disciplinary Honors, and Full University Honors. According to the website that specifies requirements, The International Honors Program recruits first-year students who exhibit qualities that align directly with the values of the honors college. The program is open to students in all majors who are willing to complete the necessary requirements. According to the requirements list, students involved “must complete



13 credit hours of coursework in Honors Seminar and meet the General Education Curriculum (GEC) requirement via taking the appropriate courses” (“International Honors Requirements,” 2017). The community of students is small and “capped at 25 students, which allows students to enhance critical reading, thinking, and expressions while in a learning-conducive environment” (“International Honors Requirements,” 2017). Students must also obtain a sufficient level of mastery in a second language and study abroad— “typically only for a semester at an exchange partner institution” (“International Honors Requirements,” 2017). Lastly, to receive this distinction at graduation, one must have a 3.30 GPA or higher and have completed these requirements. An official stated that if students choose to discontinue this honors track, it is typically because of grades or the inability to fit study abroad into their schedule. However, often, it is the latter.

Disciplinary Honors, also housed within the honors college, has separate requirements. This honors tracks allow “students who are sophomores and above with at least a 3.30-3.50 GPA to explore their major in greater depth” (“Disciplinary Honors Requirements,” 2017). While completing Disciplinary Honors, “students will be able to work personally with professors of their choosing, conduct research, study topics in greater detail, and perform at a level that shows readiness for a career or graduate or professional school” (“Disciplinary Honors Requirements,” 2017). The requirements will vary according to one’s major, so students are advised to converse with the appropriate faculty within their department. In Disciplinary Honors, it is rare that students will have to complete supplemental courses; however, if the student does have to do this, the classes are few. One official reported that students often choose to discontinue this honors track because of the Senior Honors Project, which is a project that students work on with an advisor within their department. Students can work on a topic of their choosing and will typically do so for 1 or 2 semesters.

Lastly, Full University Honors is an honors track that consists of students who have completed and maintained honors throughout their tenure at the university. The distinction is awarded to students who have completed both the requirements for International Honors and Disciplinary Honors.

### **Methods**

For the purposes of this research, a relatively small sample was collected from a large, Southern university. The participants included 2 officials within the honors college and 5 students, 3 of which were in honors programs and 2 who were not currently in one of the honors programs. The students all identified as females and were of different racial backgrounds. Two of the females in honors identified as white, while the remaining student identified as Asian-American. The students not involved in honors were African-American and Latina. Officials in the honors program were asked 5 questions to briefly account for the experiences of the students involved in the honors college. Students were asked to complete a survey of 10 questions and an open-ended question interview of 7 questions to provide information about their experiences within or outside of the honors college and how this experience has shaped their collegiate career. Please refer to Appendices A and B for the questions. The institution that is the setting for this research is a “public, coeducational, doctoral-granting, residential university chartered in 1891 that serves just over 19,000 students” (“About UNCG”, 2017). The school, at one point in its history, was an all-women’s college serving mostly white women. Today, UNCG is co-ed serving 43% of minorities.

### **Procedures and Data Analysis**

Data regarding demographics and GPA within the honors programs were obtained from officials in the honors program. However, the main source of data for this research was conducted using a dataset that was used to create crosstabs from the SPSS software. The dataset was coded

specifically to apply only to UNCG students. Crosstabs were used to compare the relationship between the variables examined. The Pearson Chi-Square function allows one to see that a relationship is not by chance, but is significant. The independent variables that were examined were parents' education, race, and gender. Each were broken down into categorical answers, so that participants could respond accordingly. Parents' education was broken down into six categories, which were less than high school (<HS), high school diploma, some college, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate. GPA was broken down into the four categories as follows: less than 2.0 (<2.0), 2.0-2.9, 3.0-3.74, and 3.75 or above (3.75+). Lastly, race was broken down into White, Black or African American, Latino/a, Asian, mixed races, or other races. The dependent variables were cumulative GPA, honors program participation, unpaid, out-of-class work with a professor, and working for pay.

## **Results**

Results will be examined in accordance with the independent variables that were examined in relation to the dependent variables. To make these transitions easier, each section of results will be broken down and examined further.

**Parents' Education**

Table 1: GPA by Parents' Highest Level of Education (Counts and Percentages)

	<HS	HS	SC	BA	MA	DR	Total
<2.0	4	22	46	30	12	4	118
	2.9%	5.1%	5.4%	3.7%	2.5%	2.8%	4.1%
2.0-2.9	56	149	331	265	147	36	984
	40.0%	34.4%	38.9%	32.4%	31.2%	25.5%	34.5%
3.0-3.74	63	182	358	347	219	66	1235
	45.0%	42.0%	42.1%	42.4%	46.5%	46.8%	43.3%
3.75+	17	80	116	177	93	35	518
	12.1%	18.5%	13.6%	21.6%	19.7%	24.8%	18.1%
Total	140	433	851	819	471	141	2855
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi Square	44.709***						

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

GPA and parents' education was broken down accordingly as described above. According to the information reflected on the table, the higher the parents' level of education, the higher the cumulative GPA of the student. In the 3.0-3.74 GPA range, one can see that as the parents' level of education increases, cumulative GPA does too. This is critical to honors because those with lower GPAs typically don't participate in honors programs. This was also reflected in some of the interviews that were conducted. One student, a participant in International Honors, stated that collectively her parents' level of education was a Master's degree. She recalled that her GPA is currently a 3.97. Another student who is currently worried about maintaining her honors status stated that she has a 3.00 and that both of her parents had earned only high school degrees collectively. One can see that a relationship may exist for students who are in honors when it comes to parents' education, but even for students who were not in an honors program, a pattern existed.

Two students that were not in an honors program both identified the highest degree earned by their parents as high school diplomas. Both students' GPAs were within the 2.0-2.9 range. Certainly, parents' education isn't the determining factor of one's GPA; however, it is a factor that can be examined when considering participation in honors.

Table 2: Part of an Honors Program by Parents' Education (Counts and Percentages)

	<HS	HS	SC	BA	MA	DR	Total
Yes	14	57	105	168	97	38	479
	10.0%	13.3%	12.4%	20.5%	20.6%	26.6%	16.8%
No	126	373	743	650	375	105	2372
	90.0%	86.7%	87.6%	79.5%	79.4%	73.4%	83.2%
Total	140	430	848	818	472	143	2851
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi Square	43.034**						

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

As explained, there are three current honors tracks that students can actively participate in. As with GPA, one could assume that the higher the parents' education, the more likely the student might be to participate in honors. From the results of the table, one can see that the students who have parents that have at least a bachelor's degree typically participate in honors more often. There are several reasons why this relationship could exist, but there does seem to be a relationship between honors participation and parents' education. Overall, there are many students who stated that they did not participate in any kind of honors track no matter what level of education their parents had. This conclusion can be made via the high percentages across the educational levels. This could be due to several factors such as GPA, disinterest in participating, time constraints, not knowing they could be a part of an honors program, or other factors. However, the relationship is

statistically significant and would suggest that parents' educations plays a part in student participation in honors.

Table 3: Unpaid Out-Of-Class Work Experience with Professor by Parents' Education (Counts and Percentages)

	<HS	HS	SC	BA	MA	DR	Total
Yes	33	72	161	164	112	45	587
	26.6%	16.8%	18.9%	20.1%	23.7%	31.5%	20.6%
No	107	357	689	653	360	98	2264
	76.4%	83.2%	81.1%	79.9%	76.3%	68.5%	79.4%
Total	140	429	850	817	472	143	2851
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi Square	19.305**						

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

Unpaid, out-of-class work experience with a professor was evaluated as a variable of participation in honors because these relationships and networks open the door for many opportunities in a collegiate setting. Students often gain valuable experiences simply from having professors as a resource. If the student has done particularly well in a course or within one's department, the student can be exposed to opportunities that other students are not exposed to. According to the table, it seems that students whose parents have higher levels of education often participate in unpaid, out-of-class work experiences with professors more often than those with lower levels of education. However, the highest percentages for those who answered yes fall under the categories of less than a high school diploma and doctorate degree. Students whose parents have less than a high school diploma may be motivated to participate in an unpaid, out-of-class work experience with a professor for several reasons; however, I did not examine those reasons in

the current research. Nevertheless, one can conclude that this relationship is statistically significant as a possible correlate and predictor of participation in honors.

Table 4: Currently Work for Pay by Parents' Education (Counts and Percentages)

	<HS	HS	SC	BA	MA	DR	Total
Yes	98	273	589	501	281	85	1827
	70.0%	63.5%	69.3%	61.4%	59.7%	59.4%	64.1%
No, search	36	125	221	227	158	39	806
	25.7%	29.1%	26.0%	27.8%	33.5%	27.3%	28.3%
No, N/A search	6	32	40	88	32	19	217
	4.3%	7.4%	4.7%	10.8%	6.8%	13.3	7.6%
Total	140	430	850	817	471	143	2850
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi Square	42.665***						

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

One would think that the less education one's parents have, the more likely a student may be to seek employment. Furthermore, if the student works for pay, one might suggest that a student would have less time to participate in honors due to possibly supporting themselves or others. The answers were broken down into yes, currently works for pay, no, but searching, and no, not searching. The students who identified their parents as having less than a high school diploma had the highest percentages among those who answered yes. This makes sense because those whose parents have less than a high school diploma typically do not have the financial means to support a student who is in college. Those who answered yes with parents who had higher levels of education had the lowest percentages, which would suggest that they are supported financially and may have less of a need for a job. Lastly, among the students who stated that they weren't working for pay and weren't searching, students whose parents had less than a high school diploma had the

lowest percentage and students whose parents had doctorates had the highest percentage. Again, this correlation makes sense because the data suggests that students whose parents have less than a high school diploma are actively working. Students whose parents have doctoral degrees may not necessarily have a need to work. This relationship is statistically significant and suggests that working for pay and parents' education may correlate with honors. Honors requires time, dedication, and support. One's ability to have these things may impact their ability to participate in honors.

**Race**

Table 5: Current Cumulative GPA by Race (Counts and Percentages)

	White	Black or African American	Latino/a	Asian	Mixed Race	Other race	Total
<2.0	33 2.3%	58 7.0%	9 3.8%	7 4.6%	12 6.9%	1 2.2%	120 4.2%
2.0-2.9	397 27.4%	374 45.1%	78 32.8%	55 36.4%	71 40.6%	19 42.2%	994 34.4%
3.0-3.74	649 44.9%	336 40.5%	113 47.5%	60 39.7%	72 41.1%	21 46.7%	1251 43.3%
3.75+	368 25.4%	62 7.5%	38 16.0%	29 19.2%	20 11.4%	4 8.9%	521 18.1%
Total	1447 100.0%	830 100.0%	238 100.0%	151 100.0%	175 100.0%	45 100.0%	2886 100.0%
Chi Square	188.944***						

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

GPA has already been discussed as an important predictor variable of honors, but race has not been discussed as much in the literature when considering participation in an honors program.



The current literature has stated that whites tend to perform better in academic spaces than their minority counterparts. If the literature is accurately reflecting the current experiences of students in different racial categories, it would also reason that this disparity would be seen in the GPAs of students. Table 5 does show a trend in the GPAs of students who identify as different races. Students who identify as Black or African American have the highest percentages in the <2.0 and 2.0-2.9 GPA range, which would automatically disqualify most students from participation in honors. It would reason that if Blacks have the highest percentages in the lowest GPA categories, then they have the lowest percentages in the highest GPA categories by default. White students, on the other hand, have the lowest percentages for lower GPAs and the highest percentages for the higher GPAs. Thus, when considering participation in honors at UNCG, it is likely that you will see more white students involved.

Table 6: Participation in an Honors Program by Race (Counts and Percentages)

	White	Black or African American	Latino/a	Asian	Mixed Race	Other Race	Total
Yes	280 19.4%	104 12.5%	42 17.6%	27 17.8%	25 14.3%	6 13.3%	484 16.8%
No	1164 80.6%	725 87.5%	196 82.4%	125 82.2%	150 85.7%	39 86.7%	2399 83.2%
Total	1444 100.0%	829 100.0%	238 100.0%	152 100.0%	175 100.0%	45 100.0%	2883 100.0%
Chi Square	19.082**						

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

According to the table, of the students who do participate in honors programs, white students participate more than students of different races percentage and count wise. An official

within the honors programs reinforced this data when she revealed that the data for participation “skews white”. UNCG is traditionally a school that serves more white students; thus, one can see why more White students participate in honors. However, as before in table 2, the percentages of the students who said no were similar, but Black/African-American students had the highest percentage for the no category. Thus, race may have some influence on participation in honors.

Table 7: Unpaid Out-Of-Class Work Experience with Professor by Race (Counts and Percentages)

	Black or African American Latino/a Asian Mixed Race Other Race						Total
	White	American	Latino/a	Asian	Race	Other Race	
Yes	290	171	54	34	33	11	593
	20.1%	20.7%	22.7%	22.5%	18.9%	24.4%	20.6%
No	1154	657	184	117	142	34	2288
	79.9%	79.3%	77.3%	77.5%	81.5%	75.6%	79.4%
Total	1444	828	238	151	175	45	2881
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi Square	1.944						

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

The students who reported having an unpaid, out-of-class work experience with a professor most often was white students by count; however, the percentage of Black, Latino/a, Asian, and other race students were larger in percentages. The no category didn’t show as much variation by percentage for the racial groups. Based on the data collected, having an unpaid, out-of-class work experience with a professor by race is not statistically significant. Therefore, it may have less bearing on one’s participation in an honors program. Perhaps this is because there are too many other variables that play a factor in determining if students are afforded the opportunity to have an unpaid, out-of-class work experience with a professor.

Table 8: Currently Work for Pay by Race (Counts and Percentages)

	White	Black or African American	Latino/a	Asian	Mixed Race	Other Race	Total
Yes	957 66.2%	522 63.0%	153 64.6%	76 50.3%	105 60.3%	34 75.6%	1847 64.1%
No, search	340 23.5%	274 33.1%	71 30.0%	60 39.7%	62 35.6%	10 22.2%	817 28.4%
No, N/A search	149 10.3%	32 3.9%	13 5.5%	15 9.9%	7 4.0%	1 2.2%	217 7.5%
Total	1446 100.0%	828 100.0%	237 100.0%	151 100.0%	174 100.0%	45 100.0%	2881 100.0%
Chi Square	72.904***						

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

The racial groups of the students and their employment status is examined because working requires one's time. Whether students of a race work for pay or not may determine their likelihood to participate in honors, which may predict their appearance or lack thereof in honors programs. The highest percentage of students in the yes category were students who identified as white and other races. Thus, the prediction above is not necessarily the case because white students participate in honors at a higher rate than the other races here at UNCG. The highest percentage for students who reported that they didn't have a job, but were searching were Asian students. Lastly, the students who had the highest percentages for "no, not searching" were white students and Asian students. For white students, this may be because they are already employed, so they don't have the desire to look for a job. For Asian students, this analysis is less clear. Multiple

factors could be determining why Asian students are searching for work, while others aren't. However, what is clear is that working for pay by race may be a correlate of participation in honors.

**Gender**

Disclaimer: Not much information is collected or offered on students who identify as other genders. Gender, for a long time, was binary: male or female. Thus, not much information will be included in this analysis on those who identify as other genders. One of the officials within the honors program stated, “we have the standard binary genders and the standard race/ethnicity options available to us. We have not done surveying where our students have had the opportunity to share other identities.”

Table 9: Cumulative GPA by Gender (Counts and Percentages)

	Female	Male	Other	Total
<2.0	91	25	4	120
	4.1%	4.1%	9.8%	4.2%
2.0-2.9	747	232	13	992
	33.4%	38.5%	31.7%	34.5%
3.0-3.74	972	262	12	1246
	43.5%	43.4%	29.3%	43.3%
3.75+	424	84	12	520
	19.0%	13.9%	29.3%	18.1%
Total	2234	603	41	2878
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Chi Square	18.183**			

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

GPA and gender was considered due to the shift discussed earlier in the literature review. UNCG was traditionally a women's college. Thus, one might hypothesize that women will be more present in honors programs, have higher GPAs, and have a higher presentation in the

university's population. The table yielded these results. Females and males had the same percentage for the <2.0 category. For the 2.0-2.9 category, males had the highest percentage. For the 3.0-3.74 range, females and males had about the same percentage. Lastly, in the 3.75+ category, females had the larger percentage. This is important because GPA is a correlate of honors. If females have higher GPAs than males, it might reason that they would occupy academic spaces (e.g. honors programs) at a higher rate than their male counterparts.

Table 10: Participation in an Honors Program by Gender (Counts and Percentages)

	Female	Male	Other	Total
Yes	396	75	13	484
	17.8%	12.4%	31.0%	16.8%
No	1834	528	29	2391
	82.2%	87.6%	69.0%	83.2%
Total	2230	603	42	2875
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi Square	15.663***			

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

As shown by the table, males also lagged in participation in honors programs. Females had a higher count and percentage compared to their male counterparts. This data was reiterated by one of the officials who stated that the honors programs are very “female-skewed”. This would suggest that more females participate in honors programs than men. Though males were not interviewed and surveyed in this analysis, one can speculate that GPA may have something to do with it. Again, in the GPA category of 2.0- 2.9, males had a higher percentage than their female counterparts. Lastly, females had a lower percentage for the no category. Unfortunately, this research cannot state exactly what discourages males from participating in an honors program because none participated in this research. Future research will need to talk to more males and get

their perspective on participation in honors program. We cannot state definitively why this relationship exist, but GPA and time constraints may be some of the reasons why. What is known, however, is that there is a relationship of significance that can be related to participation in honors.

Table 11: Unpaid Out-Of-Class Work Experience with Professor by Gender (Counts and Percentages)

	Male	Female	Other	Total
Yes	448	136	7	591
	20.1%	22.6%	16.7%	20.6%
No	1783	465	35	2283
	79.9%	77.4%	83.3%	79.4%
Total	2231	601	42	2874
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi Square	2.278			

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

The results from this table offers interesting data because the percentages are quite close to one another, essentially portraying that men and women were not significantly different in their likelihood of participating in an unpaid, out-of-class work experience with a professor. According to the table, men had a rate of 20.1%, while women had a rate of 22.6% for the yes category. For the no category, men had a rate of 79.9% while women had a rate of 77.4%.

Table 12: Currently working for Pay by Gender (Counts and Percentages)

	Female	Male	Other	Total
Yes	1456	366	19	1841
	65.3%	60.9%	45.2%	64.1%
No, search	617	180	18	815
	27.7%	30.0%	42.9%	28.4%
No, N/A	158	55	5	218
search	7.1%	9.2%	11.9%	7.6%
Total	2231	601	42	2874
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi Square	11.524*			

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

Lastly, more females currently work for pay than males by both counts and percentages. This may be for several reasons including not relying on family for financial support or embracing one's independence. More males report not currently working for pay, but looking for pay, according to percentages. This may also be due to several reasons, such as the student needing more aid, the student supporting themselves because of the lack of financial support from family, and numerous other reasons. Lastly, more males reported that they didn't have a job and weren't actively searching for pay by percentage, which could also be for reasons not explored, such as choosing to focus one's efforts on school. The females that I interviewed all worked for pay (both at school and outside). Students reported that they were working to pay their way through school, lessen the financial burden of loved ones, and have extra money for expenses. These explanations are not definite reasons, but the explanations that are provided are coming from the demographics and sample of students that I conducted research with. Working for pay by gender is significant;

however, how this relationship is applied to honors participation or lack thereof isn't explicitly known.

## **Discussion**

Several variables were examined in this research to determine the likelihood of participation in honors. Each variable was analyzed in a crosstab to examine the significance of the relationship. In research, one never comes to a "conclusion", but it is possible to come to a determination about the factors examined and one's hypothesis. From there, future research can be done to expand or contract the results. All the independent variables explored are relevant to one's education experiences, so it is no surprise that these factors matter when considering participation in honors programs. However, it is within the minute details that one can see these factors mattering the most. The only tables that didn't produce values that were statistically significant were unpaid, out-of-class work experience with a professor by gender and race. Thus, the hypothesis was not confirmed in this regard and it may not be necessary to evaluate this facet of the educational experience. Interestingly, in the interviews, students reported that they didn't feel like their gender or race impacted their experiences here. Data would suggest that these factors do carry some weight.

All the other tables produced values that were significant, according to the crosstabs. Parents' education, race, and gender seemed to be the strongest predictors of possible participation. For example, parents' education was significantly related to one's cumulative GPA, participation in an honors program, and working for pay. The tables showed that those whose parents had higher levels of education had higher cumulative GPAs, participated in honors at a higher rate, and had lower percentages compared to others who answered yes in the working for pay category. Current GPA by race was statistically significant due to its revealing that white students have higher



percentages in the higher GPA categories, while their Black counterparts have higher percentages in the lower GPA categories. Currently working for pay by race was significant because students that identified as white had the highest percentages among those who answered yes. By extension, whites had the lowest percentages for those who were not working and not actively looking for employment. Lastly, participation in honors by gender was statistically significant because more females reported participating in honors than males. Again, this is no surprise considering how the college experience is dominated by females.

My research has found findings that are aligned with what previous researchers have found. The cumulative GPA of a student does matter and can be argued to be one of the strongest predictor variables. Besides, GPA is a numerical value that follows a student throughout their educational experiences. Therefore, it is likely that it naturally shapes a lot of the experiences that students have. However, my research has also found other variables that can be of importance, such as parents' education. Parents play an influential role in the lives of their children, especially when one considers expectations. If a parent has an elevated level of education, it is likely that these same values will be instilled in their children. Thus, future research should consider continuing to explore the implications of these findings.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to the research including difficulty to obtain a varied sample of interview subjects, limited data on honors programs, and the small sample size at the single school in which the research was conducted. Though I worked tirelessly to find contacts to interview, finding informants to interview for this project proved extremely difficult. All the participants were women at UNCG. Unfortunately, situations like this can bias the data and not allow for an accurate account of details. Finding alternative options for interviewees by considering other personal contacts should be considered in the future. Also, limited data on honors

and program completion should be explored if one is choosing to examine this topic. One should consider expanding or changing the research question if there isn't enough research. Lastly, for future research, the sample size should be much bigger and include more students, faculty, and those who are relevant to the research. This research could also be done at more than one university in a specific location. This will allow for comparisons and generalizations of the results.

### **Conclusion**

The research question reviewed was what social factors influence the likelihood of participation or non-participation in honors programs. This research was conducted to examine a specific type of achievement gap in collegiate settings. Previous research by other researchers have reinforced what we know to be true about social factors that influence the university achievement gap – race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) all influence the widening of the gap and one's subjective experiences related to education. However, as I have shown in my research, these topics can be explored further once broken down. Research should continue to be explored on the topic of participation and completion of honors because it will allow all the social factors that one may face to be considered when thinking about what's in the best interest of all students. Lastly, to ensure that we do not contribute to the widening of the achievement gap, but instead allow all students to have a chance to experience the varied benefits of education, we must be knowledgeable on the things that make each opportunity different for all students. Educators, faculty members, and officials within the university setting must be aware of the disparities that social factors can create amongst students of different races, ethnicities, genders, and so on. The saying "the children are our future" is often stated. To ensure that we make this quote a reality, we must first ensure that we provide everyone a fair chance at their own.

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Appendix A  
Questions for Officials

*Directions: Please read the statements and answer the questions. Please answer as extensively as you would like.*

1. Please tell me about the demographics of students who participate in the honors programs.
2. Please tell me about the average GPA of students in the honors program.
3. Please tell me about other extracurricular activities that students report being involved in when they are involved in honors programs.
4. Please tell me what most often discourages or doesn't allow students to participate in honors programs.
5. Please tell me about what most often encourages or allows students to participate in honors programs.

Appendix B  
Questions for Students

*Directions: Please read the close-ended questions and answer them. Once finished, please hand the survey to the researcher. Shortly after, you will be asked a few interview questions.*

1. In which category does your age belong?
  - 18-24 years old \_\_\_
  - 25-34 years old \_\_\_
  - 35-44 years old \_\_\_
  - 45-54 years old \_\_\_
  - 55-65 years old \_\_\_
2. Are you currently part of an honors program on campus (including disciplinary honors)?
  - Yes \_\_\_
  - No \_\_\_
3. Have you ever participated in an internship?
  - Yes, paid \_\_\_
  - Yes, unpaid \_\_\_
  - No, paid \_\_\_
  - No, unpaid \_\_\_
4. Do you participate in extracurricular activities on campus?
  - Yes, I do \_\_\_
  - No, I don't \_\_\_
5. If you said yes to number 4, please indicate what other extracurricular activities you participate in.

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6. Please indicate your parents' income.
  - Less than \$10,000 \_\_\_
  - \$10,000 to \$19,999 \_\_\_
  - \$20,000 to \$29,999 \_\_\_
  - \$30,000 to \$39,999 \_\_\_
  - \$40,000 to \$49,999 \_\_\_
  - \$50,000 to \$59,000 \_\_\_
  - \$60,000 to \$69,000 \_\_\_
  - \$70,000 to \$79,000 \_\_\_
  - \$80,000 to \$89,000 \_\_\_
  - \$90,000 to \$99,000 \_\_\_
  - \$100,000 to 149,000 \_\_\_
  - \$150,000 or more \_\_\_
7. Please indicate your parents' highest level of education.
  - Less than high school \_\_\_
  - A high school degree or GED \_\_\_
  - Some college or technical or associate's degree \_\_\_

- Bachelor's degree \_\_\_\_
- Post-bachelor's degree certificate \_\_\_\_
- Master's degree \_\_\_\_
- Doctorate or professional degree \_\_\_\_

8. Please indicate your race.

- White or Caucasian \_\_\_\_
- Black or African American \_\_\_\_
- Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx \_\_\_\_
- Asian American or Asian \_\_\_\_
- Mixed Race \_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_

9. Please indicate your gender.

- Male \_\_\_\_
- Female \_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_

10. Please indicate your GPA. \_\_\_\_

*Directions: You will be asked these questions by the researcher. Please answer the questions as extensively as you would like.*

1. Please tell me about your experiences with academic performance.
2. Please tell me about how well you think you do academically compared to other students.
3. Please tell me about what worries you may have regarding your participation in an honors program.
4. Please tell me about how your worries may have negatively or positively impact your view of the honors programs here.
5. Please tell me about how your race may have impacted your experience(s).
6. Please tell me about how your sex/gender identity may have impacted your experience(s).
7. Please tell me about whether you feel accepted and why or why not