



BRIEF:
RECENT INCREASES IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HONORS COLLEGES IN THE UNITED STATES

Andrew J. Cognard-Black
 February 9, 2017

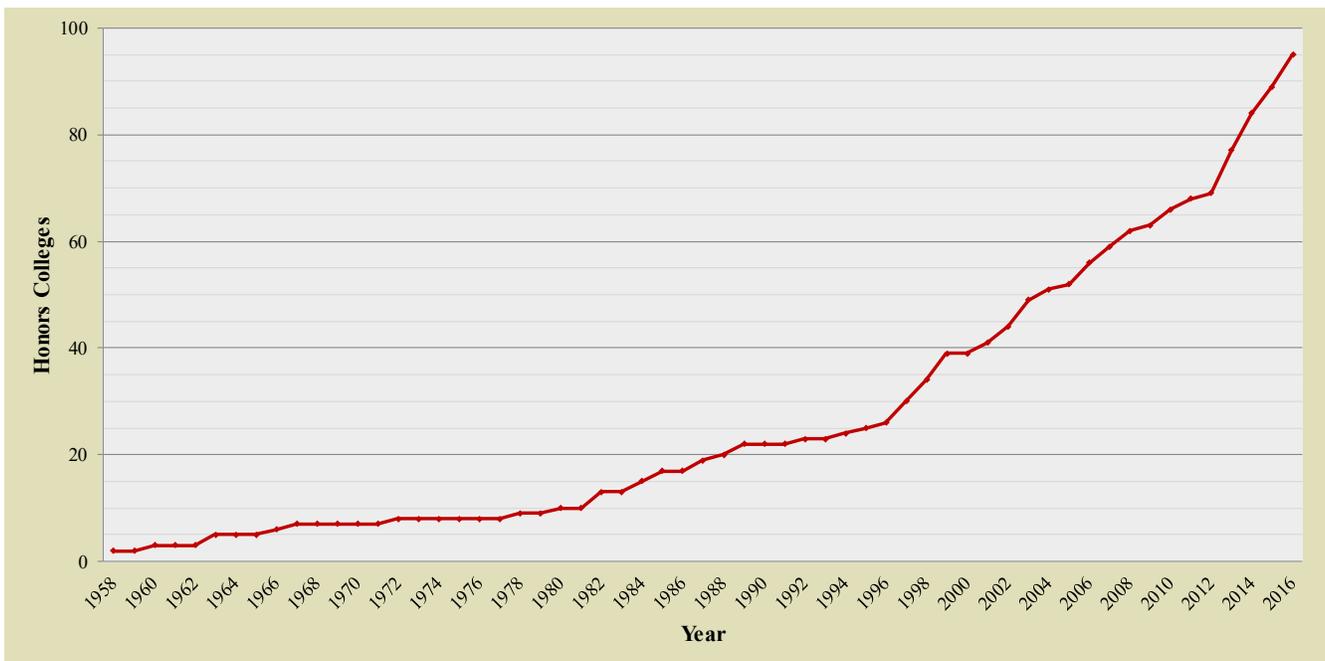
The figure below shows the growth in honors colleges in the United States. Data come from the NCHC 2016 *Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges*. Respondents for each member institution were asked whether they had an honors program or honors college. Among those who responded that they had an honors college, the Census asked, “In what year did your honors college open and/or transition from honors program to honors college status?” The 95 honors colleges responding to the question represent almost 70 percent of NCHC member honors colleges and about half of the 182 honors colleges that Scott and Smith (2016) reported to exist in the United States in 2016. The historical numbers presented here are consistent with those reported by Sederberg (2008). Sederberg reported that 65 honors colleges existed among NCHC member institutions in 2004: 51 of those responding to the 2016 Census reported that they existed in the form of a college by 2004. The 2016 Census data show that 28 honors colleges were established between 1993 and 2004: Sederberg reported an increase of only 21 colleges during that period, but that difference of 7 can be explained almost entirely by the smaller response rate for the 2004 survey (Sederberg reported a 54 percent response vs. the 70–75 percent response rate among honors colleges to the 2016 Census). Data in the graph should be taken not as indication of the precise number of honors colleges in existence at any one moment in time but instead as an indication of the pace of growth in the establishment of honors colleges as distinct from honors

program organizational structure. The data reveal that the first honors colleges were established in the late 1950s, gradually increased in number around the time that NCHC was founded in the mid-1960s, and then began steadily to increase in the early 1980s. *While the figure does not represent the entirety of all honors colleges, the trend at those schools for which we do have data indicates a dramatic increase in the growth of honors colleges since the mid-1990s, and the pace of increase is especially pronounced in just the last decade. Of the 95 honors colleges for which we have data, one-third (33.7 percent) have become honors colleges in just the last seven years, since 2010. Another one-fourth of the 95 responding were established as honors colleges in the previous decade. Thus, a clear majority of these honors colleges are younger than 16 years old.*

References

Scott, Richard I. and Patricia J. Smith. 2016. “Demography of Honors: The National Landscape of Honors Education.” *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* 17(1):73–91.

Sederberg, Peter C. 2008. *The Honors College Phenomenon*. NCHC Monograph Series. Lincoln, NE: National Collegiate Honors Council.



Number of Honors Colleges in the United States by Year
 Source: NCHC 2016 *Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges* (n = 95)