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# Honors First: A pilot recruitment initiative targeting Western Michigan University's highest achieving applicants

Anthony P. Helms, M.A., Director of Academic Advising, Lee Honors College  
Academic Leadership Academy, 2014-2015



## Background

Every January Western Michigan University (WMU) welcomes over 700 admitted students to campus to participate in the Medallion Competition for one of WMU's premier \$50,000 scholarships (\$60,000 for 2016). These students and their families are introduced to the best WMU has to offer over the course of the daylong competition, yet many of the competitors that do not receive a Medallion have not been actively recruited post-competition via any university-wide effort. Honors First is a pilot recruitment initiative designed to meet this need and approved for a two year trial by WMU Provost Timothy Greene. Offering this group of students early registration fills the void that previously existed after students compete in January by offering them a full class schedule more than four months before classes begin and reminding them that they are still highly valued and wanted at WMU.



Image 1: WMU Medallion.

## Competition

WMU currently yields less than half of Medallion competitors (see table below). All competitors have a minimum 3.7 high school GPA and scored 26 or better on the ACT. These students, due to their preparedness, have ample opportunity to study elsewhere, and we need to find innovative ways to bring more of them to WMU. Successfully recruiting more Medallion competitors would increase the amount of scholarships provided for non-Medallion recipients, however having more of them enroll at WMU would continue to improve our academic profile and increase total enrollment. In addition, retention rates are historically high for honors students. For example, 95% of fall 2013 FTIAC honors students returned for fall 2014.

Medallions	\$50,000
Finalists	\$6,000
All other competitors	\$3,000

Figure 1: Medallion Competitor scholarship amounts for 2015 competition.

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
Attended	738	730	731	681	729	514
Enrolled	345	341	305	287	330	254
Yield	46.75%	46.71%	41.72%	42.14%	45.27%	49.42%

Figure 2: Medallion Competitor Yield 2009-2014.

Honors First is designed to increase the yield of competitors to 55% or above. Yield data will be available after fall census in September, but the outlook appeared encouraging in August. Through a thorough assessment and evaluation of this program, we will be able to identify its strengths and weaknesses to improve that yield further in future years. All relevant data will be used to increase the yield from future Medallion Scholarship Competitions as well as to help determine the efficacy, focus and direction of Honors First.

## Intended Outcomes

- 1. Offer all Medallion Scholarship competitors a complete fall class schedule in April.**
  - a. Provide real 'priority registration' for honors college eligible freshmen
  - b. Serve as a powerful recruiting tool in competitors' high schools
  - c. Provide a more accurate outlook for enrollment management strategic planning
  - d. Allow advisors and Orientation staff to invest more time with other students during summer Orientation
- 2. Allow Medallion Scholarship competitors to meet faculty in their programs**
  - a. This is the population of students that most want to interact with faculty during the recruitment process
  - b. Most faculty are off campus during summer
  - c. Research opportunities are important to this population
- 3. Remind Medallion Scholarship competitors of the smaller scholarships (Dean's, Presidential and housing reduction) that they received**
  - a. The honors college and financial aid offices are inundated by walk-ins and phone calls at the beginning of fall semester with questions about these sources of funding
- 4. Emphasize to Medallion Scholarship competitors that they are still valued and wanted at WMU.**
  - a. Greatly shorten the 'dead period' of communication between the competition and summer Orientation
  - b. Allow a significant 'second touch' when they return to campus
  - c. Allow them to see campus in spring

## Timeline

**January, 2015**-Received and incorporated edits from stakeholders to Honors First website and surveys

**January 24 & 31, 2015**-Medallion competitors are provided with Honors First URL and begin signing up

**March 31, 2015**-Registration closes at midnight

**April 3, 2015**-Compiled data sent to advising directors to prepare for course registration beginning April 11

**June, 2015**-Participants complete program evaluation and repeat recruitment survey during Day 2 of Orientation

**July, 2015**-Classes dropped for Honors First registrants that did not attend Orientation

**August - September, 2015**-Compile and report assessment data to academic colleges, Provost's Council, & First Year Experience

## Outline

1. Lee Honors College staff created a webpage (wmich.edu/honors/priority) and the registration survey via Select Survey that included information needed for academic college advising offices to prepare for early registration as well as questions about what is most attractive to this population of students in the recruiting/registration/orientation process. Ideally, this will help steer future planning to improve recruiting of our most qualified applicants.
2. Lee Honors College staff worked with the Office of Admissions to communicate this new opportunity to Medallion competitors in early January, Lee Honors College Dean Carla Koretsky informed competitors when she met with them in group sessions during the competition, Anthony Helms introduced Honors First during the family portion, and the website url was included in the competitors' information packets.
3. Each academic college advising office provided specific days and times that they would be available to register these honors students via a method of their choice (walk-in, phone call, or appointment). College-specific information was included on the Honors First website, in the sign-up survey, and in all follow-up communication to ensure students were receiving consistent, accurate information.
4. Lee Honors College staff worked with Orientation staff to drop student schedules for those who registered early but failed to register for and/or attend a summer Orientation session.
5. Data from the survey pertaining to the wants and needs of this recruitment population for future recruitment planning was compiled by the Lee Honors College and delivered to all stakeholders during the summer of 2015.



Image 2: Advising. Photo by Mike Lanka.

## Program Evaluation

### Participant Program Evaluation

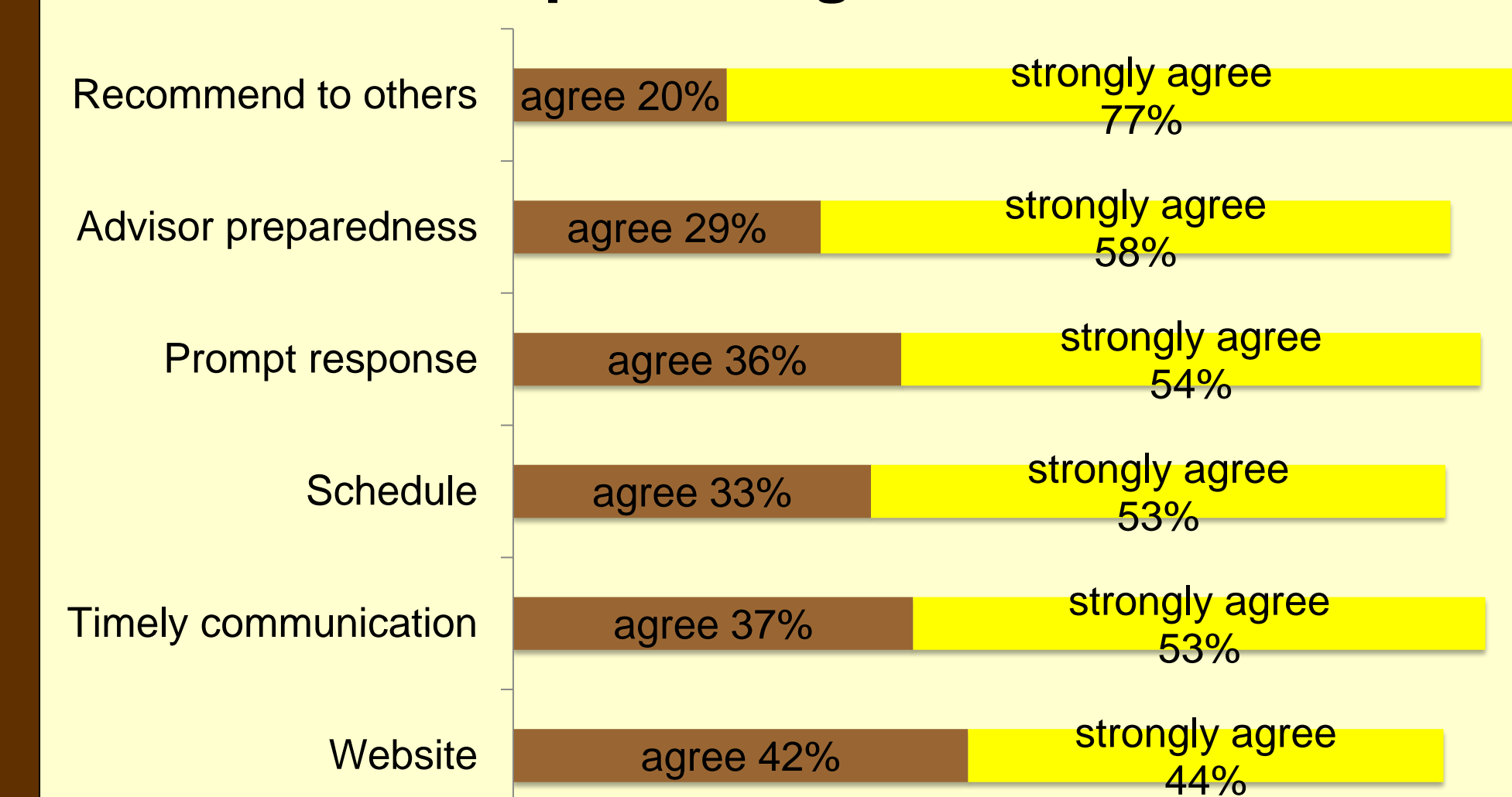


Figure 3: Participant program evaluations. Due to highly positive feedback, only positive responses listed. N ranges from 213-216 depending on question. Response options limited to strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree.

## Results

As of late August, only four Honors First participants had chosen not to attend WMU this fall (see Figure 4). This is a remarkable feat considering the choice of schools these students have. Additionally, the honors college is experiencing record enrollment (see Figure 5).

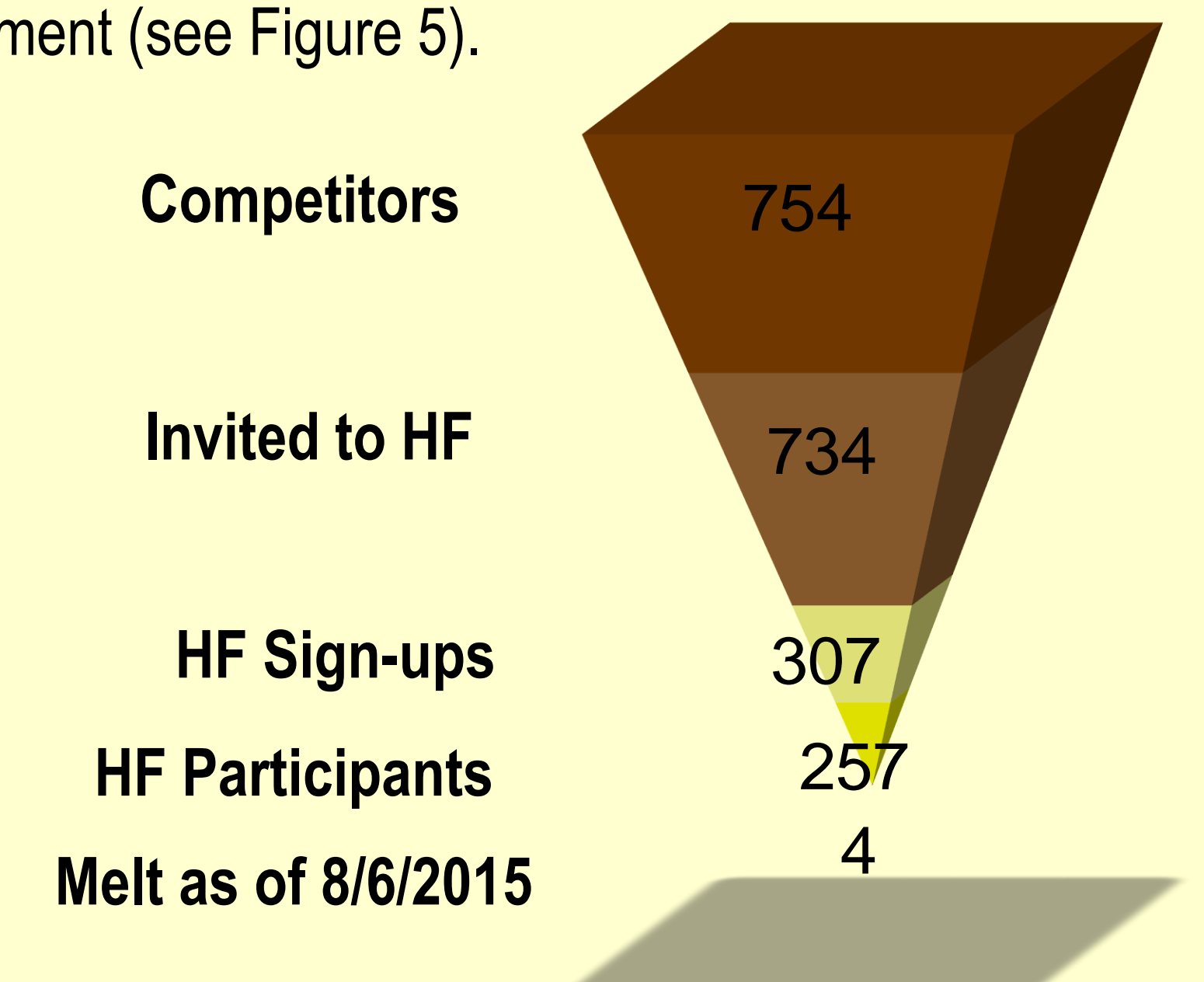


Figure 4: Funnel graph illustrating participant yield.

	2015 (as of 8/6/15)	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
FTIAC	417	369	363	293	308	294	225
Total	1764	1709	1642	1603	1522	1102	1021

Figure 5: Lee Honors College FTIAC and total enrollment 2009-2015.

## Changes for 2016 Program

1. Contact students within 48 hours of attending the Medallion Competition via email formally inviting them to sign up for Honors First.
2. Reduce number of options and better align method of advising with academic college population. For example, Fine Arts will meet with students later in to allow for the audition process. This will also reduce confusion for both students and parents during Honors First and Orientation.
3. Further integrate Honors First registration into participants' full pre-college 'to-do' list by including opportunities to sign up for Orientation, register for housing, and pay required deposits.
4. Upgrade sign-up surveys to allow for greater specificity of early credit to reduce required preparation time for advisors.

## Special Thanks

Honors First is first and foremost a collaborative effort by all academic college advising offices, First Year Experience, Office of Admissions, and the Lee Honors College. It would not have been made possible if not for significant contribution from Associate Provost Christopher Tremblay (Enrollment Management), Rebecca Scheffers (CEAS advising), Assistant Dean Paul Englemann (CEAS), Steve Booher (FYE), and Tammi Smith (CAS advising). This poster, along with invaluable lessons on leadership in academia, was funded by the Academic Leadership Academy from WMU's Office of Faculty Development. Most importantly, I cannot thank the Lee Honors College enough, specifically Associate Dean Jane Baas and Dean Carla Koretsky, for continued and unwavering support of new ideas to better serve our students.