First Destination Preparation: The Role of the Liberal Arts

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Vanderbilt University, Peabody College
Spring 2021

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Table of Contents

List of Figures, Tables, & Appendices

Foreword

This study was completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctorate of education degree from the Peabody College of Education and Human Development at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN.

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Acknowledgements[1]

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of The Honors College (THC) at Northwest Research University (NRU).[2] We are especially grateful to our primary contacts at the institution who spent many hours meeting with us, responding to our questions, and providing important context that informed our research. We are also grateful to THC students and alumni who participated in our survey and interviews, offering valuable insight about their experiences. This project would not have been possible without their contributions.

We are also indebted to Dr. Will Doyle at Vanderbilt University for his invaluable guidance and feedback throughout this project, to our program advisors Dr. Catherine Gavin Loss and Dr. Marisa Cannata for their facilitation expertise and encouragement, and to Dr. Ellen Goldring and Dr. Claire Smrekar for teaching us the research methods

[1] The photo on the cover of our report is originally from the following website: https://portal.criticalimpact.com/user/25043/image/whatlibedlookslike.pdf.
[2] These are pseudonyms.

necessary to complete this study. Our work has benefited greatly from the knowledge and mentorship of each of them.

Finally, our deepest thanks go to our families, friends, and colleagues who have walked this road with us, offering us support and encouragement, listening to us as we mused about the value of the liberal arts, and bearing the brunt of extra burdens as our time and attention were directed here. We dedicate this project to them.

Executive Summary

Introduction

This study aims to build a deeper understanding of the extent to which liberal arts experiences lead to the building of liberal arts skills and to determine whether these skills ultimately help students arrive at their first post-graduate destination. To this end, we worked with the The Honors College (THC) at the Northwest Research University (NRU) to see how current and former students engaged with and benefited from their honors college experience.[3]

THC is one of the NRU's nine colleges. THC is designed to be like a small, liberal arts college within a large, public, flagship university. As such, students have the opportunity to benefit from the best of both institution types. As described on their website, THC provides students with "the acquired skills in critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and communication that will enable you to be a life-long learner, and a versatile member of society" (*Why THC?*, n.d). The faculty and administrators within THC largely approach teaching and learning within the college with a liberal arts philosophy (Former Dean, personal communication, June 25, 2020), which is not uncommon for honors college programs at large research universities (Roche, 2010).

Students at THC are academically high-achieving students. While they do not publicize minimum requirements for admission into the program, they do report a median GPA of 3.91 and median SAT scores of 1360. This is significantly higher than the first-year class profile: GPA middle 50% is 3.31-3.90, and SAT middle 50% is 1090-1290 (*NRU Facts: Admissions*, n.d.). With such high-achieving peers, THC students can experience the benefits of a small, liberal arts college without the high costs of tuition and without having to sacrifice the social and academic benefits of attending a large research institution.

Under new leadership, THC has already begun the process of building their understanding of how the experiences students have while at THC, in conjunction with those within their major(s), will help them after graduation. Previous surveys of alumni have laid the groundwork for the development of new initiatives aimed at supporting students in achieving their desired post-graduate placements.

As a continuation of these efforts, this project utilizes a mixed-methods approach to paint a fuller picture of the experiences of current students and alumni. Additionally, based on this data, we provide recommendations that THC can employ in order to continue their work in this area.

[3] We have used pseudonyms throughout this document to protect the anonymity of the institution and the individuals within it.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: *In what ways are THC alumni using liberal arts skills to reach their first destinations?*

To better understand how liberal arts experiences help THC graduates reach their first destinations, we explored the ways in which THC alumni used their liberal arts skills to reach their first destinations. We invited 476 THC alumni from the classes of 2020, 2019, 2018, and 2017 to participate and spoke to 16 alumni across a range of majors, class years, and types of first destinations. Throughout our interviews we focused on emerging themes in alignment with the seven competencies THC has articulated for its graduates. Those competencies include intellectual engagement, critical reasoning, disciplinary methods, communication skills, intercultural competence, interdisciplinary inquiry, and research competence. The conclusions from our interviews are summarized in relation to each theme below:

Intellectual Engagement: Alumni spoke positively about the intellectual engagement they experienced as a result of their participation in THC. However, many were not explicitly aware of how this skill helped them to reach their first destinations.

Critical Reasoning: Participants found the critical reasoning skills they obtained to be useful and could articulate why they were useful and in what ways they were used to reach their first destination. Additionally, they used their critical reasoning skills to articulate the relevance of their experiences in job settings.

Disciplinary Methods: Only one of the alumni addressed this skill and articulated clear learning gains in this domain. The participant noted that THC provided a different perspective for students with majors outside of the humanities.

Communication Skills: Communication skills were a consistent and significant topic for all participants. They were extremely aware of how their communication skills helped them reach their first destinations. Not only were these skills key, they were particularly helpful in building confidence and helping them prepare for graduate programs.

Intercultural Competence: Alumni's intercultural competence was useful professionally in many ways that included pursuing employment. While THC lists intercultural competence as one of its primary student outcomes, alumni cited their major coursework and their study abroad experiences as the primary sources of this skill.

Interdisciplinary Inquiry: Alumni recognized that interdisciplinary inquiry provided them a different way of thinking and that it expanded their minds and provided them with a more well-rounded thought process. They were not able to draw connections with how this affected their path to a first destination.

Research Competence: Participants talked often about the research skills that they had acquired during their time at THC. It was one of the few competencies that most of them named explicitly. Alumni articulated its value in interview settings, on applications, and other in processes associated with reaching their first destinations.

Gap Year: Twenty-five percent of alumni participants took a gap year after graduation. For some, these were intentional and planned, but that was not always the case. Regardless, alumni articulated that gap years are a common and acceptable first-destination.

Career Supports: While students indicated that they had gained several liberal arts skills through their THC experiences, alumni consistently articulated that they needed additional career support such as career counseling, connections with alumni, resume and cover letter support, and support for applying to graduate school.

Research Question 2: *What liberal arts or other experiences are current THC students engaging in at NRU? Does this engagement differ by student characteristics?*

To answer this question, we administered an online survey that was sent to current THC second-year through fifth-year students. The target population totalled 704 students. After data clean up, we were left with a total of 129 responses for an 18% response rate. The primary variables of interest in the survey were liberal arts experiences (i.e., student-faculty contact, diverse experiences, student affairs support, extracurricular involvement, research, and thesis), career services, work experience, and various demographic characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination.

Overall, THC students report **higher levels of engagement** in:

- student-faculty contact that supported their *intellectual growth*
- *discussions* about diversity issues
- required THC activities and other non-THC extracurricular activities
- research-paper theses
- part-time employment *outside* their field of interest

They report **lower levels of engagement** in:

- student-faculty contact that supports their *career growth*
- *interactions* with diverse individuals with diverse ideas
- student affairs support
- optional THC activities
- career services and support
- work experience *within* their field of interest

Importantly, in answering the first part of Research Question 2, we found that students receive **only some direct career support** from faculty, staff, or career services. Students are building valuable skills through experiences like writing their thesis, but they view this primarily as **preparation for graduate school** and not for non-academic careers. These findings indicate that while liberal arts experiences are useful for developing skills like research competence and critical thinking, students need more **direct career support in translating these skills into non-academic careers.**

THC **students' engagement varies by several characteristics**, most notably year in college and a student's intended first destination. Unsurprisingly, a student's year in college influences their extracurricular activities, prior work and research experience, and their confidence in the type of thesis they intend to write. Additionally, those who are unsure about their first destinations report lower engagement in student-faculty contact, diverse experiences, and confidence in completing a thesis.

Among all of the liberal arts or other experiences, students' intended thesis type was influenced by the most demographic characteristics. Gender, year in college, and NRU College/School influenced the type of thesis students' planned to complete. Specifically, men/trans men, fourth-year students, and School of Music and Dance students with STEM majors reported higher likelihood of completing a research paper as their thesis. However, many of the differences between these groups were relatively small. By contrast, THC students' cumulative number of extracurricular activities was highly influenced by their background characteristics, including year in college, Pell-recipient status, and first-generation status: Younger, lower-income, and first-generation students all reported being involved in fewer extracurricular activities than their peers.

These findings are relevant to the second part of Research Question 2, and to the broader question of how students' liberal arts experiences contribute to the development of first-destination skills in two ways:

- The fact that students who are unsure about their first destinations are engaging least in the liberal arts experiences offered by THC reveals that **additional career support may be necessary** to increase engagement and improve outcomes.
- Since THC student engagement varies by income, first-generation status, year in college, and intended first destination, simply **offering educational experiences does not guarantee that all students have access to these experiences,** which can lead to inequitable outcomes.

Research Question 3: *According to the literature and data from peer institutions, what are best practices for preparing liberal arts students for their first destinations?*

In order to better understand the ways in which other honors colleges are leveraging their resources to support post-graduate student success, we examined the career services offerings at four honors colleges at other large public flagship institutions. These included:

- Penn State University (Penn State)
- Arizona State University (ASU)
- University of Kentucky (Kentucky)
- Oregon State University (OSU)

Based on this website analysis and a review of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) best practices, we determined that there are some opportunities for increased support to better prepare students for their first destinations. The key findings are described below:

Offer direct career services support. This can be done with dedicated staff members and programming within the honors college—as can be seen at Penn State—or through building stronger connections with the central career services office and identifying dedicated personnel within those offices that are equipped to support honors college students—which is the model at Oregon State University.

Integrate career preparation into a thesis course. Some programs have developed a curriculum that accompanies the thesis or capstone course so that it can be leveraged as a launching point for students as they transition from their undergraduate experiences to their first destination. This culminating work is the perfect opportunity to build in structures to help teach students how to bridge the academic-career divide by specifically and explicitly reinforcing career competencies.

Collect, maintain, and report on student outcomes. None of the schools maintain a public report of job placement outcomes for honors students broken down by student demographics. In order to determine if career initiatives are successful, accurate and robust data needs to be collected, maintained, and reported.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and literature, we suggest the following recommendations to THC in order increase students' preparation for their first destinations:

Narrate THC's Value-Add

We recommend that THC communicate the value of the liberal arts for all careers, including non-academic careers, systematically throughout their curriculum and marketing materials. This will ensure that all students have a deep understanding of THC's core competencies and the value of liberal arts skills in all workplaces.

Enhance Career Support for Students

We recommend that THC provide students with more direct career support in order to help them internalize how their liberal arts experiences and skills benefit their professional lives. This can be done by integrating career readiness into the classroom, forging

partnerships with career services professionals, and engaging alumni to build students' career readiness.

Facilitate Faculty Buy-In for Career Support

We recommend that THC create opportunities to build opportunities for faculty to engage in career support. For either of the above recommendations to be successful, faculty must embrace the idea that professional skills are not antithetical to liberal arts skills but rather enhance students' awareness of the value of their liberal arts skills.

Increase Diversity and Support for Diverse Students within THC

We recommend that THC increase recruitment efforts for students from diverse backgrounds and work to demonstrate their strong commitment to equity and inclusion throughout the college. In doing this, there will be increased opportunity for conversations among diverse individuals with diverse ideas, which can build more democratic and pluralistic values in students and alumni.

Track THC Student and Alumni Outcomes and Contact Information

We recommend that THC track their students and alumni outcomes and contact information in sufficient detail to be able to isolate relevant sub-populations by race/ethnicity, Pell status, first-generation status, etc. This will help determine if the above interventions are successful and can help justify the value-add of the honors college to various stakeholders.

Conclusion

This study has provided an important addition to the literature as it explores the role of liberal arts experiences on students' first post-graduation outcomes. It provides context for how liberal arts experiences cultivate liberal arts skills that help students to reach their first destinations, such as employment, prestigious fellowships, graduate programs, and in some cases, an intentional gap year. Moreover, it confirms that liberal arts skills can be cultivated outside of the traditional liberal arts college environment. While it is evident that THC students obtain liberal arts skills that help them to reach their first destinations, they are often unable to articulate, recognize, translate, and apply the liberal arts skills they have acquired to the career setting. Our findings confirm that it is not just human capital (i.e. liberal arts skills or technical skills) that helps students reach their first destinations but also the surrounding social/cultural capital that is necessary to translate those skills into the professional workplace.

Introduction

The history of American higher education has often been written as a tale of two institution types. On the one hand, liberal arts colleges in the United States have typically promoted general education in the traditional disciplines by teaching students to develop their intrinsic values, close relationships between students and faculty, character and citizenship, and culture (Kimball, 2014). On the other hand, American research universities have promoted the development of research skills and critical reasoning in their students (Kimball, 2014). More recently, these ideals and these institution types have been seen as in conflict with one another—each competing for the same space in the educational marketplace—with liberal arts colleges losing out primarily in times of war and economic busts given their higher price tags (Kimball, 2014).

Since the 1970s, the liberal arts have seen a dramatic decline not only in the number of liberal arts colleges but also in the number of liberal arts majors at research universities (Brint, 2011; Kimball, 2014). Meanwhile, there has been a dramatic increase in both vocational offerings at liberal arts colleges and "practical majors" across the sector (Breneman, 1990; Brint, 2011; Kimball, 2014). Some scholars have characterized these shifts as a loss of the liberal arts in the United States due to students' concerns with the job market (Breneman, 1990). However, other scholars have argued against the narrative of the devalued liberal arts given that the decline in liberal arts institutions has occurred in tandem with a surge in an alternative form of liberal arts education: honors education (Kimball, 2014).

Honors education encompasses both honors programs and honors colleges (see Sederberg, 2005, for a list of the primary distinctions), and it entered the higher education landscape in earnest in the 1970s—the same time that traditional forms of liberal arts education began to decline (Kimball, 2014; Scott & Smith, 2016).

There are a few possible explanations for the shift from liberal arts education to honors education in the United States: 1) access to higher education was rapidly expanding during this period, perhaps threatening the elite status of the college-educated crowd (Loss, 2017), and 2) the economic downturn left traditional liberal arts colleges beyond the financial reach of many students (Kimball, 2014; Scott & Smith, 2016). Therefore, honors education provided students with a less expensive means to maintain access to an elite education (Kimball, 2014; Scott & Smith, 2016). In Kimball's view (2014), the university has outcompeted liberal arts colleges in the marketplace not necessarily because of a devaluing of the liberal arts but rather because the university recognized the value of the liberal arts and incorporated this style of teaching and learning into their (heavily-subsidized) institutions.

Regardless of whether it takes place in a research university or a small liberal arts college, it is clear that a liberal arts education provides students with a multitude of

benefits from building a deep love of learning to cultivating a sense of purpose to fostering skills that are valued in the workplace (Roche, 2010; Stross, 2017; Zakaria, 2015). A recent study by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce found that there are very tangible benefits to attending a liberal arts college including a 40-year return on investment that is 25% higher than the median for all other colleges (Carnevale et al., 2020; Svrluga, 2020). While there is variation in this return by institution selectivity, location, and number of STEM majors, these findings do highlight that there are monetary as well as intellectual benefits of a liberal arts education. Importantly, students also build skills during their liberal arts education that employers find valuable—namely communication skills, problem-solving skills, and working as a part of a team (Roche, 2010; Pasquerella, 2019; NACE Staff, 2020). Liberal arts advocates argue that the wide range of skills that students build will help them succeed in a range of first destinations while also giving them the toolkit to be successful in an ever-changing job market (Gobble, 2019; Osgood, 2017; Stross, 2017; Zakaria, 2015).

Despite the benefits, students, parents, and politicians today are increasingly questioning the value of a liberal arts degree (Pasquerella, 2019). Colleges have seen this insecurity displayed in funding declines (Pasquerella, 2019) and in student major selection (Flaherty, 2017; Weise et al., 2018). Given the current context, we have engaged in this project to unpack the student perceptions of their experiences attending an honors college at a large, public institution that emphasizes a liberal arts ethos. We build upon previous work focused on the values of higher education broadly and the connections between a liberal arts education and post-graduate outcomes.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to build a deeper understanding of the extent to which liberal arts experiences lead to the building of liberal arts skills and if these skills ultimately help students arrive at their first post-graduate destinations. Proponents of liberal arts education often argue that it promotes broadly applicable skills that benefit students many years after their college graduation (Roche, 2010; Stross, 2017; Zakaria, 2015). However, our study adds to this discussion by focusing specifically on the benefits of a liberal arts education in the period directly following graduation. While much of the existing literature describes this phenomenon within liberal arts institutions, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by focusing on this phenomenon within an honors college at a large, public research institution within the United States.

Institutional Context

This capstone project is specifically focused on The Honors College (THC), one of the nine schools at Northwest Research University (NRU). THC was started in 1960 and enrolls nearly 1,000 students. THC is structured much like a small, liberal arts college situated within a larger research institution. The faculty and administrators within THC largely

approach teaching and learning through a liberal arts philosophy (Former Dean, personal communication, June 25, 2020). This is common for honors college programs at large research universities. Honors colleges often require significant coursework in the arts and sciences and provide ample opportunity for students to engage with a range of topics in close settings with peers (Roche, 2010).

The current strategic goals of The Honors College include increasing student enrollment and improving student retention (Former Dean, 2019). It has been suggested that THC can increase college diversity and accessibility by growing student enrollment. The former dean of THC had already started to collect student and alumni feedback and implement strategies to remedy current retention challenges.

Specifically, THC recently revised the curriculum to include more natural science courses and course flexibility for students. Additionally, THC hopes to draw stronger connections between the academic experiences of students in the college with their post-graduate outcomes (Former Dean, personal communication, June 1, 2020). While there are several programmatic components within THC, the primary strategy used to achieve student outcomes is the delivery of a strong and robust liberal arts curriculum.[4] Ultimately, THC expects that this liberal arts strategy, paired with a student's major, will position them for a well-rounded and successful academic life beyond NRU and THC.

Research Questions

While THC's strategy relies on the assumption that liberal arts experiences have a positive influence on students' first destinations (i.e. their initial professional outcomes after graduation, such as first jobs, graduate schools, or volunteer positions), THC has little institutional data to support this claim. Thus, this study aims to identify *what* liberal arts experiences influence *which* THC students and *how* alumni reach their first destinations. It further seeks to identify best practices in preparing liberal arts students for their first destinations. Specifically, this project answers the following questions:

> *RQ1: In what ways are THC alumni using liberal arts skills to reach their first destinations?*
>
> *RQ2: What liberal arts or other experiences are current THC students engaging in at NRU?*
>
> > *RQ2b: Does this engagement differ by student characteristics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination)?*
>
> *RQ3: According to the literature and data from peer institutions, what are best practices for preparing liberal arts students for their first destinations?*

[4] See Logic Model in Appendix 1.

RQ1 is designed to help us understand what liberal arts skills alumni developed via liberal arts experiences and how those skills were or were not used in reaching their first destinations. RQ2 is intended to determine what liberal arts or other experiences current students are participating in and the extent to which this engagement varies by student characteristics. Finally, RQ3 is meant to offer our client other ideas for changes they could make to smooth students' pathways to their first destinations. Information garnered from this study will be used by THC's leadership team to inform programmatic changes in the coming years.

Definition of Terms

Liberal Arts Education

We have defined a liberal arts education following Seifert et al. (2008, p. 109) as an:

> institutional ethos that values: (a) the development of a set of intellectual arts (e.g., intellectual openness to inquire and discover; and the ability and desire to adopt a critical perspective of one's and other's beliefs) more than professional or vocational skills; (b) curricular and environmental structures that work in combination to create a coherent integrity to students' intellectual experience; and (c) an institutional tradition of student-student and student-faculty interaction both in and out of the classroom (Seifert et al., 2008, p. 109).

Liberal Arts Experiences

The literature contributes to our understanding of the most common liberal arts experiences that comprise liberal arts education. For the present study, we have synthesized the most common experiences from previous studies (Astin, 1999; Seifert et al., 2008) into seven categories: student-faculty contact, student affairs support, diverse experiences, thesis/research, peer interactions, interdisciplinary coursework, and academic rigor.[5] We have chosen primarily to focus on the first four liberal arts experiences in the list for the quantitative portion of the present study. This allows us to focus our investigation on those liberal arts experiences outside of the curriculum that THC has the most leverage to change.[6] We have included "thesis" specifically because all THC students are required to complete a thesis, and multiple THC stakeholders cited the thesis as the primary means by which THC students were being prepared for their first destinations. A comparison of the previous literature's conceptualization of liberal arts experiences with the present study's is shown in Appendix 2.

[5] These experiences are also commonly referred to as "high-impact practices" in the literature (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2011).

[6] In our initial interviews with our client, they noted that they had spent the last year revising the curriculum with Fall 2020 marking the start of its implementation. As such, they requested that we avoid any recommendations for substantive changes to it.

Liberal Arts Skills

Previous studies in liberal arts education have specified common outcomes of liberal arts experiences, which we refer to as liberal arts skills (Haberberger, 2018; Seifert et al., 2008; Winter et al., 1981).[7] THC provides a list of seven learning outcomes, which are the skills they intend for their students to graduate with after completing their curriculum. These include critical reasoning, communication skills, research competence, intellectual engagement, disciplinary methods, interdisciplinary inquiry, and intercultural competence. These competencies were officially established by THC leadership when the curriculum was redesigned in 2019 but were implicitly used by THC prior to 2019, and these liberal arts skills were taken directly from THC's student learning objectives (see Appendix 3). THC faculty have scaffolded the curriculum to build students' skills in these areas and prepare them for their thesis. The seven liberal arts skills of THC are compared to previous studies in Appendix 4.

First Destinations

The National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) divides first destinations into five categories: employed full-time (standard job), employed other, service/military, continuing education, and seeking (NACE, 2019). THC has reported that the three most common outcomes for its alumni are employment, graduate school, or prestigious fellowships (Former Dean, personal communication, June 25, 2020). Our interviews with alumni further revealed gap years as another common first destination. Thus, our study included eight potential first destinations for students: graduate school, employment, service/volunteer work, gap year, military, fellowship, unsure, other.

[7] These skills have been referred to in other bodies of literature by varying terminology, such as "soft skills," "21st century skills," or "human skills" (Weise et al., 2018; Wende, 2014).

Literature Review

Higher education institutions have grappled with the tension inherent in their multiple missions for centuries (Breneman, 1990; Brint, 2011; Davidson, 2017; Deming, 2015; Gelber, 2017; Higham, 1979; Kimball, 2014; Lattuca & Stark, 2011; Thelin, 2019). Historically, the tension between the higher education sector's liberal arts mission and its vocational mission has arisen in times of financial uncertainty or industrial transformation (Brint, 2011; Kimball, 2014; Lattuca & Stark, 2011; Thelin, 2019)—times not unlike the present.

Currently, the onset of the fourth industrial revolution along with the long-lasting impacts of the Great Recession have left students uncertain about the payoff of a college education (Flaherty, 2017; Weise et al., 2018). With the increasing cost of tuition, more students have gone into significant debt to finance their education, and some have received degrees from institutions that have left them unable to repay these debts (Dynarski, 2013; Scott-Clayton, 2018). Thus, even before COVID-19 further disrupted our world's economy, college freshmen were expressing greater financial concerns about the costs of college than the cohorts before them (Stolzenberg et al., 2020). These financial concerns have led students to focus on becoming "well off financially" rather than developing a "meaningful philosophy of life" as the primary purpose of their education (Astin as cited in Brint, 2011, p. 132).

The Economic Benefits of Higher Education

Theoretical Foundations

Notwithstanding students' concerns, the literature is very clear about the economic benefits of higher education: A college degree significantly improves an individual's financial well-being (Goldin & Katz, 2009; Ma et al., 2016; OECD, 2020; Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013). On average, bachelor's degree holders earned $24,600 (67%) more in annual income than high school graduates in 2015 (Ma et al., 2016). And in 2019 the median lifetime return on investment (ROI) for a college degree was $723,000 (Carnevale et al., 2020, p. 3). The payoff to a liberal arts education in particular is also quite clear (Hill & Pisacreta, 2019). At $918,000, the lifetime ROI for liberal arts graduates is even greater than for the general college population (Carnevale et al., 2020, p. 3). Overall, Mayhew et al. (2016, p. 565) report that "postsecondary education leads to increased economic and career outcomes, including the likelihood of employment, more hours worked per week, occupational status, [and] overall job satisfaction."

There are several theories about why the labor market values higher education so highly. The three most prominent theories are human capital theory, social/cultural capital theories, or some combination of these two. Human capital theory stipulates that education is rewarded in the marketplace because it provides the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out essential tasks in the workforce (Autor, 2014; Becker, 1993; Goldin &

Katz, 2009; Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013; Schultz, 1961). Social/cultural capital theories, by contrast, argue that higher education exposes students to the relationships, information, and cultural norms that assist them in successfully transitioning to the workplace environment (J. Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995). Wrapped up in social/cultural capital theories of education is the idea that education "signals" one's value based simply on cultural norms and expectations about the prestige associated with certain credentials from certain institutions (Arum & Roksa, 2014).

Recent studies have attempted to establish which of these theories carries more explanatory power. On the one hand, Arum and Roksa (2014) conducted a wide-scale mixed-methods evaluation of students' career outcomes and found that students with higher critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills had better labor market outcomes than those with fewer of these skills. Similarly, Autor (2014) examined data from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), an international assessment of cognitive and workplace skills, and found a strong correlation between cognitive skills and earnings. Autor (2014, p. 845) writes, "comparing two U.S. workers who are one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the population average of cognitive ability, we would expect their full-time weekly earnings to differ by 50 to 60%." Such a strong relationship between cognitive skills and earnings would not be present if labor market returns were based only on common social graces and deep personal networks. Thus, labor market returns for higher education must at least in part be based on skills and not just on signaling.

On the other hand, Mayhew et al. (2016) in their comprehensive review of recent higher education literature found that students' major and institution type matter most for their labor market outcomes. Students who major in fields that have a "well-defined body of content knowledge, center on quantitative or scientific skills, and have a direct functional alignment with specific occupations" have the highest earnings (Mayhew et al., 2016, p. 482). While this may be due to the fact that these students' majors endowed them with the skills that are most useful in the labor market, it is also possible that these students do not actually possess these skills but rather that their majors signal that they do. At the same time, the authors also reported that institution type affects career outcomes more than the skills students have. This means that students who attended a prestigious institution will likely have better labor market returns than those who attended a less prestigious institution—even if they acquired fewer skills. Thus, while skills do matter, social and cultural capital are not without influence in the marketplace.

Therefore, labor market outcomes do support the human capital model in general. However, when these outcomes are subdivided based on *institution type* or *major,* they may lend more credence to the social/cultural capital model.

Demographic Variation

While the overall benefits to a college degree are clear, it is essential to note that these benefits have not been experienced equally across demographic groups. Specifically, Ma et al. (2016) highlight how the returns to a college education vary by race, sex, major, and institution type. For example, the wage premium for Asian graduates with a bachelor's degree is double that of Asian high school graduates, but for all other races the wage premium is less than double (Ma et al., 2016). Similarly, for male college graduates, their median earnings for full-time work in 2015 were $71,400, but for females they were only $51,700 (Ma et al., 2016). The reasons for these disparate outcomes are complex.

The inequities across racial lines are due in part to stratification of the college sector. Access to higher education institutions in the United States is highly stratified by race and social class (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010; Ma et al., 2016). Although the economy still significantly rewards those who obtain a general education at an elite undergraduate institution and wait to specialize until professional graduate schools (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010), access to such an (expensive) education is most available to white, upper class students from educated families (Aisch et al., 2017; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2018; Carnevale & Strohl, 2010). By contrast, Black, Hispanic, and low-income students tend to be overrepresented at community colleges and less selective institutions (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010, 2013). This pattern of stratification systematically affects their returns on the college investment and widens socioeconomic gaps.

By contrast, the inequities between the sexes may be a result of divisions within colleges. According to Armstrong and Hamilton's (2018) in-depth sociological study at a public, research university in the Midwest, women with high socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to select "easy" majors because they can acquire jobs via their social graces and their parents' powerful network connections, whereas those from lower-SES backgrounds without such societal advantages are more likely to choose majors that lead to stable careers more directly, like education and nursing (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2018). Low-SES students are also more likely to work long hours outside of college to finance their education, which can affect their performance in coursework (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2018). Despite the discrepancy in the effort expended, high-SES students still tend to achieve high returns for their college investment because their parents are able to fund internships and forge connections with potential employers that can lead to stable careers after graduation (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2018).

For students who enroll in institutions or majors that are not typical for their social class, race, or sex, there are often many hurdles to overcome along the path to social mobility. Stereotype threat can heighten their anxiety and lower their academic performance (Steele, 2011). Food scarcity or housing insecurity can make it hard to focus on their studies (Jack, 2019; Martinez et al., 2018; Westover, 2018). Financial concerns can hinder their ability to get involved on campus (Jack, 2019). And unfortunately, a

stereotype-threat-induced need to prove themselves may cause them to avoid seeking out professors or other resources for help. All of these factors combine to make dropping out or stopping out of college more likely (Braxton et al., 2013) and standing out on a resume more challenging.

Due to these inequities across students' background characteristics, some students continue to be disproportionately impacted in the labor market by factors outside their control. The literature outlines the economic benefits of higher education and the rewards associated with attending elite undergraduate institutions, yet the glaring inequities in access to high-quality institutions, majors, and internships make it difficult for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to reap the same rewards from higher education.

The Role of the Liberal Arts in Students' First Destinations

In addition to disparate earnings based on institution type and student characteristics, more data is also emerging about the variance in lifetime earnings by major. Recent earnings data suggest that bachelor's degree holders who have studied "practical" majors are rewarded with the highest salaries in the labor market (cf. Arum & Roksa, 2014; Carnevale et al., 2020; Mayhew et al., 2016; Stross, 2017; Weise et al., 2018). For example, disparate outcomes by major range from $1.5 million for science, technology, engineering or math (STEM) for graduates and $700,000 for those who chose arts/humanities majors (Webber, 2014). Although STEM and business majors typically see better economic returns overall, social science and arts/humanities majors have narrowed the gap.

One argument for why humanities majors have been closing the gap is that the fourth industrial revolution is rendering the narrow, technical training of "practical" majors useless as automation or cheaper labor replace these educated workers (OECD, 2020; Zakaria, 2015). Liberal arts advocates suggest that the broad base of skills offered by a liberal arts education not only prepares students for graduate school but also helps them nimbly adapt to these future changes (Gobble, 2019; Osgood, 2017; Stross, 2017; Zakaria, 2015). The logic seems to suggest that while "practical" studies may prosper in the short run, liberal arts studies will triumph in the long run.

This proposition presents a problem for liberal arts advocates, however. Can a liberal arts education also support students in reaching their first destinations directly after graduation or must they wait several years to discover the pay off to their education?

Based on the definition provided in our introduction, a liberal arts education consists of both a common set of student experiences *and* skills (Seifert et al., 2008, p. 109). Studies of the impacts of liberal arts education on students reveal that it is not necessarily liberal arts *institutions* but liberal arts *experiences* that most influence students' outcomes (Pascarella et al., 2005).

Building on this foundation, the theory that underlies a liberal arts education is that liberal arts experiences contribute to better first destinations for alumni by providing them

with useful liberal arts skills. Thus, in its most basic form, this program theory is shown below:

liberal arts experiences → liberal arts skills → first destinations

We unpack this basic program theory and discuss the literature informing it in the sections that follow.

Connection between Liberal Arts Experiences and Liberal Arts Skills

Studies have shown that liberal arts experiences are correlated with the development of liberal arts skills (Arum & Roksa, 2011, 2014), such as intercultural effectiveness, inclination to inquire and lifelong learning, well-being, and leadership (Seifert et al., 2008). Astin (1999) also reports that liberal arts experiences contribute to positive outcomes in students' critical thinking skills and overall satisfaction with their undergraduate experience. Importantly, these findings are independent of institution type; thus, students are building these liberal arts skills at both traditional liberal arts institutions as well as at two-year community colleges and large research institutions—provided that they are engaged in liberal arts experiences (Pascarella et al., 2005; Seifert et al., 2008).

More recent work has focused on how particular experiences, such as better classroom instruction, diversity experiences, and a senior capstone, result in improved critical thinking skills. Pascarella (2013a), one of the most prolific authors on this topic, has shown that the strongest growth in critical thinking skills can be attributed to clear and organized classroom instruction (Pascarella et al., 2013a). While not exclusively found within liberal arts programs, Pascarella et al. (2013a) argue that the increased focus on teaching and learning within the liberal arts allows for more intentionality in course instruction. Mayhew et al., (2016) further demonstrate the positive outcomes of student-faculty engagement. When students have the opportunity to interact with faculty outside of the classroom, they are able to build cognitive skills and sociopolitical attitudes (Mayhew et al., 2016). A large study of the long-term outcomes of student-faculty engagement further underscores these findings, suggesting that long after graduation, students who had close connections with their faculty showed stronger leadership skills, contributed more to society, and were overall more satisfied with their lives (Jaschik, 2016). These positive outcomes are fostered in liberal arts environments where there is a focus on small classes size and strengthening student-faculty connections.

The importance of interpersonal relationships are not, however, only reserved for students and faculty; diverse peer interactions have also proven to be important to building critical liberal arts skills. Pascarella et al., (2014) found that students who are regularly engaged in diverse experiences in college (e.g., attending cultural workshops and making friends with someone of another race) also increased critical thinking skills during college. Interestingly, the effects were strongest for White students with lower ACT scores (Pascarella et al., 2014). Positive outcomes were also found when students participated in diversity-related academic experiences (Mayhew et al., 2016) and when they engaged with diverse peers (Zuniga, 2005). In fact, students that participated in diverse coursework have

shown increases in cognitive development and writing skills (Mayhew et al., 2016) and students' interactions with diverse peers resulted in more inclusivity and socially just actions (Zuniga, 2005).

While there are a few studies that demonstrate that research experiences help students develop both personal and professional skills, this work has mostly been focused on the work done in STEM disciplines or on discipline-specific skills developed (Craney et al., 2011; Dowd et al., 2018; Seymour et al., 2004). There has not yet been the same level of analysis on senior capstone or thesis projects as a whole. However, Padgett & Kilgo's (2012) national study determined that these culminating experiences are leading to increased student performance on learning objectives. They were not able to link these experiences empirically to critical thinking, career development, or increased communication, but students and faculty survey responses indicate that students are likely developing these skills. While more evidence is needed to fully understand the possible impacts of these courses, Padgett & Kilgo (2012) provided further evidence that these essential liberal arts experiences and skills are not reserved for students at liberal arts institutions.

There is a robust body of work that demonstrates how student experiences, both inside and outside of class, contribute significantly to student learning and development (Astin, 1991, 1993; Astin, Sax, et al., 1999; Pascarella et al., 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Campus involvement helps students build a sense of belonging and supports the development of leadership skills (Mayhew et al., 2016; Vetter et al. 2019). Many of the non-academic student experiences fall under the purview of student affairs professionals, and thus, these individuals often serve as critical supports to student engagement and, consequently, to students' development of academic motivation, socially responsible leadership, critical thinking, and academic curiosity (Martin & McGee, 2014). Through these experiences, students are able to develop essential liberal arts skills in a similar manner to what they experience in the classroom.

Additionally, it is important to note that student experiences and student involvement may differ by student characteristics; thus, some students may be less likely to engage in liberal arts experiences and less likely to build liberal arts skills in the same manner as their peers (Jack, 2019; Kuh, 2009). For example, students that are eligible for the Pell Grant, often used as a proxy measure for low SES, may not be able to afford to participate in extracurricular experiences either because of additional fees or because they need to work when they are not in class (Ardoin, 2018; Aries & Seider, 2005; Jack, 2019; McClure & Ryder, 2018). Similarly, Pascarella et al. (2004) found that first-generation college students may be less likely to be involved in campus activities despite the fact they benefit more from these experiences than their peers.

Connection between Liberal Arts Skills and First Destinations

While much has been written about the connection between liberal arts experiences and liberal arts skills, less has been written about the connection between liberal arts skills

and students' first destinations. Although the literature explores employment outcomes for graduates of liberal arts programs, there is little-to-no literature regarding students' outcomes in other first destinations. We know that liberal arts graduates often pursue graduate degrees in higher numbers than their peers; as a result, they experience an increase in income (NACE, 2018). But, to our knowledge, there is no literature about the relationship between students' liberal arts skills and their outcomes with prestigious fellowships.

With regard to employment outcomes, the literature indicates that as employers continue to automate everyday operations, there is an increasing need for what is described as "human skills." Weise et al. (2018) notes that human skills, such as leadership, communication, and problem solving are the most sought after skills in the labor market. Further research also indicates that hiring managers and executives also listed oral communication as one of the top skills desired when seeking candidates (Hart Research Associates, 2018).

Katz (2015) states that smaller, independent colleges (which often espouse a liberal arts curriculum) have demonstrated success in providing the necessary skills for students' careers. Students who graduate from these institutions will earn about as much in their lifetimes and experience a higher level of career satisfactions than peers who graduate from other institutions. Additionally, they are as likely to find jobs in the first six months of graduation. According to NACE (2019), graduates from liberal arts colleges and those schools that feature liberal arts programs did fairly well in the labor market. More than 57 percent of those graduates found full-time employment within the traditional employment sector, which exceeded the overall average for all schools. While academic major is a hiring consideration, they indicated that the ability to communicate, think critically, and problem solve was more important.

Given that these liberal arts skills like communication, critical thinking, and problem solving are used differently across career fields, these skills must be translated from the language of academia into the language of each career field effectively in order for students to obtain employment. This means that liberal arts graduates must be poised to recognize and articulate the relevance and application of each of these skills within a given field. Thus far, it has been found that gaps exist in liberal arts students' ability to apply their knowledge to real-world settings (Anders, 2017; Hart Research Associates, 2018; Hutton, 2006; Roche, 2010; Weise et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2017). Students struggle to translate their liberal arts skills into the labor market language in resumes and interviews (Stross, 2017; Weise et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2017). Various suggestions have been offered for helping students understand how to translate their liberal arts skills into labor market language, including career courses and more exposure to alumni outcomes (Rowen, 2016; Stebleton

et al., 2020). Internships have also been touted as a potential bridge for overcoming the translation gap (Hart Research Associates, 2018; Roche, 2010; Townsley et al., 2017).

Some students are being encouraged to study both liberal arts and a technical field to close this skills gap and set them apart to employers (Deming, 2015; Stross, 2017; Weise et al., 2018, p. 11). Liberal arts degree programs and smaller institutions that supplement professional programs with significant liberal arts content can achieve similar outcomes by integrating career preparation activities and experiential learning (Katz, 2015). In fact, liberal arts colleges with a higher proportion of STEM majors report a higher ROI for their graduates (Carnevale et al., 2020). In general, it seems that students who gain both soft skills and technical skills in college often land at better first destinations (cf. Deming, 2015).

According to recent studies, most liberal arts students (regardless of background) can find some employment after graduation, but many are dissatisfied with their first destination and change careers several times in the first few years after college (Stross, 2017; Weise et al., 2018). This is known as *career* mismatch, and it has been shown to be four to ten times higher among majors such as English, foreign languages, social sciences, and liberal arts (Mayhew et al., 2016). Anecdotally, however, scholars have argued that once these students find their career fit, it is not uncommon for them to be promoted into positions of management despite less technical know-how because of their greater communication and problem-solving skills (Davidson, 2017; Roche, 2010). For example, although Google's leaders predicted that technical skills would be necessary for all managers, after examining years worth of data, they discovered that it was those employees with soft skills, like being a good coach, empowering others, taking an interest in the team's well-being, having good communication, and being results-oriented who were the most successful managers; having STEM skills ranked last among all predictors of good management (Davidson, 2017, p. 140; Garvin, 2013). To take another example, while 73% of Smith College graduates were found to start their careers in entry-level positions, twenty years later, over half held senior- or executive-level positions (Rowen, 2016, p. 54).

Job mismatch can also negatively impact employment outcomes. Some employees are overeducated, having more schooling than a job requires while others may be undereducated, having less schooling than required (Robst, 2007). Robst (2007) reported that 45% of employees stated that their job was not related at all or only partially related to their major. Additionally, his research underscores that there can be significant wage penalties for those who select fields outside of their major, thus impacting the returns to their degrees. He also notes that differential shifts in supply and demand for specific majors may force some college graduates to work outside their field more often than others. Those who are mismatched in the workplace earn less than those that are appropriately matched with the required education (Robst, 2007). Research also indicates that majors that focus on general skills (e.g., liberal arts) "have a higher likelihood of mismatch, but relatively low costs to be mismatched" (Robst, 2007, p. 406). On the other

hand, those majors that focus on "occupation-specific skills and mismatch workers incur substantial costs" (Robst, 2007, p. 406).

Overall, the returns to college education are substantially heterogeneous based on many factors (Altonji et al., 2012; Hamermesh & Donald, 2008; Webber, 2016). Ability is one such factor (Arcidiacono, 2004; Robst, 2007). This is important as ability sorting impacts the discussion about job mismatch. It is possible that one might earn lower wages due to lower ability and not due to mismatch. Arcidiacano (2004) finds that math ability has a significant impact on sorting into specific majors and labor market returns. In contrast, verbal ability has little impact on sorting and labor market returns.

While the research indicates that practical majors yield higher economic returns than liberal arts majors, this is not always a reflection of the value of the skills themselves. The AACU (2014) reports that 4 out of 5 employers agree that all students should obtain a breadth of knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences. While employers indicate that they look for liberal arts skills in candidates, there is less evidence that new employees were hired based on these liberal arts skills. Few studies indicate that students recognize and can articulate how their liberal arts skills helped them to reach their first destinations. Much of the current literature from liberal arts advocates indicates that the fruit of a liberal arts education comes years after graduates find employment and continue on their post-graduation trajectory (Pascarella et al., 2005).

Conceptual Framework and Present Study

The literature clearly demonstrates that the types of experiences students have in college can make a difference in their post-graduate outcomes. These college experiences range from curriculum and major choice to the opportunity to develop close connections with faculty members. While there is evidence that these critical liberal arts experiences and their concomitant skills are not limited to students attending one institution type, it does appear that it is the combination of both technical and liberal arts skills that help students find success, in a variety of forms, after graduation.

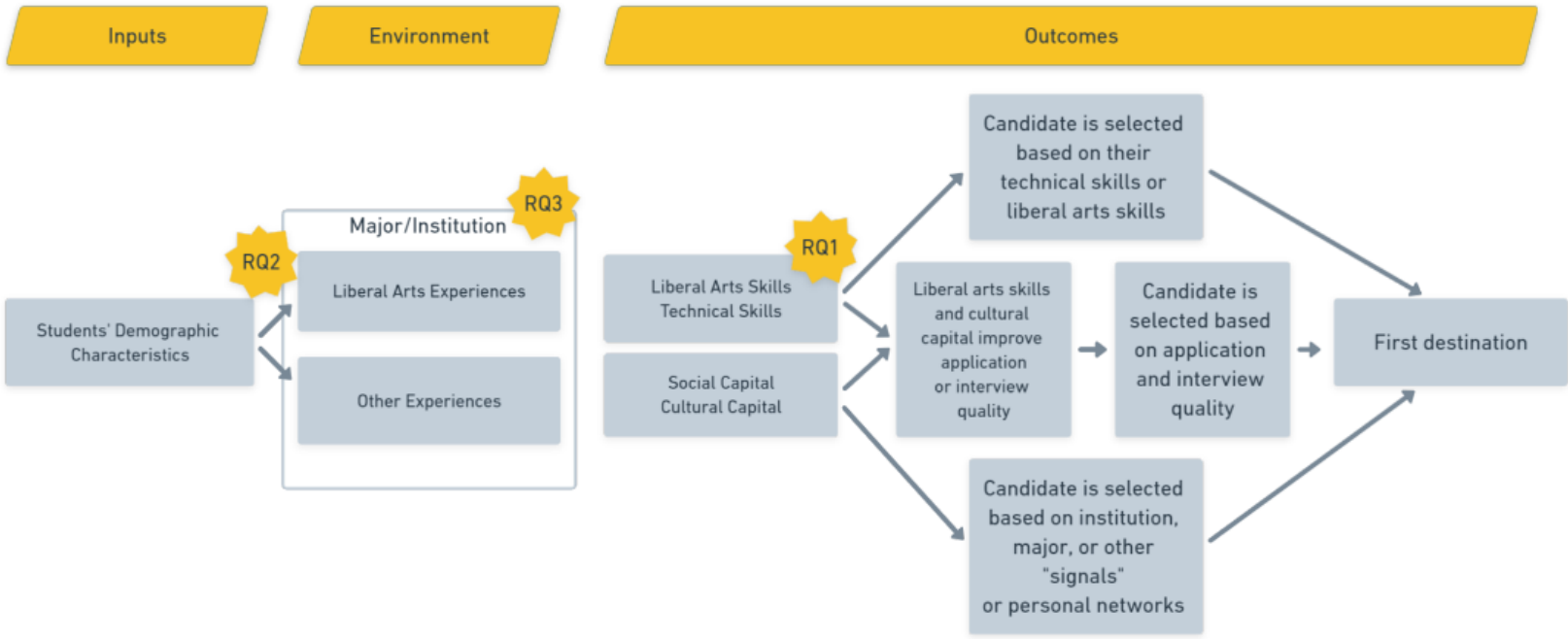
What is missing from the current literature is a robust analysis of how students are using and learning from their liberal arts experiences in a way that allows them to build the critical skills that can be leveraged to find post-graduate opportunities—be they a professional role in a company, a prestigious fellowship, or a spot in a graduate program. Additionally, there is another gap when considering this process outside of traditional, small, liberal arts institutions. Our study helps to close these gaps by triangulating these experiences and skills in conjunction with the other critical mediating factors including social and cultural capital in order to examine this trajectory for high-achieving students enrolled in an honors college at a large, public university.

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 1, details the means by which a students' liberal arts experiences impact their first destinations. We devised this framework by

building on Astin's inputs-environment-outcomes theory about the general effects of college (Astin, 1991). In this theory, Astin (1991) argues that the effects of college can be conceptualized as a movement of inputs (i.e. students) through environments, which influence students' outcomes. We employed this framework as a simple basis for grouping the multitude of factors that influence students' first destinations as discussed in the literature.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework for the impact of Clark Honors College liberal arts experiences on students' first destinations



In our conceptual framework, inputs can be captured by the demographic characteristics with which students enter college. The environment consists of all the experiences (both liberal arts experiences and other experiences) that students have while in college within their major and their institutional context. The outcomes refer not only to the human capital (i.e., liberal arts skills and technical skills) and social/cultural capital (i.e. relationships and cultural knowledge and cachet) gained in college but also the eventual first destinations they lead students to.

Candidates who are selected into their first destination because of their technical or liberal arts skills represent a human capital theory of labor market success. This pathway is represented along the top of our conceptual framework. By contrast, candidates who are selected based on "signals", personal networks , or cultural knowledge represent the social/cultural capital theories of labor market success. This pathway is represented along the bottom of our framework. In the middle of our framework, lies an alternative means of both human capital and social/cultural capital success in which a students' liberal arts skills and understanding of the most common behaviors of successful candidates help them perform well in the application and interview process and lead to their successful selection by their first destination. For example, perhaps a candidate used their superb writing and communication skills as well as their awareness of what hiring teams look for to creatively narrate their experiences in their cover letter and interview, thereby succeeding over other candidates—even those with more technical skills. Thus, this middle pathway combines both the human capital and social/cultural capital models in ways that make isolating their individual effects unfeasible.

The purpose of our study is to answer the following questions, which have been informed by our conceptual framework:

> *RQ1: In what ways are THC alumni using liberal arts skills to reach their first destinations?*
>
> *RQ2a: What liberal arts or other experiences are current THC students engaging in at NRU?*
>
> > *RQ2b: Does this engagement differ by student characteristics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination)?*
>
> *RQ3: According to the literature and data from peer institutions, what are some best practices for preparing liberal arts students for their first destinations?*

Research Question 1 investigates the ways in which alumni use their liberal arts skills cultivated through their THC liberal arts experiences to reach their first destinations. THC expects that its members will excel in the areas of intellectual engagement, critical reasoning, disciplinary methods, communication skills, intercultural competence, interdisciplinary inquiry, and research competence. We expect that alumni will use these

liberal arts skills accompanied by a variety of career supports and technical skills associated with their major to reach their first destinations. We hypothesize that liberal arts skills play a role in helping students research, identify, apply to, and reach their first destinations.

Research Question 2a examines the students' levels of engagement in liberal arts or other experiences and the link between student characteristics and these experiences. Overall, we hypothesize that THC student body will be involved in and fairly confident in the liberal arts experiences that are required by THC's curriculum (e.g. thesis/research, student-faculty contact), but we expect that they will be less involved in voluntary experiences, like student affairs support, Career Services, and work. We expect engagement with diverse experiences to be lower given the demographic composition of THC.

Research Question 2b looks at the link between student characteristics and their liberal arts or other experiences. We predict that the most salient demographic characteristics affecting involvement will be gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination. Overall, we hypothesize that students from underrepresented groups—whether they be financially, racially, or educationally—will be less engaged in liberal arts experiences. We expect that students who work more hours will be less involved. We further hypothesize that the college/school that a students' major is housed in will influence their engagement with career supports and experiences as well as with the Honors thesis. We hypothesize that students that are in more "practical" colleges/schools may be less engaged in liberal arts experiences.

Research Question 3 explores the ways in which other comparable colleges are supporting similar demographics of students in achieving their post-graduate outcomes. We expect that other honors colleges, particularly those that are highly regarded, are providing significantly more targeted career support to honors college students. Additionally, we hypothesize that specific programming around the technical skills required to secure a position in graduate school, at an organization, or from a prestigious fellowship aid high-achieving students in securing their top-choice opportunities. Finally, we predict that the career supports at other honors college programs will closely mirror those found at small, liberal arts institutions, and those outlined by NACE as best practices, despite the fact that the wider university may also offer more general career support and guidance for students.

Data & Methods

This study uses complementary mixed methods following Greene et al. (1989), implementing both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer our research questions. These complementary mixed methods allowed us to "measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched elaborated understanding of that phenomenon" (Greene et al., 1989, p. 285). We began our research with interviews with THC alumni intending to answer Research Question 1, and we used that preliminary data to inform our survey design for current students which answered Research Question 2. The results of our qualitative portion of the study guided our benchmarking process for Research Question 3 as well. This complementary mixed-methods approach allowed us to capitalize on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research while minimizing the weaknesses of each method. Assumptions behind one method or research question were elucidated or clarified in subsequent methods and research questions.

Research Question 1: In what ways are THC alumni using liberal arts skills to reach their first destinations?

Data

To better understand how liberal arts experiences help THC graduates reach their first destinations, we explored the ways in which THC alumni used their liberal arts skills to reach their first destinations. In order to give voice to the perspectives of THC alumni and depth to our research, we chose to utilize a qualitative research approach. We utilized this method because, as Patton (2001, p. 21) describes, "the open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents...to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view." As a result, we conducted semi-structured interviews to answer Research Question 1.

Sample

THC alumni from the classes of 2020, 2019, 2018, and 2017 were interviewed for the qualitative study. We invited 476 THC alumni to participate, and 16 volunteered to be interviewed. Initially, we sought to conduct the qualitative study using a maximum variant sample. The goal of this strategy was to sample for maximum heterogeneity, thus increasing respondent diversity relevant to our research questions. After obtaining initial responses from alumni interested in being interviewed, we worked with THC to target diverse perspectives. However, THC indicated that they did not have data regarding alumni's racial identities; therefore, we could not target individuals from these backgrounds. Instead, we sent an additional email to all alumni indicating that we were seeking participants from specific racial identities. Still, this yielded no additional

participants. Thus, we were left with a convenience sample of THC alumni who had self-selected to be part of our study.

We collected information about each interviewee's graduation year, college/school, and first destination. According to THC's Strategic Plan, the vast majority of THC students have majors in the College of Arts and Sciences. Most of our interviewees graduated from the College of Arts and Sciences, thus they were reflective of THC's population. Additionally, THC reports that 46% of its graduates go to graduate school, 41% obtain employment, 12% participate in service activity, and 9% travel (Life After THC, n.d.). Our interviewees were somewhat reflective of THC target population, but their pathways to their first destinations were more nuanced. For example, 88% of our interviewees obtained some level of employment directly after graduation. Those employment opportunities included the areas of research, service, travel abroad, and many equated to a gap year. Of the 16 interviewees, only 13% went directly to graduate school. At the time of the interviews, 50% of the participants were in the process of applying to graduate school or were in graduate school following their initial employment opportunity.

It should be noted that we did not collect demographic information regarding the interviewees' gender or race/ethnicity. As a result, it is not possible to compare our sample to the target population on these criteria. Below is a breakdown of the graduation year, college/school, and first destination of interviewees in Table 1.

Table 1
Interviewee characteristics

Pseudonym	Graduation Year	NRU College/School	First Destination
Kevin Moore	2018	College of Business/ College of Arts and Sciences	Research employment→[1] Graduate school
Joe Deming	2018	College of Arts and Sciences	Employment→[1] Graduate school
Erica Johnson	2018	College of Arts and Sciences	Employment
Carla Smith	2018	College of Arts and Sciences	Gap year/employment→[4,1] Graduate school
Jacob Spiller	2018	College of Arts and Sciences	Employment→[1,2] Graduate school anticipated
Noah Parker	2018	College of Arts and Sciences	Graduate school

Howard Jacobs	2019	College of Arts and Sciences	Research employment→[1] Graduate school
Candace Jones	2019	College of Arts and Sciences	Employment→[1] Graduate school
Tim Hill	2019	College of Arts and Sciences	Employment
Kelly Day	2019	College of Arts and Sciences	Research employment→[1,2] Graduate school anticipated
Jade Allen	2020	College of Arts and Sciences	Graduate school
Ruby Solomon	2020	College of Arts and Sciences	Volunteer/Employment→[3,1] Graduate school
Samantha Brown	2019	College of Arts and Sciences/ School of Journalism and Communications	Fellowship/Employment
Ellie Smith	2017	School of Journalism and Communications	Gap year/Employment[4]
Veronica Turner	2017	School of Journalism and Communications	Gap year/Employment[4]
Whitney Malone	2019	School of Music and Dance	Gap year/Employment→[4,3] Volunteer/Employment

[1] First destination was employment but continued to graduate school within two years or less, [2] Applied to graduate school in 2020 and awaiting outcome, [3] Joined Americorp, [4] Traveled or taught English abroad

Methods

To collect our qualitative data, a THC staff member emailed THC alumni from the classes of 2020, 2019, 2018, and 2017 to invite them to participate in the study (see Appendix 5). Potential participants were instructed to email us if interested. After emailing, participants were sent the date and time for the interview as well as a Zoom link. Interviewees had the opportunity to participate by phone or Zoom as in-person interviews were not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each researcher conducted 5-6 individual interviews with alumni. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Quotes used in this report were also edited for readability by removing fillers, such as "like," "um," and "you know."

The interview protocol was organized to probe into the professional experiences of alumni their first year after graduating from the NRU. We used Arum and Roksa's (2014) "Employment and Graduate School" portion of their interview protocol as an early

foundation for developing our protocol about the ways in which liberal arts skills helped THC alumni to reach their first destination. We focused specifically on how alumni identified, applied for, interviewed for, and selected their first destinations after graduation. These questions helped to determine what liberal arts skills obtained via their THC experience alumni utilized during these processes. Additionally, the protocol sought to highlight potential gaps in resources from THC and/or NRU. A copy of the interview protocol may be found in Appendix 6.

Data analysis

After conducting 16 alumni interviews, we developed a data analysis plan to identify themes that align with Research Question 1. Our analysis included the following phases: listening tours, analytic memos, and developing and implementing a coding scheme. These phases allowed for a comprehensive review and analysis of the qualitative data.

Listening tours.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed via Zoom and Otter.ai. Each team member listened to the interviews they conducted in order to ensure accuracy of the transcripts and to become refamiliarized with the content in preparation for creating analytic memos and developing a coding scheme.

Analytic memos.

Each team member crafted an analytic memo that summarized key themes from the interviews they conducted. The memos provided an opportunity to articulate descriptive information about the interviewees, to identify overarching themes amongst the interviews, and to identify lingering questions to inform the study design for Research Question 2. This process helped to elucidate interview themes and create a foundation for comparison across interviews.

Developing and implementing a coding scheme.

We first decided to use a deductive approach to our qualitative study using THC's learning objectives to frame our coding. We then applied a multipronged approach to coding the data. According to Thomas (2006), this approach allows researchers to "use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data" to allow the theory to emerge without the constraints of preconstructed methodologies. The team identified general themes throughout the interviews. Each team member used those themes to complete the first round of coding for the five to six interviews they had individually conducted. A joint coding scheme for the entire dataset was then developed based on this initial round of coding. Subsequently, every interview was re-coded three additional times using this data coding scheme. Team member one was responsible for identifying and confirming general themes in the entire dataset. Once that was complete, a second team member coded the interviews to fine tune themes where necessary. Lastly, the third team member completed

the final round of coding to confirm themes and resolve any discrepancies amongst coders. This process of triangulation among coders reduced bias and increased reliability of our findings.

Research Question 2: What liberal arts experiences are current THC students engaging in at NRU? Does this engagement differ by student characteristics?

Data

The data used to answer Research Question 2 were collected via an online survey which was created for this purpose and administered to current second-year through fifth-year THC students using Qualtrics. A copy of the recruitment email can be found in Appendix 7, and a full copy of the survey can be found in Appendix 8. The primary variables of interest in the survey were liberal arts experiences (i.e., student-faculty contact, diverse experiences, student affairs support, extracurricular involvement, research, and thesis), career services, work experience, and various demographic characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination. Table 2 contains a summary of how these variables were operationalized and their origins.

Table 2

Measures used in this study and their origins

Measure	Survey Questions	Origins
Demographic characteristics	12-30	UCLA CIRP Freshman Survey, Questions 8, 10, 12, 27, and 35 (UCLA, 2020) Wabash Student Experiences Survey, Section III, Question 2, H-O (Pascarella et al., 2007) Other items were created for this survey
Student-faculty contact	1	Wabash Student Experiences Survey, Section II, Question 4 (Pascarella et al., 2007)
Diverse experiences	2	Wabash Student Experiences Survey, Section III, Question 3 (Pascarella et al., 2007)
Student affairs support	3	Wabash Student Experiences Survey, Section II, Question 14 (Pascarella et al., 2007)
Extracurricular involvement	4	Adapted from Wabash Student Experiences Survey, Section II, Question 1 (Pascarella et al., 2007)
Research	5	Item created for this survey
Thesis	6, 7, 8	National Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences, adapted from Question 15 (Padgett & Kilgo, 2012) Other items were created for this survey
Career services	9, 10	Adapted from Career and Professional Aspirations Student Survey, Questions 14 and 15 (NASPA, 2017)
Work experience	11	Adapted from Career and Professional Aspirations Student Survey, Questions 16 (NASPA, 2017)

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics used in this study were age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, NRU College/School, major, SAT/ACT, hours worked, year in college, financial aid received, first-generation status, and intended first destination. Full-time or part-time student status. year in THC, motivation, residential status, best language, and parental education were also measured by the survey but were not used in the current analysis. These demographic characteristics were primarily operationalized by questions created for this survey. However, five demographic items were taken from the UCLA CIRP Survey. Additionally, student motivation was measured by a scale from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNSLAE) Student Experiences Survey.

Student-Faculty Contact

We operationalized student-faculty contact using one subscale (Section II, Question 4) of the WNSLAE Student Experiences Survey (Pascarella et al., 2007). This student-faculty contact subscale consisted of statements about students' contact and interactions with faculty with a five-point Likert response scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. As a whole, the subscale operationalized student-faculty contact as students' degree of belief that their non-classroom and informal interactions with faculty have influenced their intellectual growth and career goals, whether students have found opportunities to build relationships with faculty, and whether they are satisfied with opportunities to interact informally with them. We believe that this operationalization most accurately reflects THC's liberal arts ethos surrounding student-faculty contact while also allowing us to respect THC wishes to avoid changes to the curriculum. Cronbach's alpha for this subscale was .7187. The list of items can be found in Question 1 of Appendix 8.

Diverse Experiences

We also measured diverse experiences via a subscale (Section III, Question 3) from the WNSLAE Student Experiences Survey (Pascarella et al., 2007). This subscale consisted of diverse experiences and a five-point Likert response scale denoting how often respondents had had such experiences (*Very often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never*). Taken together, this subscale measures how often students have had diverse experiences outside the classroom, via interactions as well as discussions with faculty and other students. Cronbach's alpha for this subscale was .6193. The list of items can be found in Question 2 of Appendix 8.

Student Affairs Support and Extracurricular Involvement

Student affairs support and involvement was operationalized by two questions: one from the WNSLAE Student Experiences Survey (Pascarella et al., 2007) and one created for this study. The scale from the WNSLAE Student Experiences Survey consisted of six statements about the frequency of students' various interactions with student affairs professionals. The scale measured how often students interacted with students affairs

professionals in out-of-class activities or in discussions about personal issues, coursework, or career plans. Cronbach's alpha for this subscale was .8702. The list of items can be found in Question 3 of Appendix 8.

The second student affairs question asked students to select which activities they had participated in at NRU or THC. These activities included studying abroad, living in Global Scholars Hall or Bean Hall, living in Academic Residential Communities, taking a first-year seminar, participating in Mock Trial, leading a organization/club, attending a religious organization, participating in Ephemera, participating in THC Student Association, participating in Inside Out Prison Exchange, or participating in other student clubs or organizations.

Research

The research item was created for this survey and measured how many terms (including summer) of out-of-class research (e.g. *working in a research lab, an institute, or with a professor*) respondents had participated in throughout college. Respondents could select from *0* to *10 or more terms.*

Thesis

Students' experiences with the thesis were measured by three items. Two of these items were created for this survey, and one was adapted from the National Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences (Padgett & Kilgo, 2012). The first item asked respondents how confident they felt about completing an undergraduate thesis (e.g., *Quite confident, Somewhat confident, Undecided, Somewhat unconfident, Not at all confident*). The second item asked what type of thesis they intended on completing (e.g., *exhibition, research paper, business plan, portfolio, other*). The third item asked respondents to identify the three most important areas that the thesis would support (e.g., *career development, writing skills, critical thinking skills*). This item was added to the survey specifically because our client mentioned that they believed the thesis was the most important means by which they prepared students for their first destinations. THC administration also noted that they were not sure if students viewed the thesis similarly; consequently, they wanted more information about these student perceptions.

Career Services and Work Experience

Based on preliminary results from our alumni interviews which highlighted the importance of career support, we revised our survey to measure students' engagement with career services and work experience in addition to liberal arts experiences. We operationalized career services and work experience using three items from the Career and Professional Aspirations Student Survey (NASPA, 2017). The first item measured how many times respondents had visited the Career Services office. The second item asked respondents to select all the career supports they had participated in through the university or their college/department (e.g., *career counseling, resume writing workshops, job*

fairs). The third item asked respondents to select the types of employment (e.g., *full-time in field of interest, part-time outside field of interest, internships in field of interest*) they had engaged in throughout college.

Sample

Our sample was drawn from the entire population of THC students, excluding first-year students (as they had not attended THC long enough to answer many survey items). The target population totalled 704 students. The sample was collected via a Qualtrics link sent by email to all 704 students by a THC Assistant Dean. The first 100 respondents were offered a $5 gift card as an incentive for their participation. All responses were anonymous.

We initially received 514 responses to the survey; however, based on the rapid influx of responses in a very short window of time, we concluded that many of these responses came from computer bots. We confirmed this was the case by observing hundreds of nonsensical majors and impossible SAT/ACT scores in the dataset. We used the following criteria to drop responses from the dataset: 1) response completed between November 20-24, 2020, AND characterized by one of the following: 2) respondent latitude outside 35-48 or longitude outside (-125)-(-117) OR 3) SAT score less than or equal to 500 or greater than 800 OR 4) ACT less than or equal to 24 or greater than 36. We used nonsensical majors to confirm deletions from the dataset. After data clean up, we were left with a total of 129 responses for an 18% response rate. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for our sample and THC's target population.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of study variables

	Sample (N=129)			THC (N=704)
Student Characteristics	**Mean**	**SD**	**Obs**	**Mean**
Age	20.254	1.056	118	Not reported
Gender				
Man/Trans man (1=Man)	.228	.421	28	.324
Woman/Trans woman (1=Woman)	.724	.449	89	.676
Non-binary/Gender queer or non-conforming/Not listed	.049	.216	6	Not reported
Race/ethnicity				
Asian/ Pacific Islander (1=Asian)	.119	.325	14	.232 = Total Students of Color in THC
Black/ African American (1=Black)	0	0	0	
Hispanic/ Latino (1=Hispanic)	.051	.221	6	
More than one race or Other (1=more than one race or other)	.093	.292	11	
International (1=International)	0	0	0	.035
White (1=White)	.737	.442	87	.733
Year in College				
2nd year (1=2nd)	.420	.496	50	.455
3rd year (1=3rd)	.286	.454	34	.287
4th year (1=4th)	.244	.431	29	.213
5th year or more (1=5th)	.050	.220	6	.045
NRU College/School				
College of Arts and Sciences (1=CAS)	.713	.454	87	.770-.790
College of Business (1=CoB)	.074	.262	9	.060-.080
College of Design (1=CoD)	.082	.275	10	.060
School of Journalism and Communication (1=SoJaC)	.041	.199	5	.060
School of Music and Dance (1=SoMD)	.049	.217	6	.010
College of Education or Undecided (1=COE or Undecided)	.041	.199	5	.067
Work during college (1=yes)	.407	.493	50	Not reported
Financial aid (1=Pell)	.160	.368	19	.205
First generation (1=First gen)	.084	.279	10	.165
Intended first destination				
Graduate school (1=Graduate school)	.378	.487	45	Not reported
Employment (1=Employment)	.134	.343	16	Not reported
Multiple first destinations (1=Multiple)	.403	.493	48	Not reported
Unsure (1=Unsure)	.084	.279	10	Not reported

When we compare our sample to the target population, we find that our sample is overall quite representative. Our sample may slightly overrepresent those who identify as women (72%) and underrepresent those who identify as men (23%). It is important to note, however, that THC has only reported data on sex not gender identity; therefore, this is not an exact demographic comparison. Roughly 5% of our sample identified as non-binary, gender queer/gender non-conforming, or identity not listed and cannot be compared to THC's target population data. The percent of White students in our sample is roughly equivalent to that of the target population at 74%. The total percent of students of color seems fairly proportional to THC's target population at 23%; however, we cannot compare specific race/ethnicity groups within this bucket as THC did not report this data. International students are not represented in our sample, whereas they make up 3.5% of THC population.

Our sample is also fairly representative by students' year in college with second-year students being very slightly underrepresented and fourth-year students being very slightly overrepresented. By major, our sample is again broadly representative: Students in the College of Arts and Sciences are underrepresented by about 6 percentage points, and students in the School of Music and Dance are overrepresented by about 4 percentage points. Approximately 59% of our sample reported having a job while in college; however, we cannot compare this data to THC target population as it was not reported. Pell recipients are somewhat underrepresented in our sample: Roughly 16% of our sample reported receiving Pell Grants versus 20.5% of the target population. First-generation students make up 8% of our sample, which is substantially lower than their proportion of the target population at 17%. This is the most substantial underrepresentation in our sample.

With regard to intended first destinations, 39% of our sample reported that they intend on attending graduate school immediately after graduation while 13% indicated that they would find regular employment. 40% of respondents selected multiple intended first destinations and 8% were unsure of their intended first destination. Though THC could not provide data on current students' intended first destinations, NRU did provide first destination outcomes for THC's Class of 2019-2020. As a point of comparison, within six months of graduating, 18% of THC's 2019-2020 First Destination Survey respondents continued their education, 52% found regular employment, 2% joined the military, 4% volunteered, and 23% were still looking (Director of Assessment and Research, 2020).

Methods

Following Loeb et al. (2017), we employ complex descriptive statistics to answer our Research Question 2. According to the authors, "Good descriptive research relies primarily on low-inference, low-assumption methods that use no or minimal statistical adjustments" (Loeb et al., 2017, p. 27). Such low-inference and low-assumption methods refer to the

straightforward comparisons of means, medians, and modes in contrast to the statistical alterations used in regression. By avoiding the assumptions and controls inherent in regression, we can better identify "what is really happening in the data and in the real world" (Loeb et al., 2017, p. 23).

To identify what liberal arts experiences students are engaging in, we present the overall means for each experience scale and/or item on our survey. To determine whether these values vary based on student characteristics, we conducted one-way ANOVA, independent samples t-tests, or chi-square analyses (depending on the number and types of variables involved). We focused on seven demographic variables: gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination. These variables of interest were chosen based on our expectations of relevance given the findings in previous literature as well as feedback from our client. This intentional identification of specific variables of interest beforehand prevents us from "fishing" for any and all potentially spurious relationships in the data (Loeb et al., 2017, p. 26).

Research Question 3: According to the literature and data from peer institutions, what are some best practices for preparing liberal arts students for their first destinations?

Data

In order to better understand the ways in which other honors colleges are leveraging their resources to support post-graduate student success, we utilized the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) definition of career readiness and their key competencies (NACE) in conjunction with the liberal arts skills and experiences frameworks previously described (NACE Career Readiness Defined, n.d.). Using these frameworks, we developed a rubric to evaluate how each institution addressed these factors on their website. The rubric was revised after our quantitative and qualitative data collection to ensure that we encompassed critical resources referenced by both students and alumni. The full description of the NACE career readiness competencies used can be found in Appendix 9.

We began our inquiry on each institution's home page and navigated to the sub-pages dedicated to the honors college. Within the pages dedicated to the college, we searched for answers to our 14 questions as outlined in the rubric. Lack of data or unclear language was noted. In order to better understand how this data fit within the broader offerings at the institution, we then navigated to the central career services webpage. Here, we searched for specific data and resources dedicated to honors college students and added that information to the rubric as appropriate. Next, we visited the institutional research pages in order to collect the broad demographic data on the university to contextualize our evaluation of each honors college. Finally, we used the Integrated Postsecondary Education

Data System (IPEDs) data to pull official institutional data on enrollment, demographics, and tuition.

Sample

We selected four Honors Colleges at large, public universities based on recommendations from THC leadership. Three of the four institutions, Penn State University (Penn State), Arizona State University (ASU), and the University of Kentucky (Kentucky) were selected because they are highly regarded honors colleges with strong reputations of success. Oregon State University (OSU) was selected because it is also in the Northwest.

Methods

Our rubric included 3 sections, with 14 specific questions regarding institutional and honors college offerings. Section 1 includes 13 binary (yes/no) questions to assess what career topics are explicitly highlighted or offered for honors college students. After completing each individual evaluation, we summarized the offerings by providing a total of the number of offerings at each institution. In this way, we were able to draw broad comparisons in programming and offering between institutions. In section 2, we provide a narrative summary that offers the highlights and broad focus of each honors college's career services support. Finally, section 3 explicitly outlines which specific career services offerings are available at the honors college itself. This final question "Which of the following are offered at the honors college" breaks down 20 important career support offerings as outlined by NACE.

Finally, we summarized key best practice reports as well as studies on issues of importance to THC in order to provide additional perspectives about how best to support students in reaching their first destinations.

Results

Research Question 1: In what ways are THC alumni using liberal arts skills to reach their first destinations?

The results are derived from the analysis of our 16 alumni interviews. During our interviews, we focused on how liberal arts skills helped alumni to reach their first destinations. We focused on emerging themes in alignment with the seven THC competencies for its members. Those competencies include intellectual engagement, critical reasoning, disciplinary methods, communication skills, intercultural competence, interdisciplinary inquiry, and research competence.

Intellectual Engagement

There were three overarching themes amplified by participants in the area of intellectual engagement. Those themes were exceptionally intelligent students, challenging courses, and an implicit love of learning.

Participants spoke positively about the level of intellectual engagement they experienced within THC. Specifically, students indicated that they were surrounded by peers within THC that were exceptionally intelligent. As a result, they indicated that they learned more, thus enhancing their THC experience. Erica stated:

> I learned so much also from my fellow students. Just getting to know people in the smaller class sizes I think was extremely helpful to get to know maybe their background. A lot of them were from [this state]. That was kind of fun to see, and also they're just brilliant people. They're brilliant students who have done so much and continually were driven to do so much throughout our time at [NRU]...

Participants saw intellectual engagement as a benefit of THC and a clear characteristic of THC's students. Howard explained "and so I think there's a lot of benefit of that. I think I was able to have, like, a lot more discussions with people who were clearly, like, engaged with the material. Otherwise, they really wouldn't be in the Honors College."

In addition to being surrounded by students who challenged them intellectually, participants indicated that the course content was more challenging. As a result, students expressed that they worked harder to meet the elevated THC academic expectations. Kevin explained:

> ...So I think that it challenged me like a lot more than my business classes did, so I felt like I was actually pushing myself. It definitely made me a better writer which was good...I got to take psychology classes and I took a class on genetics, and I would have never had that opportunity...if I was just in the business track...

Lastly, participants articulate that students enjoy and find THC experience useful because they have an implicit love of learning. However, they also indicate that if they were

not lifelong learners, THC experience would not be worthwhile or helpful in reaching their first destinations. Veronica expressed:

> My favorite classes of all of college were my first ever class and my last ever class and both of them were honors college classes. There was wisdom literature and there was an ethics class. And these were classes that, I mean, I guess if you look at my resume [they] wouldn't matter to my resume, but they mattered a ton in the way that I think and the way that I continue to think…outside of yourself and…about the world in a different way. That sounds really cheesy, but I think that that partnered with my very tangible and hard skills within journalism was very refreshing…

While some of the participants were aware of the usefulness of the intellectual engagement offered by THC experience, some indicated that its usefulness was contingent upon one's career path. Kevin said:

> My best friends also did it [participated in THC], and like they're also all, I mean, mostly all going into academia. So I think that that's what a key thing is: that's what it prepares you for and sets you up [for], and I didn't even realize that it was basically like four years of grad school training, but that's what it is. If you don't go into grad school, I'm not really sure what it does for you, other than like, you know, I mean the 'learning is good' kind of thing. I don't know if it really sets you apart or if it gives you really any fundamental skills, other than grad school prep.

Overall, students spoke positively about the intellectual engagement they experienced as a result of their participation in THC. However, many were not explicitly aware of how this skill helped them to reach their first destinations.

Critical Reasoning

In contrast to intellectual engagement, participants were aware of their critical reasoning skills and made direct links between this skill and how it helped them to reach their first destinations. Ruby demonstrated this when she said that she believed THC had "unintentionally" prepared her for her first destination:

> …it's great that I could think about Plato, but how is that going to translate into having a corporate boss? So, I think it's more unintentional that [THC] taught me how to think and be critical. And I'm able to translate that [into my career field] even if that wasn't like [THC's] obvious goal…

Furthermore, alumni could clearly articulate how the application of critical reasoning assisted them in reaching their first destinations. They relayed that their analytical development helped them think critically about their coursework and post-graduation plans. Ruby talks about the development of her analytical skills when she says:

> It became helpful for me just getting in the habit of producing large quantities of written words, and also being analytical about it too and really reflecting on my experiences. So much of what I learned in the Honors College is to be able to reflect and look back, so that was extremely valuable.

Additionally, some participants relayed that they used their critical reasoning skills to articulate the relevance of their experiences in job settings. Ultimately, they were able to identify critical reasoning as a skill they obtained as a result of their THC experience.

While many participants found it to be a valuable skill, some participants did not think it was worth the financial costs of being associated with THC. Tim makes this clear when he says:

> So I mean it's just one of those things where they aren't necessarily creating an experience that—and I know they're trying to get better about it—was actually very applicable for those critical arts, like critical learning skills, and everything else like that. And it was just, you know, an extra $5,000 plus a year for something that, you know, you already have all your department honors and everything else. And it's just kind of this weird separate administration that, in my head, I probably wouldn't recommend to a lot of other folks now.

Overall, however, participants found the critical reasoning skills they obtained to be useful and could articulate why they were useful and in what ways they used this skill to reach their first destination.

Disciplinary Methods

Only one of the alumni we interviewed addressed disciplinary methods and articulated clear learning gains in this domain. The participant noted that THC provided a different perspective for majors outside of the humanities, specifically for science majors. This was achieved by creating courses that allowed professors to share their expertise beyond their typical specialty areas. For instance, science professors were called to teach and provide their perspective on the humanities.

Communication Skills

Communication skills were a consistent and significant topic for all participants. They were extremely aware of how their communication skills helped them reach their first destinations. Not only were these skills key, they were particularly helpful in building confidence and helping them prepare for graduate programs. Alumni spoke about both oral and written communication skills. Experiences such as public speaking, debate, and practicing for presentations were key in helping them to garner and hone their oral communication skills. Veronica expressed:

> You have to do public speaking; you have to do your research. And I think that whole experience helps you become a better public speaker. And in this role that I was interviewing for, part of it was attending these public speaking events through this grant. And so that [skill] was something that I relied on.

In addition to the oral communication skills, they talked about how THC experiences transformed their writing skills, which were useful in preparing graduate school applications. Candace relayed:

> I mean, I think it goes without saying, like the writing skills that I got from the Honors College were absolutely necessary for writing my personal statement.

Science majors spoke specifically about how their acquired communication skills helped to hone their scientific writing skills. Howard expressed this in his sentiments. He said:

> And I think ultimately I could develop my scientific communication skills. It was basically…a little bit more readable, like for a general audience. I think it really honed my scientific writing skills and my ability to do research—learning new laboratory methods and kind of learning how to ask those questions and how to answer them. So those are definitely the skills that I'm taking away and still trying to develop.

Overall, participants consistently talked about the importance of communication skills and how THC helped them to improve, which in turn helped them to reach their first destinations.

Intercultural Competence

Alumni were also aware of how intercultural competence helped them to reach their first destinations. Their understanding of intercultural competence was mostly related to acquiring proficiency in a second language by being in another country and/or experiencing another culture, however. Carla said, 'the French position was frankly something I applied for as, like, a backup…but, I think, I had studied abroad in France, and I wanted to keep using my language skills, so that motivated that decision [to teach English in France after graduating].'

Alumni's intercultural competence was useful professionally in many ways that included pursuing employment as a nanny or a journalist, teaching English abroad, and working in foreign affairs. Erica illustrated how she used intercultural competence to reach her first destination when she said:

> So a lot of those resume skills I highlighted to get like the congressional relations work for [the country I worked in] and to show that I knew about government—how government works—and also have an Arabic skill and studied the Middle East. So those were some of the components I used.

The ability to utilize a second language boosted their confidence and served as a talking point in their personal statements. Candace made this clear when she relayed:

> I wrote my personal statement broadly on the experience of, like, learning a second language—that language specifically being Spanish—about teaching English speakers, and

> then my thesis was [on a related topic]. A lot of my statement was about...some things that I had learned from my professor...the one who is, like, quadrilingual.

While THC lists intercultural competence as one of its primary student outcomes, alumni cited their major coursework and their study abroad experiences as the primary sources of this skill.

Interdisciplinary Inquiry

Alumni recognized that interdisciplinary inquiry provided them a different way of thinking. Although they were aware of this skill, they could not relay how it helped them to reach their first destinations. Participants cited their coursework and housing assignments as the root of their interdisciplinary inquiry. Jade described how housing impacted her application of interdisciplinary inquiry. She noted the following:

> So they have the Global Scholars Hall, which is the freshman dormitory that they guarantee housing for for all the first year students in the Honors College. You don't have to choose to live there, but if you want to, they reserve a spot for you. And so what it allowed me to do is basically make a bunch of friends who were also in the Honors College, but it spans multiple disciplines. And so now, who I consider to be my three best friends and I, all met in that dorm hall, and one of them was an econ major, one of them was in cinema studies, and then one of them was international studies.... So we were all in completely different parts of the university and wouldn't have met otherwise if we weren't all living together.

They noted that the interdisciplinary courses helped them to find the field of interest that they wanted to pursue. Howard stated that:

> And I think, in general, all the sorts of different subjects that I had to study for all sorts of different professors and classes I guess I wouldn't have otherwise. I think it did end up making me more well-rounded and more, just like, interested more generally, in different sorts of academia and like, gave me...a broader appreciation of things beyond just my tiny little field that I'm in right now.

Ultimately, alumni said that the new way of thinking expanded their minds and provided them with a more well-rounded thought process, but they were not able to draw connections with how this affected their path to a first destination.

Research Competence

Participants talked often about the research skills that they had acquired during their time at THC. It was one of the few competencies that most of them named explicitly. Not only were they aware that THC had provided them with this skill, but they could articulate its value in interview settings, on applications, and in other processes associated with reaching their first destinations. They noted that the skill was a necessity in their graduate school applications and that they had clearly demonstrated its application through their thesis project. In reference to her personal statement, Jade stated:

> And then I spent quite a bit of time talking about what I've done since being in [the] lab. So the story arc of my research of starting in the lab. I had that kind of mini project, how that led me to the thesis, and how the thesis has now led me to other projects and other collaborations…

Participants talked about their research competence in two distinct ways. Some talked about research as a scholar who creates new knowledge while others talked about researching to find and/or prepare for first destinations. Those who expounded upon their research competence for the purpose of reaching their first destination used spreadsheets and systematic thinking to choose their first destinations. Ruby expressed:

> Oh okay, yeah, picking which med schools: that was a lot more of me honing into scientists' spreadsheet version of me. You know, in that case I talked more with some of my research mentors in the lab—I worked in a biology lab—so coming up with like an unbiased way to try to find which schools to apply to, and then I talked to my pre-med advisor…and I created this huge spreadsheet that had the school and all of these attributes about it, like its cost its location, MCAT, GPA, key things about it. And I just go school-by-school through this one registry of schools.

Some noted that the thesis and these research skills mattered when they were attempting to get a job. Kelly provided context for how her thesis helped her in her interview when she relayed the following:

> Yeah, I mean, the general gist of the best way to interview for a lab is to read some of their work and be able to talk about specifics of their research, so that you sound knowledgeable, and then also to be able to talk about what you've done. So I know from one of the interviews in particular that I did, they asked me to put together a presentation on my own research. And I was like, 'Well, my thesis is coming up. That's really good practice, that's fine.' But things like that. You need to be able to talk knowledgeably about your own experiences and then be able to make connections to their work and what you're interested in about their work.

The continued use of research competence depended upon alumni's first destinations. For those opting for graduate school, the research skill was useful long-term, but it was less notable for those who talked about employment.

Gap Year

The concept of a gap year for THC graduates became an emerging theme. Twenty-five percent of participants indicated that they took a gap year before solidifying their post-graduation plans. While some of the gap years were unstructured, most were planned and/or structured. Those who took intentional gap years used the time to hone skills and/or gain experiences that might support their career aspirations. Ruby described this when she said:

> So [a gap year] wasn't always the plan. I entered college thinking I wanted to go into medicine, so right off the bat I joined a pre-med club and everything. And they said early on,

> 'We recommend taking a gap year just to get more experience, take a break from school while you have the chance'...so I planned early on on taking a gap year.

Ruby's comments indicate that gap years are acceptable and common paths for THC students who are still mapping out their post-graduate plans.

Career Supports

While students indicated that they had gained several liberal arts skills through their THC experiences, alumni consistently articulated that they needed additional career support. In one case, the absence of career supports resulted in a gap year that lacked intention. Candace indicated that she spent her gap year nannying and wished that she had had the knowledge to be more strategic about her decision. She explains:

> I don't have any skills for my law school resume right now. I think if I had been on the ball—if somebody had been on the ball for me senior year—because I was drowning studying for the LSAT and writing my thesis a little bit, and like, 'what I'm going to do when I'm graduating' wasn't super important because I knew at some point I would go to law school. And I think if I had had like a bi-quarterly meeting with somebody that was like, 'Hey, you know you could law clerk, right? And here are some places to apply' that I would have done that instead.

Some alumni indicated that they wished that they would have had mandatory career counseling while others articulated a need for help specifically with resumes and cover letters. Additionally, some indicated a specific need for assistance with navigating the intricacies of the graduate school process. Several alumni expressed that they were interested in hearing from other alumni and/or professionals in the field to learn about their career trajectory. Howard expressed similar thoughts when he articulated the following:

> I think [THC] could have benefited more from outreach with alumni network emails or, you know, maybe even like events that they'd offer to talk to people that did different things after graduating. And yeah, I think, in general, just like workshops beyond the thesis, like on applying for grad school, like what can you expect from a career in academia for people in all sorts of different fields. I think with how much it really does prepare you for grad school, I think they could have emphasized earlier—like, kind of showcased—the skills and expertise that they had there a little bit better.

THC alumni said they were interested in learning more about the outcomes for THC alumni and those in their field of study.

Summary

Overall, participants reported that they utilized some liberal arts skills to reach their post-graduation destinations. For the most part, participants were aware of the liberal arts skills they utilized and how they were applied; however, they relayed varying levels of awareness depending on the skill in question. For instance, interviewees were able to

recognize that they had gained intellectual engagement, critical reasoning, communication skills, intercultural competence, interdisciplinary inquiry, and research competence through their THC experience. While participants recognized that they had obtained intellectual engagement and interdisciplinary inquiry as liberal arts skills, they were unclear about their usefulness. Additionally, only one student talked about disciplinary methods, which indicates that most participants were unaware of this skill. This suggests that THC is meeting their learning objectives to some extent, but that there is an opportunity for additional education for students.

Outside of THC learning-objective related themes, there were two other emerging themes. This study revealed that a gap year is a common post-graduation option, whether it be intentional or not. Students who opted for a gap year also relayed using liberal arts skills to solidify that opportunity. While students appreciated their liberal arts skills, they relayed that they desired additional career supports. They indicated that this additional assistance, in collaboration with their liberal arts skills, would have been helpful in reaching their first destinations.

Research Question 2a: What liberal arts or other experiences are current THC students engaging in at NRU?

To answer Research Question 2a, we analyzed data from our THC student survey. We first calculated students' mean responses to each item of the liberal arts experience scales (Table 4) as well as the proportion of THC students who have engaged in various liberal arts and other experiences at THC and NRU (Table 5). We also calculated *overall* liberal arts experience scale scores and *overall* means for students' number of extracurricular activities, thesis confidence, number of terms of outside research, and frequency of visits to Career Services (Table 6). While we were originally concerned only with what liberal arts experiences students were engaging in at THC, we expanded our student survey to include Career Services and work experience after discovering the importance of these opportunities from alumni.

We hypothesized that THC's student body would be fairly confident in and involved in the liberal arts experiences that were required by THC's curriculum, like the thesis, research, and student-faculty contact, but we expected that they would be less involved in opt-in experiences, like student affairs support, Career Services, and work. We also expected engagement with diverse experiences to be lower given the demographic composition of THC. Overall, these hypotheses are supported by the data. Results are presented by type of experience below.

Table 4

Mean rating of liberal arts experience scale items

Liberal Arts Experience Scales	Mean Response to Each Item		
	Mean	**SD**	**N**
Student-Faculty Contact Scale Items			
My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas	4.213	.773	127
My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations	3.898	.921	128
Since coming to this institution, I have developed a close relationship with at least one faculty member	3.508	1.280	128
I am satisfied with opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members	3.641	.978	128
Diverse Experiences Scale Items			
Encountered diverse perspectives on campus outside the classroom	3.391	.916	128
Made friends with a student whose race was different from your own	3.648	.952	128
Made friends with a student from another country	2.806	1.061	129
Had serious discussions with other students about different lifestyles and customs	3.550	.976	129
Had serious discussions with other students about major social issues such as racial diversity, human rights, equality, or justice	4.178	.785	129
Had serious discussions with faculty whose political, social, or religious opinions were different from your own	2.636	1.159	129
Student Affairs Contact Scale Items			
Discussed a personal problem or concern	2.442	1.152	129
Had a serious discussion with staff whose political, social, or religious opinions were different from your own	1.822	.964	129
Worked on out-of-class activities (e.g. committees, orientation, student life activities)	2.781	1.322	128
Talked about career plans	3.209	1.137	129
Discussed ideas from your reading or classes	2.868	1.289	129
Discussed grades or assignments	2.760	1.261	129

Student-Faculty Contact

Table 4 illustrates the mean response to each item of the student-faculty contact scale, which asked respondents to rate each item from *Strongly agree* (5) to *Strongly disagree* (1). Notably, students reported stronger agreement with faculty's influence on their intellectual

growth and interests (*M* = 4.213, *SD* = .773) than with faculty's influence on their career goals (*M* = 3.898, *SD* = .921). An independent samples t-test revealed these means to be significantly different at $p < .01$. Students' agreement with faculty's influence on their intellectual growth was reportedly .41 standard deviations higher than their agreement with faculty's influence on their career goals. Table 6 shows that *overall* respondents rated their student-faculty contact near *Agree* (*M* = 3.8248, *SD* = .7335).

Diverse Experiences

The mean response to each item of the diverse experiences scale is shown in Table 4. The diverse experiences scale asked respondents to select the frequency with which they encountered each diverse experience. Frequencies of diverse experiences ranged from *Very Often* (5) to *Never* (1). Our findings reveal that while diversity issues are discussed often by THC students (*M* = 4.178, *SD* = .785; *M* = 3.550, *SD* = .976), diverse people with diverse ideas are not encountered as frequently (see means of all other scale items). Table 6 shows that students' *overall* rating of the frequency of diverse experiences fell near *Sometimes* (*M* = 3.3714, *SD* = .5789).

Student Affairs Contact

Table 4 presents the mean response to each item of the student affairs contact scale. The student affairs contact scale asked students to rate the frequency with which they engaged in experiences with student affairs staff, ranging from *Very Often* (5) to *Never* (1). While students may be involved in many extracurricular activities, our findings show that their substantive involvement with student affairs staff seems to be relatively limited. Table 6 shows that respondents' *overall* rating of the frequency of student affairs contact was between *Sometimes* and *Rarely* (*M* = 2.6563, *SD* = .9259).

Table 5

Mean engagement in liberal arts and other experiences

Liberal Arts and Other Experiences	Proportion of Respondents that Selected Each Experience		
	Mean	SD	N
Extracurricular Involvement			
Lived in Global Scholars Hall or Bean Hall	.837	.371	129
Participated in other student clubs and organizations	.822	.384	129
Participated in a first-year seminar/course	.752	.434	129
Led a student club or organization	.279	.450	129
Participated in study abroad	.171	.378	129
Lived in another Academic Residential Community	.163	.371	129
Been a member of a religious congregation or group	.155	.363	129
Participated in speech, debate, and/or mock trial	.124	.331	129
Been a member of THC Student Association	.085	.280	129
Participated in Inside Out Prison Exchange	.078	.268	129
Participated in Ephemera, the creative arts journal	.054	.227	129
Intended Thesis Type			
Research paper	.698	.461	126
Unsure	.190	.394	126
Exhibition of performing, musical, or visual arts	.032	.176	126
Portfolio	.024	.153	126
Business plan	.024	.153	126
Other	.024	.153	126
I don't plan on completing a thesis	.008	.089	126
Top Three Areas that a Thesis Supports			
Conducting scholarly research	.736	.443	121
Critical thinking/analytical skill/problem-solving skills	.620	.487	121
Project management skills	.339	.475	121
Writing skills	.322	.469	121
Discipline-specific skills	.306	.463	121
Career development	.273	.447	121
Graduate school application process	.140	.349	121
Oral communication skills	.140	.349	121
Diversity topics	.041	.200	121
Leadership skills	.041	.200	121

Career Services			
On-campus job fairs	.444	.499	124
Individual career counseling	.290	.456	124
Resume writing/reviewing assistance	.282	.452	124
None of the above	.258	.439	124
Graduate school information assistance	.145	.354	124
Alumni networking	.113	.318	124
Career Services online resume and job listing delivery system	.105	.308	124
Career skills testing and career assessments	.097	.297	124
Job search assistance	.089	.285	124
Informational interviews	.081	.273	124
Practice interview sessions	.073	.261	124
Career or employment workshops	.073	.261	124
Other	.057	.232	124
Work Experience			
Part-time employment outside my field of interest	.528	.501	125
Internship in my field of interest	.368	.484	125
Part-time employment in my field of interest	.328	.471	125
None of the above	.200	.402	125
Internship outside my field of interest	.080	.272	125
Full-time employment outside my field of interest	.056	.231	125
Full-time employment in my field of interest	.008	.089	125

Extracurricular Involvement

The average number of different types of activities respondents reported being involved in was 3.519 (*SD* = 1.404) as shown in Table 6. The proportion of THC students involved in specific types of extracurricular activities is found in Table 5. Our results demonstrate that most students are involved in THC-specific activities when they are required (e.g. living in Global Scholars Hall or Bean Hall, participating in a first-year seminar), but as a whole they choose to engage with other external clubs and organizations more than any THC offerings that are not required (e.g. mock trial, Ephemera, THC Student Association, Inside Out).

Thesis and Research

Table 5 shows the proportion of THC respondents who expect to complete each thesis type. These results show that more students view the thesis as a research paper than a capstone project. Almost 70% of respondents intend on completing a research paper as their thesis, and almost 20% of respondents are unsure about what type of thesis they will complete.

The proportion of the sample who ranked each skill area or knowledge domain as "one of the top three areas that a thesis supports" can be found in Table 5. Our results demonstrate that THC students believe they are developing skills via the thesis that will benefit them in their first destinations. However, it seems that THC students view the thesis as preparation for graduate school/research careers more than non-academic careers. This can be seen in the fact that nearly 74% of the sample felt that conducting scholarly research was one of the top three skills that are developed by the thesis, yet only 27% felt career development was.

Table 6 also shows the mean confidence level of respondents with regard to completing a thesis. On average, respondents reported that they were between *Somewhat confident* (4) and *Undecided* (3) with a mean rating of 3.7460 (*SD* = 1.200).

Respondents reported that they have participated in an average of 1.76 terms (*SD* = 2.751) of outside research working in a research lab, an institute, or with a professor as shown in Table 6. However, the standard deviation is quite large revealing wide disparities in research involvement between individual students.

Career Services

Table 5 presents the proportion of THC respondents who have participated in each Career Services activity through the university or their college or department. Overall, the proportion of respondents engaged in each service is relatively low. THC students receive resume support (28.2%) more than any interview support (15.4%), participate in career counseling (29%) more than career assessments (9.7%), and attend job fairs (44.4%) more than workshops (7.3%). Importantly, a substantial portion of all THC students (25.8%) have never received any career support.

Table 6 shows the mean rating of Career Services visits for all respondents (*M* = 1.288, *SD* = 1.413). This rating fell between *Once a year* (2) and *Less than once a year* (1). The high standard deviation here also suggests that some students are taking advantage of these services occasionally while many others are not at all.

Work Experience

The proportion of students who have engaged in different types of work experience are shown in Table 5. Our results demonstrate that the majority of respondents have worked at some point during college. However, a higher proportion of *part-time workers* report working *outside* their field of interest (52.8%) while a higher proportion of *interns* report working *within* their field of interest (36.8%). Crucially, 20% of all respondents have had no work experience.

The vast majority of students surveyed work 20 hours a week or less (Table 5). Of the 73 respondents who report currently being employed, 54.8% reported working 11-20 hours

per week, and 27.4% reported working less than 10 hours per week. No respondents reported working more than 40 hours per week.

Summary

Overall, THC students report higher levels of engagement in: student-faculty contact that supports their intellectual growth, discussions about diversity issues, THC-required activities and other extracurricular activities, research-paper theses, and part-time employment outside their field of interest. By contrast, they report lower levels of engagement in: student-faculty contact that supports their career growth, interactions with diverse individuals with diverse ideas, student affairs support, optional THC activities, Career Services support, and work experience within their field of interest.

These survey findings provide crucial answers to the larger question of how students' liberal arts experiences are developing the skills that lead them to their first destinations. First, current THC students report that their experience with direct career support is relatively low whether it is from faculty and staff or through relevant work experience or career services. Second, while students are highly engaged in required liberal arts experiences like the thesis, they primarily view this activity as improving skills that are necessary for graduate school rather than non-academic careers. These findings indicate that while students perceive that liberal arts experiences are useful for developing skills like research competence and critical thinking, they need more direct career support in translating these experiences and skills into non-academic careers.

Research Question 2b: Does this engagement differ by student characteristics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination)?

To answer Research Question 2b, we again used data collected from our THC student survey. As shown in Table 6, we calculated *overall* mean liberal arts experience scale scores as well as *overall* means for students' number of extracurricular activities, thesis confidence, number of terms of outside research, and frequency of visits to Career Services across students' relevant demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination). We also conducted crosstabulations to determine whether students' intended thesis type or types of work experience varied by their characteristics. Means and results of statistical significance tests are reported below by each student characteristic.

Table 6

Mean engagement in liberal arts and other experiences by selected student characteristics

Selected Student Characteristics	**Student-Faculty Contact Scale** (5 = high)	**Diverse Experiences Scale** (5 = high)	**Student Affairs Contact Scale** (5 = high)	**Extracurricular Involvement** (# of different activities involved in throughout college)	**Thesis Confidence** (5 = quite confident)	**# of Terms of Research** (0-10+)	**Frequency of Career Services Visits** (5 = several times a term; 1=less than once a year; 0=never)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Overall average	3.8248 (.7335) N=127	3.3714 (.5789) N=127	2.6563 (.9259) N=128	3.5194 (1.4037) N=129	3.7460 (1.1996) N=126	1.7600 (2.7515) N=125	1.2880 (1.4132) N=125
Gender	***F*(2,118)=.33**	***F*(2,118)=.95**	***F*(2,120)=.04**	***F*(2,120)=.63**	***F*(2,120)=.53**	***F*(2,119)=.46**	***F*(2,120)=.84**
Man/Trans man	3.8393 (.8693)	3.4286 (.6276)	2.6369 (1.0184)	3.2857 (1.3840)	3.9286 (1.1198)	1.2857 (2.0341)	1.5714 (1.5736)
Woman/Trans woman	3.8239 (.6867)	3.3199 (.5476)	2.6479 (.9040)	3.6292 (1.4253)	3.6629 (1.2242)	1.7955 (2.8894)	1.1798 (1.3531)
Non-binary/ Gender queer/ Gender non-conforming/ Not listed	4.1000 (.8023)	3.6111 (.9047)	2.7500 (1.1438)	3.5000 (1.3784)	3.8333 (1.4720)	2.1667 (3.4881)	1.3333 (1.2111)
Race/ethnicity	***F*(3,112)=1.55**	***F*(3,112)=1.88**	***F*(3,114)=1.73**	***F*(3,114)=2.4**	***F*(3,114)=1.13**	***F*(3,113)=.82**	***F*(3,114)=.26**
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.1071 (.5255)	3.6190 (.5165)	3.0357 (.8452)	4.2857 (1.3828)	3.9286 (.9169)	2.0714 (3.2691)	1.4286 (1.2839)
White	3.8324 (.7573)	3.3020 (.5759)	2.6552 (.9327)	3.5517 (1.3447)	3.7816 (1.2049)	1.6163 (2.6664)	1.2989 (1.4557)
Hispanic/Latino	3.7500 (.6325)	3.0833 (.5028)	2.1389 (.2453)	3.3333 (1.5055)	3.1667 (.9832)	.3333 (.5164)	.8333 (1.1690)
More than one race/ Other	3.4773 (.7702)	3.5152 (.7654)	2.3788 (1.1669)	2.8182 (1.6011)	3.2727 (.9832)	2.3636 (3.2641)	1.3636 (1.3618)
Year in College	***F*(3,113)=1.58**	***F*(3,113)=.96**	***F*(3,115)=.64**	***F*(3,115)=4.31****	***F*(3,115)=2.60**	***F*(3,114)=11.42****	***F*(3,115)=1.19**
2nd year	3.8010 (.7107)	3.4653 (.6063)	2.7933 (.8535)	3.3000 (1.3439)	3.5400 (1.1643)	.4082 (.9336)	1.4000 (1.5253)
3rd year	3.6618 (.7585)	3.2892 (.5370)	2.6029 (1.0126)	3.2647 (1.3775)	3.5294 (1.2610)	1.6765 (1.9497)	1.1471 (1.4170)
4th year	4.0517 (.7391)	3.2759 (.6351)	2.5057 (1.0279)	4.1379 (1.2167)	4.1724 (1.2268)	3.7241 (3.9901)	1.1034 (1.0805)
5th year or more	3.9500 (.5420)	3.2222 (.5837)	2.6111 (.8344)	4.6667 (1.7512)	4.3333 (.5164)	2.0000 (3.3466)	2.1667 (1.4720)
NRU College/School	***F*(5,114)=.55**	***F*(5,114)=.83**	***F*(5,116)=.98**	***F*(5,116)=.52**	***F*(5,116)=.21**	***F*(5,115)=3.16***	***F*(5,116)=1.19**
College of Arts and Sciences	3.8023 (.7766)	3.3882 (.5391)	2.6609 (.9409)	3.5747 (1.4276)	3.6782 (1.2984)	1.8023 (2.6693)	1.2644 (1.3247)
College of Business	3.8333 (.5000)	3.5741 (.7551)	3.0926 (1.1184)	3.4444 (1.1304)	3.7778 (.8333)	1.2222 (1.6415)	2.2222 (1.8559)
College of Design	3.825 (.7551)	3.2833 (.8317)	2.6833 (1.0612)	3.7000 (1.4944)	3.8000 (1.1353)	0 (0)	1.3000 (1.6364)
School of Journalism and Communication	4.3500 (.3354)	3.3000 (.4916)	2.5000 (.6124)	3.8000 (1.6432)	3.8000 (.8367)	.2000 (.4472)	1.2000 (1.7889)
School of Music and Dance	3.9583 (.5342)	3.0556 (.7201)	2.0833 (.7941)	3.6667 (1.5055)	4.1667 (.9832)	5.0000 (4.8580)	.8333 (.7528)
College of Education /Undecided	3.8750 (.9242)	3.1000 (.4802)	2.3333 (.5)	2.6000 (1.5166)	3.6000 (1.1402)	2.0000 (3.4641)	.6000 (1.3416)

Hours worked	***F*(2,69)=.07**	***F*(2,69)=.54**	***F*(2,70)=1.33**	***F*(2,70)=2**	***F*(2,70)=.89**	***F*(2,70)=1.32**	***F*(2,70)=.63**
Less than 10	3.9125 (.8401)	3.2417 (.5143)	2.3583 (.9181)	3.8000 (1.0563)	4.0000 (1.1698)	2.5500 (3.3635)	1.0000 (1.4510)
11-20	3.8397 (.6870)	3.4060 (.5846)	2.7208 (.8990)	3.4250 (1.2171)	3.5750 (1.2171)	1.3500 (2.5575)	1.4500 (1.5844)
21-40+	3.8846 (.7116)	3.3462 (.6363)	2.7821 (.8033)	4.2308 (1.8328)	3.8462 (1.2142)	2.2308 (2.9483)	1.2308 (1.0919)
Pell recipient	***t*(115)=-.55**	***t*(115)=1.01**	***t*(117)=-.30**	***t*(117)=2.69****	***t*(117)=.388**	***t*(117)=-.89**	***t*(117)=-.78**
Yes	3.9167 (.6530)	3.2281 (.5671)	2.7193 (.9146)	2.7895 (1.2727)	3.6316 (1.3829)	1.1579 (2.2177)	1.5263 (1.4286)
No	3.8131 (.7477)	3.3793 (.5977)	2.6483 (.9490)	3.7100 (1.3802)	3.7500 (1.1839)	1.7677 (2.8133)	1.2500 (1.3953)
First generation	***t*(115)=.243**	***t*(115)=-.344**	***t*(115)-.344**	***t*(117)=2.06***	***t*(117)=2.31***	***t*(116)=-.52**	***t*(117)=-.07**
Yes	3.7750 (.5197)	3.4167 (.4985)	2.5333 (.6517)	2.7000 (1.8288)	2.9000 (1.3703)	2.1000 (2.1833)	1.6000 (1.3499)
No	3.8341 (.7507)	3.3489 (.6029)	2.6713 (.9637)	3.6422 (1.3370)	3.8073 (1.1744)	1.6296 (2.7771)	1.2661 (1.4053)
Intended first destination	***F*(3,113)=3.34***	***F*(3,113)=3.57***	***F*(3,115)=1.86**	***F*(3,115)=.76**	***F*(3,115)=3.70***	***F*(3,114)=1.93**	***F*(3,115)=.45**
Graduate school	3.9111 (.7484)	3.5568 (.5862)	2.8630 (1.0294)	3.7333 (1.2505)	4.0444 (1.0435)	2.2500 (2.8783)	1.2667 (1.3551)
Employment	3.8750 (.5244)	3.2500 (.6146)	2.7604 (.8432)	3.3125 (1.4930)	3.6875 (1.1383)	.5625 (1.2093)	1.6250 (1.5438)
Multiple first destinations	3.8723 (.7030)	3.2743 (.5332)	2.5278 (.8673)	3.5833 (1.3342)	3.6667 (1.2937)	1.6875 (2.9762)	1.2708 (1.4253)
Unsure	3.1110 (.8396)	2.9815 (.6585)	2.2167 (.8715)	3.1000 (2.1318)	2.7000 (1.1595)	.8000 (1.9322)	1.0000 (.1.3333)

Note: Standard deviations are shown in parentheses
**p*<.05; ***p*<.01

Gender

To determine if students' gender identity influenced their involvement, we calculated their mean engagement in liberal arts and other experiences by whether they identified as Men/Trans Men, Women/Trans Women, or Non-binary/Gender queer/Gender Non-conforming/Not listed (Table 6). Based on the literature, we expected that students whose gender identities were underrepresented might be less engaged in liberal arts and other experiences. We also expected that those who identify as women/trans women would have less research experience given the historic discrimination they have faced in STEM fields. Results demonstrate, however, that there are no differences in students' mean levels of engagement by their gender identity.

To identify whether students' gender identity might influence the type of thesis they intended to complete, we also conducted a crosstabulation as seen in Appendix 10. Results show that there is a statistically significant relationship between gender and the type of thesis students plan on completing, X^2 (12, N = 123) = 24.1017, p = 0.020 (Appendix 10). While men/trans men are slightly more likely to intend on a research paper, women/trans women are slightly more likely to select a wider variety of thesis types or to be unsure of their thesis type.

Year in College

In order to determine whether students' year in college influenced their engagement in liberal arts and other experiences, we calculated their mean levels of engagement in each experience by whether they were in their second year, third year, fourth year, or fifth year or more (Table 6). We expected that students who had been in college for more time would report more cumulative engagement. Our results confirm this hypothesis: Students with a longer tenure at the college have more extracurricular and research experiences. These results are discussed in more detail below.

Table 6, Column 4 shows students' mean cumulative number of extracurricular activities by their year in college. Our results suggest that THC students are continuing to find and remain involved in new extracurricular activities throughout their fourth year of college. Results of a one-way ANOVA demonstrate that respondents' year in college influences their cumulative number of extracurricular activities at the statistically significant level of $p < .01$ [$F(3, 115) = 4.31$, $p = 0.0064$] as shown in Table 6, Column 4. Post-hoc comparisons using the Scheffe test reveal that the mean number of extracurricular activities of fourth-year students (M = 4.138, SD = 1.217) was significantly different than the mean score of third-year students (M = 3.265, SD = 1.378) and of second-year students (M = 3.300, SD = 1.344).

Table 6, Column 6 shows students' mean total number of research terms by their year in college. Results indicate that a substantial portion of students' research experience occurs when they are in their later years of college. The high standard deviations also

suggest that level of research involvement is highly variable from student to student. One-way ANOVA results also show that year in college significantly influences respondents' number of terms of research $p < .01$ [$F(3, 114) = 11.42$, $p = 0.0000$]. A post-hoc Scheffe test indicates that fourth-year students' mean number of research terms ($M = 3.724$, $SD = 3.990$) was significantly different than the mean of third-year students ($M = 1.677$, $SD = 1.950$) and of second-year students ($M = .408$, $SD = .934$). Fourth-year students reported approximately two more terms of research than third years and three more than second years.

To identify if there was a relationship between students' year in college and their thesis type or work experience, we conducted crosstabulations showing the percent of students that chose each thesis type broken down by their year in college (Table 7). Results demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between respondents' year in college and their intended thesis type, X^2 (18, N = 119) = 61.6681, $p = 0.000$ (Table 7). Unsurprisingly, a greater proportion of second-year students (40.0%) report being *Unsure* about their intended thesis type compared to their peers. It is also interesting to note that third-year students report more variety in the thesis types they are considering (5) than fourth-year students (2) or fifth-year students (2).

Table 7

Thesis type by year in college crosstabulation

	Year in College									
	2nd Year		3rd Year		4th Year		5th Year or more		Total	
Thesis Type	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Exhibition of performing, musical, or visual arts	2	4.00	0	0.00	1	3.45	0	0.00	3	2.52
Portfolio	0	0.00	1	2.94	0	0.00	2	33.33	3	2.52
Business plan	1	2.00	1	2.94	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.68
Research paper	27	54.00	26	76.47	27	93.10	4	66.67	84	70.59
Other	0	0.00	3	8.82	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	2.52
Unsure	20	40.00	3	8.82	0	0.00	0	0.00	23	19.33
I don't plan on completing a thesis	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	100.0	0	0.00	1	.84
Total	50	100.0	34	100.0	29	100.0	6	100.0	119	100.0

Pearson $X^2(18) = 61.6681$, $p = 0.000$

Finally, to find out whether students' work experience varied by their year in college, we conducted a crosstabulation, which shows the percent of the population with each type of work experience by their year in college (Table 8). Our results demonstrate that

students seem to be acquiring more work experience generally and more in their field of interest specifically throughout their time in college. These results may also reflect the disparate impacts of COVID-19 on newer students' ability to find work. Our results demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between respondents' year in college and their work experience, X^2 (15, N = 119) = 46.9552, p = 0.000 (Table 8). A much higher proportion of second-year respondents (40.00%) report having no work experience compared to third-year or fourth- and fifth-year students (0%). Internships in respondents' fields of interest are more common among fourth-year students (24.14%) compared to all other cohorts. Multiple types of work experience are much more common among third- (52.94%), fourth- (58.62%), and fifth-year (100.0%) students than second-years (18.00%).

Table 8

Work experience by year in college crosstabulation

	Year in College									
	2nd Year		3rd Year		4th Year		5th Year or more		Total	
Work Experience	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Part-time in field of interest	3	6.00	1	2.94	1	3.45	0	0.00	5	4.20
Internship in field of interest	3	6.00	2	5.88	7	24.14	0	0.00	12	10.08
Part-time outside field of interest	14	28.00	9	26.47	4	13.79	0	0.00	27	22.69
Internship outside field of interest	1	2.00	1	2.94	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.68
None	20	40.00	3	8.82	0	0.00	0	0.00	23	19.33
Multiple types of work experience	9	18.00	18	52.94	17	58.62	6	100.0	50	42.02
Total	50	100.0	34	100.0	29	100.0	6	100.0	119	100.0

Pearson $X^2(15) = 46.9552$, $p = 0.000$

NRU College/School

To discern whether a student's enrollment in a particular NRU College/School influenced their engagement, we calculated mean engagement levels in liberal arts and other experiences by whether each student was enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business, the College of Design, the School of Journalism and Communication, the School of Music and Dance, and the College of Education/Undecided[8] (Table 6).[9] We hypothesized that students who were enrolled in more "practical" majors

[8] The College of Education was combined with Undecided due to low sample size to maintain respondents' anonymity.

[9] To ensure that each of these categories was mutually exclusive, we categorized students who were enrolled in multiple colleges by their most "practical" NRU College/School. For example, if they were enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Business, we categorized them as being in the College of Business. In this way, we could identify the possible influence of liberal arts vs. practical arts more clearly.

would be less engaged in liberal arts experiences. However, most results could not confirm this hypothesis. There was only one statistically significant relationship between NRU College/School and mean levels of engagement: Students enrolled in the School of Music and Dance reported more terms of research than students in the College of Design. NRU College/School was also related to students' intended thesis type with students in the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Journalism and Communications being more likely to choose to write a research paper. These results are discussed below in detail.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine the influence of a student's College/School at NRU on their number of terms of research (Table 6, Column 6). A student's NRU College/School was found to have statistically significant effects on respondents' number of terms of research at $p < .05$ [$F(5, 115) = 3.16$, $p = 0.011$]. A post-hoc Scheffe test revealed that students enrolled in the School of Music and Dance ($M = 5.000$, $SD = 4.858$) have participated in 5 terms of research (out of a possible "10 or more"), which is significantly higher than students in the College of Design ($M = 0$, $SD = 0$). Because we did not expect students in the School of Music and Dance to report higher levels of research engagement, we took a closer look at other factors influencing these responses. 5 of the 6 students enrolled in the School of Music and Dance reported that they were also enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences (4 of the 6 also had STEM majors). However, 6 of the 10 College of Design students were also enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences (but only 1 had even a STEM minor), and they reported no research experience. This suggests that being enrolled in a STEM discipline is a better predictor of research engagement than NRU College/School.

In order to identify any relationships between students' College/School at NRU and their intended thesis type, we conducted a crosstabulation (shown in Appendix 10). We expected that students in more practical majors would be more likely to choose something other than a research paper for their thesis and that students in liberal arts majors would be more likely to write a research paper. As hypothesized, the majority of students who are involved in liberal arts majors are slightly more likely to plan on completing a research paper, and students who are involved in the "practical" arts are slightly more likely to plan on using another format for their thesis. However, students who study Journalism and Communications did not follow this pattern and are more likely to choose a research paper. The crosstabulation in Appendix 10 demonstrates this statistically significant relationship between respondents' College/School at NRU and their intended thesis type, X^2 (30, N = 122) = 84.3312, $p = 0.0000$.

Pell Status

As can be seen in Table 6, we conducted an independent samples t-test to determine whether students' mean levels of engagement differed by Pell Grant receipt. We hypothesized that Pell recipients might be less engaged in liberal arts and other

experiences. As hypothesized, results showed that Pell Grant recipients (*M* = 2.7895, *SD* = 1.273) reported being involved in just under 1 fewer extracurricular activity compared to non-recipients (*M* = 3.71, *SD* = 1.380) at *t*(117) = 2.69, *p* = .008 (Table 6, Column 4). At first glance, these results might suggest that Pell recipients may have external commitments, like a job, that make it difficult to engage in as many extracurricular activities as their peers. However, chi-square results show that there is no significant relationship between Pell Grant receipt and hours worked, X^2 (3, N = 73) = 1.656, *p* = .647. Thus, there must be other factors besides work (e.g., finances for involvement or sense of belonging on campus) that affect these students' engagement.

First-Generation Status

To identify whether first-generation status influenced respondents' engagement in liberal arts or other experiences, we conducted an independent samples t-test (Table 6). We hypothesized that first-generation students would be less engaged than their peers, and our results confirm this hypothesis. First-generation students were found to be involved in just under 1 type of extracurricular activity fewer than their peers. Independent samples t-test results revealed that first-generation students (*M* = 2.700, *SD* = 1.829) reported significantly lower levels of extracurricular involvement compared to their peers (*M* = 3.642, *SD* = 1.337) at *t*(117) = 2.06, *p* = .0411 (Table 6, Column 4).

We also conducted an independent samples t-test to determine whether first-generation status influenced students' thesis confidence (Table 6, Column 5). Based on the literature, we expected that these students may have lower levels of confidence. Indeed, we found that while their peers report being near *Somewhat confident (4),* first-generation students report feeling mostly *Undecided (3)* about their thesis-confidence level. Results of our independent samples t-test show first generation students (*M* = 2.900, *SD* = 1.370) reporting significantly lower levels of thesis confidence (*M* = 3.807, *SD* = 1.174) at *t*(117) = 2.31, *p* = .0228 (Table 6, Column 5).

Intended First Destination

To discern the influence of students' intended first destination on their engagement, we calculated students' mean levels of engagement in liberal arts or other experiences according to whether they intended on graduate school, employment, multiple first destinations, or whether they were unsure (Table 6). We expected that students who intended on going to graduate school might engage in more liberal arts experiences and more research with more confidence than their peers. Our results support the hypothesis in part: Students intending on graduate school report higher scores in student-faculty contact, diverse experiences, and thesis confidence than *some* of their peers. Results are discussed in detail below.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine the influence of a student's intended first destination on their student-faculty contact (Table 6, Column 1). Intended first

destination was found to have statistically significant effects on respondents' student-faculty contact at $p < .05$ [$F(3, 113) = 3.34$, $p = 0.0219$]. A post-hoc Scheffe test revealed that students who are *Unsure* about their first destination ($M = 3.111$, $SD = .840$) report significantly lower student-faculty contact scores than all other peer groups. Specifically, these students reported lower agreement with the student-faculty contact scale by 1.069 standard deviations compared to those going to graduate school.

To identify the influence of students' intended first destination on their diverse experiences, a one-way ANOVA was conducted (Table 6, Column 2). Results identified that students' intended first destination significantly influences their diverse experiences at $p < .05$ [$F(3, 113) = 3.57$, $p = 0.0163$]. A post-hoc Scheffe test demonstrated that respondents who are *Unsure* about their intended first destination ($M = 2.982$, $SD = .659$) reported significantly less frequent diverse experiences than those who were intending to go to graduate school ($M = 3.557$, $SD = .586$). Students who were *Unsure* about their first destinations reported .981 standard deviations lower frequency on the diverse experiences scale compared to those going to graduate school.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether students' intended first destination influenced their thesis confidence (Table 6, Column 5). Intended first destination was found to have statistically significant effects on respondents' thesis confidence at $p < .05$ [$F(3, 115) = 3.70$, $p = 0.0138$]. A post-hoc Scheffe test showed that students who are *Unsure* about their intended first destination ($M = 2.700$, $SD = 1.160$) are significantly less confident about completing a thesis than those who plan on attending graduate school ($M = 4.044$, $SD = 1.044$). These students reported 1.288 standard deviations lower confidence about completing a thesis compared to those going to graduate school.

Taken together, these results reveal that while THC administrators and faculty intend for THC's liberal arts experiences to prepare students for their first destinations, those who are unsure about where they will end up are engaging in some of these experiences with less frequency and less confidence.

Race/Ethnicity and Hours Worked

To identify whether students' engagement in various liberal arts and other experiences differed by their race/ethnicity, we calculated the mean engagement of students who identified as Asian/Pacific Islanders, White, Hispanic/Latino, or More than one race/Other (Table 6). We hypothesized that students who were underrepresented racially might be less engaged in liberal arts and other experiences. Nevertheless, one-way ANOVA tests revealed no statistically significant differences among levels of engagement in any liberal arts or other experiences according to students' race/ethnicity.

We also calculated students' mean engagement in liberal arts and other experiences by whether they work less than 10 hours, 11-20 hours, or 21-40+ hours per week in order

to determine whether hours worked impacted students' engagement (Table 6). We expected that students who worked more hours per week would be less engaged in liberal arts and other experiences. However, one-way ANOVA tests show no statistically significant differences among levels of engagement in any liberal arts or other experiences by hours worked.

Summary

Our results demonstrate that THC students' engagement varies by several characteristics. Unsurprisingly, their year in college seems to influence the most types of engagement, including their cumulative number of extracurricular activities, their terms of research, and their types of work experience as well as their confidence in their intended thesis type. Students' intended first destinations also influence several areas. Specifically, those who are unsure about their first destinations report lower engagement in student-faculty contact (by 1.069 standard deviations) and diverse experiences (by .981 standard deviations) as well as lower confidence in completing a thesis (by 1.288 standard deviations) compared with those who intended on graduate school.

Among all of the liberal arts or other experiences, students' intended thesis type was influenced by the most demographic characteristics. Students' intended thesis type was very slightly influenced by their gender, year in college, and NRU College/School: Men/trans men, fourth-year students, and School of Music and Dance students with STEM majors reported a higher likelihood of completing a research paper as their thesis. THC students' cumulative number of extracurricular activities was also significantly influenced by student characteristics, including their year in college, Pell status, and first-generation status. Specifically, newer, lower-income, and first-generation students all reported engaging in just under 1 fewer type of extracurricular activity than their peers.

These findings are relevant to the broader question of how students' liberal arts experiences contribute to the development of first-destination skills in two ways. First, our findings show that while many students are highly engaged in liberal arts and other experiences on campus, this is not true of all. THC student engagement varies by income, first-generation status, year in college, and intended first destination. Thus, simply offering educational experiences does not guarantee that all students have access to these experiences. Accommodations for subgroups may be necessary to provide equitable access to opportunities for all. Second, the fact that students who are unsure about their first destinations are engaging less in liberal arts experiences and with less confidence reveals that additional career guidance may be necessary to increase their engagement.

Research Question 3: According to the literature and data from peer institutions, what are some best practices for preparing liberal arts students for their first destinations?

To answer Research Question 3, we reviewed the websites of four peer institutions in order to determine how each of these honors colleges are preparing students for their first destinations. Three of the institutions Penn State University (Penn State), Arizona State University (ASU), and University of Kentucky (Kentucky) were requested by the client for inclusion based on national reputation and one institution, Oregon State University (OSU), was selected because it is also in the Northwest. Additionally, we reviewed the best practices documents from NACE to provide further guidance.

Peer Demographics

In order to contextualize the approaches of each institution, it is important to understand the similarities and differences between the universities chosen for this comparison. The demographic data in Table 9 allows for a careful comparison between NRU and the selected peer institutions. While all of the institutions are considered large, public state schools they do vary significantly in cost, size, and demographics. Penn State is the most expensive at over $17,000 per year for in-state students (in 2018-2019) while OSU is the least expensive at just over $9,000 per year in-state (in 2018-2019). NRU, at $9,765 per year in-state (2018-2019) is most comparable to OSU in price. All of the institutions are similarly priced for out-of-state students ranging from $27,600 at ASU to $33,800 at Penn State. NRU is also the smallest of the selected schools with just under 20,000 undergraduate students. This is about half of the student enrollments at both Penn State and ASU. While NRU is closer in size to both Kentucky and OSU, it is still smaller by at least 2,000 students.

In terms of student demographics, ASU has the smallest percentage of White students (48%) and the largest percentage of Hispanic students (19%), and the University of Kentucky has the largest percentage of White students (74%). NRU is most similar to OSU in terms of student race and ethnicity percentages with student demographics of 59% and 61% White, 12% and 9% Hispanic, and 2% and 1% Black respectively. Interestingly, NRU has the lowest percentage of in-state student enrollment (52%) while OSU has the highest (70%).

The size, cost, and demographics of the institution clearly have direct implications for available student resources and must be considered as we evaluate programmatic offerings. Larger institutions with more resources, like Penn State, have the ability to develop more comprehensive programming that can be duplicated for specific student populations. Additionally, they can dedicate resources to hire more staff or develop large events for honors college students. Even with smaller student populations and smaller

budgets, however, there are opportunities to learn from the strategies of larger and well-resourced institutions. Of course, there is much that can be gleaned from the approach of similarly sized and resourced institutions, like OSU, as the possibility of implementing similar strategies may be more feasible. In examining this range of approaches, we can develop a strategy appropriate for the size and resources of NRU.

While the institutional differences are important, the size and make-up of the honors college itself will enable more direct comparisons in best practices and possible strategies for NRU. Unfortunately, most of the universities publish significantly less data on the composition of the individual colleges.

For the individual honors colleges, little data was publicly available for most of the institutions apart from student enrollment and differential tuition. Unsurprisingly, ASU has the largest student enrollment in their honors college at over 7,000 students, and NRU has the smallest enrollment at nearly 1,000 students. NRU also has the largest differential tuition at an increase of over $900 per term (fall, winter, and spring) while Penn State actually offers a guaranteed $5,000 yearly scholarship to honors college students. ASU and Kentucky have an increased tuition of $500 to $2,000 per year respectively. OSU has a tuition increase of $1,500 per year ($500 per term) for honors college students.

Regardless of the missing data, we can utilize these findings to start to understand the similarities and differences between NRU and the comparison universities. As such, we can frame which best practices are likely to be possible and successful at NRU.

Table 9
Institutional comparison data

	Comparison Institutions				
	Penn State University	**Arizona State University**	**University of Kentucky**	**Oregon State University**	**Northwest Research**
*University Demographics**					
Tuition					
In-State Tuition	$17,416	$10,104	$10,896	$9,390	$9,765
Out-of-State Tuition	$33,820	$27,618	$27,750	$28,365	$33,345
6-Yr. Graduation Rate	69%	63%	65%	65%	72%
First-Year Retention Rate	93%	88%	85%	84%	85%
Race/Ethnicity					
% White	62%	48%	74%	61%	59%
% Hispanic	6%	19%	5%	9%	12%
% Black	4%	3%	7%	1%	2%
% Asian or Pacific Islander	6%	8%	3%	7%	6%
% Native American	0	1%	0	0	1%
% Two or more races	3%	4%	3%	7%	7%
% Non-resident Alien	16%	16%	5%	11%	11%
Total UG Enrollment	40,363	42,844	22,136	25,699	19,101
% In-State Enrollment	64%	61%	67%	70%	52%
% Pell	23%	29%	23%	26%	26%
*Honors College Demographics***					
Differential Tuition	$5,000 per year scholarship for all students	$1,000 per semester	$250 per semester	$500 per term	$987.75 per term
Graduation Rate	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	50%
Retention Rate	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported
Total College Enrollment	1823	7428	Not reported	1600	800
% In-State Enrollment	71%	Not reported	Not Reported	83% (from 2010)	Not Reported
Race/Ethnicity	Not reported	Not Reported	Not Reported	65% White (from 2010)	Not Reported
% Pell	Not reported	Not Reported	Not Reported	Not reported	Not Reported

*Source: IPEDS 2018 -2019 Year Data; **Sources: Institutional websites

Binary Question Responses

In order to more clearly describe what career-related support structures are available at each institution for honors college students, Table 10 outlines a series of binary (yes or no) questions. The more “yes” responses an institution has indicates, the more robust their career-related supports for honors college students. Penn State has the strongest support with a score of 9 “yes” responses, and NRU has the lowest with only 3 “yes” responses.

The reporting and allocation of resources described in Table 10 demonstrates that there are a range of structural approaches that might be beneficial for NRU to explore. In particular, it outlines the range of structural options that can be in place. While Penn State has the highest score, OSU uses a combination of institutional resources—career services personnel—and honors-college-specific programming—like a course dedicated to career readiness—to enhance their student career preparation.

All of the honors colleges focus on research opportunities and emphasize the thesis. This focus on research is an important component of the honors college curricula at each institution. They narrate the opportunities from both the academic side, as seen through the thesis, and on the extracurricular side, as demonstrated through the additional undergraduate research opportunities.

The institutions that scored the highest on the rubric have specific career-related supports at the institution level for the individual colleges and/or dedicated personnel for honors college students. This targeted support elevates the opportunities for students and enables the staff members to meet students where they are.

Table 10

Website review framework: Binary question responses

	Comparison Institutions				
Yes/No Questions	**Penn State University**	**Arizona State Univ.**	**University of Kentucky**	**Oregon State Univ.**	**Northwest Research**
Does the university offer career services support that is specifically geared towards the individual colleges?	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Does the university offer specialized career programming for Honors Students?	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Does the university collect and report student outcome data?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Is it available at the college level?	No	No	No	No	No
Is it available for the honors college?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Do they report data by student demographics?	No	No	No	No	No
Does the honors college highlight information about co-op programs or externships?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Does the honors college highlight information about research opportunities for undergraduates?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the honors college require a thesis for Honors students?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the honors college highlight an alumni association?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Does the honors college offer a course that focuses on career preparation?	No	No	No	Yes	No
Does the honors college have dedicated career personnel for honors college students?	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Does the university have dedicated career personnel for honors college students?	No	No	No	Yes	No
Total “Yes” Answers	9	4	4	6	3

Honors College Programmatic Offerings

In addition to reviewing what structures are in place at the institution to support honors college students, we also evaluated the specific programming done within the honors college to help students prepare for life after college as outlined below in Table 11. Together these offerings allow students to gain the guidance necessary to successfully translate their honors college experiences into the workplace or graduate school. While the ideal would be to offer all of these programmatic offerings, that is not always financially or functionally possible. As such, institutions often only provide a subset of these offerings.

Each “yes” response was tabulated to provide a total score for each college. Penn State and OSU scored the highest with 12 “yes” responses. Again, NRU scored the lowest with 4 “yes” responses. While most of the supports do require time, money, or staff/faculty resources, other honors colleges have prioritized these opportunities for students. Most of the other institutions offer at least a few of the individualized supports.

The institutions that scored the highest offer a full range of programmatic offerings that provide specific and guided resources geared towards honors college students. This includes general programming such as career fairs, job/internship postings, and alumni networking as well as more individualized support such as 1:1 coaching, resume, and cover letter reviews. Notably, none of the institutions requires career advising or offers graduate schools fairs for honors college students.

Table 11

Website review framework: Honors college programmatic offerings

	Comparison Institutions				
	Penn State University	**Arizona State Univ.**	**University of Kentucky**	**Oregon State Univ.**	**Northwest Research**
Which of the following are offered at the honors college?*					
1:1 coaching	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Group workshops	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Alumni networking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Other networking	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
On-campus or virtual interviewing	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Career fairs	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Graduate school fairs	No	No	No	No	No
Job postings	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Internship postings	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mandatory career advising	No	No	No	No	No
Interview preparation	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Fellowship application support	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Graduate school application support	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Personal statement support	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Career exploration (identifying opportunities)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Resume review	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Cover letter review	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Mentoring	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Informational Interviews	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Total "Yes" Answers	12	6	11	12	4

*"Yes" recorded if explicitly mentioned on the website

Honors College Career Programming Narratives

To provide additional depth to the numerical calculations, Table 12 provides a narrative description of the programmatic offerings at each of the comparison institutions. This analysis allows for a more nuanced understanding of the depth and breadth of career-related supports offered at each honors college which might not be apparent in the quantitative analysis of programmatic offerings. As with all of the benchmarking data, this is based on information publicly available on each institution's websites.

Table 12

Website review framework: Descriptions of honors college career programming

Institution	Programmatic Descriptions
Penn State University	Penn State's honors college, Schreyer Honors College, offers comprehensive career support for students to supplement the university career services. This includes focused programming, alumni networking, and trips to major cities to meet with honors college alumni. They have four dedicated staff members focused on career support and three staff members focused on development and alumni relations. The college produces a comprehensive annual report that highlights graduate outcomes broken down by campus, major, and destination.
Arizona State University	Barrett, the honors college at Arizona State University, provides some level of career supports for students. This includes professional development offerings including group workshops, community partner information sessions, and one-on-one coaching to support internship searches and career development. They stress the importance of their partnership with the University's Career and Professional Development services. The website is explicit about encouraging the use of their services.
University of Kentucky	The Lewis Honors College at the University of Kentucky has a dedicated Center for Personal Development which provides programs and individual counseling services to support students as they grow personally and professionally. They take a holistic approach in an effort to address the needs of the whole student. They seek to cultivate self-awareness, well-being, and career readiness. They have several staff members that are charged with providing career supports in addition to other resources. The website provides comprehensive career support resources as well as opportunities for students to meet with career counselors one-on-one.
Oregon State University	Oregon State's honors college provides a range of career supports specifically geared toward students in the program. While it does not appear that they have dedicated personnel, they provide a range of online resources and appear to work closely with the university's career center to put on programming for honors college students. Additionally, they focus on opportunities to connect current students with honors college alumni and offer a 400-level course that is focused on career exploration.
Northwest Research University	The Honors College provides a wide range of academic supports, but little-to-no career supports for students. There are staff members dedicated to helping students obtain distinguished scholarships and fellowships but not career readiness. There are job and internship listings as well as a link to the Career Center on the resources page.

NACE Best Practices

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) compiles and publishes best practices on a wide range of topics. We have specifically reviewed content related to some key areas of opportunity for THC including facilitating faculty buy-in to career readiness, incorporating career readiness into capstone or thesis experiences, and integrating career readiness in the liberal arts.

In considering how to increase career readiness among honors college students, the college should consider the implementation in addition to the specific structures and

programmatic offerings. The NACE best practices provide some concrete guidance on how to approach this work (Table 13). Most notably, making faculty central to the process is fundamental to programmatic success. Incorporating faculty from the conception will allow for the efforts to be seamlessly integrated into the academic experiences of students. NACE suggests faculty task forces and faculty learning communities as a way to build faculty investment and comfort with career competencies. This will allow faculty to be more comfortable incorporating these competencies into course content at important junctures, particularly as students prepare for their thesis or other culminating work. Additionally, NACE recommends colleges develop a comprehensive communications plan to ensure consistency of the messaging and language used regarding the value of the program and the ways in which students can make use of the skills and experiences they build in college throughout their post-graduate lives.

Table 13

NACE best practice reports

Report Topic	Best Practice Summary
Facilitating Faculty Buy-in (Smydra, 2020)	• Facilitate a career readiness task force that is directed by faculty • Create faculty learning communities centered on career readiness • Develop face-to-face trainings for faculty when possible
Incorporating Career Readiness into Capstone Experiences (Sanders, 2019)	• Create opportunities for students to reflect on their entire college experience • Incorporate alumni and alumni stories to highlight how they transitioned from college to career • Highlight how the skills students build across majors are valuable in the workplace • Integrating career supports into coursework is more effective than only sending students to the career center
Integrating Career Readiness into the Liberal Arts (Koerner, 2018; Sanders, 2019)	• Use a faculty committee to develop goals and core career competencies • Make career readiness central to your mission • Prioritize facilitating faculty buy-in • Build intentional opportunities for students to reflect on the career competencies and articulate the connection between academic work and career readiness • Develop a communications campaign that incorporates career readiness language in all areas of the college

Discussion

Research Question 1: In what ways are THC alumni using liberal arts skills to reach their first destinations?

THC uses seven learning outcomes to assess students' acquisition of liberal arts skills. Those learning outcomes include intellectual engagement, critical reasoning, disciplinary methods, communication skills, intercultural competence, interdisciplinary inquiry, and research competence. It is the expectation of THC that students' learning will deepen as they take courses within THC. The depth of the course content increases with each course level so that students continue expanding their content knowledge and skill set. Below, we discuss the themes that emerged via our interviews and how they align with THC's liberal arts learning outcomes and related literature. Additionally, we explore the meaning of other themes that surfaced beyond the stated learning outcomes.

Intellectual Engagement

Intellectual engagement is one of seven learning outcomes of THC experience. THC expects that students will "show initiative, independence and intellectual engagement in the classroom and in assessments" (Appendix 3). Students talked about the intensity of their writing requirements and how their classroom experiences deeply influenced their level of intellectual engagement. Participants indicated that being surrounded by exceptionally intelligent peers, engaging in challenging courses, and possessing an explicit love of learning contributed to their ability to cultivate intellectual engagement through their THC experience. Roche (2010, p.10) indicates that "learning for its sake" is requisite for success beyond the college years and can be cultivated through a liberal arts experience.

As indicated by Seifert et al. (2008), liberal arts experiences, like THC's, positively impact liberal arts outcomes such as lifelong learning. Alumni consistently discussed the many ways that they experienced intellectual engagement during their time at THC; however, they could not articulate how it helped them to reach their first destinations. One participant relayed that in hindsight, it was clear that they had received four years of graduate school training. Overall, participants were not aware of the value or usefulness of the skill. It is clear that THC is achieving the intellectual engagement learning outcome, but students are not clear about how and when to apply this skill beyond the collegiate experience.

Critical Reasoning

Participants could clearly identify and articulate critical reasoning as a THC learning outcome. THC expects its students to "apply and demonstrate critical reasoning through the use of appropriate evidence and methods" (Appendix 3). Not only were alumni able to

relay that they obtained critical reasoning as a skill, but also they could articulate how they applied it as students and how it played a role in helping them to reach their first destinations. Alumni articulated that critical reasoning was particularly helpful in the analysis of their coursework and post-graduation plans. According to Astin (1999), liberal arts experiences, like those cultivated by the THC, contribute to positive outcomes in students' critical thinking.

Although participants were clear that this skill was valuable, one participant did not think that it was worth the additional differential tuition required of THC students. He specifically states that he could have received this skill through the honors program housed within his academic department. This sentiment is supported by the literature, which indicates that liberal arts experiences can happen outside of liberal arts colleges (Pascarella et al., 2005). While THC was effective in ensuring that students could apply this skill to assist them in reaching first destinations, they could have obtained this skill through other means at NRU.

Disciplinary Methods

In general, participants were least familiar with the disciplinary methods learning outcome. Of the 16 participants, only one alluded to how this skill emerged during their academic career. As a result of THC experience, participants should be poised to "identify and appropriately apply disciplinary methods in the humanities, social sciences and the natural sciences" (Appendix 3). Although the participant talked about the skill, she struggled to categorize it and could not apply it beyond her collegiate experience. With that said, she named the course she obtained the skill from as one of her most influential courses, thus underscoring its importance.

It is not clear whether or not THC is adequately achieving this learning outcome. However, it is clear that students lack clarity about the learning outcome, its purpose, and how it can be applied. The literature speaks to this challenge and confirms that there are gaps in liberal arts students' ability to apply what they have learned in the real world (Anders, 2017; Hart Research Associates, 2018; Hutton, 2006; Roche, 2010; Weise et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2017). Moving forward, THC will need to be explicit about naming, explaining, and helping students to identify the ways that this skill can be applied to their first destinations.

Communication Skills

Communication skills were one of the most cited THC learning outcomes by participants. They articulated that these skills were helpful during their academic career, when choosing a first destination, and in first jobs or graduate school. THC expects that its students will be able to "practice active participation and oral communication of ideas in a group setting" as well as "recognize and employ the conventions of academic writing, presentation, and discussion" (Appendix 3). Participants spoke to the benefits of the oral

and written aspect of communication and how it was developed by THC experience. Based on our interviews, THC is successfully achieving the communication learning outcome. Alumni responses clearly indicate that this skill helped them to reach their first destinations and remained useful in their careers, academia, and daily lives. Research indicates that liberal arts skills such as communication skills are valuable to employers (Roche, 2010; Pasquerella, 2019; NACE Staff, 2020). In fact, it is noted as one of the most desired skills in the labor market (Weise et al., 2018).

Intercultural Competence

Interview participants spoke about intercultural competence specifically in the context of being in another country, thereby learning about other cultures and becoming proficient in a second language. Acquiring proficiency in a second language was paramount in obtaining intercultural competence for many participants. This is in line with THC's learning objective that states that students will "demonstrate intercultural competence through linguistic diversity and awareness of and appreciation for diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspective" (Appendix 3).

While students were explicit about their linguistic diversity, they did not speak overtly about their appreciation and awareness of other cultures outside of their experiences abroad. The literature indicates that diverse interactions promote other skill sets that include academic ability, leadership, civic attitudes and behaviors, and positive diversity attitudes (Mayhew et al., 2016, pp. 550, 553). The literature indicates that students who are consistently engaged in diverse collegiate experiences had increased critical thinking skills (Pascarella et al., 2014). The literature provides examples such as attending cultural workshops and developing relationships with those from other races. This is not the way that THC students articulate their intercultural competence, thus there is additional opportunity for development in this area.

It should be noted that students articulated that they obtained this skill due to experiences outside of THC. It is possible that THC provides opportunities to highlight this skill, but it seems that students are less aware of these. THC should highlight existing opportunities it sponsors to engage this skill while reinforcing its application.

Interdisciplinary Inquiry

THC expects its students to "engage in interdisciplinary inquiry by integrating insights from more than one research approach and by synthesizing diverse perspectives and modes of thinking" (Appendix 3). Interview participants were aware of their interdisciplinary inquiry skills but could not explicitly articulate how they had helped them to reach their first destinations. However, they did indicate that the wide range of interdisciplinary coursework helped them to narrow and/or determine their field of interest. While they asserted that the skill allowed them to expand their mind and engage in a holistic thought process, they were not clear about how this process factored into

their career trajectory. THC should create more awareness about the purpose of this skill and how it impacts and enhances other skills such as critical reasoning and intellectual engagement. Although interdisciplinary inquiry is highlighted as a common liberal arts skill (Astin, 1999; Seifert et al., 2008), participants struggled to translate its value. Highlighting the application of this skill would create more meaning and value for THC students.

Research Competence

Alumni consistently spoke positively about the research competence skill and how it impacted them. They indicated that the research skill was not only useful to them as scholars, but also as a method to find and prepare for their first destinations. THC's learning outcomes state that they expect that their students will be able to "develop research competence through inquiry, project-based and active learning based on students' own questions" (Appendix 3). The THC is intentional about offering an in-depth research experience to students, which the literature explains is a critical and necessary to build liberal arts skills (Kilgo & Padgett, 2012; Pascarella et al., 2005; Seifert et al., 2008). Alumni describe achieving this outcome when discussing how they used research competence as a tool to reach their first destination and how talking about their ability to conduct research via the thesis process was essential to their success.

Gap Year

The study revealed that students often took a gap year between completing college and attending graduate school or becoming employed. This gap year came in the form of nannying, research, volunteering, temporary employment, and in some cases, odd jobs. For some participants, they planned their gap year with advice from peers, mentors, and faculty while others may have postponed post-graduation opportunities without a structured plan. Some engaged in experiences that would advance their goals and post-graduation plans while others chose employment, like nannying, in a more haphazard manner. Those without a plan missed out on an opportunity to acquire specific skills or knowledge that would have directly contributed to advancing their post-graduation plans. The THC should consider providing additional guidance in this area as it is a popular pathway to students' subsequent destinations.

Career Supports

THC has seven learning outcomes that are designed to ensure that students obtain specific liberal arts skills that will ultimately contribute positively to their academic journey and into their career trajectory. While participants noted that these skills were helpful overall, they were explicit in naming that they needed additional support for their careers. They stated that they needed both the liberal arts skills and the career readiness skills to successfully reach their first destinations. The literature echoes this finding as it relays that skills must be partnered with direct career support or internships to assist students with

translating these skills in their post-graduate experiences (Rowen, 2016; Stebleton et al., 2020). Students cited that they needed assistance with things such as mock interviews, resume writing, and career advice.

In some cases, participants articulated that they sometimes sought assistance outside of THC in the area of career preparation. Moreover, they indicated that they wanted to know more about the potential career trajectories of others in their field of study via alumni. The literature indicates that alumni connections are a significant aspect of students' transition to their first destinations, and these connections are integral in creating opportunities for gaining knowledge about career paths and obtaining positions (NACE Staff, 2016). Career support is not a focus for THC, but this does not align with the needs of students. It can be argued that based on the responses of the alumni, the need for career support is essential for THC to fully meet its stated learning outcomes. As a result, THC should consider how it can provide career support to its students.

Summary

The results in conjunction with the literature confirm that participants used liberal arts skills, in varying ways, to reach their first destinations. They did so when researching, identifying, applying to, and obtaining their first destinations. The utilization of these skills ranged from using their research skills to employ the creation of spreadsheets to synthesize career options to using critical reasoning skills to discern if an opportunity was appropriate for them. The findings indicate that they were aware of most of their liberal arts skills, but struggled to apply and translate some of them to real-world settings. Thus, THC will need to focus its efforts on helping students to apply and translate the liberal arts skills beyond their academic experience.

Research Question 2a: What liberal arts or other experiences are current THC students engaging in at NRU?

In the section that follows, we relate the literature to THC students' reported engagement with the following liberal arts and other experiences: student-faculty contact, diverse experiences, student affairs contact, extracurricular involvement, thesis, research, career services, and work experience.

Student-Faculty Contact

Our findings indicate that students agree more strongly with faculty's influence on their intellectual growth and interest in ideas than with faculty's influence on their career goals or aspirations, their development of close relationships with faculty, or their satisfaction with opportunities to interact with faculty. These responses confirm Mayhew et al.'s (2016) findings that faculty-student interactions outside the classroom positively influence students' cognitive growth and sociopolitical attitudes—especially when these interactions are focused on intellectual or academic topics. Further, these results also support Astin's (1993) finding that close student-faculty interaction leads to a greater likelihood of academic development.

Students' lower levels of agreement regarding close relationships with faculty and opportunities to interact with faculty may also demonstrate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their ability to interact meaningfully outside of class with faculty.

The results of our study are less conclusive with regard to the influence of student-faculty contact on students' career development and career aspirations and preparation. While Mayhew et al. (2016) report a positive influence of student-faculty contact on career development, the average student response in our survey fell between *Neutral* and *Agree* with regard to faculty's influence on their career goals or aspirations. The fact that students feel faculty have influenced their intellectual growth more than their career goals may reflect THC faculty's orientation toward academic careers rather than careers outside academia (Former Dean, personal communication, June 25, 2020). These results suggest a need for greater faculty engagement with students' non-academic career trajectories.

Diverse Experiences

With regard to diverse experiences, THC students reported having more frequent conversations about diversity issues but less frequent interactions with diverse people or diverse ideas. This quantitative finding is supported by qualitative data.[10]

While diversity-related coursework has been shown to improve skills like students' writing ability, interpersonal diversity interactions have strong links to their cognitive development (Mayhew et al., 2016). Both types of diversity interactions support academic ability, leadership, civic attitudes and behaviors, positive diversity attitudes (Mayhew et al., 2016, pp. 550, 553). Zuniga (2005) also notes that while interactions with diverse peers lead to more democratic outcomes among students (i.e. greater inclusivity and social justice), diversity curricula also encourage students to critically evaluate and alter their own behavior in relation to these outcomes. Thus, both types of diverse experiences are needed.

Given these distinct outcomes for different types of diverse interactions, THC administration will likely need to invest in ways for their students to interact more with diverse individuals who have diverse ideas in addition to guiding students in diversity coursework discussions.

Student Affairs Contact

Our findings indicate that while students may be involved in many extracurricular activities, their involvement with student affairs staff seems to be relatively limited. This conclusion is important because the influence of student affairs professionals versus the influence of extracurricular involvement itself has been shown to be distinct. For example, Martin and associates (2014; 2011) have reported that interactions with student affairs professionals positively influence students' academic motivation, need for cognition, and literacy attitudes. Additionally, student affairs professionals have a strong positive influence on students' socially responsible group leadership abilities (e.g., common purpose, collaboration, and controversy with civility), which are skills likely to be useful to students in the workforce (Martin, 2013; Martin & McGee, 2014). Therefore, while students can develop important skills through extracurricular involvement, interactions with student affairs professionals provide unique positive outcomes for students in areas of professional significance. This is one area that THC may need to bolster to improve students' post-graduation outcomes.

[10] Tim Hill gave voice to this issue with the following: I think [THC's] just a pretty politically one-minded space...it's just kind of my viewpoint on it. I'm a relatively conservative man. And, you know, I'm fine with whoever's viewpoints, but it's just kind of those situations where you walk on a lot of thin ice in those classes. And it just particularly feels like there's not an openness to any dialogue in any situation that isn't necessarily the main [viewpoint].

Extracurricular Involvement

According to Mayhew et al. (2016), extracurricular involvement positively influences leadership skill development, intellectual and academic self-concept, and positive masculinities. Furthermore, Vetter et al. (2019) found that high levels of involvement in a small number of activities help students develop a stronger sense of belonging and well-being on campus. Our survey results demonstrate that on average THC students are involved in roughly 3.5 different types of extracurricular activities. Based on literature, this level of extracurricular involvement could lead to positive outcomes for students, including the development of traits that are valued in the labor force, like leadership.

Additionally, while most students are involved in THC-specific activities when these are required, students choose to engage with other external clubs and organizations more than any one optional THC offering. This may be because students prefer external organizations that align more closely with their specific interests than THC's optional offerings; however, more research is needed about the other kinds of external organizations students are engaging in.

Thesis/Research

Based on our survey results, the vast majority of students intend their thesis to be a research paper, which confirms THC administration's perceptions that students have fairly narrow conceptions about what the thesis actually is (L. Chan & D. Gallagher, personal communication, July 27, 2020). This suggests a need for THC faculty and administrators to communicate their broader vision and purpose for the thesis (i.e., to be a capstone project that prepares them for their individual careers) more clearly to students.

THC students believe they are developing skills via the thesis that will benefit them in their first destinations; however, it seems that THC students view the thesis as preparation for graduate school/research careers more than other non-academic careers. These findings contrast with THC administration's intended purpose for the thesis. When asked which THC experiences and activities contribute to supporting students in establishing a career, THC administration reported that the thesis was their primary tool for career preparation (E. Raisanen, personal communication, July 9, 2020). Nevertheless, our survey results highlight that students are not necessarily perceiving the thesis, or THC curriculum more broadly, in the same way. It is important to point out that these quantitative findings from current students are also supported by qualitative findings from alumni.[11]

Students' tendency to engage in research and view this as primarily useful for graduate school preparation is confirmed in the literature as well. Studies have shown that students

[11] As Kevin expressed: "I didn't even realize that it was basically like four years of grad school training, but that's what it is. If you don't go into grad school, I'm not really sure what it does for you, other than like, you know, I mean the 'learning is good' kind of thing. I don't know if it really sets you apart or if it gives you really any fundamental skills, other than grad school prep."

who engage in research with faculty are more likely to choose graduate school or further study as their first destination (Miller et al., 2018; Smyth et al., 2016).

Career Services

With regard to their use of Career Services, THC students are engaging in these supports at relatively low rates. When they do use these services, they receive resume support more than interview support, participate in career counseling more than career assessments, and attend job fairs more than workshops. These results are congruent with national benchmark surveys of career services, which report that career fairs have surpassed workshops in prevalence and that in-person appointments are more common than group sessions (NACE, 2021).

On average, THC students visit the Career Services office between once-a-year and less than once-a-year. This finding stands in contrast to THC faculty's belief that students are getting career support from outside THC (Former Dean, personal communication, June 25, 2020). While these university supports are available, many students are not availing themselves of these services. In fact, one-quarter of all survey respondents report that they have never received any career support from the university or from their department or college. This suggests a strong need for THC to build bridges to help students connect with these university-wide resources or to provide targeted career services with the honors college for THC students.

Work Experience

Over 80% of THC survey respondents who are currently employed work less than 20 hours per week. Working more than this amount can negatively affect students' grades and educational attainment in college (Mayhew et al., 2016; McCormick et al., 2010); thus, most THC students are not likely putting themselves at risk academically by working.

Survey respondents reported that part-time employment *outside* their field of interest is their most common type of work experience followed by internship experience or part-time employment *within* a field of interest. These results are fairly consistent with a survey conducted by THC in February 2020, which found that work experience outside a student's field of interest was more common than within (Alumni Outreach Manager, 2020). However, the February 2020 results also suggested that a larger percent of THC population have had work experience within their field of interest than our dataset did. Additionally, one-fifth of all respondents to our survey report having no work experience, which is significantly higher than the percent reported in the February 2020 survey (Alumni Outreach Manager, 2020). This may reflect the fact that we included second-year students and above in our survey while the February survey only included third years and above. It could also be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of students today work during college (Douglas & Attewell, 2019; Kuh, 2009). Work experience has been associated with greater levels of career-related skills, employment after college, citizenship, autonomy, moral formation, and post-college wages (Mayhew et al., 2016). Furthermore, internships have been positively associated with stronger application of acquired skills in the workplace (Hart Research Associates, 2018; Roche, 2010; Townsley et al., 2017) and acquisition of secure employment before graduation (Miller et al., 2018). Working during college has also been associated with higher salaries after graduation (Titus, 2010). Thus, THC should continue to provide support for students to find employment and internships within their field of interest during college.

Summary

Based on our findings, THC's liberal arts education is supporting students' engagement in the following areas: their intellectual growth, discussions about diversity topics, participation in THC-required activities, completion of research-paper theses, and participation in part-time employment *outside* their field of interest. Nevertheless, THC's liberal arts curriculum also has some gaps where students still need support that will improve their transition to their first destinations. Specifically, THC can provide better support for students' engagement in: their career growth, interactions with diverse individuals with diverse ideas, optional THC activities, and work experience *within* their field of interest.

It is clear from the literature that liberal arts experiences like student-faculty contact, diverse experiences, student affairs contact, and completing a thesis help students build important liberal arts skills, such as critical thinking, inclination to inquire, leadership, and motivation (Martin & McGee, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2016; Padgett & Kilgo, 2012; Pascarella et al., 2013a; Seifert et al., 2008). However, the literature also indicates that these skills must be accompanied by direct career support or internships to help students translate these skills to the professional workplace (Rowen, 2016; Stebleton et al., 2020). Therefore, to make the most of their liberal arts experiences, our findings indicate that THC students need more career support through interactions with faculty, career services, and relevant work experience.

Research Question 2b: Does this engagement differ by student characteristics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination)?

The influence of students' characteristics (i.e. their gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, NRU College/School, hours worked, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination) on their engagement are discussed in relation to the literature below.

Gender

While the majority of students of all gender identities expect to write a research paper, we did find some differences among the groups. We found that men/trans men are more likely than others to report that they intend to complete a research paper while women/trans women are more likely than others to report that they are unsure what type of thesis they will complete. However, these differences were overall quite small. The results may be a reflection of historic biases toward women in research fields, which have perhaps contributed to their lower levels of confidence in their choice of thesis type and lower likelihood to complete a research paper (Steele, 2011). Or, it is possible that men overestimate their research abilities compared to women (Kuh, 2009). THC might consider offering targeted thesis support to students who may be less confident in their research abilities. They may also want to improve their messaging about the purposes and possibilities for the thesis to increase students' confidence in their chosen type.

Year in College

Year in college was found to affect students' extracurricular involvement, research, work experience, and thesis type. Each of these findings is discussed below in turn.

Fourth-year students report having been involved in more extracurricular activities than second and third years throughout their college careers. This is expected, though not guaranteed, given their longer tenure at the university. These higher levels of involvement suggest that THC students are continuing to stay engaged in university life throughout their college careers. It is also important to acknowledge, however, that the COVID-19 pandemic has likely affected students' ability to get involved in new extracurricular activities—perhaps affecting newer students more than older students with their already well-established social networks.

Year in college also affects students' research experience with much of it occurring when students are in their later years of college. Again, this is expected given that research opportunities are often found after close relationships with faculty members have been established. The high standard deviations found in our dataset also suggest that level of research involvement is highly variable from student to student.

Our results further indicate that students seem to be acquiring more work experience and more work in their field of interest throughout their time in college. This is congruent with the literature which has found that two-to-three times as many fourth-year students report having jobs compared to first-year students (Kuh, 2009). Nevertheless, our results may also reflect the disparate impacts of COVID-19 on newer students' ability to find work.

Finally, more second-year students (40.0%) report being *Unsure* about their intended thesis type relative to their peers. This is not surprising given the fact that sophomores are likely still in the early stages of their major coursework. Yet, this lack of clarity may also be a sign of what the literature calls the "sophomore slump," or "a stage where students seem to drift through their second year of college as they struggle to determine what they hope to gain from college and establish short- and long-term goals" (Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013, p. 541; see also Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). Third-year students report more variety in the thesis types they are considering than fourth-year or fifth-year students. This finding may support perceptions of THC administration that students may be being directed by faculty toward research papers as they approach the thesis (L. Chan & D. Gallagher, personal communication, July 27, 2020). This redirection may be because faculty members feel more confident mentoring students through the process of writing a research paper compared to other projects. More research is needed to confirm whether this is indeed the case.

Many institutions collect data about their first-year students and their graduating seniors, but few know much about the experience of students in the interim (Kuh, 2009). Together, the above results contribute to closing the research gap surrounding these second- and third-year students. THC should continue to monitor their second- and third-year students and encourage their engagement to ensure their success in college and beyond.

NRU College/School

NRU College/School is related to both students' intended thesis type and their research involvement. Students who are involved in the liberal arts (i.e. the College of Arts and Sciences) are more likely to intend on writing a research paper for their thesis, and students who are involved in the practical arts (i.e. the College of Design or the School of Music and Dance) are more likely to intend on completing another type of project for their thesis.

Our results also indicate that NRU College/School may influence students' research involvement. Specifically, students in the School of Music and Dance are more involved in research than students in the College of Design. Because this difference is not one we had predicted, we examined students' major and found that most of the students enrolled in the School of Music and Dance were simultaneously enrolled in STEM majors in the College of Arts and Sciences, while none of the students in the College of Design were. This

may suggest that enrollment in STEM majors is a better predictor of research experience than NRU College/School. The literature supports this idea as STEM majors are found to have higher interest and participation in research relative to other disciplines (Coakley, 2016; Nzekwe, 2017).

Pell Status

Our survey results indicate that Pell recipients are less involved in extracurricular activities than their peers; however, these results do not support the hypothesis that this lower involvement is due to their hours worked. Based on the literature, it is possible that low-income students lack the sense of belonging or the financial resources necessary to participate in social activities (Ardoin, 2018; Aries & Seider, 2005; Jack, 2019; McClure & Ryder, 2018). More research is needed to confirm whether this might be the case for THC students. THC administration may consider providing both financial and emotional support to help low-income students get more involved on campus.

First-Generation Status

Congruent with the literature, first-generation students in our study were involved in fewer types of extracurricular activities than their peers. Other studies have found that while first-generation students are often less involved on campus (perhaps because they also work more hours) (McCormick et al., 2010; Pascarella et al., 2004), they also benefit from their on-campus involvement to a greater degree than their peers (Pascarella et al., 2004).

With regard to thesis confidence, although their peers report being near *Somewhat confident,* first-generation students report feeling mostly *Undecided*. These results are consonant with the literature, which notes that first-generation students may have greater "feelings of intimidation, discomfort, inadequacy, and deficiency" during college (Aries & Seider, 2005, p. 439).

Together these results suggest that THC might offer targeted support for first-generation students to encourage their extracurricular involvement and their confidence in completing a thesis. It is also important to note that first-generation students were the most underrepresented in our sample; the above results should be interpreted with this underrepresentation in mind.

Intended First Destination

Students who are unsure about their intended first destinations report lower student-faculty contact scores, less frequent diverse experiences, and less confidence about their ability to complete a thesis. This finding is consistent with theoretical models about career maturity and student engagement. That is, it has been proposed that students who feel more confident about their career path are more likely to be engaged in school because they see the direct value of these experiences for their future careers

(Perry, 2010). However, this stands in contrast to THC's program theory (see Appendix 1), which presupposes that students will engage with liberal arts experiences which will prepare them for their future careers—whether or not students have a well-defined career path. While the directionality of the influence between liberal arts engagement and intended first destination can proceed in either direction, these findings suggest that THC should consider 1) providing students with or 2) connecting students to support services that can help them identify a career path and increase their engagement with other THC offerings.

Race/Ethnicity and Hours Worked

Our survey found no evidence of a relationship between students' race/ethnicity and their engagement nor between their hours worked and their engagement. This is in contrast to previous studies which have shown that 1) students from underrepresented races may be less likely to interact with faculty (Jack, 2019; Kim & Sax, 2009; Steele, 2011) and 2) there are mixed results regarding hours worked and levels of engagement depending on the number of hours and whether the work was on-campus or off- (McCormick et al., 2010; Zilvinskis & McCormick, 2019). The non-significant results by race/ethnicity may be due to our very small sample sizes for these sub-groups; for hours worked, the non-significant results may be due to the fact that we did not record whether the work was on-campus or off-.

Summary

Together these results demonstrate that THC students engage with the experiences and resources provided by the institution differently based on their background characteristics. Given this fact, THC must make a clear and firm commitment to provide equitable access to these experiences in order to produce equitable outcomes for all students (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2018; Jack, 2019; Steele, 2011). One important step toward this equity goal is providing support for underrepresented students who may be less engaged. This support can take many forms, including increasing their representation on campus, providing funding for extracurricular activities, or integrating career supports throughout required activities (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2018; Jack, 2019; Steele, 2011). Another step toward this equity goal is collecting ongoing data about students' engagement and outcomes according to characteristics like gender, year in college, major, Pell status, first-generation status, and intended first destination. With this information, THC can begin to adequately support the students who need it most; without it, they may find themselves inadvertently contributing to inequitable outcomes for their students and alumni.

Research Question 3: According to the literature and data from peer institutions, what are some best practices for preparing liberal arts students for their first destinations?

While institutional websites may not perfectly reflect what is occurring on campus, they can provide insights into the college's strategies, philosophies, and priorities. The central objective of this research question was to better understand the approaches that peer honors colleges are taking to support students in preparing for their first destinations. In addition to developing the liberal arts skills that will help them reach their first destinations, students need support in understanding and translating those skills into the workforce (Anders, 2017; Hart Research Associates, 2018; Hutton, 2006; Roche, 2010; Weise et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2017).

Thus, of the schools reviewed, Penn State currently has the most comprehensive approach and is likely to see the best outcomes. While Penn State is also by far the most expensive institution, unlike the other honors colleges, every student is guaranteed a scholarship. This is of critical importance as we know that financial concerns can impact a student's ability to fully engage in college and take advantage of resources like career supports (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2018; Braxton et al., 2013; Jack, 2019; Kuh, 2009). Even though these additional resources cost the institution, the schools that charge differential tuition for honors college enrollment are placing additional burdens on low-income students.

While financial constraints may be a factor, OSU, a school much more similar to NRU, charges roughly half as much for their differential tuition and is able to offer a comprehensive range of programming, including a course that focuses on career preparation. Building career preparation into the curriculum is key to helping students bridge the connections between their academic experiences and their future professional goals (Sanders, 2019). For this to be done successfully, institutions must utilize a comprehensive approach that engages and includes faculty (Smydra, 2020). Developing strategies and opportunities for faculty to help students build career connections in their thesis courses would help students translate their honors experiences on resumes, cover letters, interviews, etc. (Koerner, 2018; Padgett & Kilgo, 2012; Pascarella et al., 2013b; Smydra, 2020).

In addition to the fact that all of these universities also have central career services centers, three of the five institutions also have dedicated personnel for honors college students. In some models, like at Penn State and Kentucky, there are individuals within the honors college dedicated to this work, while at OSU there are staff members at the central career services center dedicated to honors college students. We learned from our interviews that the general career services supports at NRU are not meeting students' needs, and thus these dedicated staff members can be instrumental for student

development in this respect.[12] As students that are engaged in a liberal arts curriculum, like those found at THC and other honors colleges, they can benefit from more targeted career guidance (Stross, 2017; Weise et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2017). Even if students are taking advantage of the central career services support and opportunities developed for particular majors, they may still be missing the skills that will help them articulate how their liberal arts skills and experiences in particular make them an asset unless they are intentionally taught how to do this (Koerner, 2018; Sanders, 2019; Stross, 2017; Weise et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2017). Fortunately, THC is already incorporating many of the essential career competencies into their curriculum, primarily through the thesis process. What is missing currently are the supports that help students make sense of the skills they are building and learn how to articulate these skills in a career context.

THC does provide students with robust research opportunities, which is one of the critical liberal arts experiences that builds essential liberal arts skills (Kilgo & Padgett, 2012; Pascarella et al., 2005; Seifert et al., 2008). This research experience is fundamental to THC student learning and is one of the key benefits of participating in the program. In fact, all of the honors colleges reviewed place a strong emphasis on the research experience and require a thesis. What is not evident from the website content is to what extent the thesis or capstone experience is positioned by the college as an “exit ramp” to the students’ post-college life (Koerner, 2018; Sanders, 2019). This culminating work is the perfect opportunity to build in structures to help teach students how to bridge the academic-career divide by specifically and explicitly reinforcing career competencies like “critical thinking/problem solving, oral and written communications, teamwork/collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, career management, and global/intercultural fluency” (Sanders, 2019). Given the importance of the research experience, this is a prime opportunity to incorporate career readiness into the existing curriculum.

Nearly all of the institutions highlight the alumni association on their websites. Only one school, Kentucky, does not; however, they do offer alumni networking opportunities for their honors college students. The alumni network is an important point of leverage for current students in their first destination transition (NACE Staff, 2016). Alumni networks create opportunities for students to learn more about potential career paths and in acquiring positions (NACE Staff, 2016). A NACE 2015 survey found that 70% of seniors used alumni connections during their job search and 60% said that alumni were very or extremely important to their job search (NACE Staff, 2016). Thus, building strong connections with alumni is a critical way to support students in their career transitions.

[12] Samantha demonstrated the insufficiency of career services when she said: "If you look at the university at large, a lot of people aren't going to go to graduate school, for example. Or most of them are going to stay in [state], which is fine, but people that are going to be joining the Honors College, I think tend to be more ambitious. They might want to go to a graduate school program, or they might want to move to New York or DC…[and] the current career services aren't really serving them."

Additionally, there are opportunities to continue to engage alumni through offering targeted programming that also benefits a range of alumni which can help keep them connected to the institution (NACE Staff, 2016). While THC is already working to maintain an alumni network for students, this reinforces the importance of continuing these efforts.

Finally, none of the schools maintain a public report of job placement outcomes for honors students broken down by student demographics. Only OSU has an annual report that is publicly available, however, it is from 2010. Even if not posted publicly, it is essential that colleges track and maintain placement and outcome data on students that is broken down by student demographics as students from different backgrounds experience college differently and therefore have different needs (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010; Ma et al., 2016; Aisch et al., 2017; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2018; Jack, 2019; Braxton et al., 2013). Ultimately, in order to determine if career initiatives are successful, accurate and robust data needs to be collected, maintained, and reported.

Limitations

Below we discuss the limitations of the qualitative, quantitative, and benchmarking components of our study in turn.

Qualitative

We began this project in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, our access to campus was limited. This meant that we were unable to have an in-person site visit to become familiar with the campus, collect campus artifacts, and have in-person conversations with stakeholders. While many of the interview participants were located in various parts of the country, we did not have an opportunity to meet in person with alumni that are currently local to the NRU area. Ultimately, all conversations were required to take place via virtual means.

We utilized a convenience sample of alumni to conduct our qualitative study. In general, convenience samples are not guaranteed to be representative of the target population. Ultimately, interviewees self-select to participate. As a result, we may have under- or over- representation of certain populations. Typically, those with strong opinions whether positive or negative are most likely to be interviewed, thus limiting the overall perspective of the target population. This may have contributed to biased results and should be taken into account when interpreting our interview findings.

During the qualitative interviews, we did not obtain demographic data from the participants pertaining to race/ethnicity and gender identity. This additional information would have allowed us to tell the story of specific demographics, thus allowing THC to understand and address the needs of various demographic groups. This information could have also potentially helped THC address retention concerns for these groups. This will now be left to further research.

Quantitative

Our survey data was collected in November 2020 while students were studying remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This fact most certainly affected our results in many and indiscernible ways. Results should be interpreted through this lens.

While descriptive statistics for the quantitative portion of our study reveal that our sample is fairly representative of our target population, the fact that this was also a convenience sample means that our populations may still differ in other unobserved characteristics. The underrepresentation of first-generation students should also be noted. Given that our study included students from only one institution, these results are not intended to be generalizable to other institutions.

The quality of our quantitative data was also impacted by the computer bots that completed our survey. Although we systematically cleaned the data based on relevant

criteria, some real responses may have been deleted and some automated responses may have been kept, thus affecting the reliability and validity of our findings.

Finally, the very small sample size for some of our demographic subgroups may affect the reliability of our intergroup comparisons. Results should be interpreted with this in mind.

Benchmarking

In order to complete the benchmarking study, we relied on the information that is publicly available on each institution's website. It is possible that these webpages are not entirely representative of what programming and supports actually exist. Additionally, it is challenging to fully judge how robust these offerings are and if students are actually utilizing the available resources listed on the website.

Particularly, given all of the disruption due to COVID-19, some schools might have eliminated some programming or shifted resources to different areas. In order to fully understand the nuances of the career supports for honors college students, in-depth interviews with students, faculty, staff, and alumni at each institution would be required.

Recommendations

1. Narrate THC's Value-Add

Alumni who participated in our interviews were not aware of all THC's student learning objectives (see Appendix 3), and they were not always capable of translating these skills into labor market language or applying them to their careers (especially those outside academia). Specifically, THC alumni could articulate the usefulness of their critical reasoning, research competence, communication skills, and intercultural competence, but they needed more support translating the usefulness of their intellectual engagement, disciplinary methods, and interdisciplinary inquiry skills to their first destinations. This skills translation challenge for liberal arts students is well documented in the literature (Stebleton et al., 2020; Stross, 2017; Weise et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2017).

Despite these translation challenges, liberal arts skills are indeed highly valued in the workforce (Hart Research Associates, 2018; Weise et al., 2018). Consequently, THC needs to be intentional and strategic in narrating the value that the college brings to its students. Our benchmarking study revealed that other honors colleges are providing clear narratives about the value of their programs and services. This process of narration is known in the literature as "sensegiving" (Foldy et al., 2008). When organizational leaders engage in sensegiving, they create "cognitive shifts," or significant changes in perceptions, in their followers by intentionally communicating why their organization is run as it is (Foldy et al., 2008). In contrast to sensegiving, "sensemaking" is the process whereby individuals in an organization are left to create narratives of their own that explain why certain events happened as they did; these narratives may or may not align with organizational leaders' views (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Weick, 1993).

Based on our conversations with THC administrators, it seems that this process of sensegiving has been done more informally through individual conversations and short taglines like, "Come for the Honors, stay for the liberal arts" (E. Raisanen, personal communication, July 9, 2020). However, to be truly effective, it needs to be more systematic and widespread. Systematic sensegiving can be accomplished through several channels. On the one hand, THC's core competencies can be incorporated into student coursework, like first-year experience courses and capstone courses (Koerner, 2018; Sanders, 2019). On the other hand, THC can increase students' awareness of their core competencies and their value by including them in their marketing materials. For example, the University of Minnesota's College of Liberal Arts has created a webpage dedicated to describing their ten core competencies and how these translate into students' future careers; they have also included a video in which different alumni explain each of the core competencies of the college and how each has benefited them professionally (Koerner, 2018; University of Minnesota, 2017). THC's recent additions to their website are a strong

step in this direction (*Why THC?*, 2016). In the absence of such a strategic narrative about the value of the liberal arts in the workplace, students and alumni will begin to write their own, and it might not align with the story THC wants to tell.

2. Enhance Career Support for Students

While narrating THC's value is important, "the traditional approach to teaching—the transmission model—promotes neither the interactions between prior and new knowledge nor the conversations that are necessary for internalization and deep understanding" (Richardson, 2005, p. 3). Our benchmarking study revealed that THC's peers are signaling to students how and where to get additional career guidance and support. However, THC students need more direct career support that can help them internalize how their liberal arts experiences and skills benefit their professional lives. This is especially necessary given that most THC alumni both surveyed by the NRU (Director of Assessment and Research, 2020) and interviewed in this study reported employment as their first destination. There are several ways this more direct career support can be accomplished as outlined below.

Integrate Career Readiness into the Classroom

One way of providing career support for students is to integrate career readiness into the classroom. Fortunately, THC has already started doing this by organizing their new curriculum around the core competencies (see Appendix 3) that students will develop through their liberal arts education (Koerner, 2018). In fact, several of THC's core competencies are considered essential for career readiness (see Appendix 9). However, more work can be done in this area, particularly with regard to the thesis. For example, some liberal arts colleges and institutions have created capstone courses or career planning courses that accompany students' final research projects—integrated into these courses are tasks like writing an intellectual autobiography and career planning (Sanders, 2019; Stebleton et al., 2020). After completing these tasks, students are encouraged to design a project that builds both on their past experience and toward their future goals by applying their acquired skills to a real-world problem (Sanders, 2019). Thus, students not only get time to reflect on the skills they have developed, but they also get to apply them in a professional context outside their liberal arts institution, thereby internalizing the value of their liberal arts skills (Sanders, 2019; Stebleton et al., 2020). While much of THC's current thesis model mirrors this ideal, both students and alumni in our study reported viewing the thesis primarily as a research paper that was useful for graduate school preparation. Given that THC students are highly engaged with required THC activities, the classroom is a natural place to incorporate a focus on career readiness.

Forge Partnerships with Career Services Professionals

Another means of offering career support is by forging partnerships with career services professionals. These partnerships could resemble THC hiring career services staff, THC actively working with central Career Services, or both. Most of the benchmarked institutions used one of these two approaches. A growing number of career services are offered via more decentralized or hybrid models (Garis, 2014; NACE, 2021), but no matter what model is adopted, it is imperative that these professionals are deeply familiar with the unique needs, skills, and goals of THC students. This desire was consistent among the alumni we interviewed. It is also imperative that bridges are intentionally built between THC students and these professionals as our survey data showed that students are rarely receiving career support if at all. Therefore, THC must take more direct steps in connecting students to these supports.

Engage Alumni in Building Students' Career Readiness

A final way of enhancing career support for THC students is engaging alumni in this effort. Students are increasingly turning to alumni for professional support in their post-graduate transition (NACE Staff, 2016). Yet, THC alumni we interviewed reported not being aware of what alumni were doing or knowing how to contact them. It is important to note that the Alumni Outreach Manager has begun work in this area since many of those alumni have graduated, but it is still in its early stages (Alumni Outreach Manager, personal communication, July 2, 2020). Alumni can support students' career readiness through various means, such as mentoring (Priest & Donley, 2014), marketing (University of Minnesota, 2017), and informational interviews (Long, 2016). The more students can make connections with THC alumni, the more they will be able to see the value of their own education beyond THC.

3. Facilitate Faculty Buy-In for Career Support

We have defined a liberal arts education as an institutional ethos that, in part, values intellectual arts more than professional or vocational skills (Seifert et al., 2008). As such, it is not surprising that many liberal arts faculty may bristle at the thought of providing career support for their students. A career focus is often seen as antithetical to the liberal arts tradition. However, it is essential to point out that in our definition, value for the intellectual arts is not promoted *in exclusion to* professional or vocational skills but rather *more than* professional or vocational skills. The professional skills recommended here do not replace the liberal arts skills that THC offers its students. To the contrary, they help students see and articulate the value of their liberal arts skills even more clearly (Koerner, 2018). Specifically, THC students and alumni reported believing that their liberal arts skills were primarily useful for academic careers; therefore, the focus on career readiness that we are proposing will not actually narrow their understanding of the value of the liberal arts but expand it.

For any of the above recommendations to be successful, faculty must embrace the idea that professional skills do not oppose liberal arts skills but rather enhance students' awareness of the value of their liberal arts skills (Koerner, 2018). They must also spearhead career-readiness initiatives for them to truly take root in the college culture. There are a few ways to facilitate this faculty buy-in. First, faculty must be involved in all stages of the process, including planning and implementation (Koerner, 2018). Second, faculty must be trained in how to connect THC's core competencies to students' future careers. Studies have shown that even when faculty support competency-based education, they feel unsure of how to implement it in their classrooms (Hortman, 2017). Thus, training is essential. Once faculty understand how to help students draw connections between what they are learning in class and their lives after class, they will begin to appreciate their liberal arts education more deeply.

4. Increase Diversity and Support for Diverse Students within THC

The lack of racial, social, and economic diversity in honors colleges and programs has been widely discussed in the literature (Ashton, 2009; L. L. Coleman & Kotinek, 2010; Harper, 2019; MacDonald, 2019; Pittman, 2001). Thus, the fact that THC students discuss diversity issues more than they encounter diverse individuals with diverse ideas is not uncommon. Nevertheless, as highlighted in THC's most recent Strategic Plan, it is an issue that must be addressed (Former Dean, 2019).

While THC should increase recruitment efforts for students from diverse backgrounds, it will likely be difficult to convince them to come or to stay unless THC also demonstrates a strong commitment to equity and inclusion throughout the college. Support for equity and inclusion can take many forms: financing to get involved in extracurriculars (Jack, 2019; MacDonald, 2019), extra support to build confidence for the thesis process (MacDonald, 2019; Steele, 2011), spaces to create a sense of belonging (Jack, 2019; Johnson et al., 2007), and enough diversity to promote the emergence of divergent perspectives (Ashton, 2009). When this commitment to equity and inclusion is made, the table will begin to be set for conversations to be had among diverse individuals with diverse perspectives (L. L. Coleman & Kotinek, 2010), which can contribute to more democratic and pluralistic outcomes for students and alumni (Colby et al., 2003; Zuniga et al., 2005). Or, as Garces and Jayakumar (2014, p. 121) note, such dynamic diversity can activate "more lively discussion, challenge to prior understandings/convictions [/]stereotypes, greater potential for innovation, and expanded range of perspectives and solutions."

5. Track THC Student and Alumni Outcomes and Contact Information

To implement and measure the success of the above interventions, THC should track their student and alumni outcomes and contact information in sufficient detail to be able to isolate relevant sub-populations. As Bottoms and McCloud (2019) have pointed out,

data is essential for justifying the value-add of honors colleges to various stakeholders in today's higher education landscape. Fortunately, NRU has already begun collecting some of this data via their First Destination Survey (Director of Assessment and Research, 2020), and their Alumni Outreach Manager has started collecting other information about alumni (Alumni Outreach Manager, personal communication, July 2, 2020). Further collaboration among data-collecting entities across the university is highly encouraged (Garis, 2014) as having updated information about alumni outcomes and contact details will facilitate their engagement in current students' career readiness.

Conclusion

This study has provided an important addition to the literature as it explores the role of liberal arts experiences on students' first post-graduation outcomes. Advocates of liberal arts education claim that it develops broadly applicable skills that are advantageous to students many years beyond college graduation (Roche, 2010; Stross, 2017; Zakaria, 2015). However, the literature does not present an in-depth review of how students are using and learning from their liberal arts experiences to reach their first destinations post-graduation.

This study provides context for how liberal arts experiences cultivate liberal arts skills which help students to reach their first destinations, such as employment, prestigious fellowships, graduate programs, and in some cases, an intentional gap year. Moreover, it confirms that liberal arts skills can be cultivated outside of the traditional liberal arts college environment. In fact, it is often these liberal arts experiences, not their institution type, that most influence student outcomes (Pascarella et al., 2005). As such, liberal arts skills can even be cultivated in an honors college situated in a research institution (Kimball, 2014; Roche, 2010). This study also provides additional breadth to the literature that indicates that thesis and research experiences contribute to students' personal and professional development. In the literature, most of the studies about the impacts of research experiences are STEM-focused or about discipline-specific skills (Craney et al., 2011; Dowd et al., 2018; Seymour et al., 2004); however, our findings indicate that research competence, such as writing a thesis, also helped students to reach their first destinations.

While it is evident that THC students obtain liberal arts skills that help them to reach their first destinations, they are often unable to articulate, recognize, translate, and apply the liberal arts skills they have acquired to the career setting (Anders, 2017; Hart Research Associates, 2018; Hutton, 2006; Roche, 2010; Weise et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2017). The literature indicates that students can overcome this challenge by obtaining career supports and access to alumni (Rowen, 2016; Stebleton et al., 2020). This finding confirms that it is not just human capital (i.e. liberal arts skills or technical skills) that help students reach their first destinations but also the surrounding social/cultural capital that is necessary to translate their skills into the professional workplace.

The findings of our study informed our recommendations, which were to narrate THC's value-add, enhance career support for students, facilitate faculty buy-in for career support, increase diversity and support for diverse students in THC, and to track THC student and alumni outcomes and contact information. The findings and recommendations of our study provide insights and opportunities for further research. We recommend further studies that explore whether there is an economic return to their liberal arts education once graduates reach their first destinations or whether they must

wait several years to feel the impact of the economic benefits. This is particularly important as THC continues to explore ways to attract diverse populations and as students continue to weigh the costs of a liberal arts education.

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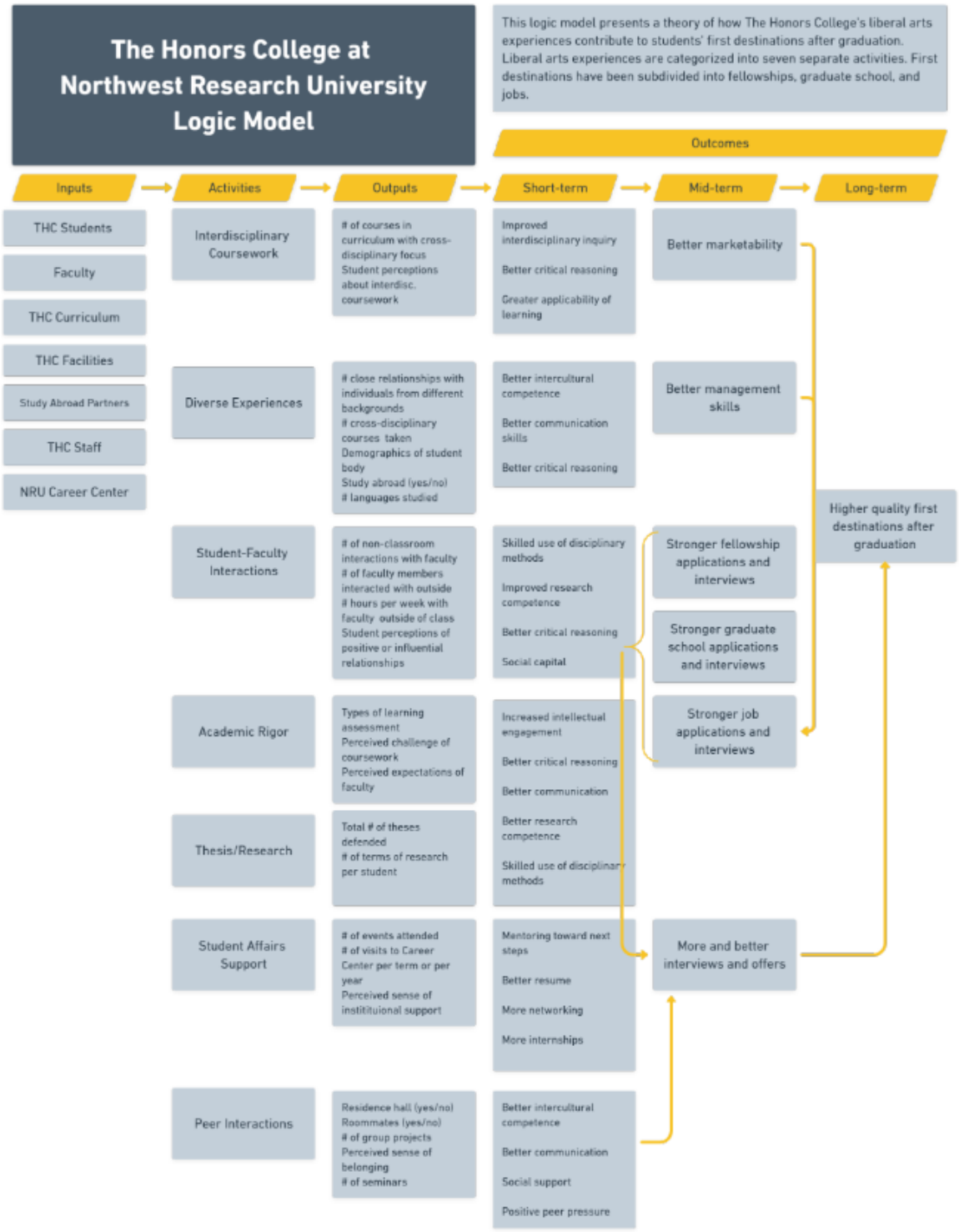
Appendices

Appendix 1
THC Logic Model



Appendix 2
Comparison of Liberal Arts Experiences across Studies

Liberal arts experiences examined in present study versus previous studies

Seifert et al. (2008)	Astin (1999)	Present Study
Positive and influential student—faculty contact; Instructor feedback to students; Faculty interest in teaching and student development instructional clarity, organization, and preparation; Frequency of faculty contact	Frequent student-faculty interaction	Student-Faculty Contact
Degree to which the institution is supportive; Frequency of student affairs contact	Generous expenditures on student services	Student Affairs Support
Overall diversity experiences and interactions; Diversity courses	A strong faculty emphasis on diversity	Diverse Experiences
Out-of-class research with faculty member	Frequent involvement of students in independent research; Frequent involvement of students in faculty research	Thesis/Research
Positive influence of interactions and relationships with peers; Frequency of engaging in cooperative learning activities	Frequent student-student interaction	Peer Interaction
Integration of ideas through class activities and assignments;	Frequent use of interdisciplinary and humanities courses (especially history and foreign languages)	Interdisciplinary Coursework
Academic effort and challenge; Challenging classroom environment characterized by high expectations; Emphasis on higher-order examinations and assignments; Involvement with active learning; Academically meaningful out-of-class experiences	Frequent use of narrative evaluations; Infrequent use of multiple-choice exams; Frequent use of courses that emphasize writing	Academic Rigor

Appendix 3
THC Learning Objectives

1. Critical Reasoning Apply and demonstrate critical reasoning through the use of appropriate evidence and methods	Develop ability to read and question critically, think logically, and reason effectively. Identify the major assertions and assumptions of an academic argument and evaluate its supporting evidence	Develop, and articulate well-reasoned arguments supported with appropriate evidence. Integrate material from multiple sources in support of a single argument	Develop innovative research questions and determine the evidence needed to support an argument.	Integrate complex and diverse bodies of evidence in support of sophisticated and original arguments
2. Communication Skills Use effective communication skills, both written and oral, by constructing coherent, logical, and persuasive arguments	Practice active participation and oral communication of ideas in a group setting. Recognize and employ the conventions of academic writing, presentation, and discussion	Productively engage in academic dialogue and debate. Express complex ideas clearly in writing and demonstrate strong command of structure, syntax, and mechanics.	Articulate the purpose, methodology and results of independent research, integrating material from multiple sources.	Demonstrate the ability to communicate complex and difficult concepts orally and in writing to both specialists and a broad audience.
3. Research Competence Develop research competence through inquiry, project-based and active learning based on students' own questions	Use appropriate methods for identifying and accessing relevant and reliable sources.	Evaluate the use of diverse research methods for the production of knowledge.	Define and refine research questions, and synthesize, integrate, and evaluate relevant and reliable sources of evidence.	Adapt appropriate research skills to a thorough and effective investigation of a research topic or problem.
4. Intellectual Engagement Show initiative, independence and intellectual engagement in the classroom and in assessments	Collaboratively and independently explore and evaluate issues, ideas, data, and/or sources.	Develop and articulate reasoned responses to issues, ideas, data, and/or sources.	Identify and engage with individual interests within a broader research area.	Demonstrate independence, initiative and self-direction in well-conceived individual research papers and projects, and in group projects.
5. Disciplinary Methods Identify and appropriately apply disciplinary methods in the humanities, social sciences and the natural sciences	Identify a range of disciplinary approaches and characterize the diverse perspectives they offer.	Assess and evaluate the use of disciplinary methods.	Employ approaches, methods, and writing style appropriate to the discipline(s) and audience.	Critically reflect on methods within the course discipline(s).
6. Interdisciplinary Inquiry Engage in interdisciplinary inquiry by integrating insights from more than one research approach and by synthesizing diverse perspectives and modes of thinking	Describe the value of a liberal arts perspective across fields of inquiry.	Explore the contributions of different disciplinary perspectives within a field of inquiry.	Synthesize ideas and information from relevant disciplines in support of arguments.	Adapt, analyze, integrate, and critically reflect on methods within relevant disciplines.
7. Intercultural Competence Demonstrate intercultural competence through linguistic diversity and awareness of and appreciation for diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.	Describe the underlying premises in their own and others' arguments or perspectives.	Engage with and reflect on examples of diverse human identities, experiences and thought.	Appreciate the role of diverse perspectives in shaping complex arguments. Characterize the importance of research ethics and describe best practices.	Demonstrate an ability to empathically consider and present issues from multiple nuanced perspectives.

Appendix 4
Comparison of Liberal Arts Skills across Studies

Liberal arts skills examined in present study versus previous studies

Seifert et al. (2008)	Winter et al. (1981) as cited in Haberberger (2018, p. 1054)	NRU THC/Present Study
Effective reasoning and problem solving	Critical thinking and broad analytical skills	Critical Reasoning; Interdisciplinary Inquiry; Disciplinary Methods; Research Competence; Communication Skills
Inclination to inquire and lifelong learning	Learning how to learn; Independence of thought	Intellectual Engagement
Intercultural effectiveness	Participation in and enjoyment of cultural experience	Intercultural Competence
Psychological well-being	Empathy-seeing all sides of an issue; Self-control for broader loyalty	
Leadership	Self-assurance in leadership ability	
Moral reasoning	Mature social-emotional judgment, personal integration; Equalitarian, liberal values	

Appendix 5
Interview Recruitment Emails to THC Alumni

Dear THC Alumni,

I hope this email finds you well, despite the times we all find ourselves in. I am writing because The Honors College is working with a team of doctoral candidates from Vanderbilt's Peabody School who are serving as consultants as part of their IRB-approved capstone project. Their project is part of a study which examines honors college students' experience with liberal arts education and career preparation and evaluates the effectiveness of the career and graduate school preparation that THC offers.

THC is excited about participating in this study, since the consultants will make available the results of the project to us. Preparing our students for careers and graduate and professional schools is a THC priority. This study can help us take a research-driven approach to improving how we prepare current and future honors college students for worlds of work and post-graduate education. Your input will allow us to better understand how student experiences at THC affect post-graduate plans, including job placement.

To this end, we are inviting you to participate in an interview about your experiences at NRU and THC. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can decide not to participate or to discontinue your participation at any time. Interviews will take approximately **45-50 minutes** and will be conducted by **phone or video call**.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please **contact Angela King Taylor** at angela.n.taylor@vanderbilt.edu **by Friday, October 16, 2020**. If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Angela.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to help support The Honors College!

Warm regards,
Alumni Outreach Manager

Hi again, fellow members of THC community: Just a reminder that if you are interested in participating in the Vanderbilt Peabody School project described below, the deadline to respond is tomorrow, October 16. If you have already reached out to Angela Taylor, my apologies for adding to your inbox. To maintain confidentiality, they are not able to tell me who has responded.

Thank you!
Alumni Outreach Manager

Dear THC alumni: One final (promise!) follow up regarding the Vanderbilt-Peabody project described below. While the consultants have had the opportunity to speak with a number of alumni, they want to ensure that they speak with as diverse a group as possible. In particular, the consultants are hoping to speak with additional alumni that identify as Black, African American, and/or Latinx. For this reason, they have asked me to reach out again to invite your participation.

As you may recall, this research is part of a study that examines honors college students' experience with liberal arts education and career preparation. Your input is important as we seek to understand how your experiences at THC have influenced your post-graduate plans including job placement. Interviews will take approximately 45-50 minutes and will be conducted by phone or video call. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can decide not to participate or to discontinue your participation at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Angela King Taylor at Angela.n.taylor@vanderbilt.edu. If you have any questions about this research study, Angela would be happy to answer them. And if you have already contacted her, my apologies again for adding to the content in your inbox.

Thank you for considering participating!
Alumni Outreach Manager

Appendix 6
Alumni Interview Protocol

Introduction/Purpose:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to help us understand what liberal arts skills The Honors College (THC) alumni developed via their liberal arts experiences in the THC and how those skills were or were not used in reaching their first destinations after graduation. It is your choice whether or not you elect to participate. Should you elect to participate, you can opt-out at any time. Your responses will be anonymous, and your name will not be shared with anyone. Can I have your permission to record this discussion?

Quality Improvement Question:

Q2: In what ways are THC alumni using liberal arts skills to reach their first destinations?

Alumni

Ice Breaker

1. How are you managing given everything going on this year?
2. When did you graduate from NRU? What was your major?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about what you were doing professionally your first year after graduating from NRU?

I am going to ask you about your professional experiences your first year after graduation and your time at NRU. Answer as best you can, but if there are things you don't recall that's fine--just let me know!

To get us started...

Finding First Destinations (deciding on a career path, meeting employers/collaborators/professors, doing internships or summer jobs, narrowing the list of possible institutions/organizations to work with)

1. How did you **identify** your post-graduation options (e.g. *through college resources, through internships/volunteering/former employer, the thesis process, family and friends, or a formal job search*)?
    a. Did you research the industry, companies, or graduate schools you were interested in? If so, how?
    b. Did you reach out to alumni, friends, or mentors to learn more about the jobs, companies, schools, or positions you were interested in? If so, who?
    c. How was the search process different in any subsequent jobs/positions you've looked for since graduating?

d. What parts of the process were key in helping you identify post-graduation options?
e. What other resources might have been helpful to you when attempting to identify post-graduation options?

Applying to First Destinations (resumes/CVs, applications, cover letters)

2. Please describe your process for **applying** to post-graduation opportunities.
    a. Did you have to write a cover letter? Resume? How much time did you spend writing and revising these documents?
    b. How did you decide what to include in these documents?
    c. What parts of the application process were most significant and why?
    d. What else might have been helpful to you during the post-graduation application process?

Interviewing with First Destinations

3. Please describe your **interview** process for the post-graduation opportunities you explored.
    a. How did you prepare for these interviews? Who, if anyone, helped you?
    b. Did you feel ready for the interview process? If so, why? If not, what resources would have assisted with your post-graduation interview process?
    c. If you remember, what experiences from college did you find most valuable to discuss in your interview?
    d. Do you still talk about any experiences from college in an interview? Which ones? Why do you feel they continue to be relevant?

Choosing a First Destination

4. How would you describe your process for **selecting** _____ [insert first destination]?
    a. Did you have multiple options? If so, how did you narrow your options?
    b. What other resources might have aided you in this process?

Overall Reflection

5. What NRU/THC experiences were most useful in helping you reach _____ [insert first destination]? Why?
6. If you could go back and do it all over again, what would you change about your path to _____ [insert first destination]?

Appendix 7
Survey Recruitment Email to THC Students

Dear students,

A team of Vanderbilt researchers in cooperation with THC would like to invite you to participate in a short survey about your experiences at NRU and THC.

This survey is part of a study which examines honors college students' experience with liberal arts education and career preparation. The researchers are seeking responses from students that have completed at least one full year of school in THC. Your input is important as the researchers seek to understand how involvement differs across student groups and how this might affect students' career outcomes. Completion of this survey should take approximately **10-15 minutes**. Please complete the survey by November 25th.

To thank you for your time, we are offering the **first 100 respondents** a **$5 gift card**.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You can decide not to participate or to discontinue your participation at any time.

To complete the survey, follow this link:
https://peabody.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5dRGzJct4QURAPP

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Kelsey Daniels at kelsey.daniels@vanderbilt.edu.

Thank you for considering participating!

Appendix 8
THC Student Survey

First Destination Preparation Survey

Overview:

This survey is part of a study which examines honors college students' experiences with liberal arts education and career preparation. Your input is important as we seek to understand how these experiences differ across student groups and how this might affect students' career outcomes. Completion of this survey should take approximately **10-15 minutes**.

Participation:

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You can decide not to participate or to discontinue your participation at any time.

Contact:

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Kelsey Daniels at kelsey.daniels@vanderbilt.edu or our faculty supervisor Will Doyle at w.doyle@vanderbilt.edu.

Risks and Confidentiality:

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this survey, nor are there any costs for participating in the study. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.

Benefits:

This survey gives you the opportunity to reflect on your own involvement in college experiences in the liberal arts and career preparation.

Upon completion of this survey, you will be prompted with a Google Form where you can add your personal details. This information will not be linked to your survey answers. The first 100 respondents will be sent a **$5 gift card** after all survey responses have been collected**.** If you do not wish to receive a gift card, you can simply exit the survey.

Electronic Consent:

Please read the following statement and select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records.

"I agree to participate in the research study. I understand the purpose and nature of this study, and I am participating voluntarily. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without any penalty or consequences."

Click “Agree” if:

- You have read the above information

- You voluntarily agree to participate

- You are 18 years of age or older

Click "Disagree" if:

- You decline to participate in this survey

o Agree

o Disagree

1. Below are statements about your contact and interactions with faculty at this university. Indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with each.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.	o	o	o	o	o
My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations.	o	o	o	o	o

Since coming to this institution, I have developed a close, personal relationship with at least one faculty member.	o	o	o	o	o
I am satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members.	o	o	o	o	o

2. How often have you had the following experiences while attending this university?

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
A. Encountered diverse perspectives on campus outside the classroom (e.g. administrative offices, public forums)	o	o	o	o	o
B. Made friends with a student whose race was different from your own	o	o	o	o	o

C. Made friends with a student from another country	o	o	o	o	o
D. Had serious discussions with other students about different lifestyles and customs	o	o	o	o	o
E. Had serious discussions with other students about major social issues such as racial diversity, human rights, equality, or justice	o	o	o	o	o
F. Had serious discussions with faculty whose political, social, or religious opinions were different from your own	o	o	o	o	o

3. How frequently have you interacted with student affairs professionals (non-academic support staff at the college, e.g., first-year advisor, residence hall staff, career counselor, student union or campus activities staff) as described below?

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
A. Discussed a personal problem or concern	o	o	o	o	o
B. Had a serious discussion with staff whose political, social, or religious opinions were different from your own	o	o	o	o	o
C. Worked on out-of-class activities (e.g., committees, orientation, student life activities)	o	o	o	o	o
D. Talked about career plans	o	o	o	o	o
E. Discussed ideas from your reading or classes	o	o	o	o	o
F. Discussed grades or assignments	o	o	o	o	o

4. Below are some activities in which students often participate while in college. Indicate which experiences you have had during your time at this college. (Check all that apply)

- ▢ Participated in study abroad
- ▢ Lived in Global Scholars Hall or Bean Hall
- ▢ Lived in another Academic Residential Community
- ▢ Participated in a first-year seminar/course
- ▢ Participated in speech, debate, and/or mock trial
- ▢ Led a student club or organization
- ▢ Been a member of a religious congregation or group
- ▢ Participated in Ephemera, the creative arts journal
- ▢ Been a member of THC Student Association
- ▢ Participated in Inside Out Prison Exchange
- ▢ Participated in other student clubs and organizations

5. How many terms (including summer) have you participated in out-of-class research (e.g. working in a research lab, an institute, or with a professor)?

- o 0 terms
- o 1 term
- o 2 terms
- o 3 terms
- o 4 terms
- o 5 terms
- o 6 terms
- o 7 terms
- o 8 terms
- o 9 terms
- o 10 or more terms

6. How confident do you feel about your ability to complete an undergraduate thesis?

- Quite confident
- Somewhat confident
- Undecided
- Somewhat unconfident
- Not at all confident

7. What type of thesis will you complete in your final year?

- Exhibition of performing, musical, or visual arts
- Portfolio
- Business plan
- Research paper
- Other
- Unsure
- I don't plan on completing a thesis

Display This Question:

If 7. What type of thesis will you complete in your final year? = I don't plan on completing a thesis

7b. What are your reasons for deciding not to complete a thesis?

_____

8. In your opinion, what are the **three** most important areas that **completing an undergraduate thesis** supports?

Three most important areas that completing a thesis supports:
_____ Career development
_____ Conducting scholarly research
_____ Critical thinking/analytical skill/problem-solving skills
_____ Discipline-specific skills
_____ Diversity topics
_____ Ethical topics
_____ Financial literacy
_____ Graduate school application process
_____ Leadership skills
_____ Oral communication skills
_____ Project management skills
_____ Teamwork/group work
_____ Technology skills
_____ Writing skills

9. During your time at this university, how often have you visited the Career Services office?

o Several times a term (4 or more times)

o A few times a term (2-3 times)

o Once a term

o Once a year

o Less than once a year

o Never

10. In which of the following career support programs and services (through the university or your college/department) have you participated? (Check all that apply)

- ▢ Individual career counseling
- ▢ Resume writing/reviewing assistance
- ▢ Career skills testing and career assessments
- ▢ Job search assistance
- ▢ Informational interviews
- ▢ On-campus job fairs
- ▢ Internship/co-op search assistance
- ▢ Graduate school information assistance
- ▢ Alumni networking
- ▢ Practice interview sessions
- ▢ Career or employment workshops
- ▢ Career Services online resume and job listing delivery system
- ▢ Other
- ▢ None of the above

11. Which of the following experiences have you had since enrolling at this university? (Check all that apply)

- ▢ Full-time employment in my field of interest
- ▢ Part-time employment in my field of interest
- ▢ Internship in my field of interest
- ▢ Full-time employment outside my field of interest
- ▢ Part-time employment outside my field of interest
- ▢ Internship outside my field of interest
- ▢ None of the above

12. How old are you?

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30
- Other

13. What is your current gender identity?

- Man/Trans Man
- Woman/Trans Woman
- Non-binary
- Gender queer/Gender non-conforming
- Identity not listed above

14. What College(s) or School(s) are you enrolled in at the university? (Check all that apply)

- College of Arts and Sciences
- College of Business
- College of Design
- College of Education
- School of Journalism and Communication
- School of Music and Dance
- Undecided

15. What is your major(s)?

_____

16. What is your minor(s)?

_____

17. What is your residential status at the university?

o In-state

o Out-of-state

o International

18. Where do you currently live?

o A THC residence hall on campus

o Another residence hall on campus

o An apartment off campus

o Other

19. What were your scores on the SAT and/or ACT?

	Your Score
SAT Critical Reading	
SAT Mathematics	
ACT Composite	

20. Are you currently employed?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Display This Question:

If 20. Are you currently employed? = Yes

20b. How many hours a week do you work on average?

- Less than 10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-39
- 40+

21. Are you a full-time or part-time student?

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Unsure

22. How many years have you attended college?

- This is my first year
- This is my second year
- This is my third year
- This is my fourth year
- This is my fifth year or more

23. How many years have you been in The Honors College?

- This is my first year
- This is my second year
- This is my third year
- This is my fourth year
- This is my fifth year or more

24. Indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with each of the following statements about your views or perspectives in general.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A. I am willing to work hard in a course to learn the material even if it won't lead to a higher grade.	o	o	o	o	o
B. When I do well on a test, it is usually because I am well-prepared, not because the test is easy.	o	o	o	o	o
C. I frequently do more reading in a class than is required simply because it interests me.	o	o	o	o	o

D. I frequently talk to faculty outside of class about ideas presented during class.	o	o	o	o	o
E. Getting the best grades I can is very important to me.	o	o	o	o	o
F. I enjoy the challenge of learning complicated new material.	o	o	o	o	o
G. My academic experiences (i.e., courses, labs, studying, discussions with faculty) will be the most important part of college.	o	o	o	o	o

H. My academic experiences (i.e., courses, labs, studying, discussions with faculty) will be the most enjoyable part of college.	o	o	o	o	o

25. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

- ▫ Black/African American
- ▫ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ▫ Native American
- ▫ Hispanic/Latinx
- ▫ White/Caucasian
- ▫ International
- ▫ Other

26. What language do you know best?

- o English only
- o English and another language
- o Another language

27. Which of these types of financial aid have you received (from all sources)? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Military grants
- ☐ Work-study
- ☐ Pell Grant
- ☐ Need-based grants or scholarships
- ☐ Merit-based grants or scholarships
- ☐ None of the above

28. Are you the first person in your immediate family to go to college?

- o Yes
- o No
- o Unsure

29. What is the highest level of formal education attained by your parent(s) or guardian(s)? If you have only one parent or guardian, you may leave Parent/Guardian 2 blank.

	Highest Level of Education								
	Some high school	High school diploma or equivalent	Vocational or trade school	Some college	Associate or two-year degree	Bachelor's or four-year degree	Some graduate or professional school	Graduate or professional degree	Unknown
Parent/Guardian 1	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Parent/Guardian 2	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

30. What is your intended path after graduation?

- ▢ Graduate/Professional school
- ▢ Employment (standard job)
- ▢ Service/Volunteer work
- ▢ Gap year
- ▢ Military
- ▢ Fellowship
- ▢ Unsure
- ▢ Other

Thank you for completing this survey. If you are interested in receiving a **$5 gift card** if you are among the first 100 respondents, please follow this link to enter your personal details. This information will not be linked to your survey answers.

https://forms.gle/gR4QKAth9eN8e3Dn9

Appendix 9
NACE Career Readiness Competencies

NACE Career Readiness Competencies

Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems. The individual is able to obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data in this process, and may demonstrate originality and inventiveness.
Oral/Written Communication	Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms to persons inside and outside of the organization. The individual has public speaking skills; is able to express ideas to others; and can write/edit memos, letters, and complex technical reports clearly and effectively
Teamwork/Collaboration	Build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints. The individual is able to work within a team structure, and can negotiate and manage conflict.
Digital Technology	Leverage existing digital technologies ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals. The individual demonstrates effective adaptability to new and emerging technologies.
Leadership	Leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. The individual is able to assess and manage his/her emotions and those of others; use empathetic skills to guide and motivate; and organize, prioritize, and delegate work.
Professionalism/Work Ethic	Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time workload management, and understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional work image. The individual demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior, acts responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind, and is able to learn from his/her mistakes.
Career Management	Identify and articulate one's skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences relevant to the position desired and career goals, and identify areas necessary for professional growth. The individual is able to navigate and explore job options, understands and can take the steps necessary to pursue opportunities, and understands how to self-advocate for opportunities in the workplace.
Global/Intercultural Fluency	Value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions. The individual demonstrates openness, inclusiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to interact respectfully with all people and understand individuals' differences.

Appendix 10
Thesis Type Crosstabulations

Thesis type by gender crosstabulation

	Gender							
	Man/Trans Man		Woman/Trans Woman		Non-binary/ Gender queer/ Gender non-conforming/ Not listed		Total	
Thesis Type	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Exhibition of performing, musical, or visual arts	0	0.00	3	3.37	0	0.00	3	2.44
Portfolio	0	0.00	3	3.37	0	0.00	3	2.44
Business plan	0	0.00	2	2.25	0	0.00	2	1.63
Research paper	23	82.14	60	67.42	4	66.67	87	70.73
Other	1	3.57	2	2.25	0	0.00	3	2.44
Unsure	4	14.29	19	21.35	1	16.67	24	19.51
I don't plan on completing a thesis	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	16.67	1	.81
Total	28	100.0	89	100.0	6	100.0	123	100.0

Pearson $X^2(12) = 24.1017$, $p = 0.020$

Thesis type by NRU College/School crosstabulation

	NRU College/School													
	College of Arts and Sciences		College of Business		College of Design		School of Journ. and Comm.		School of Music and Dance		Undecid-ed or College of Ed.		Total	
Thesis Type	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Exhibition of performing, musical, or visual arts	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	20.00	0	0.00	1	16.67	0	0.00	3	2.46
Portfolio	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	20.00	1	20.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	2.46
Business plan	0	0.00	2	22.22	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.64
Research paper	68	78.16	5	55.56	4	40.00	4	80.00	3	50.00	2	40.00	86	70.49
Other	1	1.15	0	0.00	1	10.00	0	0.00	1	16.67	0	0.00	3	2.46
Unsure	17	19.54	2	22.22	1	10.00	0	0.00	1	16.67	3	60.00	24	19.67
I don't plan on completing a thesis	1	1.15	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	.82
Total	87	100.0	9	100.0	10	100.0	5	100.0	6	100.0	5	100.0	122	100.0

Pearson $X^2(30) = 84.3312$, $p = 0.000$