

ABSTRACT

THESIS: How Honors Students are Constructing Well-being within their Higher Education Experience at a Public Midwest University

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There is an abundance of research on academically underprepared students within higher education; however, there is a lack of research on high-achieving students (Rinn & Plucker, 2004). In research in general, honors students are stereotyped in many cases for being highly motivated, independent, and academically driven. The fact that many of these students share these intellectual traits has led to a narrowed perspective of viewing this population. Yet, honors students are a diverse population. Honors students are a broad population who are invested for instance, in different academic interests and extra-curricular involvements. Honors students are looked at primarily for their academic achievement (GPA) for their success in college, however, it does not account for all the variability in a student's life in and out of the classroom. Research has shown these factors, include but are not limited to social adaption, physical fitness, and emotional stability contributes to a students experience at college (Astin, 1993). One's ability to cope and manage these changes can affect the ability to be successful.

Wellness is a concept that combines numerous factors, such as social relationships, physical health, financial stability, or intellectual competence. Wellness no longer captures the sense of combating diseases, but has given way to a more complex problem of success in modernity: living well (Kirkland, 2014). The purpose of this study was to understand and

examine the relationship of honors students' perceptions of wellness and their experience within an honors-track. In addition the study looks at honors students persistence to stay within the honors environment. Within this study, wellness was defined using various conceptual frameworks, which was explained in the literature review. However, overall wellness is viewed holistically.

The study contributed to the empirical research on honors students through a qualitative methodology. The qualitative research design selected was applying a phenomenology approach through semi-structured interviews. The purpose of this study was to examine the well-being experiences of upperclass honors students from a multidimensional perspective. Furthermore, this project looks at exploring the impact of wellness, and how upperclass honors students are making sense of their college experience. In addition, certain theories of wellness and student development theories, like Martin Seligman's PERMA theory and Alexander Astin's student involvement theory will be explored to further provide insight on persistence for this unique-population.