



## A Survey of Highlander Early Start Academy Evaluation (HESA) Participants, Summer 2015

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*Summary:* This brief report provides demographics of students who participated in the Highlander Early Start Academy (HESA) at UC Riverside (UCR) and summarizes survey data about participants' experiences. Notable findings include:

- A higher percentage of participants were female, first-generation, and Latino/a students, as compared to all incoming UCR freshmen.
- Participants were generally interested in adjusting to college life and working to address specific academic deficiencies.
- There were high levels of participation in the community-building events, and participants were generally comfortable with the amount of work assigned.
- A majority reported gains in knowledge of campus resources. Changes in confidence in the ability to succeed and ability to focus on school were limited, but participants tended to start at high levels.

Overall, there is preliminary evidence that HESA helped participants develop a sense of community and increase their knowledge of campus resources. (Future reports will address other HESA program outcomes such as first-year retention and academic performance.)

### *Introduction*

This report addresses a number of questions about the Highlander Early Start Academy (HESA), as offered by the UCR's Academic Resource Center (ARC) in the summer of 2015. HESA participants were drawn from students whose math and English placement scores indicated they were not ready for college-level course work. Participants took a preparatory level English (English 004) or a math course (Math 005 or 008A, depending on students' majors). In HESA, unlike the Summer Bridge program offered in previous years, students also took a general education course (History 015, World History 1500 to 1900) and participated in a curated set of activities and workshops designed to help them transition successfully from high school to college as well as build a sense of community with the UCR campus. These included, for example, Early Start Seminars that focused on study skills as well as activities like a scavenger hunt to familiarize students with navigating the campus.

The primary data source is an online survey of participants conducted near the end of the program. Sixty-six percent (66%), or 97 of 147, participants responded. The report also analyzed data

from a follow-up survey during the fall, although the response rate was very low (18%). Finally, the report examined student demographics from institutional data sources.

These surveys queried the extent to which HESA developed a sense of community and imparted knowledge about campus resources – key goals for the program. (Goals related to first-year retention and academic performance will be addressed later when institutional data is available for both participants and comparison groups.)

### *1) How did participants hear about HESA?*

Participants most often reported hearing about HESA through the website (48%), the postcard (32%), or a brochure (26%). A significant number of participants also selected the “other” (35%) option. Two or three participants each mentioned hearing about HESA from advisers, HESA staff, or their parents.

<b>How did you hear about HESA? (n=97)</b>	
Website	48.5%
Other	35.1%
Postcard	32.0%
Brochure	25.8%
HESA Staff	4.1%
Parents	3.1%
Advisor	2.1%

Note: Multiple answers are possible.

### *2) Why did students decide to participate?*

The follow-up survey asked participants what one or two expected benefits helped them make up their mind to participate in HESA. This was a free response item and answers could be categorized in multiple ways. More than half of the participants hoped that HESA would help them adjust to college life. Also, more than half of participants mentioned addressing specific deficiencies in college readiness. About one in four mentioned an interest in earning units or “getting head” in a more general way. Some participants also mentioned an interest in gaining specific skills (like time management) or a desire to “do something” with otherwise unoccupied summer time.

### *3) Who participated in HESA?*

HESA participants had lower academic index scores than all freshmen who entered UCR in the fall of 2015, although their high school GPAs were similar. A higher percentage of participants were women, Latino/a, or first-generation, as compared to all incoming UCR freshmen; a lower percentage were Asian. (These differences are in the same direction and of roughly the same size compared to participants in the Summer Bridge program in previous summers, with the exception of the gender difference which is larger here.) When broken down by enrolled courses taken during HESA, students’ academic index scores in English are, on average, about 100 points lower than those students enrolled in the math courses. There is also a much larger percentage of female students in English than either of the math classes.

	All HESA (n=144)	All Freshmen (n=3805)
High School GPA	3.65	3.67
Academic Index <sup>1</sup>	4166	4256
Female	60.4%	53.9%
Male	39.6%	46.1%
Unknown	0.7%	2.2%
African American	3.5%	5.1%
Native American	0.7%	0.3%
Latino/a	59.0%	35.1%
Asian	27.8%	45.4%
Caucasian	8.3%	11.9%
First-generation <sup>2</sup>	70.8%	51.9%
Engineering	10.3%	12.1%
Arts, Humanities, Soc. Sci.	44.8%	50.9%
Natural Sciences	44.8%	36.9%
	<b>All HESA</b>	<b>All Freshmen</b>
Five most common majors	Biology (14.5%)	Pre-Business (14.0%)
	Pre-Business (9.7%)	Biology (13.4%)
	Biochemistry (6.9%)	Undeclared (7.8%)
	Sociology (6.9%)	Biochemistry (6.3%)
	Undeclared (6.21%)	Psychology (5.7%)

<sup>1</sup> Academic Index is a composite measure used in admissions decisions. It is calculated from high school GPA, standardized test scores (SAT/ACT), number of college preparatory courses taken beyond the minimum (A-G requirements), eligibility status and UC admission preferences for first generation and low income college students.

<sup>2</sup> First Generation is defined as neither parent holding a four year degree.

<sup>3</sup> Majors with less than five students not reported to preserve confidentiality.

	English (n=79)	Math 005 (n=47)	Math 008A (n=18)
High School GPA	3.66	3.61	3.71
Academic Index <sup>1</sup>	4101	4249	4232
Female	68.4%	51.1%	50.0%
Male	31.7%	48.9%	50.0%
Unknown	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%
African American	5.1%	2.1%	0.0%
Native American	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%
Latino/a	64.6%	46.8%	66.7%
Asian	24.1%	36.2%	22.2%
Caucasian	5.1%	12.8%	11.1%
First-Generation <sup>2</sup>	76.0%	61.7%	72.2%
Engineering	5.1%	19.2%	5.6%
Arts, Humanities, Soc. Sci.	73.4%	12.8%	5.6%
Natural Sciences	21.5%	68.1%	88.9%
	<b>English</b>	<b>All Math</b>	
Five most common majors <sup>3</sup>	Pre-Business (17.7%)	Biology (23.1%)	
	Sociology (12.7%)	Biochemistry (10.8%)	
	Poli. Sci. (8.9%)	Neuroscience (9.2%)	
	Biology (7.6%)	--	
	Undeclared (7.6%)	--	

4) *What was the level of participation in community-building activities?*

Almost all HESA events, with the exception of the dance, were well attended.

Which peer mentor lead team building activities did you attend? (n=97)	
Welcome event	97.3%
Low ropes	87.6%
High ropes	87.6%
Campus scavenger hunt	63.9%
Dance	15.5%

5) *What did participants think about the workload?*

Two-thirds of participants (65%) stated they thought the workload was “about right.” When broken down by the primary class they took (English or math), a higher percentage of English students said the workload was “hard” compared to those in math classes. It may be that the workload seemed more taxing to students enrolled in two writing intensive courses (English and History).

Do you Feel the HESA workload was . . .				
	All Participants	Only English 004	Only Math 005	Only Math 008A
Very Easy	1.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Easy	2.06%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%
About right	64.9%	58.49%	67.65%	90.0%
Hard	32.0%	39.6%	26.5%	10.0%
Very Hard	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	100% (97)	100% (53)	100% (34)	100% (10)

6) *How do participants think they changed?*

Participants were asked how much they changed over the summer along several dimensions, like confidence and motivation to succeed academically at UCR, as well as awareness of campus resources and support services. Participants were grouped into those that reported negative changes, those that reported no change, and those that reported positive changes. In most areas, a clear majority of participants’ attitudes moved in a positive direction. For motivation to succeed and focus on college, there was little change, but most participants started and ended at relatively high levels. A significant minority of participants (13%) showed negative movement in the confidence they could succeed academically.

Change in Attitudes, general (n=97)						
	Confidence in success	Motivation to succeed	Focus on college	Awareness of support	Balance school/life	Plans to use ARC
Negative	13.4%	5.2%	2.1%	2.1%	2.1%	3.1%
No Change	20.6%	52.6%	61.9%	4.1%	21.7%	15.5%
Positive	66.0%	42.3%	35.1%	94.0%	76.3%	81.4%
Total	100% (97)	100% (97)	100% (97)	100% (97)	100% (97)	100% (97)

Change in Attitudes, subject specific preparation		
	Prep. for Math	Prep. for Writing
Negative	2.6%	6.8%
No Change	23.4%	40.7%
Positive	74.0%	52.5%
Total	100% (77)	100% (59)

*7) How did participants rate the Early Start Seminar and Peer Mentors?*

A number of items on the survey were evaluations of Early Start Seminar (ESS) leaders and Peer Mentor student workers. HESA participants, by and large, agreed or strongly agreed that these student leaders were prepared, responsive, and able to effectively impart knowledge in a number of areas. (A more detailed version of the results to these items will be provided directly to HESA staff.)

*8) What did participants think of the academically oriented advising sessions?*

Participants were also asked to rate how much they learned about important academic skills. A vast majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they learned useful information in a number of areas, such as how to schedule an appointment with an academic advisor. Almost all of participants (92%) reported attending an academic advising session.

During HESA I was provided information about . . . (n=93)					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Scheduling appointments with an academic advisor	2.6%	5.4%	8.6%	27.9%	58.0%
My chosen major	4.3%	5.4%	10.8%	33.3%	46.2%
Resources on campus, outside of the ARC	1.1%	2.2%	5.4%	30.1%	61.3%
How to understand my class schedule	2.1%	3.2%	8.6%	29.0%	57.0%
Graduation requirements	2.1%	4.3%	7.5%	39.8%	46.2%

*9) What did participants think about HESA after it was over?*

Those who respond to the follow-up survey (note, 18% response rate) tended to strongly agree that HESA prepared them for academic coursework in the fall, and that they knew where and how to seek support services. About 90% of this group indicated that they have stayed in touch with other HESA participants. This indicates that HESA may have experienced success in creating a sense of community among participants.

The follow-up survey also asked participants to reflect on the most important one or two benefits they gained from HESA. This was a free response item, and answers could be categorized in multiple ways. About one in three respondents mentioned gaining familiarity with the physical layout of the campus, and about the same number mentioned building (or starting to build) a social network of peers. About a quarter mentioned gaining time management or study skills, and a similar number mentioned gaining college-level math or writing skills. About one in five mentioned that participation in HESA helped them focus or clarify their priorities. (For example, one respondent mentioned studying while hall mates were out socializing.) At least a few participants also mentioned gaining an understanding of when

and how to interact with faculty and teaching assistants as well as gaining a knowledge of campus resources.

Participants indicated . . . (n=26)					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The rigor of the summer program prepared me for fall quarter	3.8%	0.0%	11.5%	30.8%	53.8%
Participating in HESA definitely gave me an advantage compared to other freshmen who didn't participate	0.0%	0.0%	11.5%	19.2%	69.2%
I am familiar with academic and personal resources I can turn to on campus in this academic year	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	26.9%	69.2%
I have already utilized academic and personal services this quarter.	0.0%	7.7%	11.5%	30.8%	50.0%
I have stayed in touch with fellow HESA participants	3.8%	0.0%	7.7%	34.6%	53.8%

### Conclusions

In general, the data from this survey suggest that HESA created a sense of community. Participants rated their peer mentors and ESS leaders highly, and team-building activities were well-attended. The survey further suggests HESA also provided participants with an opportunity to learn about campus resources, e.g., resource at the Academic Resource Center (ARC), specific features of the campus, and important academic policies. Participants also indicated positive attitude changes in several areas. While there are limitations to these self-reported measures, the results are encouraging.