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Community College Students, Faculty See Significant Benefits in For-Profit Partnership to Create Honors Programs

American Honors Charges Students More but Provides Intensive Advising

New York, July 27, 2017 — Several two-year colleges across the United States have partnered with the for-profit company Quad Learning to create local honors programs with wraparound advising services. College administrators and faculty believe the program improves the chances for talented students who wish to transfer to selective or out-of-state four-year colleges, according to a [new research brief](#) from the [Community College Research Center](#) (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Many faculty members were initially skeptical about bringing a for-profit company into their schools to run an honors program and concerned about charging students more for the services. But many came to support the program when they realized that they would control admissions, curriculum, and pedagogy and that students would receive valuable advising in exchange for the extra fees. Some faculty members remained opposed to the program, however, especially at one college that had replaced its existing honors program with American Honors.

The new research brief, [Understanding American Honors: Student Selection, Key Program Components, and Stakeholder Impressions](#), examines the program features of American Honors and faculty, student, and staff perspectives on the program. A 2018 report will look at how American Honors students fare in community college and after they transfer, and will include a cost-benefit analysis of the program.

American Honors was established in 2013 and has programs at [eight community colleges or college districts](#) in Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington. Amid concerns about the increasing reliance by public colleges on for-profit companies, the research

on American Honors suggests that community colleges can create successful partnerships with for-profit entities that provide tailored services that fill a need. This research reinforces the findings of a [2011 study](#) by Eric P. Bettinger and Rachel Baker of Stanford University, which found that students randomly assigned to individualized coaching provided by the company InsideTrack were more likely to continue in college.

Along with broad, though not universal, faculty support for American Honors at the colleges where it operates, the program also received largely positive responses from students. Most students felt the program to be worth the extra cost because it provided more challenging courses, focused advising, and transfer support and created a built-in network of friends. However, some students felt the program might not be worth it for certain majors, if their college did not provide honors sections of the specialized courses needed for those majors. Others planning to transfer locally felt the specialized advising was unnecessary. Many American Honors students viewed the program as a good deal because it was cheaper than the alternative of attending a four-year college, though some non-American Honors students said they could not afford the additional cost.

Administrators liked the minimal effort needed to launch the program and felt having an honors program enhanced their college's reputation. Though colleges split the revenue from American Honors students with Quad Learning, college leaders generally believed the program was revenue-neutral because it brought in students who would otherwise not attend their college.

The brief was written by Shanna Smith Jaggars, Markeisha Grant, Maggie P. Fay, and Negar Farakish. The research was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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The **Community College Research Center** (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, conducts research on the major issues affecting community colleges in the United States and contributes to the development of practice and policy that expands access to higher education and promotes success for all students.