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2021

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The Role of Admissions Practices in Diversifying Honors Populations: A Case Study

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Abstract: While there is scant evidence that standardized test results (SAT/ACT) predict college success, these scores can act as barriers to college admissions and honors programs, particularly for students in underserved communities. This study examines the impact of transitioning from an honors admission framework—in which standardized tests are a key variable in the process—to a test-blind environment with holistic admissions protocols that identify students who are academically strong as well as engaged in extracurricular activities. Parallel (test-dependent and test-blind) admissions protocols were used in 2020–2021 applications to determine if a test-blind environment fostered greater inclusivity and diversity in the first-year honors cohort. Data suggest that test-blind transitions yielded a more ethnically diverse honors applicant pool as well as first-year cohort population. Results also indicate that students of color are more likely to notice the test-blind admission option and that this option is more likely to have an effect on their decision to apply than on their white counterparts. Survey respondents ($n = 105$) also attest to their confidence in graduating with honors. While high across ethnicities and genders, rankings of desire and commitment to remain in the program are highest among Black and Hispanic students. Augmenting data on test-blind admissions, the authors reflect on the newly adopted holistic review process, acknowledging that other aspects of admissions must be addressed for achieving meaningful diversity and inclusion in honors.

Keywords: university & college admission; educational equalization; standardized tests; holistic admissions review; Northern Illinois University (IL)—Honors Program

Citation: *Honors in Practice*, 2021, Vol. 17:45–62

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the National Collegiate Honors Council published *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*, an online paper that sets forth guidelines for inclusive admissions practices. The authors note that dependence on standardized test scores is among the most problematic admissions practices for honors programs as they benefit students from privileged backgrounds and lack predictive value regarding college success. The authors also note that inclusion has been an important topic within the honors community for over a decade, with programs increasingly moving away from admissions criteria rooted in standardized test scores and toward holistic admissions appraisals.

Evidence of the lack of correlation between standardized test results and college success continues to mount (Green & Kimbrough, 2008; Khé, 2007; McKay, 2009; Smith & Zagurski, 2013), and a burgeoning body of research shows these test scores are a barrier to entry for students from underserved communities. Rhea (2017) observes that Hispanic and African American students are likely to have lower standardized scores than students from other backgrounds (135). He references the ACT National Graduating Class 2016 data, which showed that on average African American students scored 5.2 points lower and Hispanic students scored 3.5 points lower than White students. These deficits have stayed remarkably consistent over the last four years: the ACT Profile Report for the class of 2020 states that African American students scored 5.3 points on average below White students and that Hispanic students continued to score 3.5 points lower.

Both Rhea (2017) and McKay (2009) discuss the hindrance that standardized tests present to diversity in honors programs. The issues they tackle are of concern at Northern Illinois University (NIU) as well, where the University Honors Program (NIU UHP) has failed to mirror the diversity of the wider institution historically. Looking at the entering class of fall 2018, when the institution began to focus on equity issues in the NIU UHP, Black students made up 31% of the incoming first-year class but only 3% of the incoming honors class. An important impediment was clearly the gatekeeping of standardized test scores. Fewer than 6% of the Black incoming first-year students qualified for the UHP according to standardized test scores as compared to 23% of White students. In fact, Asian and Hispanic first-year students of that year also lagged behind White students with about 6% of each group eligible for honors given their test scores. With an eye to addressing these inequities, NIU and the NIU UHP began to plan for a test-blind admissions environment.

This essay offers some important insights garnered from the NIU UHP's transition from an admissions framework in which standardized tests were a key variable in the gatekeeping process to a test-blind environment and a holistic admissions protocol. For the 2020–2021 school year, the NIU UHP ran parallel admissions protocols that provided a unique opportunity to test the hypothesis that a test-blind environment fosters inclusivity and greater diversity. This parallel process along with a survey given to the incoming first-year cohort in 2020 provided the NIU UHP the opportunity to investigate the following questions:

1. Does holistic review attract students from diverse backgrounds to apply to honors programs?
2. Does the holistic review process help diversify the honors student population?
3. How do honors programs ensure that holistic review does not embed patterns of privilege?

Based on the data collected, this transition yielded a more diverse pool of applicants as well as a more diverse entering NIU UHP class. The initial lessons gleaned from holistic review also provide the beginnings of important conversations about best holistic admissions practices. As more programs begin to take on the challenge of adopting inclusive admissions practices, sharing experiences such as these both (1) helps confirm the building consensus about the negative effects of standardized tests for admissions gatekeeping and (2) establishes robust entrance mechanisms that identify diverse, active, and dedicated honor students.

METHODS

NIU adopted a test-blind institutional approach for undergraduate admissions that took effect for fall 2021 admissions. The NIU UHP started its shift to test-blind holistic review one year earlier, for fall 2020 admissions. During the fall 2020 admissions cycle, the NIU UHP recognized both the outgoing admissions criteria and the incoming holistic review protocols. Applicants could automatically qualify for admission by meeting test score and high school GPA (HSGPA) thresholds based on the outgoing catalog language, but they were also informed that they could opt out of providing test scores and submit to holistic review. These circumstances occurred because of the transition and overlap between the outgoing and the new admissions

protocols but also presented a unique opportunity to conduct important research about how the two protocols might affect diversity.

Please note that the NIU UHP also admits transfer and continuing students. In this study, the data reflect only first-year admissions as the issue is primarily moving from mandatory standardized test score minimums to test-blind holistic review.

Three sets of data are reflected in this study. First are the first-year applications received for fall 2019 and fall 2020. Second are the data on how all first-year students were admitted into the NIU UHP to see if greater diversity was achieved through holistic review where standardized test scores were not provided or failed to meet the score threshold that was applied previously. Third is a survey conducted to determine if applicants were aware of the test optional policy and if this knowledge made a difference in their decision to apply to the NIU UHP. The second set of data helps ascertain if certain mechanisms provide a more equitable gateway into the program, and the first and third attempt to glean whether the pool of applicants expanded with the test optional feature for fall 2020 applicants.

Admission Criteria Overview

The outgoing criteria were thresholds of HSGPA (3.75) and SAT (1280)/ACT (27) scores, which, if met, garnered the applicant automatic acceptance to the NIU UHP.

The new holistic review scores several measures of preparedness on a scale of 0–3, with different relative weighting given to the various measures:

- Academic record/academic preparedness: HSGPA (50%)
- Academic record/academic preparedness: AP credits/classes (10%)
- Commitment/interest in honors education principles (enrichment, engagement, drive, curiosity): Essay content (10%)
- Communication/academic preparedness: Essay style (10%)
- Engagement Record (co- and extra-curricular engagement, leadership potential, meaningful responsibilities in academics or outside of academics, including work): Activities and obligations (20%)

HSGPA is weighted heavily because it is a proven predictor of academic success (McKay, 2009:79). Since the NIU UHP has co-curricular as well as curricular requirements, it is valuable to gauge if the applicants value engagement, but in an effort not to penalize students whose personal and financial

circumstances do not permit them to participate in such unpaid activities, significant work or home obligations are awarded high rubric scores (Badenhausen, 2018:11). The essay is largely meant as a measure of interest in and probable commitment to the program as well as its proficiency as a written piece of communication. Access to AP courses and tests can certainly be problematic; if distinctions by background begin to emerge as data from holistic review is gathered, then this measure will be reconsidered.

In addition to the holistic review provision, the NIU UHP instituted a conditional admission category of admission. Conditional admission means that students score slightly below the ideal rubric range for entrance into the program and are admitted to the UHP on a conditional basis. Students admitted in the “conditional” range in fall 2020 were not made aware of this fact but were provided with opportunities for extra advising and other support for their first couple of semesters in the program. As the holistic approach was new, the NIU UHP wanted to identify a range of academic and engagement scores that would accord with probable success in the program but, at the same time, identify a benefit-of-the-doubt admissions range to ensure that privilege was not inadvertently included in the new holistic review. After all, privilege also manifests itself with better guidance in completing admissions essays and so forth.

For fall 2020 NIU UHP admissions, applicants could choose to provide standardized test scores or submit to holistic review. On the evaluation side, all applications—even those with test scores and HSGPAs that met the outgoing automatic admission criteria—were assessed through the holistic review mechanism. From the applicant’s point of view, they were accepted into the program if they passed either the holistic review or the automatic admission criteria. For the sake of this study, it was possible to see if the makeup of the honors student body changed or became more diverse as a result of the test-blind holistic review as opposed to the automatic admission criteria that relied in large part on standardized test scores. Going forward, students will all be assessed based on holistic review, and standardized test scores will not be accepted.

Survey Overview

An online survey was launched on September 10, 2020, via email to 212 first-year students who applied and were admitted to the NIU UHP and registered at NIU in the fall 2020 semester. Of these 212 students, 182 ended up as the first-year honors cohort, with 40 of the applicants admitted to the NIU

UHP failing to complete the mandatory honors orientation process. For the purposes of the survey, it made sense to contact all NIU students who experienced the NIU UHP fall 2020 application process.

Three email reminders were sent on September 14, 17, and 21. The survey closed two days after the final email reminder. In the final tally, 112 students began the survey and 105 completed it for a response rate of 50.5%. As Table 1 indicates, the demographic makeup of the respondents closely approximates the full fall 2020 UHP cohort. The survey instrument focused on whether the applicants were affected by the option not to submit standardized test scores (i.e., SAT or ACT) in order to gain entry to the NIU UHP. In addition to a short series of questions querying whether they provided test scores (including the actual test score, if they remembered), all respondents were asked the following three questions:

1. When completing the application to join the University Honors Program, were you aware that you could qualify based on two different sets of criteria: automatic admission through high school GPA and standardized test scores OR through a holistic review that did not include standardized test scores? (Yes or no answer)
2. Did the option to apply without submitting standardized test scores have any effect on your decision to apply to the University Honors Program? Please Explain.
3. Express how likely you are to remain in the Honors program and graduate with Honors. (Likert scale, five points from “extremely likely” to “extremely unlikely”)

Using Student IDs provided as a part of the survey, the researchers located standardized test scores provided as a part of their application to NIU for 105 respondents. Due to extremely small n-sizes for some ethnicities, survey analyses will focus primarily on Black Non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and White Non-Hispanic respondents.

RESULTS

Honors First-Year Applications (2019 vs. 2020)

First-year applications grew overall from 2019 to 2020, but the number of Black and Hispanic applicants grew at dramatically higher rates, 150% and 100% respectively, than the overall applicant pool (9%) (see Table 2).

Honors First-Year Population (2019 vs. 2020)

The first-year composition of the NIU UHP diversified from 2019 to 2020. While White students made up 79% of the first-year entering class of 2019, they made up 62% of the 2020 fall entering class in the NIU UHP. The number of Black first-year students in honors tripled, and the number of Hispanic first-year students in the program doubled (see Table 3).

Method of Admission into the NIU UHP

The dual admission assessment conducted made it possible to determine under which admission protocol each applicant was accepted and, ultimately, whether the holistic appraisal aided the process of diversification.

Holistic review makes a clear difference for both Black and Hispanic students. Without holistic review, the percentages of the Black and White honors

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC MAKEUP OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS VS. 2020 UHP COHORT

Demographic	Sample		Cohort	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Asian Non-Hispanic	7	7	13	7
Black Non-Hispanic	11	10	20	11
Hispanic	16	15	26	14
Other			1	1
No Response	1	1	1	1
Two or More Races	3	3	9	5
White Non-Hispanic	67	64	112	62
Totals	105	100	182	100

TABLE 2. HONORS FIRST-YEAR APPLICATIONS 2019 VS. 2020

Demographic	Number of Applicants 2019	Number of Applicants 2020	Percent Growth
Asian Non-Hispanic	21	22	5
Black Non-Hispanic	12	30	150
Hispanic	13	26	100
Other	23	15	- 35
White Non-Hispanic	158	154	- 3
Totals	227	247	9

populations would resemble the breakdown of the 2019 incoming class where the former made up 5% of the honors population and the latter 79% (see Table 3). Almost four times more Black students were admitted through holistic review than qualified through test scores; over twice the number of Hispanic students were admitted through holistic review than qualified through test scores. Asian students were fairly evenly distributed between the two modes of admission criteria while twice as many White students were admitted through qualifying test scores than through holistic review, thus qualifying through both gateways.

Conditional Holistic Admissions into the NIU UHP

Without the conditional holistic admissions provision, the fall 2020 class would have been less diverse. Black applicants in particular are overrepresented in this conditional admissions category. Of the 29 Black students who were admitted, 23 were admitted holistically, and 15 of these 23 would have qualified without the conditional admission category (see Tables 4 and 5).

The conditional admissions category housed two kinds of applicants: (1) those who struggled on the automatic test score criteria and scored in a mediocre range on the holistic review and (2) applicants who likely relied on their test scores for admission and did not make adequate effort on their holistic applications. In the conditional admissions category, 61% had qualifying test scores. Of White applicants who were admitted conditionally based on their holistic scores, 72% had qualifying standardized test scores compared to 27% of Black applicants. Hispanic and Asian applicants who scored in the conditional holistic range also lagged well below White applicants in this range. The “other” category was too small and heterogenous to draw any conclusions.

TABLE 3. NEW FIRST-YEAR HONORS STUDENTS BY ETHNICITY

Demographic	Fall 2019		Fall 2020	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Asian Non-Hispanic	5	4	13	7
Black Non-Hispanic	6	5	20	11
Hispanic	13	10	26	14
Other	4	3	11	6
White Non-Hispanic	104	79	112	62
Totals	132	100	182	100

Holistic Rubric Scores by Ethnicity

As Table 6 shows, the average rubric scores by component measurement for conditionally admitted students support the supposition that some applicants scored poorly on the rubric because they were relying on their test scores and HSGPAs to be admitted automatically (via the outgoing admissions criteria). In general, there is an inverse correlation between lower HSGPA (and perhaps also lower engagement scores) and higher essay scores (particularly essay content). Recall that the essay attempted to capture the desire and motivation to join the UHP. The group that wrote the strongest essays by far were Black students, perhaps signifying the effort exerted on the part of the application that could be controlled. And the group that wrote the weakest essays were White students, who, with few exceptions, would have known that their test scores and HSGPA would guarantee them entrance into the NIU UHP.

TABLE 4. METHOD OF ADMISSION INTO THE NIU UHP FOR FALL 2020

Demographic	Qualified via Test Scores		Qualified via Holistic Review		Total Admitted	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Asian Non-Hispanic	12	9	10	9	22	9
Black Non-Hispanic	6	5	23	21	29	12
Hispanic	7	5	17	16	24	10
Other	5	4	9	8	14	6
White Non-Hispanic	103	77	49	45	152	63
Totals	133	100	108	100	241	100

Note: All but 3 admitted first-year students who qualified through test scores also qualified through holistic review. Those identified as qualifying through holistic review qualified only through holistic review.

TABLE 5. CONDITIONAL HOLISTIC ADMISSIONS INTO THE NIU UHP

Demographic	Qualified via Test		Did Not Qualify via Test		Total	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Asian	4	57	3	43	7	100
Black	3	27	8	73	11	100
Hispanic	3	60	2	40	5	100
Other	3	75	1	25	4	100
White	23	72	9	28	32	100
Totals	36	61	23	39	59	100

Whether scoring very high on the admissions rubric or scoring toward the lower “conditional” end of the spectrum, a minority of Black students had standardized test scores that qualified for automatic admission; 27% of Black students who were admitted conditionally and 20% of Black students who scored in the highest holistic echelon had qualifying test scores (see Table 7). For Hispanic and Asian applicants, the data are not as consistent. The makeup of Asian students in the honors-admitted pool of students does not vary a great deal according to type of admission, and while admission through test scores falls below that of White students, it is much higher than for Black students. For both White and Hispanic students, a greater percentage of the group qualified through test scores when admitted conditionally than when achieving the highest rubric scores possible; this again likely relates to the amount of effort that went into the application when applicants were aware of meeting the automatic test criteria while completing the application.

TABLE 6. AVERAGE RUBRIC SCORES (RANGE 0–3) FOR CONDITIONAL ADMITS (FALL 2020)

Demographic	GPA (0–3)	AP (0–3)	Essay Style (0–3)	Essay Content (0–3)	Engagement (0–3)
Asian	2.86	0.43	0.57	0.71	1.71
Black	2.27	0.73	1.73	1.91	1.64
Hispanic	2.60	0.20	0.80	0.80	2.60
White	2.70	0.64	0.58	0.55	2.21

TABLE 7. CONDITIONAL VS. HIGH RUBRIC SCORES BY ETHNICITY/RACE

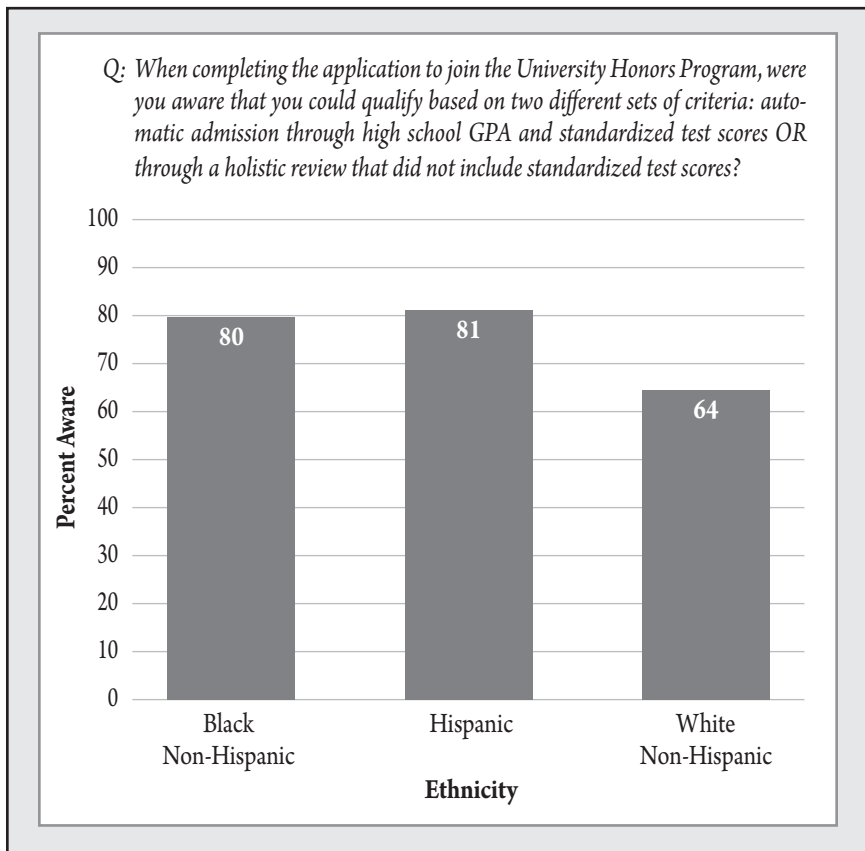
Demographic	Conditional Holistic Admission		Highest Rubric Scores (28+ out of 30)		Qualified via Test Scores	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Conditional	Highest
					Percent	Percent
Asian	7	12	7	9	57	57
Black	11	19	5	7	27	20
Hispanic	5	8	3	4	60	33
White	32	54	55	73	72	64
Other	4	7	5	7	75	0
Totals	59	100	75	100	—	—

Survey Findings: Attitudes Toward Holistic Review Admission Option

Figure 1 reports the percent of respondents, by ethnicity, who were aware of the option to submit or not submit standardized test scores as a part of their honors application. Although most students were aware of this option (78%), Black and Hispanic students were much more aware of this option than their White peers.

Figure 2 shows the percent of respondents who reported that the option not to submit standardized test scores as a part of their honors application played a role in their decision to apply. As the figure indicates, the option not to submit test scores was more significant for Black and Hispanic students than for their White peers and for women more than for men.

FIGURE 1. PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS, BY ETHNICITY, WHO WERE AWARE OF THE OPTIONAL SUBMISSION OF TEST SCORES



When asked *Did you provide any standardized test scores when you applied to the honors program?*, a total of 68% of the respondents indicated that they had provided test scores as a part of their honors application. This matched closely with the percent of respondents who actually qualified for the honors program through their standardized test scores. In contrast, those who responded either “no” or “don’t recall” overwhelmingly did not meet the stated standardized test score thresholds for admission into the NIU UHP. Table 8 reports the number and percent of students who provided their test scores as a part of their honors application. As the table indicates, Black students were less likely to provide standardized test scores and more likely not to recall submitting standardized test scores than their Hispanic and White peers.

FIGURE 2. PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED THAT THE OPTION NOT TO SUBMIT TEST SCORES PLAYED A ROLE IN THEIR DECISION TO APPLY

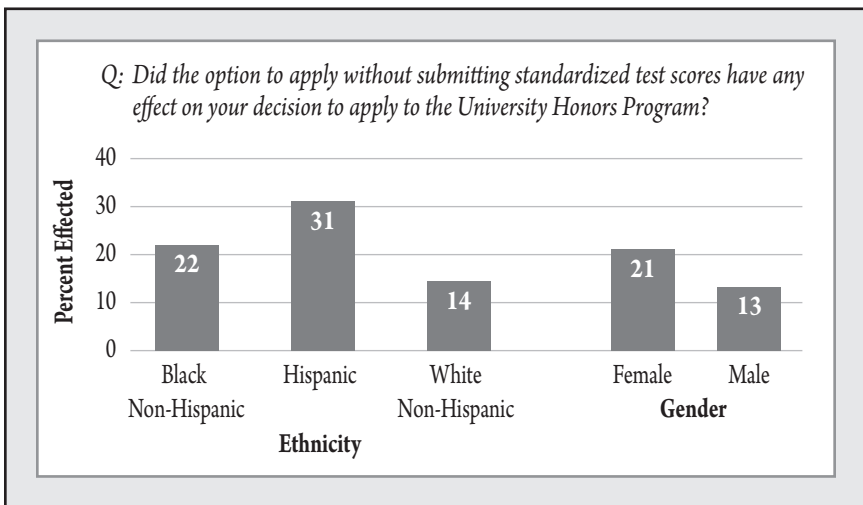


TABLE 8. STUDENT RESPONSES WHEN ASKED IF THEY PROVIDED TEST SCORES WITH THEIR APPLICATION

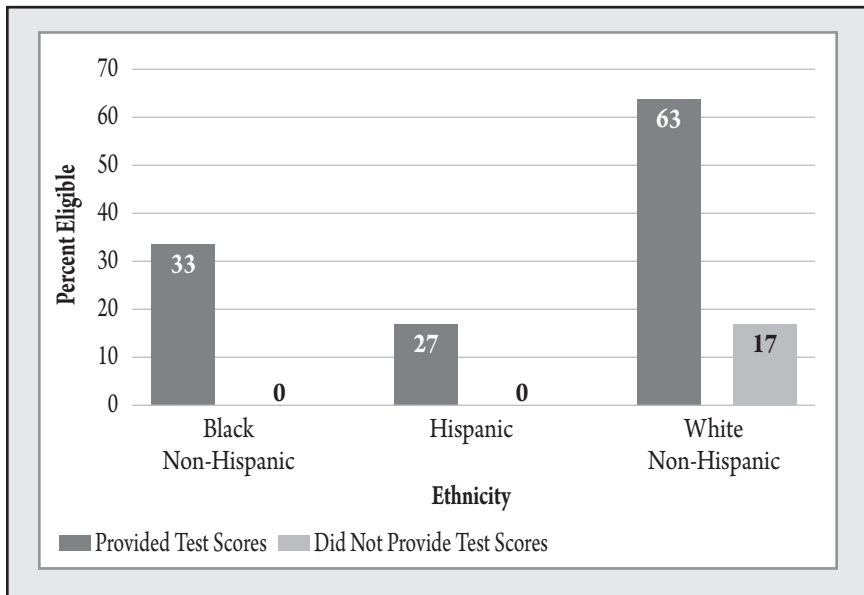
Demographic	Yes		No		Don't Recall	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Black Non-Hispanic	6	55	2	18	3	27
Hispanic	11	69	3	19	2	13
White Non-Hispanic	49	73	7	10	11	16

Recall that standardized test scores were institutionally available for nearly every respondent regardless of whether they provided them as part of their honors application. Figure 3 shows the percent of students who were eligible for honors based on their standardized test scores. These data were further disaggregated by each student's ethnicity and their decision to provide standardized test scores as a part of their honors application. White students who provided standardized test scores were more likely to be eligible for honors than their Black and Hispanic peers (63% versus 33% and 27%, respectively). Furthermore, Black and Hispanic respondents who chose not to submit test scores were universally ineligible for honors (via standardized test scores).

Students were provided with an opportunity to explain why they chose to provide or not to provide test scores. The explanations for not providing test scores can be divided into three categories:

1. Test scores do not reflect overall ability to succeed in honors. (31%)
2. Tests scores are too low, and not submitting them provided me with the opportunity to gain entry. (56%)
3. I submitted scores even if not necessary. (13%)

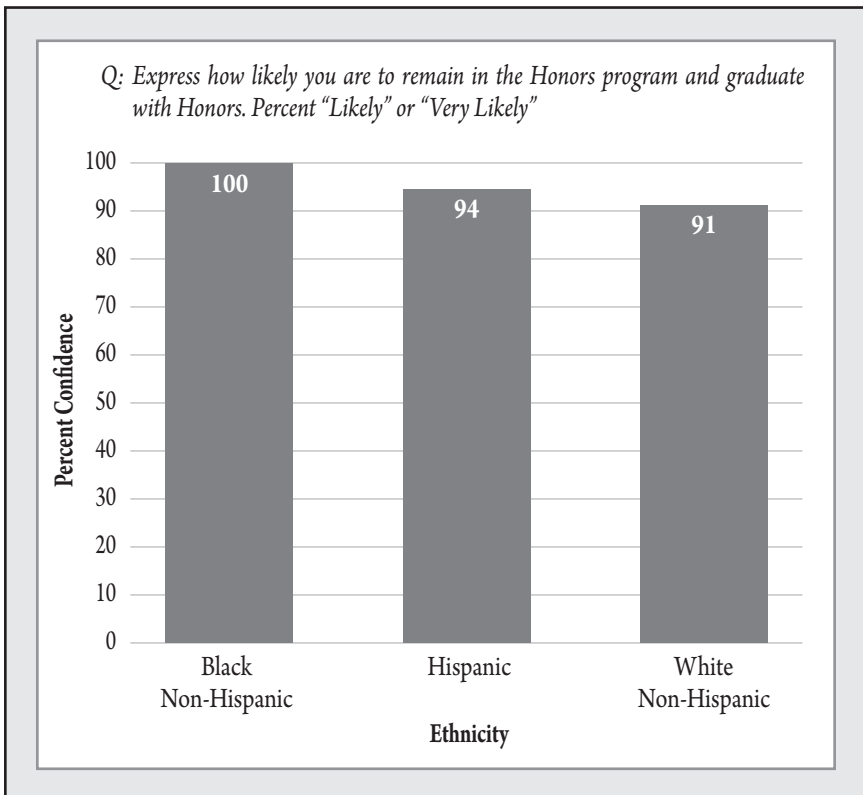
FIGURE 3. PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO WERE ELIGIBLE FOR HONORS BASED ON THEIR STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES BY WHETHER THEY PROVIDED TEST SCORES AND ETHNICITY



The most common response for not submitting their test scores was that they were too low for admission, suggesting that eliminating the requirement for a test score encouraged some students to apply for honors who might not otherwise have done so although no particular ethnicity was more likely to feel this way.

Figure 4 reports the students' confidence in graduating With Honors by ethnicity. While confidence is high across the ethnicities and genders, it is highest among Black and Hispanic students, but perhaps rather than confidence, this response expresses a desire and commitment to remaining in the program.

FIGURE 4. STUDENT CONFIDENCE IN GRADUATING WITH HONORS BY ETHNICITY



ANALYSIS

The implications of this study for its three research questions are as follows:

Question 1

Does holistic review attract students from diverse backgrounds to apply to honors programs?

The answer to this question appears to be yes. The holistic review provided an opportunity for students to gain entry into the NIU UHP who would not have had that opportunity based on the former entrance criteria. For fall 2020, a more diverse group of students applied to the program. Table 2 shows that applications from Black students increased by 150% from 2019 and applications from Hispanic students by 100%. Applications and admissions for White students stayed relatively flat over the two admissions cycles. While the reasons for this shift may be varied, including the fact that the institution grows more diverse each year, we can confidently say that the holistic review option provided an avenue into the program that encouraged applications by students from diverse and underserved backgrounds and communities. Through the survey, we saw that Black and Hispanic students were more aware of the option not to provide test scores than their White peers and that this option affected their decision to apply at significantly higher rates than their White peers: 22% of Black respondents, 31% of Hispanic respondents, and 14% of White respondents said the existence of the holistic, test-free option influenced their decision to apply.

Question 2

Does the holistic review process help diversify the honors student population?

With one year of holistic review completed, the answer is also yes. While not all honors programs suffer from a deficit in diversity vis-à-vis the wider institutional or community contexts, some—such as the NIU UHP—do. In these cases, the results of our study encourage programs to consider whether standardized test thresholds primarily act as a form of exclusionary gatekeeping. In the NIU environment, Black students are deeply disadvantaged when it comes to standardized test scores. Out of the 29 Black students who were admitted, 23, or 79%, did so holistically and not through the test scores. Four out of the five Black students who scored 28 out of 30 on the rubric would not

have qualified based on their standardized test scores. Hispanic students are also disadvantaged by the test score requirement: of the 24 Hispanic students admitted into the NIU UHP, 17 or 70% qualified based on holistic review alone.

The survey results also show that applicants are aware of the implications when programs do or do not provide them with an opportunity to be admitted without standardized test scores. Most applicants said they would have applied regardless of whether the standardized test scores were mandatory, but among those who were affected by the option not to provide these scores, many provided accounts of why this mattered to them. About a third of those who offered comments said that test scores do not reflect their ability to succeed. One respondent wrote: “I love how the University Honors Program gave me the opportunity to display all that I had accomplished throughout my four years of high school outside of standardized testing.” Others expressed similar sentiments, linking their belief that standardized tests do not tell the story of a person’s promise to their affinity for the UHP for sharing this point of view with them. Holistic review can attract students who see in test optional/blind policies a program that acknowledges them as whole individuals.

Question 3

How do honors programs ensure that holistic review does not embed patterns of privilege?

NIU UHP’s experience of the last year shows the impact that the conditional holistic admission had on diversifying the fall 2020 class. Eight out of the 29 Black students who were admitted to the program qualified under conditional holistic admissions, so a quarter of Black students would not have had the honors opportunity based on test scores or strong rubric scores. Having no maximum number of program participants, we decided in the early days of setting rubric cutoffs to consider the “maybe” scores in favor of the students. Students are not stigmatized or treated any differently if admitted in this manner, but program staff do reach out more frequently and enforce a stricter advising protocol to help these students meet their goal of succeeding in the honors program.

CONCLUSION

The NIU UHP’s experience of the transition to a test-blind admission process provides welcome news that these sorts of changes can bring fast shifts toward more inclusive honors student populations, bolstering the theory that

admissions protocols rooted in standardized test scores can contribute to equity issues for underserved minorities. Based on the data reported here, a more diverse applicant pool can emerge from the shift to test-blind holistic admissions.

The hard work of building equitable gateways while also identifying students who are suited to make the most of their honors education does not stop with abandoning standardized tests. As consensus about the appropriateness of holistic review grows and as more programs jettison their standardized test regimes, identifying students who are academically strong as well as engaged in extracurricular activities is a key issue in honors admissions. The holistic review that the NIU UHP is currently using will no doubt need to evolve; we offer it not as a model but as an attempt to share with transparency the beginnings of a new admissions regime. Inclusive admissions practices need to include many other considerations that the authors of the NCHC position paper mention, including reevaluating invitation-based honors program promotion and the overall narratives that describe honors missions to prospective students (NCHC’s *Honors Enrollment Management*, 2020; see also Badenhausen, 2018).

One meaningful insight from our year-long study is that applicants tended to notice and appreciate that holistic review meant that the full extent of their work over many years mattered to an honors program. Holistic review may help both with diversity and with fit, telegraphing what values an honors program hopes to instill and how it will further growth and fulfillment in the course of completion.

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