

# Civic Tolerance among Honors Students

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The large literature on the impact that college has on student attitudes and values, which includes work by researchers such as Astin, Newcomb, Pascarella and Terenzini, also includes studies that have focused specifically on the effects of a college education on student tolerance (Hall & Rodeghier; Henderson-King; Lawrence & Licari; Rich; Taylor; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora). This literature, however, contains virtually nothing on the impact that honors has on the social attitudes of honors college students. Thus, neither of Pascarella's and Terenzini's massive 1991 and 2005 reviews of the research literature on the effects of college on student values cited any studies that focused on the attitudinal or social consequences of an honors education. This absence is surprising since, for the past half-century, a substantial number of our country's brightest students have enrolled in honors programs (Long; Shushok; Willingham).

In a 2007 article, Seifert et al. also commented on the surprising paucity of research addressing the educational outcomes of participating in honors programs. In their analysis of eighteen four-year colleges and universities, they found that honors students were advantaged by "good practice" teaching measures in honors classes and reported significant positive effects of honors programs on critical thinking, mathematics, and cognitive development. They focused narrowly on cognitive learning outcomes, as measured by standardized tests of intellectual and cognitive development, rather than the impact of an honors education on students' values and social attitudes.

As important as cognitive outcomes are in assessing the educational merits of honors programs, we must still ask whether honors programs affect the values and social attitudes of their students differently than other students: in particular, whether honors students are more or less tolerant than other students and, if so, in what ways and why. We have little empirical evidence on what arguably is an important but understudied area in the sociology of higher education.

We consider the cultivation of civic tolerance in a democratic society as a laudable goal of higher education generally and of an honors education in particular. To discover whether honors advances this goal, we review an attraction-accentuation model for understanding college student development, summarize our methodology for replicating a survey of civic tolerance at comparison schools in Michigan and Arkansas, describe how we defined civic tolerance for the purposes of our study, and summarize the results of our data analysis to test hypotheses concerning the cultivation of civic tolerance among honors students at the two schools.

### **CIVIC TOLERANCE AS A FUNCTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

Complex, pluralistic societies that are not united by a limited range of shared social and cultural characteristics must find ways to transcend their internal differences in order to function effectively in meeting people's needs and sustaining their political rights. This need is central to modern democracies in which social and cultural diversity are the norm. Recognizing and protecting minority as well as majority rights is a major challenge for all democratic states in the contemporary world (Almond & Verba; Gibson; Jorgensen; Sullivan & Transue).

As a foremost exponent of democracy, the United States has experienced its fair share of problems in confronting the pernicious consequences of ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, religious intolerance, and corresponding forms of social discrimination in an increasingly diversified and complex society. Tolerance of diversity under the law—in which sundry groups of people are afforded liberty and security in pursuit of their life goals—has become one of the cardinal requirements of modern democracy for minimizing social strife and promoting a civil society. Tolerance in this regard does not require moral agreement or approval. To the contrary, Susanne Karstedt argues that tolerance is a concept that must be defined negatively:

It is not an expression of benevolence, but embodies a sense of disapproval. Tolerance is the deliberate choice not to interfere with conducts and beliefs, lifestyles and behaviors, of which one disapproves. Tolerance is defined by passivity, not activity, and it is non-reaction and non-interference that characterizes tolerant attitudes and behaviors. (5012)

Deliberate non-interference in the lives, customs, and beliefs of people with whom others differ in a democratic society implies recognition of and respect for their rights under the law; this may be called “civic tolerance.” Acknowledging that tolerance does not denote approval, in more positive terms we

define civic tolerance as “the recognition and respect for the equal civil rights and liberties of people whose social status and cultural preferences are different from one’s own.”

Professed recognition of and respect for minority rights are not tantamount to practicing tolerance in daily life or implementing and enforcing tolerance measures enacted in law. We should be mindful of the distinction between human ideals and peoples’ actual behavior and normative practices and of the substantial discrepancies that often divide them. While tolerance in action is ultimately paramount, however, we cannot plausibly expect contemporary mass societies to institute and successfully practice civic tolerance if attitudes of tolerance are not morally justified and vigorously promoted by civic, intellectual, religious, and educational leaders.

Thus we may say that civic tolerance is both a social attitude and corresponding practice whose cultivation is never easy. John Dewey and others have long argued that one of the important functions of public education is the socialization of young people for citizenship roles in a pluralistic society (Dewey; Biesta; Levinson). Higher education in particular has been linked to the cultivation of an expanding world view, greater appreciation for cultural diversity, and more tolerant attitudes congenial with the constitutional mandates of American democracy (Chang; Chang & Ledesma; Engberg, “Educating”; Engberg & Hurtado; Henderson-King; Kimball; King & Kitchener; Menand). In addition to promoting the presumptive broadening impact that a liberal arts curriculum has on student social values and critical thinking skills, Simone Himbeault Taylor makes the case that college and university officials should be proactive in implementing their institutions’ commitment to diversity and tolerance by sponsoring “cocurricular diversity experiences” outside, as well as inside, the classroom (292). Co-curricular activities in the form of volunteerism and community service projects have, in fact, been linked to the promotion of increased civic responsibility among college students in recent years (Astin & Sax; Astin, Sax, & Avalos; Engberg, “Promoting”; Engberg & Fox; Hunter & Brisbin; Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado; Pryor et al.; Sax).

The value of a liberal arts education for active citizenship in general and the particular value of programmatic exposure to diversity experiences in the development of civic tolerance, including co-curricular activities, are typically an explicit emphasis in contemporary honors programs.

## **THE CIVIC TOLERANCE GOALS OF AN HONORS COLLEGE EDUCATION**

The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) numbers among its membership hundreds of affiliate institutions that collectively enroll thousands of high-achieving students annually in both public and private schools,

## CIVIC TOLERANCE AMONG HONORS STUDENTS

including research universities, four-year colleges, and two-year colleges. On the basis of grades, scholarships, retention and graduation rates, awards, admissions to post-graduate or professional degree programs, and occupational attainments following their undergraduate careers, honors students as a group are among the highest-achieving students in American higher education (Easterbrook; Sederberg; Willingham).

Honors programs are designed to reinforce classical liberal arts objectives of free inquiry, critical thinking, and the reasoned exposition of creative ideas and new technologies in conjunction with humane values. The NCHC's Core Values Statement emphasizes "the importance of life-long learning and social responsibility in preparing individuals for an increasingly complex world" <<http://www.nchchonors.org/public-press/about-nchc>>. According to the NCHC website, honors curricula encourage students "to pursue active learning experiences, such as independent study, undergraduate research, and study abroad, or to seek learner-centered courses that fall outside of the typical curriculum, such as field study, seminars, mini-courses, or internships" <<http://www.nchchonors.org/faculty-directors/honors-teaching>>. In summarizing the principle teaching objectives of honors courses, the NCHC gives official emphasis to "creating a classroom environment that is open to many perspectives and points of view . . . where [students] learn to respect each other . . . and where they are taught to consider both the immediate and long term consequences of their ideas" <<http://www.nchchonors.org/faculty-directors/honors-course-design>>. In general, the NCHC asserts that "an honors program or college is designed to ensure that the most academically motivated students are challenged to achieve at their highest potential as individuals while preparing for their responsibilities to the community" <<http://www.nchchonors.org/faculty-directors/honors-teaching>>.

These admirable educational objectives are well-suited to the cultivation of civic responsibility among some of our best-educated undergraduates as they look forward to assuming adult roles and responsibilities in their future careers. We cannot simply assume, however, that such ideals are fully or even partially realized in practice. We must ask to what extent, if any, an honors education has an actual impact on students' civic responsibility, including civic tolerance toward various marginalized minority groups. The attraction-accentuation model of student development for conceptualizing the types of students whom honors programs ideally cultivate can help us start to address this question.

## THE ATTRACTION-ACCENTUATION MODEL OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

A college education of any type should ideally open students' minds to a larger world beyond the parochial confines of their local environments and promote critical thinking skills consistent with their civic responsibilities. With its emphasis on liberal arts values congenial to an appreciation for the problems of human diversity, an honors education in particular ideally promotes attitudes of civic tolerance among some of our country's brightest students, many of whom will eventually be moving into various leadership positions in their future careers (Freyman, "When It's Bad"). An attraction-accentuation model of college student development helps us understand what (besides scholarship money) attracts academically eligible students to honors programs and what effects their participation in these programs has on their personal values and social attitudes.

The attraction-accentuation model of higher education posits that students' initial social attitudes, formed prior to entering college, are reinforced by attraction to and participation in programs that advocate values with which they already agree (Feldman & Newcomb; Feldman & Weiler; Pascarella & Terenzini). Whatever factors or personal characteristics selectively propel students toward a particular academic setting or major, their predispositions are likely to be reinforced and extended by the experience acquired in those selected settings. In short, students' initial intellectual and attitudinal inclinations typically are accentuated by their college experiences as they pursue different educational career paths. Assuming that honors students are no different from other students in this regard, we infer that honors colleges and programs tend to attract and recruit bright undergraduates who are not only academically qualified but also predisposed to the critical thinking and liberal arts curriculum emphasized in honors programs (Freyman, "What is an Honors Student?"). In *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited*, Alexander W. Astin provided an empirical typology of college students, based on CIRP survey data, showing that the students most likely to enroll in honors programs were "scholarly" types, which in turn correlated positively with their critical thinking ability and interest in discussing political/social issues. That honors students are more likely to demonstrate critical thinking and show a greater interest in discussing political and social issues has been confirmed by Seifert et al. and by Shushok. At the same time, a liberal arts emphasis in honors programs appears to appeal more strongly not only to certain types of students but also to those faculty members who are attracted to active involvement and leadership positions as directors of honors programs, a majority of whom express relatively liberal political and social values (Shepherd & Shepherd, "War Attitudes").

Honors students, like any designated student population, are likely to display a range of aptitudes, values, interests, and character traits. Predictably, however, intellectual and value differences among honors students are likely to be significantly smaller than among other students enrolled at the same institution. At the same time, similar to their honors faculty mentors, students attracted to honors tend to be idealistic, responsive to humanistic values, and open to intellectually questioning the cultural trends and social practices of their society. Even though they themselves are educationally advantaged, they are more likely to sympathize with minority struggles than to advocate or support elite privileges (Shepherd & Shepherd, "Liberal Tolerance").

We surmise that matriculation in honors programs puts many students into close association for the first time with a concentration of peers who share their intellectualism and relatively tolerant values. Research on college peer influence typically has shown that students' values and social attitudes are more likely to be affected by association with fellow students than by the formal instruction they receive in their academic courses (Dey; Harris; Mayhew & Engberg; Milem; Newcomb & Wilson). At the same time, institutional conditions most conducive to faculty influence on students' values are typically found in small residential colleges that feature a relative homogeneity of both faculty and student interests coupled with an opportunity for regular, informal interaction between students and their instructors (Newcomb; Feldman & Newcomb; Feldman & Weiler; Pascarella & Terenzini).

Research on institutional conditions that maximize the intellectual impact of faculty-student relations has been incorporated into the residential college movement, which emphasizes the cultivation of peer attachments in an academic setting and closer contact with faculty mentors in order to bolster student retention and improve academic success rates at larger institutions (Golde & Pribbenow; Inkelas & Weisman; Jessup-Anger; Johnson & Romanoff; Pike, Schoeder, & Berry). This research is congruent with the attraction-accentuation model of student learning, which predicts that students who are attracted to programs that sponsor ideas to which they are predisposed have their views reinforced by close association with peers and faculty who share their academic interests. Even when situated on the campuses of large, multi-collegiate universities, honors programs attempt to implement close relationships between like-minded students and faculty and to mimic the academic environments of small, liberal arts colleges.

### **STUDENT TOLERANCE AT A NORTHERN AND A SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY**

One preliminary attempt to address the question of student tolerance and the accentuation effects of an honors education was a study by Shepherd &

Shepherd (“Liberal Tolerance”) that reported the results of a student attitude survey concerning the civil rights of selected marginalized groups. Shepherd & Shepherd compared cohort samples of both honors and non-honors (“regular”) students at two state universities of similar size and institutional type in Michigan and Arkansas. Based on the attraction-accentuation model of student development, they anticipated that honors students at both universities would, on average, score higher on civic tolerance than other students. At the same time, they also anticipated that honors students would already be more tolerant compared to other students at the onset of their college careers and that they would become progressively more tolerant over time as they advanced through the various stages of their undergraduate degree programs. The study attempted to measure not only student tolerance differences within these schools but also regional differences between the two schools.

The study’s primary findings confirmed that honors students at both institutions were more tolerant of communists, atheists, and homosexuals than were other students. However, progressive accentuation of tolerant attitudes by cohort comparisons only occurred in the honors college of the Arkansas university.

The fact that honors students at both schools were more tolerant than their regular student counterparts is an important finding. But the finding that Arkansas honors students were progressively more tolerant than Michigan honors students was unexpected because of the putatively greater conservative influence of Bible-belt religion, conservative politics, and historical civil rights struggles in Southern states like Arkansas (Glass; Hankins; Lindsey & Silk). The comparative snapshot picture of student tolerance taken at these institutions over a decade ago needs to be revisited. Were the original findings a fluke? Do the same differences and patterns of honors student tolerance persist today, or would an entirely different picture emerge from a new study based on the same or similar measures employed in the original survey?

### **REPLICATION SURVEY: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMPARISON SCHOOLS**

In the fall of 2011 we administered a replication survey questionnaire to students at the same Michigan and Arkansas universities surveyed in Shepherd & Shepherd’s 2001 study. Institutionally similar in many respects, these two schools also manifest institutional differences, not the least of which is their location in different cultural regions of the country. Below we summarize both similarities and key differences between the two universities and the honors programs they sponsor. Their institutional differences can potentially help us explain statistical variations in their students’ levels of civic tolerance.

## CIVIC TOLERANCE AMONG HONORS STUDENTS

The Michigan school competes with other institutions of higher education in a populous, highly industrialized, Northern state while the Arkansas school competes for students in a small, primarily agricultural, Southern state. At the same time, both schools are small to mid-sized state universities with current student populations of approximately 11,000 in Arkansas and 19,000 in Michigan. Correspondingly, enrollment in the Arkansas honors college was approximately 300 at the time of our replication survey while the Michigan honors program enrolled approximately 600 students.

Both universities sponsor some graduate programs—especially the Michigan school, which is classified as a Carnegie I Research University—but neither is a top-tier research institution, and both are more focused on their undergraduate teaching missions. Furthermore, both schools are situated in suburban areas approximately thirty miles from their states' principal cities (Detroit and Little Rock), and both schools primarily recruit in-state residents. Both schools also actively recruit top students into their honors programs by promising a traditional, small liberal arts college experience within a multi-collegiate university setting. A significant institutional difference is that the Arkansas honors college, originally instituted as a program in 1982, has for the past dozen years operated as a fully developed college with its own faculty and administration while, in contrast, the Michigan school, in operation since 1977, continues to sponsor an academically contingent honors program that depends on faculty and curriculum offerings borrowed from participating departments.

Both schools require honors students to complete a special set of core honors courses that are designed to meet general education requirements, and students must also work closely with an academic advisor chosen from outside the honors program in carrying out an independent research project resulting in an honors thesis. Additionally, both schools sponsor study-abroad programs and provide research grants and travel funding. Both schools also feature small class sizes that encourage interactive student participation. The Arkansas honors curriculum, however, is much more standardized and features more programmatic group activities. Michigan honors students must fulfill a foreign language requirement (encouraged but not required of Arkansas students) but also have considerable latitude in choosing a minimum of four liberal arts honors courses for meeting university general education requirements. The honors courses included in the Michigan curriculum vary from one semester to the next as different university faculty members from different academic disciplines contribute courses that reflect their specialty interests. In contrast, the Arkansas honors students are required to take a cumulative series of four specially designed honors courses in their freshmen and sophomore years, and then, in their junior and senior years, complete a prescribed fifteen-hour minor



in honors disciplinary studies that is open only to honors students. All required courses in the Arkansas honors curriculum are taught by honors college core faculty.

Additionally, Arkansas honors students are housed in their own dormitory, and over seventy percent reside on campus. The honors college dormitory is organized by various student leadership groups that include honors resident assistants, an elected hall council, and upper-division freshman mentors. In contrast, at the Michigan school less than a third of honors students live on campus and, of those who do, even fewer room together in a dorm that is not exclusively set apart for honors students. Thus, residence in a designated honors college dormitory is the norm on the Arkansas campus but not at the Michigan school. Finally, in addition to the major outside speaker events, parties, and senior thesis presentations that both schools sponsor, the Arkansas honors college sponsors freshman and senior banquets and sophomore lectures as well as dances, field trips, a weekly discussion series, a foreign movies series, and a monthly op-ed/newsletter. Combined with residential campus living, these regular group activities put Arkansas honors students into more frequent contact with each other than their Michigan peers and encourages more systematic development of primary group attachments within the honors community. This set of structural characteristics represents what we consider to be a key difference between the honors student cultures at the two schools.

## SURVEY SAMPLES

We advertised participation in the survey by enlisting the support of faculty members as well as honors college administrators at both institutions to encourage students to respond to an online questionnaire that we had set up through SurveyMonkey. These efforts resulted in 385 completed questionnaires from Michigan students and 409 from Arkansas students for a total sample of 794 student surveys. In addition to university affiliation, our data set was further subdivided into honors student and regular student samples. The Michigan sample included 184 honors students and Arkansas 97. Our survey methodology did not rely on random sampling principles but produced a type of convenience sample that precluded performing tests of significance on the sample results.

Even though our student samples were not random, our confidence in their statistical accuracy was enhanced by comparing their gender and racial compositions to the student body populations from which they were obtained. As shown in Table 1, the regular student samples matched fairly well with their respective universities' gender and racial demographics at both the Michigan and Arkansas schools, displaying for the most part only relatively minor discrepancies. At both universities females outnumbered males three to two, and

**Table 1: Student Gender and Racial Percentage Comparisons**

Michigan School				Arkansas School			
	University Totals	R-Student Sample	H-Student Sample		University Totals	R-Student Sample	H-Student Sample
<b>Males</b>	39.6	26.8	22.7	<b>Males</b>	39.4	43.0	37.5
<b>Females</b>	60.4	73.2	77.3	<b>Females</b>	60.6	57.0	62.5
<b>White</b>	82.7	81.3	85.9	<b>White</b>	80.8	77.9	87.5
<b>African American</b>	9.7	8.2	1.6	<b>African American</b>	15.7	12.3	2.1
<b>Asian</b>	4.2	2.9	3.8	<b>Asian</b>	1.7	3.2	5.2
<b>Other</b>	3.4	7.6	8.7	<b>Other</b>	1.8	6.6	5.2

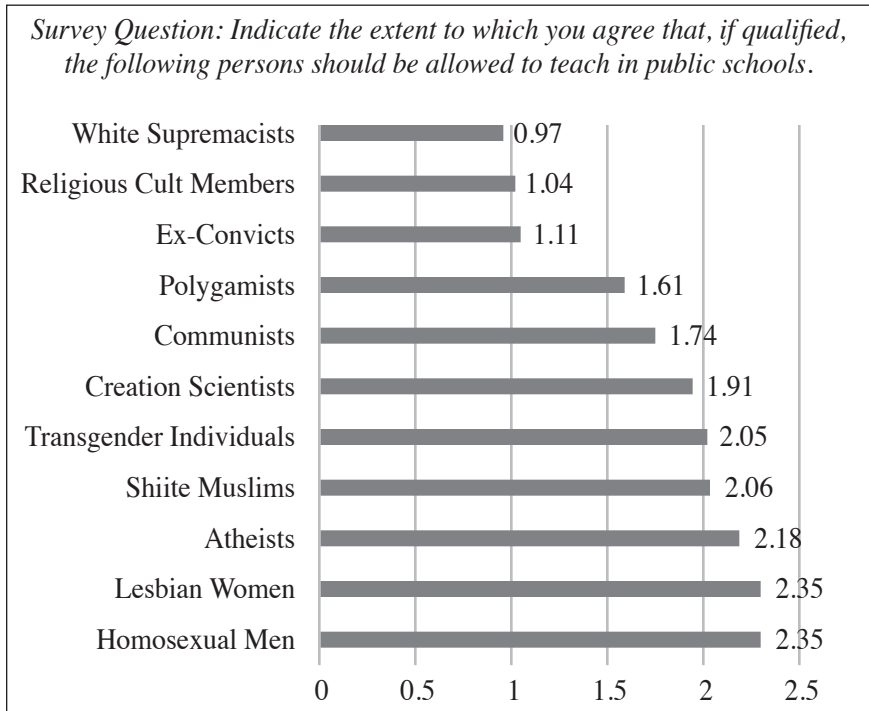
white students constituted 82.7 and 80.8 percent of the respective student populations. Our largest sampling bias occurred in the Michigan sample, in which females were over-sampled by a 12.8 percent margin compared to 3.6 percent in the Arkansas sample. Racially, our regular student samples closely approximated university figures, with white majorities of 81.3 and 77.9 percent in the respective Michigan and Arkansas samples.

In the honors student samples, females were again statistically dominant at both universities, accounting for 77.3 percent of the Michigan honors sample and 62.5 percent of the Arkansas sample. African American students were underrepresented relative to their numbers in the student populations of both schools, accounting for only 1.6 and 2.1 percent of honors students in our respective samples. The figures on sex and race closely mirror the demographic makeup of the honors samples obtained in the 2001 study (Shepherd & Shepherd 105–06) and are indicative of the problem that both schools continue to have in successfully recruiting African American students and other minorities into their honors programs. Thus, in contrast to their teaching objectives concerning student exposure to cultural diversity, the racial composition of both honors programs remains relatively homogeneous.

## **SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Students from both universities responded to a 53-item questionnaire that included an assortment of background questions as well as items designed to measure levels of civic tolerance. One can measure civic tolerance through many different kinds of survey questions, but, we argue that whatever questions are posed should (1) ask respondents if they respect the civil rights of people whose social status or life-style preferences might be incongruent with their own and (2) be clear that these rights entitle such persons to be in common contact with and to exercise authority over other people, including the respondents and their family members. Consistent with these criteria, both the 2001 survey and our replication study focused on the right to employment as a public school teacher. We identified eleven socially marginalized groups in American society and asked our student respondents to “indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that, if qualified, the following persons should be allowed to teach in public schools.” Marginalized minority groups listed in alphabetical order for student consideration were: atheists, creation scientists, communists, ex-convicts, homosexual men, lesbian women, polygamists, religious cult members, Shiite Muslims, transgender individuals, and white supremacists. Using a Likert-scale format, we scored student responses to each group as follows: strongly disagree = 0; disagree = 1; agree = 2; strongly agree = 3. Using this scale we were able to rank-order the eleven selected groups from most to least tolerated by students at both of our survey universities, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Mean Tolerance Levels for Selected Marginalized Groups, Combining Michigan and Arkansas Student Responses (N = 794; Tolerance Scale = 0 to 3)**



There was consensus among both Michigan and Arkansas students concerning the rank-order distribution of all groups shown in Figure 1. At both schools, homosexual men and lesbian women were most tolerated as public school teachers and white supremacists were least tolerated, with mean tolerance scores for the former groups approaching 2.5 (agree/strongly agree) and an average score of less than 1.0 (disagree) for the latter group on our civic tolerance scale. In between these two groups, atheists, Shiite Muslims, and transgender individuals all received average tolerance ratings above 2.0 while the tolerance ratings of creation scientists, communists, and polygamists were slightly above the midpoint (1.5) on our scale, indicating indecision about these three groups. Only ex-convicts and religious cult members joined white supremacists with mean tolerance scores hovering around 1.0. That the students recognized the rights of homosexual males and lesbian females to teach in public schools is consistent with current national trends regarding the legitimacy of same-sex marriage (Banks; Engberg, Hurtado, & Smith) and gay service in the armed forces (Pew Forum).

## THE CIVIC TOLERANCE SCALE AND CORRESPONDING RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In order to test hypotheses concerning civic tolerance among students enrolled in honors programs, we constructed a composite tolerance scale. This scale was based on summing students' Likert scale responses to all eleven of the marginalized groups identified in our questionnaire, producing a possible range of scores falling between zero and 33, which we called the "civic tolerance scale." A minimum score of zero would mean that a respondent answered "strongly disagree" to all of the selected groups proposed as public school teachers. A maximum score of 33 would mean that a respondent answered "strongly agree" to all of the proposed groups. Thus, the closer students' tolerance scores were to 33, the more tolerant they were considered to be and, the closer their scores were to zero, the less tolerant. This scale is limited to only one of any number of possible civic tolerance indicators, but it has the virtue of focusing consistently on a relevant civic issue (teaching in the public school system) for a range of marginalized groups that has potential relevance to the lives of respondents and their families.

Summary statistics for the civic tolerance scale employed in our study include the following: (1) the range of student tolerance scores was zero to 33, with 10 student respondents scoring zero on the tolerance scale and 25 students scoring tolerance maximums of 33 points; and (2) the mean civic tolerance score for all 794 students from both universities was 19.4, indicating an overall moderate level of tolerance toward the groups specified in our survey. With regard to internal scale consistency and reliability, we calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient to be .894, safely above the .7 value recommended by DeVellis.

The attraction-accentuation model of higher education and related research literature lead to the following hypotheses concerning variations in civic tolerance among honors students and regular students:

- H1: On average, freshman honors students will score higher on civic tolerance than regular freshmen prior to either group's commencement of college classes.
- H2: Tolerance levels for honors students will be more consistent and less variable than for regular students.
- H3: On average, both honors and regular students will be progressively more tolerant by class cohort comparisons.
- H4: Honors students will be progressively more tolerant by class cohort comparisons than regular students.

H5: Because of its residential college, separate honors faculty, structured core curriculum, and institutional promotion of close social ties among students and faculty, honors students at the Southern university will be progressively more tolerant by class cohort comparisons than students at the Northern university.

## DATA RESULTS

In Table 2 we have recorded mean tolerance scores and tolerance standard deviations for honors students compared to regular students. Consistent with hypothesis 2, honors students at both universities were, on average, more tolerant and less variable in their responses to the proposition of marginalized groups teaching in public schools. However, the differences on our tolerance measures between honors and regular students at the Michigan school were modest: Michigan honors students scored only 0.8 points higher on the civic tolerance scale than their regular student peers and were only 0.7 standard deviations less variable. At the Arkansas school, however, the tolerance differences between honors students and regular students were substantial: Arkansas honors students scored 5.5 points higher on the tolerance scale and were 2.2 standard deviations less variable than their regular student peers.

Mean tolerance comparisons between the two universities indicate that the Michigan school's regular students were consistently more tolerant than Arkansas regular students, scoring 19.5 on the civic tolerance scale compared to 17.7. However, Arkansas honors students averaged almost 3 points higher on tolerance than their Michigan counterparts (23.2 compared to 20.3) as well as being a little more consistent in responding to the designated marginal groups, with a standard deviation of 6.1 compared to 6.4 for honors students at the Michigan school. Thus the honors students at the Arkansas school stood out in our survey, scoring much higher in tolerance than their regular student peers at the same university and substantially higher than their honors counterparts in Michigan.

Based on an attraction-accentuation model of higher education, we expected that freshman honors students would already be more tolerant of marginalized groups than regular freshman students. At the same time, we anticipated that all students and especially honors students would become progressively more tolerant over their academic careers. Because longitudinal panel studies represent a superior methodology for testing accentuation effects, our lack of carefully controlled panel data is one of the important limitations of our research to date. Though difficult to obtain, systematic panel studies of the impact honors programs have on student values would be a boon to future research. In the meantime, our best approximation in the measurement of progressive student tolerance over time is comparisons of freshman,

sophomore, junior, and senior cohort groups. In Table 3 we report the results of honors student cohort comparisons in order to infer accentuation effects, if any, for student tolerance.

Consistent with hypothesis 1, we first observe in table 3 that honors freshmen at both universities had higher tolerance levels upon entering school than did their regular student peers; this was particularly true for honors freshmen recruited into the Arkansas honors college. Second, consistent with hypothesis 3, we see that most student tolerance scores tend to increase with cohort levels. The two exceptions to this overall trend were the regular student sophomore cohorts at both universities, who scored slightly lower than their freshmen peers. At both universities, however, junior and senior cohort groups among regular students rebounded to achieve progressively higher tolerance scores. Progressive accentuation of civic tolerance was most striking among Arkansas honors students whose cohort tolerance means increased from 20.1 for freshmen to 21.9 for sophomores to 22.4 for juniors and 24.7 for seniors. In contrast, Michigan honors students' tolerance levels showed only modest, incremental increases from a tolerance mean of 19.8 for freshmen to 20.1 for sophomores, 20.7 for juniors, and 21.2 for seniors. Third, at the Arkansas school we see progressively higher honors student tolerance at every cohort level in comparison to regular students, as predicted by hypothesis 4. Thus, and consistent with hypothesis 5, senior honors students from Arkansas were by far the most tolerant students in our survey and their tolerance levels displayed the strongest accentuation effects by cohort comparisons. For Michigan students, however, hypothesis 4 was not confirmed: Honors students in the Michigan sample scored slightly *lower* in tolerance than regular students at the junior and senior levels. In other words, while Michigan juniors and seniors in both cohort groups were progressively more tolerant, regular Michigan students were a little *more* so than the honors students. While we predicted that Michigan honors students would show weaker accentuation effects than their Arkansas counterparts, we did not anticipate that their progressive tolerance would also be weaker in comparison to other Michigan junior and senior students. This anomaly warrants bringing additional variables into the analysis.

Do any correlations between civic tolerance and being an honors student persist when controlling for other relevant variables that might also be related to tolerance? Other potentially relevant variables we considered were students' sex, academic major, and religiosity. Race was so homogenous among both honors student samples that it could not be included as a meaningful control variable.

Previous research indicates that female students tend to be more tolerant than males prior to entering college and subsequently make greater tolerance gains during the first two years of college (Taylor). Other research on both

**Table 2: Mean Civic Tolerance Scores**

Michigan Sample				Arkansas Sample			
	N	Mean Tolerance	Standard Deviation		N	Mean Tolerance	Standard Deviation
H-Students	184	20.3	6.4	H-Students	97	23.2	6.1
R-Students	201	19.5	7.1	R-Students	312	17.7	8.3
Totals	385	19.8	6.8	Totals	409	19.0	8.2

**Table 3: Student Cohort Civic Tolerance Comparisons**

Michigan Sample						Arkansas Sample							
Cohort	H Students		R Students		Mean	Standard Deviation	Cohort	H Students		R Students		Mean	Standard Deviation
	N	Mean	N	Mean				N	Mean	N	Mean		
FRESH	84	19.8	49	17.6	17.6	6.4	FRESH	14	20.1	74	15.1	15.1	6.1
SOPH	35	20.1	32	16.2	16.2	7.1	SOPH	11	21.9	54	14.7	14.7	8.3
JR	40	20.7	62	21.0	21.0	6.8	JR	27	22.4	82	18.8	18.8	8.2
SR	25	21.2	58	21.3	21.3	7.1	SR	45	24.7	102	20.2	20.2	8.3
Totals	184	20.3	201	19.5	19.5	6.8	Totals	97	23.8	312	17.7	17.7	8.2



faculty and student social and political values indicates that those with academic backgrounds in the humanities and social sciences tend to be more liberal than their peers in other disciplines (Gross; Ladd & Lipset; Lipset; Shepherd & Shepherd, “War and Dissent”). Also, given the influence of conservative Protestant denominations in Southern states, particularly as expressed in combative opposition to gay rights and related social issues (Hankins; Lindsey & Silk), we included a religious variable in the analysis.

In Table 4 we show the results of regression analyses for both the Michigan and Arkansas samples, with tolerance of marginalized groups teaching in public schools as the dependent variable and honors college status, student sex, academic major, and frequency of church attendance as independent variables. Honors status, sex, and major were all coded as binary dummy variables with values of either 0 or 1 in the following manner: HONORS: No = 0, Yes = 1; SEX: Male = 0, Female = 1; MAJOR: Humanities/Social Science = 1, Other = 0. Thus, positive correlations in the analysis would indicate that honors students were more tolerant than regular students, females more tolerant than males, and humanities/social science majors more tolerant than students with other majors. Church attendance was coded on a four-point ordinal scale but

**Table 4: Predicting Student Tolerance for Michigan and Arkansas Students**

<b>Michigan Students</b>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Zero-Order r</b>	<b>Partial r</b>	<b>Beta</b>
Honors	.057	.104	.111
Sex	.048	.058	.057
Major	.061	.056	.059
Church	-.208	-.216	-.220
Multiple R = .242			
Adjusted R Square = .048			
<b>Arkansas Students</b>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Zero-Order r</b>	<b>Partial r</b>	<b>Beta</b>
Honors	.276	.278	.260
Sex	.063	.010	.009
Major	.123	.035	.032
Church	-.369	-.357	-.351
Multiple R = .453			
Adjusted R Square = .197			

## CIVIC TOLERANCE AMONG HONORS STUDENTS

was treated in the analysis as though it were an interval scale: Never = 0; Rarely = 1; Occasionally = 2; Frequently = 3.

Regression analysis allows us to answer the question of which independent variable is the best predictor of the dependent variable while controlling for all of the other variables included in the analysis. As shown in Table 4, student sex and academic major were not predictive of civic tolerance in either student sample. Both of these variables' zero-order correlations with tolerance were weak to begin with (.048 and .061 in the Michigan sample and .063 and .123 for Arkansas students) and were either reduced to virtually nothing after controlling for the other independent variables in the equation (as indicated by partial correlations of only .010 and .035 and closely corresponding Beta values in the Arkansas sample) or remained weak (as indicated by partial correlations of .058 and .046 and corresponding Beta values in the Michigan sample).

While the weak zero-order correlation of .057 between civic tolerance and honors standing among Michigan students showed a modest increase when controlling for the other variables in the equation (demonstrated by a positive partial  $r$  of .104 and Beta coefficient of .111), being a member of the honors college was only an anemic predictor of civic tolerance. This result reinforces findings which we discussed above, as summarized in Table 3. In contrast, displaying a negative partial  $r$  of .216 and a corresponding Beta value of -.220, church attendance among Michigan students was two times stronger in predicting student tolerance levels.

At the Arkansas school, however, membership in the honors college and frequency of church attendance were both stable predictors of student tolerance. As indicated by multiple  $R$  and adjusted  $R$  Square values, the combined honors status, sex, academic major, and church attendance did a much better job of explaining variation in civic tolerance for the Arkansas student sample than for the Michigan sample. In particular, honors college status for Arkansas students produced a positive zero-order correlation of .276 with tolerance, which remained virtually unchanged when controlling for all other variables, as shown by a partial  $r$  of .278 and a corresponding Beta value of .260. Thus, we again conclude that being an honors student at the Arkansas university had a positive impact on students' civic tolerance. At the same time, we must also consider the depressing impact of church attendance on tolerance, which produced a negative zero-order correlation of -.369 among Arkansas students. This correlation remained virtually unchanged when controlling for all other variables, including honors college status, with a partial  $r$  of -.357 and a corresponding Beta coefficient of -.351. Thus, religious attendance turned out to be the strongest predictor variable in the analysis for students at both schools; the more frequently students attended church, the lower their civic tolerance, and

this was the aggregate case for all students—both honors and regular—who responded to our survey. Since Arkansas honors students clearly demonstrated the highest tolerance levels, we need to ask whether they were less religious than other students and, if so, whether the Arkansas honors college attracted fewer religious students and/or was a place where students were more apt to lose their religious faith.

When we compared Arkansas honors students' religiosity with their regular student counterparts, we found modest rather than dramatic differences. Thus, honors students were 11.6 percent less likely to claim any religious affiliation, were 10.1 percent less likely to affiliate with a Christian denomination, and attended church somewhat less frequently, but were only 3.3 percent less likely to describe themselves as being religious or very religious compared to regular students. We may conclude that Arkansas honors students were somewhat less religious on average than their regular student peers, but none of the comparisons summarized statistically in Table 5 revealed large differences. At the same time, the relative number of respondents who frequently attended church was actually greater for honors students compared to regular students by a difference of 35.1 to 32.1 percent. All in all, our data do not support a supposition that the Arkansas honors college was a haven for irreligious students.

Only negligible differences between Arkansas and Michigan honors students appeared on all of our three religious measures. At the same time, Michigan honors students were substantially more religious on all three measures compared to regular student peers at their own school. Of all our respondents, the Michigan regular students were least likely to belong to a Christian denomination (53.4 percent), most likely to be religiously unaffiliated (44.7 percent), most likely never to attend church (31.1 percent), and most likely to define themselves as "not at all religious" (34.9 percent).

We have no ready explanation for why Michigan honors students were collectively more religious than other students at their school or, conversely, why Michigan regular students were substantially less religious than all of the other students in the survey. Nevertheless, the greater religiosity of Michigan honors students may help explain their lower levels of tolerance and weaker accentuation outcomes when compared to their honors student peers in Arkansas. Since church attendance was most strongly predictive (in a negative sense) of civic tolerance at both schools, we should further explore the relationship between church attendance and civic tolerance by separating honors students from regular students in our samples.

Calculating civic tolerance means by frequency of church attendance separately for honors students and regular students, we obtained the results summarized in Table 6.

**Table 5: Religiosity Measures for Honors Students Compared to Regular Students**

	Arkansas Sample		Michigan Sample	
	Percent Regular Students	Percent Honors Students	Percent Regular Students	Percent Honors Students
<b>Affiliation with a Religious Denomination</b>				
Christian denomination	70.5	60.4	53.4	65.0
Non-Christian Denomination	3.6	2.1	1.9	5.5
Unaffiliated	25.9	37.5	44.7	29.5
<b>Frequency of Church Attendance</b>				
Never	15.6	20.8	31.1	20.0
Rarely	23.4	26.0	28.7	25.4
Occasionally	28.9	17.7	20.6	23.2
Frequently	32.1	35.4	19.6	31.4
<b>Religious Self-Label</b>				
Not at all religious	21.9	24.5	34.9	28.4
Somewhat Religious	32.7	33.0	34.0	30.6
Religious	32.7	28.7	23.4	29.0
Very Religious	12.7	13.8	7.7	12.0

Table 6: Civic Tolerance and Church Attendance

Arkansas Sample						
Frequency Of Church Attendance	Honors Students			Regular Students		
	N	Mean Tolerance	Standard Deviation	N	Mean Tolerance	Standard Deviation
Never	20	25.4	4.4	49	23.2	5.2
Rarely	25	24.2	4.5	73	20.4	7.5
Occasionally	17	21.9	7.6	91	16.9	7.8
Frequently	35	21.3	6.7	99	14.0	8.5
Totals	97	23.1	6.1	312	17.8	8.3
Michigan Sample						
Frequency of Church Attendance	Honors Students			Regular Students		
	N	Mean Tolerance	Standard Deviation	N	Mean Tolerance	Standard Deviation
Never	37	21.9	4.8	63	21.1	6.2
Rarely	47	22.2	6.1	58	20.1	6.7
Occasionally	43	21.1	5.8	41	18.2	6.3
Frequently	57	17.2	6.9	39	18.2	9.0
Totals	184	20.3	6.9	201	19.6	7.0

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Frequency of church attendance was negatively associated with civic tolerance for both honors and regular students at the Arkansas school; that is, as church attendance levels increased, tolerance levels correspondingly declined for both groups. With a civic tolerance mean of only 14.0, Arkansas regular students who attended church frequently were by far the least tolerant group in our analysis. In comparison, Arkansas honors students who attended church frequently were much more tolerant, with a civic tolerance mean of 21.3. At the same time, the most tolerant Arkansas students in both our regular and honors samples were not church attendees, with corresponding tolerance means of 23.2 and 25.4 respectively. While frequent church attendees among Arkansas honors students were less tolerant than other honors students, we may speculate that their considerably higher tolerance levels relative to regular church-attending students was a function of their honors college status. In any case, while substantially more tolerant than their regular student counterparts, religious honors students were not as tolerant of marginalized groups' teaching in public schools as were their less religious peers in the honors college.

Frequency of church attendance among respondents in the Michigan sample also corresponded inversely with mean civic tolerance levels for both regular and honors students. In vivid contrast to the Arkansas sample, however, frequent church attendees among Michigan honors students scored lower in mean tolerance compared to regular students who attended church regularly, 17.2 to 18.2 respectively. We infer that, for the most religiously devout students in the Michigan sample, unlike for the Arkansas students, an honors education did not have an accentuating, positive impact on their civic tolerance. Thus, the offsetting influence of church attendance on students' social views emerges as an important caveat in our analysis of the impact an honors college education has on civic tolerance.

To summarize our principal findings: Most students at two modest-sized state universities were relatively tolerant of marginalized groups' teaching in public schools, especially of homosexual men and lesbian women. At the same time, honors students at both universities were, on average, more tolerant of marginalized groups' right to teach than were their regular student peers. However, only the tolerance levels of Southern honors students enrolled in a fully developed honors college were systematically accentuated in cohort comparisons. Finally, religious students in the Southern honors college were substantially more tolerant than their regular student peers, whereas religious Michigan honors students were not. Finally, frequency of church attendance emerged as the single best predictor of how tolerant students at both universities were likely to be.

## DISCUSSION

The primary limitation of our study was that, while our online data collection methodology was successful in producing a sizeable number of approximately eight hundred total student surveys, it was not designed to generate random samples at either the Michigan or Arkansas school. Without random samples we cannot conduct appropriate tests of significance and are therefore not in a position to accurately judge the probability of random sampling error in our data results. In addition, we did not have longitudinal panel data for measuring student tolerance changes over time and therefore had to infer college accentuation effects through student cohort comparisons. Finally, our study measured civic tolerance attitudes but did not include any corresponding measures of students' actual civic engagements or behavior.

These limitations notwithstanding, by replicating the key findings of a survey taken over a decade ago, our study contributes to the initial development of an important but largely unexplored area of inquiry in the sociology of higher education. There is a dearth of comparative statistical studies on the relative effects of an honors education on student values and social attitudes. One notable exception to this shortage is Frank Shushok's 2006 longitudinal study, which, among other findings, demonstrated that honors students (especially males) were more likely than non-honors students to interact with faculty mentors, to participate with peers in discussing contemporary social issues, and to engage in out-of-class activities with an academic emphasis. While Shushok's study provides corroborative support for our analysis of the honors student's academic environment, the presumed cultivation of civic tolerance among many of the country's brightest students who enroll in honors programs has received virtually no previous attention.

While our sample of only two schools needs to be greatly expanded, it is a sample that has the virtue of focusing on schools with similar institutional characteristics (small to mid-sized state universities situated as commuter campuses adjacent to metropolitan areas) that emphasize their teaching missions but that are located in different cultural regions of the country. Another research advantage, for comparative purposes, is that the Southern school's honors program is implemented in a fully developed honors college whereas the Michigan school's program is implemented through the participation of a number of academic departments throughout the university, thus allowing us to determine whether differences in student levels of civic tolerance varied by type of honors college program as well as by cultural region.

It is possible that replication of the primary findings of the 2001 survey by our 2011 survey—that Arkansas honors students consistently scored higher in civic tolerance not only as freshmen but progressively over time—was merely coincidental or the result of random sampling error, but it is implausible to

conclude that this result occurred because students growing up in Arkansas were more likely to be tolerant than students growing up in Michigan. Regional stereotypes would, in fact, lead to the opposite conclusion. What is more plausible is the inference that the honors college instituted at the Arkansas school has been more successful in attracting students who already have value orientations congruent with a liberal arts emphasis and that it has been more successful in accentuating values of civic tolerance among students enrolled in its program. Beyond the variable personality traits or leadership qualities of particular honors administrators and faculty, the crucial institutional difference between the two schools is that the Arkansas school supports an honors college with its own administration, core faculty, and sequentially structured liberal arts curriculum, simultaneously affording regular interaction between students and faculty in and outside of class, frequent contacts among students themselves, and a cohesive, reinforcing subculture environment for honors students.

Mapping a comprehensive research agenda for the future study of the effects of honors programs on student values should include more systematic comparative analyses of honors programs and colleges in the context of a wider range of different types of institutional settings (e. g., private schools, public schools, four-year colleges, and research-oriented universities of varying sizes) that are situated in different regional areas and different proximate environments such as small college towns, large metropolitan centers, or satellite suburban campuses. Researchers also need to examine more thoroughly the intervening effects of student religiosity in these different academic settings as well as the potential correspondence of students' propensities for civic tolerance to their parents' educational backgrounds, occupational careers, and socioeconomic status. With particular respect to the accentuation of student tolerance in honors programs, alternative measures of civic tolerance should be developed and compared in conjunction with other control variables. Finally, corresponding measures of civic behavior need to be added in order to determine whether accentuated attitudes of civic tolerance promote increased civic engagement among students enrolled in honors programs and colleges.

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