

LIBERAL TOLERANCE AMONG HONORS COLLEGE STUDENTS: A REGIONAL COMPARISON

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Abstract

Attitudes of liberal tolerance among honors college students and regular students attending a Northern and Southern university were surveyed to test an attraction-accentuation model of higher education. At both institutions honors college students were more tolerant of communists, atheists and homosexuals than were other students. But progressive accentuation of tolerant attitudes by cohort comparisons only occurred in the honors college of the Southern university, which emphasized a sequentially structured humanistic curriculum in a residential college environment that promoted close social ties.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, as both public and private schools increasingly compete to recruit the country's brightest students, there has been a substantial increase in the amount of institutional support given to honors colleges and/or honors programs in American higher education (Christian Science Monitor 1997). Surprisingly, however, very little research has been done on the characteristics of such programs and the impact they have on students' education. Only a handful of disconnected references to honors programs can be found in the literature on higher education published over the past decade (see for example Byrne 1998; Greer et al. 1997; Haas 1992; Mack 1996; Wade and Walker 1994). What kinds of students, with what kinds of academic interests and backgrounds, are attracted to the kinds of curricula typically sponsored by honors college programs? And, in addition to their intellectual capacities and academic development, in what ways and to what extent are students' values and social attitudes shaped by their participation in such programs?

In a recent study of these sorts of questions we surveyed students enrolled at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) to investigate whether or not honors students were more liberal in their social views than other students (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998). Our data demonstrated that honors

students in general were not only more tolerant in their attitudes toward selected stigmatized groups (communists, atheists, and homosexuals) than their student peers, but that freshmen honors students were already more liberal in their social views than other UCA students as they began their college careers and were progressively more liberal by class cohort comparisons (i.e., sophomores were more liberal than freshmen, juniors more liberal than sophomores, and seniors most liberal of all). In contrast, UCA students who were not enrolled in the honors college were not only less liberal in social tolerance as a whole, they did not become significantly more liberal from one class cohort to the next. We also discovered that, based on their own assessments, the social views of honors students were much more influenced by their college classes than was the case for UCA students outside the honors college.

THE ATTRACTION-ACCENTUATION MODEL OF COLLEGE INFLUENCE

These findings supported hypotheses derived from an attraction-accentuation model of college influence, which proposes that students' initial attitudes are reinforced by participation in programs that advocate values with which they already agree (Feldman and Newcomb 1969: 328-335; Feldman and Weiler 1976; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991: 610; Shepherd and Shep-

herd 1996, 1998). Whatever the factors or personal characteristics are that selectively propel students toward a particular academic setting or major, they are likely to be reinforced and extended by experience incurred in those selected settings. Thus, initial intellectual and attitudinal differences among students typically are accentuated by their college experience as they pursue different educational career paths. At the same time, the attraction-accentuation model suggests that the more incongruent students' initial dispositions are relative to the intellectual settings in which they find themselves, the more likely they are to change majors, withdraw from school, or switch their enrollment to a different program or institution.

Assuming that students admitted into honors colleges are no different than other college students in this regard, we hypothesize that honors colleges and programs tend to recruit and select bright undergraduates who are not only academically qualified but also are predisposed to the critical thinking, liberal arts curriculum emphasized in honors programs. Astin's (1993) empirical typology of college students based on national CIRP survey data showed that students most likely to enroll in honors programs were those identified as "scholarly" or "artistic" types, which in turn correlated positively with critical thinking ability and interest in discussing political/social issues. The honors college liberal arts emphasis not only appears to appeal more strongly to certain types of students, but also to those members of the faculty who are attracted to active involvement and leadership positions as directors of honors programs, a majority of whom also tend to express liberal values. This was demonstrated in a national survey of college professors' reactions to the Persian Gulf war, in which the war attitudes and political values of honors directors were significantly more liberal than those of any other faculty status group surveyed, even when controlling for academic disciplines and pre-Vietnam, Vietnam and post-Vietnam age cohorts in con-

temporary academia (Shepherd and Shepherd 1996). In turn, honors directors' relatively liberal values are reinforced in their roles as student mentors and primary advocates of the honors liberal arts curriculum.

As with any student subpopulation, there is bound to be a range of aptitudes, values, varying interests and character traits among honors students. We would hypothesize, however, that intellectual differences among honors students are significantly less great than corresponding differences between honors students as a group and other students enrolled at the same institution. Similar to their honors faculty mentors, many students attracted to honors programs 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 privileged in American higher education, they often are prone to sympathize with minority struggles rather than advocate or support elite privileges. Those students recruited to honors programs least open to these emphases are the ones, we hypothesize, most likely to drop out of the program.

In our UCA survey we investigated what Pascarella and Terenzini (1991:7) refer to as "within college effects" at a particular institution. They point out, however, that researchers must also ask if there are any "between college effects" when comparing students at different institutions. Do our conclusions about the accentuation of honors versus nonhonors students' social views at UCA also hold true at other universities and colleges in different regions of the country?

INSTITUTIONAL COMPARISONS OF HONORS COLLEGE PROGRAMS

As a preliminary investigation of regional differences in the tolerance attitudes of honors students, we replicated the University of Central Arkansas survey at Oakland University-Michigan (OU).

Because we are faculty members at UCA and OU respectively, we were able to ob-

tain the permission and cooperation of both institutions' honors directors and faculty colleagues in administering surveys to their students. In addition to data collection convenience, these two schools also offered meaningful comparisons that were relevant to our theoretical concerns.

Institutionally similar in many respects, Oakland University and the University of Central Arkansas also manifest institutional differences, not the least of which is their location in two very different cultural regions of the country. OU competes with other institutions of higher education in a populous, highly industrialized northern state while UCA competes for students in a small southern state. At the same time, both are mid-sized state universities situated in suburban areas approximately 30 miles from their states' principle cities (Detroit and Little Rock respectively) and both institutions primarily recruit in-state residents. Both schools maintain dormitories for on campus living but depend heavily on commuter student enrollments. Both schools actively recruit top students to apply to their honors programs and honors admissions are highly competitive. However, while Oakland's student body population (approximately 14,000) is somewhat larger than UCA's (approximately 9,000), the OU Honors College is only about half the size of UCA's, with 136 students enrolled at the time of our study and a cap set at 200. In comparison, UCA enrolled approximately 300 students in its honor college, with a projection cap of 400 students by the Fall of 2001. Additionally, UCA honors students are housed in their own separate dormitory and over 70 percent reside on campus. In contrast, at OU only 25 percent of honors students live on campus and, of those who do, only a modest number room together in a dorm that is not exclusively set apart for honors college residence. Thus, residence in a designated honors college dormitory is the norm at UCA but not at Oakland.

At both universities honors students are required to complete a special set of core

honors courses, which are designed to meet general education requirements, and they must also work closely with an academic advisor in carrying out an independent research project which results in the writing of an honors thesis. The UCA honors curriculum, however, is more standardized every semester and features more programmatic group activities. OU honors students must demonstrate second year proficiency in a foreign language (not required of UCA honors students) but are also given a considerable amount of latitude in taking a minimum of four honors courses, which they are allowed to choose, for meeting university general education requirements. The particular honors courses included in the Oakland curriculum vary from one semester to the next, as different participating OU faculty are asked to develop courses that reflect their specialty interests. In contrast, UCA honors students are required to take a cumulative series of four specially designed honors courses in their freshman and sophomore years, and then, in their junior and senior years, they must complete a prescribed, 15 hour minor in honors disciplinary studies which is only open to honors students. Finally, in addition to major outside speaker events, which both colleges sponsor, the UCA honors program also includes freshmen and senior banquets, parties and dances, sophomore lectures and senior thesis presentations, field trips, conferences, weekly discussion series, movie series, and a monthly op-ed/news letter that, along with residential campus living, puts UCA honors students into more frequent contact than their OU peers and encourages more systematically the development of primary group attachments within the honors college.

STUDENT SAMPLES AND SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

We designed a brief questionnaire to assess students' tolerance toward three groups which often have been stigmatized in American society (atheists, communists, and homosexuals), as well as the degree of

influence which they thought their college classes had on their social views. Questionnaires were distributed to all students enrolled in honors classes at UCA and Oakland University by the honors college directors at both institutions. From a total of 136 honors students enrolled in OU's Honors College, 77 returned the questionnaire for a response rate of 57 percent. At UCA, 259 out of 297 honors students returned their questionnaires for a response rate of 87 percent. We also administered the same questionnaire to 176 OU students and 205 UCA students, representing a range of students outside the honors college, who were enrolled in lower and upper division sociology classes taught by our departmental colleagues.

As measures of tolerance, all students were asked to indicate on four-point likert scales how strongly they agreed or disagreed that atheists, communists, or homosexuals should be allowed to teach in American public schools. Tolerance responses to each of these questions were scored as follows: Strongly disagree = 0. Disagree with some reservations = 1. Agree with some reservations = 2. Strongly agree = 3. Questions concerning these three groups were intended primarily as indicators of liberal values rather than as measures of a general attitude of tolerance toward the rights of all groups or ideologies to be represented in public schools. We did not include attitude questions in our survey, for example, toward white supremacists, male supremacists, or advocates of creation science, who represent ideologies that individuals with liberal values might prefer were discouraged or suppressed rather than tolerated in American education. Honors students also were asked to indicate on a four-point scale how much influence their honors college classes had on their social views while students not enrolled in the honors college were asked the same question with respect to the degree of influence that their university classes had on their social views. College influence responses were scored in the following way: No influence = 0. Little influence = 1. Moderate influence = 2. Major influence = 3.

In addition to these basic questions for measuring tolerance and degree of college influence, students also were asked on the questionnaire to indicate their age, sex, race, religious affiliation, frequency of church attendance, current student status, academic major, high school and college GPAs, ACT scores, whether or not they planned to further their education by going on to receive professional or graduate degrees, and what proportion of their current friends were also college students at the university where they attended. Honors students were asked to indicate what proportion of their friends were other students in the honors college. These items all represented supplementary variables that we used in comparing students from Oakland and UCA and for testing hypotheses about student tolerance at both institutions.

HYPOTHESES

The institutional differences between the two schools' honors programs led us to hypothesize that the social views of UCA honors students would be more influenced by their participation in the honors program than was true for Oakland's honor students. This hypothesis is consistent with earlier research on the greater accentuating effects of small college environments, which are more closely approximated in UCA's honors program than at OU, and related literatures on residential colleges in university settings and the relative impact of peer influence on student attitudes.

We surmise that for many honors students, matriculation in honors programs puts them into close association for the first time with a concentration of peers who share their intellectualism and liberal tendencies. Research on college peer influence typically has shown that students' values and social attitudes are more likely to be affected by their association with fellow students than by the instruction they receive in academic courses at the university (Dey 1997; Milem 1998; Newcomb and Wilson 1966).

At the same time, however, the institutional conditions conducive for faculty in-

fluence on students' values are typically found in small residential colleges that feature the relative homogeneity of both faculty and student interests, coupled with the opportunity for regular, informal interaction between students and their instructors (Newcomb 1943; Feldman and Newcomb 1969; Feldman and Weiler 1976; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991). Research related to the institutional conditions for maximizing the intellectual impact of faculty-student relations is currently being incorporated in 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 and Pribbenow 2000; Johnson and Romanoff 1999; Pike et al. 1997). All of this 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 already predisposed are reinforced in their views through close association with both peers and faculty who share their academic interests.

Because Oakland's honors curriculum is less structured than UCA's and is not implemented in the same kind of intimate residential environment, we hypothesized that the social views of OU honors students would be less influenced by their participation in the honors program compared to their UCA counterparts. At the same time, we anticipated that their association with the honors college would have a greater accentuating effect on liberal values than was true for other students enrolled at Oakland University. Thus we hypothesized that OU honors students would be more tolerant in their attitudes toward communists, atheists, and homosexuals than regular OU students, more influenced in their social views by their honors classes than other students taking conventional university classes, and progressively more tolerant through class-cohort comparisons. Finally, we also anticipated that the potentially countervailing

influence of religious attachments affecting OU students' liberal tolerance would be less pronounced than at UCA, where conservative Protestantism is a major element of the region's cultural environment.

SAMPLE PROFILE COMPARISONS

Differences among honors students and regular students at Oakland were not as pronounced as those which showed up in the UCA survey. At the same time, comparisons of Oakland students with UCA students reveal a number of profile similarities as well as differences between the two institutions, as indicated in the following summary.

1. Honors students at both universities predictably had greater academic aptitude (as measured by high school and college GPA and ACT scores) than other students at their institutions, but aptitude differences were greatest among students at UCA. For example, the mean ACT score for Honors students at UCA was 28.9 compared to a mean of 22.1 for other UCA students, while the mean ACT score for Oakland honors students was 26.3 compared to a mean of 22.7 for the regular students at Oakland surveyed in our study. And while a large majority (two-thirds) of OU honors students definitely planned to pursue post-graduate schooling after completing their baccalaureate degrees, an even larger proportion (three-quarters) of UCA's honors students planned to do so.

2. The gender and racial composition of honors college students sampled at both institutions was very similar: females represented a substantial majority (about three-quarters at OU and approximately two-thirds at UCA) and honors students in both colleges were overwhelmingly white (95 percent and 93 percent respectively). At the same time, there was greater racial diversity in the regular student sample at UCA, where one-quarter of the respondents were racial minorities, most of whom were African Americans (17 percent). In comparison, only 15 percent of the OU regular student sample was comprised of racial mi-

norities (6 percent of whom were African Americans).

3. Honors college students were significantly younger, with an average age of 19.5 at both OU and UCA, than other students in the survey, whose average age ranged between 22 and 23. Similarly, 44 percent of honors students responding to the survey at both OU and UCA were freshmen, while class cohort distributions among regular student samples at both institutions included a greater proportion of older, upper division students who were either juniors or seniors (47 percent at OU and 67 percent at UCA).

4. At both OU and UCA, approximately one-third of honors students were enrolled as science/math majors, a significantly greater proportion than their regular student counterparts. At OU in particular a greater proportion (20 percent) of honors students majored in humanities disciplines. In contrast, as a consequence of sampling sociology classes to which we had access, close to 50 percent of regular students sampled at both institutions were social science majors.

5. Religious affiliation and church attendance questions revealed some interesting patterns of variation both within and between our student samples. Honors students at both institutions were less likely than their regular student peers to claim a particular religious affiliation. This was especially true at UCA where only 7 percent of the regular student sample said they were unaffiliated. At the same time, when comparing schools, OU honors students were even less likely to claim a religious affiliation than UCA honors students (27 percent vs. 20 percent). Among OU students who were affiliated, however, there were virtually no differences in the distribution of different religious groups with which honors and regular students identified. Catholicism was the single, most commonly specified affiliation in our OU sample, accounting for approximately one-quarter of both honors and nonhonors students surveyed, with almost equal numbers of denominational

Protestants and unspecified Christians. In contrast, denominational Protestants represented by far the dominant religious affiliation at UCA, but significantly less so in the honors college (47 percent) compared to other students on campus (62 percent). Overall, church attendance among Oakland students was considerably less than at UCA, but at Oakland a surprisingly larger fraction of honors students were regular church attenders than were other OU students (40 percent compared to only 24 percent). At UCA, honors students were more likely than their peers to never attend religious services, but the percentage of UCA honors students who went to church regularly (41 percent) was virtually identical to other UCA students and OU honors students. Of all groups sampled, it was Oakland's conventional students who were least likely to be regular church attenders, with 44 percent reporting that they rarely or never attended religious services.

6. Finally, as an indicator of primary group ties in a college environment, students at both universities were asked to estimate what proportion of their current friends were college students. The response to this question suggested that OU students were, as we anticipated, less well integrated in campus friendship networks than UCA students. This was particularly true for OU honors students, over one-quarter of whom said that none of their friends were honors college students, with only 9 percent indicating that a majority of their current friends were in the honors college. In contrast, only 4 percent of UCA honors students surveyed said that they had no friends in the honors college and over half said that a majority of their friends were other honors college students. Among regular students at OU, only 20 percent had a majority of friends who were college students at OU, in contrast to UCA where over 50 percent of the regular students said that a majority of their friends were other UCA students.

To summarize our profile comparisons: Honors students at both Oakland University and the University of Central Arkansas

TABLE 1. INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE CLASSES ON STUDENTS' SOCIAL VIEWS

CLASS INFLUENCE	OU HONORS STUDENTS (N=77)	OU REGULAR STUDENTS (N=176)	Chi-sq		UCA HONORS STUDENTS (N=255)	UCA REGULAR STUDENTS (N=205)	Chi-sq	
	Percent	Percent		Sig.	Percent	Percent		Sig.
0. None	11.9	7.4	1.75	.626	2.3	8.8	47.13	.000
1. Little	31.3	28.4			13.6	34.3		
2. MODERATE		41.8			47.7	51.0	41.7	
3. Major	14.9	16.5			33.1	15.2		
	Mean	Mean	t-score	Sig.	Mean	Mean	t-score	Sig.
	1.60	1.73	1.13	.261	2.15	1.63	6.99	.000

had high academic aptitude, were predominantly young and white, disproportionately female, more inclined to major in science/math related fields or the humanities compared to other students, and a large majority at both schools expected to pursue post-baccalaureate professional or graduate training. Both OU and UCA honors students were less likely to be religiously affiliated than other students but, compared to each other, OU students in general were more likely to be Catholics while UCA students were more likely to be denominational Protestants. Honors students at both universities were more likely to never attend religious services than their peers, but a sizeable minority (two-fifths) of both groups were frequent church attenders. At the same time, OU honors students were much less likely than their UCA counterparts to have close friendship ties with other honors students at the university.

INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE CLASSES ON STUDENTS' SOCIAL VIEWS

Institutional differences in honors curriculum requirements, extra curricular activities, and residential living norms contributed to stronger student attachments at UCA and led us to predict that the social values of Oakland honors students would be less influenced by their honors classes when compared to their UCA counterparts. Consistent with the basic assumptions of our attraction-accentuation analysis, how-

ever, we also expected OU honors students to be more influenced by their classes when compared with other Oakland students. Data pertinent to these hypotheses are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

As hypothesized, UCA honors students were the most likely of all students surveyed to say that their college classes influenced their social views. We were surprised, however, by the magnitude of the difference. UCA honors students were twice as likely as OU honors students (33 percent compared to 15 percent) to say their classes had a major impact on their social values. At the same time, Oakland honors students were almost three times more likely to say that their honors classes had little or no influence on how they thought about social issues (43 percent compared to only 16 percent of UCA honors students surveyed). And contrary to what we expected, OU honors students were not more strongly influenced by their honors college classes than other students were by their classes at Oakland University. T-tests based on mean comparisons of college class influence included in Table 1 support these conclusions by showing a statistically significant difference in the mean influence of college classes between honors and nonhonors students at UCA, but no significant difference between honors and regular students at OU.

Because of the profile similarities in our university samples, these results cannot easily be explained by sample variations in

TABLE 2. PREDICTING THE INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE CLASSES ON STUDENTS' SOCIAL VIEWS (OAKLAND AND UCA SAMPLES COMBINED, N=717, WITH T-SCORES AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVELS FOR PARTIAL R AND BETA)

variable	zero-order r	partial r	beta	t-score	sig.
UCAHONORS	.28	.26	.341	6.65	.000
COHORT	.02	.05	.062	1.24	.215
ACT	.12	-.07	-.093	-1.77	.077
GRADPLAN	.13	.08	.079	1.94	.053
AGE	.01	.03	.035	0.69	.488
SEX	-.06	-.05	-.049	-1.23	.219
RACE	.02	.01	.014	0.35	.729
CHURCH	-.01	.00	.000	0.01	.993

Multiple R = .32 Adjusted R square = .09
 F-value = 8.23 Significance of R = .000

student class standing or academic majors. Younger students might be expected to report less influence on their thinking by their classes as they are just getting started in their college careers, and social science majors might be expected to have their social views more strongly shaped by their course of study compared to students majoring in other disciplines, especially physical science fields. However, the distribution of students according to class standing and academic majors was very similar at Oakland and UCA. Thus, for example, the same, disproportionate number of honors students in both samples were freshmen (44 percent). Nonetheless, UCA honors respondents were still much more likely to report being influenced by their classes than were other students. And at both institutions, 50 percent of the conventional student samples consisted of social science majors. However, in spite of the survey's bias in sampling regular students at both universities who were routinely exposed to social issues in their majors, their views were much less influenced by their classes than were UCA honors students (only 14 percent of whom were social science majors).

We are led to the tentative conclusion that the key factor in whether or not college classes played a significant role in

shaping students' social views in our study was the type of honors program instituted at UCA, with its emphasis on a sequentially structured humanistic curriculum in a residential college that promotes close social ties. This conclusion is supported by the multiple regression analysis displayed in Table 2, which combines the Oakland and UCA surveys in order to measure the relative influence of UCA's honors program in conjunction with students' academic aptitude, demographic characteristics, and religious participation in predicting college class influence on students' social views. Specific independent variables in the model are as follows:

UCAHONOR - type student (UCA honors students = 1, all other OU/UCA students = 0)

COHORT - cohort class standing (freshman = 1, sophomore = 2, junior = 3, senior = 4)

ACT - ACT Score

GRADPLAN - plans for post-baccalaureate training (no = 0, not sure = 1, yes = 2)

AGE - student's age

SEX - student's sex (male = 0, female = 1)

RACE - student's race (white/non-Hispanic = 0, other = 1)

CHURCH - frequency of church attendance (never = 0, rare = 1, occasional = 2, regular = 3)

Neither cohort class standing, age, sex, race, or religious involvement were significant predictors of the influence of college classes on students' thinking about social issues. Two academic measures (students' ACT scores and plans for graduate school) were weakly correlated with college class influence. But the only variable that really made any difference in predicting the impact of college classes on students' social views at OU and UCA was whether or not the respondent was a member of the UCA Honors College. All eight variables in the analysis combined to produce a modest multiple correlation coefficient of .32. Of this amount, controlling for all other variables in the equation, UCA honors status produced a partial correlation of .26 and a beta weight of .34.

LIBERAL TOLERANCE OF STIGMATIZED GROUPS

Our analysis of the attraction-accentuation process of student learning in higher education led us to hypothesize that honors students, attracted to and reinforced in their social views by programs that emphasize humanistic values, would be more liberal in their attitudes of social tolerance than other students. This expectation was supported by findings organized in Table 3, which show the reaction of honors students compared to other students, at both Oakland and UCA, to the proposition that communists, atheists, and homosexuals should be allowed to teach in public schools.

A majority of all students in both university samples expressed liberal tolerance by agreeing or strongly agreeing that the groups specified in the survey should be allowed to teach in the public school system. Generally speaking, however, a significantly greater proportion of honors students at both Oakland and UCA were more likely to express agreement than their student peers, especially at UCA. Thus, between 40 and 46 percent of UCA honors

students strongly agreed in favor of all three stigmatized groups, compared to a range of 11 percent to 28 percent of regular UCA students who were in strong agreement. At Oakland, honors students were significantly more tolerant of atheists than other students, with 53 percent in strong agreement compared to 37 percent of other OU students. With regard to communists, 26 percent of OU honors students were strongly tolerant compared to 16 percent of their peers, a difference that was not quite statistically significant at the .05 level of significance. But with regard to tolerance of homosexual teachers, there were no statistically significant differences between Oakland honors and non-honors student categories, with large proportions of both groups in strong agreement (57 and 48 percent respectively).

Students' separate responses to atheists, communists, and homosexuals were combined and summed to form an overall tolerance scale that ranged in value from zero (indicating that a respondent strongly disagreed that any of the three groups should be allowed to teach in public schools) to nine (indicating that a respondent strongly agreed that all three groups should be allowed to teach in public schools). As with UCA honors students in our previous survey, Oakland honors students had a significantly higher mean tolerance rating of 6.72 compared to a mean of 5.81 for regular students at the same institution. At the same time, t-score comparisons between universities showed that OU and UCA honors students were not statistically different in their overall attitudes of tolerance for communists, atheists, and homosexuals ($t=0.45$, $sig.=.651$). Students not enrolled in the honors college at OU, however, were significantly more tolerant of those groups than their regular student counterparts at UCA ($t=2.99$, $sig.=.003$).

In addition to predicting that honors students would express a greater overall degree of tolerance than other students, we also anticipated that they would be progressively more tolerant from one class cohort to the next as a consequence of the accen-

TABLE 3. LIBERAL TOLERANCE FOR ALLOWING COMMUNISTS, ATHEISTS, AND HOMOSEXUALS TO TEACH IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

	OU HONORS STUDENTS (N=77) percent	OU REGULAR STUDENTS (N=176) Percent	Chi-sq	Sig.	UCA HONORS STUDENTS (N=259) Percent	UCA REGULAR STUDENTS (N=205) Percent	Chi-sq	Sig.
ALLOW COMMUNISTS			7.21	.065			56.15	.000
0. Strongly Disagree	9.5	19.0			8.5	22.7		
1. Disagree	17.6	24.7			14.7	22.7		
2. Agree	47.3	40.2			36.8	43.8		
3. Strongly Agree	25.7	16.1			39.9	10.8		
ALLOW ATHEISTS			9.67	.022			51.17	.000
0. Strongly Disagree	1.4	10.3			5.4	12.4		
1. Disagree	8.1	12.6			8.1	17.4		
2. Agree	37.8	40.2			36.8	43.8		
3. Strongly Agree	52.7	36.8			46.3	15.9		
ALLOW HOMOSEXUALS			2.62	.453		16.96		.000
0. Strongly disagree	5.4	9.1			8.1	12.7		
1. Disagree	5.4	9.1			8.5	0.8		
2. Agree	32.4	33.7			37.5	49.0		
3. Strongly Agree	56.8	48.0			45.9	27.5		
Summed Tolerance Scale	Mean 6.72	Mean 5.81	t-score .98	Sig. .003	Mean 6.58	Mean 5.10	t-score 6.65	Sig. .000
t-score Comparisons of Student Tolerance Between Universities								
						t-score		Sig.
OU Honors Students Compared to UCA Honors Students						0.45		.651
OU Regular Students Compared to UCA Regular Students						2.29		.003

tuation of liberal values in an honors college environment. Panel studies would be the ideal way to test accentuation hypotheses and should be pursued in more systematic research on the impact of honors college programs. With the data at hand, however, we categorized students by class cohorts and compared the mean tolerance scores of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. In our UCA survey we found progressive tolerance differences between honors cohort groups, but, as shown in Table 4, this result was not replicated among Oakland honors students.

As predicted, OH honors freshmen already had significantly higher tolerance means than their counterparts in the regular student sample (6.33 compared to 5.12)

and sophomore honors students were even more tolerant (7.18 compared to 5.65). But among upper division students—especially seniors—there were no statistically significant differences between honors students and regular students at Oakland University. Though still high, tolerance means for junior and senior honors students declined slightly to 6.93 and 6.90 respectively, while simultaneously rising to 5.68 and 6.67 for OU juniors and seniors in the regular student sample. Thus, contrary to our expectations, progressive differences in liberal tolerance between honors students and their Oakland peers were not maintained from one class cohort comparison to the next, as they were at UCA. This conclusion is reinforced when looking at the ANOVA results,

TABLE 4. MEAN TOLERANCE SCALE DIFFERENCES BY COLLEGE CLASS COHORTS

	FRESHMEN		SOPHOMORES		JUNIORS		SENIORS		F-value	Sig.
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean		
OU Honors Students	33	6.33	18	7.18	14	6.93	10	6.90	0.88	.456
UCA Honor Students	113	6.05	82	6.84	30	7.03	34	7.26	3.39	.019
OU Regular Students	52	5.12	40	5.65	34	5.68	47	6.67	3.86	.011
UCA Regular Students	23	4.64	42	4.76	68	5.06	67	5.41	1.03	.382
Totals	221	5.74	182	6.13	146	5.79	158	6.28		
F-value		3.87		10.42		5.88		7.18		
Sig.		.010		.000		.001		.000		

which indicate statistically significant cohort differences among regular OU students ($f=3.86$, $sig.=.011$) but no overall significant cohort differences in the honors sample ($f=0.88$, $sig.=.456$).

One obvious caveat to attach to these findings is the relatively small number of upper division honors students obtained in the Oakland sample (14 juniors and only 10 seniors), which substantially attenuates the ability to make confident generalizations. In contrast, 30 juniors and 34 seniors in the UCA honors college responded to our earlier survey, making statistical generalizations somewhat easier. Nonetheless, while the Oakland survey supported the "attraction" side of our hypothesis (freshmen attracted to the OU Honors College were already more liberal in their tolerance than other freshmen students), it did not confirm the "accentuation" side (OU honors students were not progressively more tolerant by class cohort comparisons). In our UCA survey (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998), multiple-regression analysis demonstrated that honors college status was a statistically significant predictor variable of students' liberal tolerance, even when controlling for other measures of academic aptitude that might be correlated with tolerant attitudes in a university environment, independent of whether students were enrolled in the honors college. Among the academic measures employed in the regression analysis, ACT scores and influence of college classes also proved to be modestly

correlated with student tolerance at UCA. None of the other variables in the model (age, sex, and race) had significant predictive value, with the notable exception of students' religious participation. Frequency of church attendance was negatively correlated with students' liberal tolerance and was by far the best predictor variable of UCA students' social attitudes, independent of their academic status in or out of the honors college.

We replicated the UCA regression analysis using Oakland data and the results are summarized in Table 5. The variable designations employed in Table 5 are the same ones used earlier in Table 2, with the exception that OUHONORS has replaced UCAHONORS in the model (OUHONORS = honors vs. regular student status; COHORT = cohort class standing; ACT = ACT score; GRADPLAN = plans for post-baccalaureate training; CLASSTHINK = influence of college classes; AGE = student's age; SEX = student's sex; RACE = student's race; and CHURCH = frequency of church attendance).

Overall, the variables used in the regression analysis of the Oakland data were not as strongly predictive of students' liberal tolerance as they were at UCA. Thus, comparing adjusted R square values, the same multivariate model explained 28 percent of the variance in tolerance scores at UCA but only 13 percent at Oakland. Nonetheless, as was the case at UCA, honors student sta-

TABLE 5. PREDICTING LIBERAL TOLERANCE OF OAKLAND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FOR ALLOWING ATHEISTS, COMMUNISTS, AND HOMOSEXUALS TO TEACH IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS (N=253, WITH T-SCORE AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVELS FOR PARTIAL R AND BETA)

variable	zero-order r	partial r	beta	t-score	sig.
OUHONORS	.17	.15	.16	1.98	.049
COHORT	.21	.04	.07	0.53	.594
ACT	.17	.13	.14	1.75	.082
GRADPLAN	.11	.07	.06	0.88	.381
CLASSTHINK	.01	-.02	-.02	-0.32	.748
AGE	.21	.09	.16	1.13	.262
SEX	.18	.21	.20	2.84	.005
RACE	-.02	-.04	-.04	-0.58	.561
CHURCH	-.16	-.20	-.19	-2.67	.008
multiple R =	.42	adjusted R square =	.13		
f-value =	4.05	significance of R =	.000		

tus at Oakland showed a modest but statistically significant correlation with student tolerance (partial $r = .15$ and $\beta = .16$) when controlling for all other variables in the equation. Also similar to the UCA survey, religious attendance was negatively correlated with liberal tolerance and proved to be a reliable predictor variable with partial $r = -.20$ and $\beta = -.19$. Unlike the results at UCA, however, student ACT scores and the influence of college classes on their social views were not significant predictors of tolerance at Oakland University.

Perhaps the most striking new finding in the Oakland survey was the emergence of gender as a predictor of student tolerance. Whereas gender was not a significant variable at UCA, females were significantly more tolerant at OU than their male counterparts. With a partial correlation of $.21$ and a β weight of $.20$, gender was a better predictor of student tolerance than any OU academic measures, including honors college status, and equal in predictive value to OU students' degree of religious involvement.

DISCUSSION

The data examined in this study represents an effort to test hypotheses about the impact of an honors college education on

students' social values. It represents both a replication and an extension of our earlier research on this subject by comparing honors students enrolled at two institutions that exhibit certain program differences situated in very different regions of the country. The attraction-accentuation model of educational development led us to predict that students attracted to the liberal arts honors curriculum at Oakland University and the University of Central Arkansas would be more liberal in their attitudes of social tolerance than other students. This was in fact a core finding replicated at both schools. However, accentuation hypotheses, predicting that honors students would be more strongly influenced by their college classes and progressively more tolerant from one class cohort to the next when compared to other students, were only confirmed at UCA and not at Oakland. Our explanation for these contrasting findings revolves around curriculum and program differences at the two schools. At UCA the honors curriculum is more standardized and sequentially structured and there is a greater range and frequency of social activities sponsored by the honors college that brings students and faculty together, encouraging closer social ties and, we would argue, more strongly reinforcing a set of shared values among students in a residential college environ-

ment. Clearly, institutional variations in honors college accentuation patterns are empirical issues that require considerably more comparative study.

In addition to institutional differences in college programs, we anticipated there would be variations in students' social views linked to regional differences between the two schools, especially with regard to religious influence. Thus, while OU and UCA honors students were not significantly different from one another in overall liberal tolerance, regular students at OU were significantly more tolerant than their UCA counterparts. This latter finding may in part be attributed to the religious backgrounds of a majority of UCA students who grow up in a religiously conservative state. Our survey data in fact confirmed that UCA students were more likely to claim a denominational affiliation and attend church regularly than most students at Oakland. What we failed to anticipate, however, were sizable minorities among honors students at Oakland, as well as UCA, who had strong religious attachments and were frequent church attenders. Religious attendance among students at both universities, including honors college students, proved to be a significant independent variable for predicting opposition to communists, atheists, and homosexuals teaching in public schools. Thus, contrary to our expectations, we found no regional differences with regard to religious influence. In both Michigan and Arkansas, church attendance was negatively correlated with students' liberal tolerance. In comparing the two regions we should not forget that, historically, Roman Catholicism has often exerted a conservative influence in response to certain social issues in northern industrial states (including crusades against atheistic communism and opposition to gay rights) that is analogous to the influence of denominational Protestantism in the American South (Dinges 1991; Hitchcock 1991; Greeley 1977).

We did not anticipate that gender would be a significant predictor of liberal toler-

ance at Oakland but not at UCA, and we do not have a ready explanation for why it was. Conceivably this is another potentially important regional difference that requires much more comparative study. It might be the case, for example, that identification with contemporary feminist values is more widespread among college females in northern states like Michigan than in the South, where traditional gender attitudes are arguably more pronounced. Regional differences in students' gender attitudes could, in turn, be correlated with a greater or lesser degree of liberal tolerance toward the stigmatized groups identified in our survey.

In conclusion, we have begun to accumulate comparative data that support the proposition that honors students are more liberal than their peers in social tolerance and that certain kinds of religious attachments transcend regional differences and academic program variations as a countervailing influence on many students' attitudes of tolerance. In addition, our data suggest that the accentuation of liberal tolerance among honors students depends on the type of program instituted by the honors college, while gender differences in tolerance may be associated primarily with regional cultural variations in American society.

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