

NATIONAL MERIT FINALISTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA-
TRENDS, ATTRITION, AND RETENTION
1997-2005

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the trends, attrition and retention rates of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida between the years of 1997 to 2005. This study was intended to provide information for higher education practitioners, faculty, and administrators to help them better understand the expectations and current trends of National Merit Finalists. The problem was to determine how to increase recruitment and retention while decreasing the attrition rates of these highly desirable students.

The importance of this study includes identifying trends that may aid in future recruitment efforts for National Merit Finalists; finding the causes of dissatisfaction towards the University among these students; and identifying specific areas in which to alleviate those dissatisfactions. The results will hopefully provide insight into specific recruitment, services, and programming options for these students.

The study examined data that was collected from the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College database known as FileMaker 8.0. The data examined characteristics such as grade point averages (high school and college); valedictorian and salutatorian status; test scores (SAT and ACT); Honors in the Major (undergraduate thesis) students; Honors and university status (withdrawn, probation, removed, disqualified, enrolled, graduated); Honors college attrition; university attrition; ethnicity; gender ratios; majors; and, prestigious scholarships awarded in college (such as the Rhodes, Truman, Marshall). The actual size of the sample was one hundred ninety-eight National Merit Finalists.

Data was also collected from a survey given to all University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists. Descriptive statistics were reported for each of the components examined. This data examined the types of scholarship packages that National Merit Finalists were offered; the reasons students chose the University of Central Florida over other universities; the college recruitment process; hours studied for the PSAT; siblings; perceptions on being a National Merit Finalist; the number of times students changed their majors; job status; transportation; computer attainment; disabilities; and the potential disadvantages of being labeled as a National Merit Finalist. The data could be utilized to examine the trends of our National Merit Finalists, in order to see what is working and what is not in terms of recruitment and retention; and also to further examine what these students want from their institutions.

Findings indicated that problems exist in regard to the following: the recruitment of female and minority National Merit Finalists; males historically score higher on the SAT than females; decreasing the attrition rates of this population at the University of Central Florida; the majority of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida come from Florida; the majority of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida do not tend to be high school salutatorians or valedictorians; high school counselors seem to be the least effective tool for recruiting National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida; and the majority of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida did not study at all for the PSAT test.

However, the University of Central Florida is extremely competitive with other institutions of higher education with regard to scholarship packages. Results also revealed the following: the SAT is a more widely accepted tool for determining NMSC status as opposed to the ACT; the majority of National Merit Finalists have a GPA between 3.600 and 3.999 at the University of Central Florida; the University of Central Florida is succeeding in making its National Merit Finalists feel special during the recruitment process; the most influential reason that National Merit Finalists are choosing UCF is based upon the financial scholarship packages they are offered; and the majority of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida do not feel that there are disadvantages toward being labeled as such.

This data provides a basis for further research on National Merit Finalists trends, attrition, and retention. Practical considerations are revealed in the data that will influence future recruitment methods and lead to higher retention rates and increased student satisfaction. Several other recommendations are made to conduct further research studies on the trends, attrition, and retention rates of National Merit Finalists.

This work is dedicated with love to my wonderful husband Charles Strickland Norburn, to my own supportive and loving Painter family, to my favorite in-laws, my co-workers in the Burnett Honors College, and to all my encouraging friends and students.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Each year, institutions of higher education invest thousands of dollars competing for graduating high school seniors who have been recognized as National Merit Finalists. These National Merit Finalists are considered to be the finest students in the nation, based on their PSAT and SAT scores. National Merit Finalist enrollment is important to institutions of higher education because it is one of the top measures of a school's national ranking. Universities hand out scholarships worth millions of dollars to attract these students with the expectation of raising the school's academic reputation (Haber, 2005, p.1). Institutions of higher education also focus on these students because they are high achievers and therefore a low risk in terms of increasing an institution's attrition rate. Institutions proudly note how many National Merit Finalists they were able to recruit each year. After so much attention has been focused on attaining these National Merit Finalists, it is curious to find that little attention is focused on retaining these students once they have gained admittance into their respective universities.

Problem Statement

Not all institutions track National Merit Finalist data. Institutions are also very territorial about this kind of information due to the fact that it contains descriptions of the National Merit Finalist recruitment packages that they offer. They do not want competing

schools to know what they are offering for fear that the competing institutions will rebut with more enticing offers to prospective students.

The problem of was study is three-fold. First, there was no current literature or research on effective recruitment of National Merit Finalists. How would schools know what methods to try and what methods to avoid? The National Merit Scholarship Corporation is the only institution that tracks certain statistics of National Merit Finalists but because of their heavy case loads, they cannot share all of this information with the public. Second, institutions do not share information about the types of recruitment packages they offer in fear that their competitors will make a better offer. Students do not know what each school could offer them unless they apply to that school, which can be a costly process. There was also no accountability to actually see if these students received what they were promised. Third, no one, including the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, tracked National Merit Finalists with disabilities.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are included to clarify terms that will be used in this study:

Attrition: The voluntary or involuntary student departure from an institution, not including graduation. The failure of a student who has been enrolled to continue his or her studies (Baird, 1993).

Commended Student: Commended Students are named on the basis of a nationally applied Selection Index score that may vary from year to year but is below the level

required for participants to be named Semifinalists in their respective states. Commended Students do not continue in the competition for Merit Scholarships (www.nationalmerit.org).

Gifted: Having exceptionally high intelligence (Webster, 1999).

Honors Probation/Removal: Students who do not meet the Honors GPA requirements (UCF GPA of 3.2 and Honors GPA of 3.0) at the end of any semester will be placed on Honors probation. Students can be placed on Honors probation for their UCF GPA, their Honors GPA, or both, simultaneously. Students on Honors probation must increase their GPA the following semester. Once the UCF GPA reaches 3.2 or better, the student will then return to good standing. Should the probationary student not maintain a 3.2 term GPA, s/he will be removed from the program. Removed students have one opportunity to apply for readmission to University Honors.

Honors Student: At the University of Central Florida, to be considered an Honors student one must be accepted into the Burnett Honors College and follow a certain educational track while maintaining an overall 3.2 UCF GPA and a 3.0 GPA in Honors courses.

National Merit Finalist: Approximately 8,200 Finalists are selected each year from the pool of 16,000 Semifinalists. Finalists are given the highest award amount (www.nationalmerit.org).

National Merit Semi-Finalist: Semifinalists are designated on a state representational basis. They are the highest scoring entrants in each state (www.nationalmerit.org).

National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT): Common name for the PSAT.

PSAT: Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

Retention: The ability of an institution to retain students. The category of students who are successfully enrolled at a university or who have graduated (Dunphy, et al, 1987).

Retention refers to a student's continued enrollment (Baird, 1993).

Selection Index (SI): National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) uses the Selection Index score as an initial screen of the 1.3 million test-takers who meet program entry requirements and to designate groups of students to be honored in the competitions it conducts (www.collegeboard.com). The SI is the sum of the three PSAT scores: Math, Verbal, and Writing.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study follow:

1. The data for this study will be collected from one institution.
2. The data for this study only covers those students classified as National Merit Finalists.
3. Not all institutions track National Merit data. Institutions are also very territorial about this kind of information due to the fact that it contains descriptions of National Merit recruitment packages they offer. They do not want competing schools to know what they are offering for fear that the competing institutions will rebut with more enticing offers to prospective students.
4. There is no existing data on National Merit Finalists with disabilities.

Assumptions

The specific assumptions of this study are:

1. It is assumed that participants will respond honestly to the survey questions.
2. It is assumed that the survey instrument is appropriate to obtain students' responses towards being a National Merit Finalist.
3. It is assumed that qualitative responses from the survey will provide accurate data regarding students' experiences as National Merit Finalists.
4. It is assumed that the quantitative data collected from 1997-2005 is accurate.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the trends, attrition, and retention rates of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida between the years of 1997 to 2005. Comparisons of student expectations and experiences were analyzed. There was a focus on actions being taken to retain these students as well as an in-depth look at recruitment methods which worked for this population. This study could provide relevant data to assist future higher education administrators in determining ways to increase retention and decrease attrition of National Merit Finalists at their universities.

Research Questions

1. What is a National Merit Finalist?
2. What types of incentive are offered to National Merit Finalists who attend the University of Central Florida?
3. What are some of the demographic and academic trends among the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida (majors, gender ratios, ethnicity, etc.)?
4. Is the method of selecting National Merit Finalists fair?

Sample Population

The participants of this study included the one hundred ninety-eight National Merit Finalists enrolled at the University of Central Florida between the years 1997 and 2005. The participants represent the various academic colleges at the University and not one particular major. All but one of the participants came to the University of Central Florida as FTIC (First Time in College) students.

Methodology

For this study, data analysis on the retention and attrition rates came from the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College database (FileMaker). The data was updated at the end of each fall and spring semester. This information provided a look at the National Merit Finalists' choices of majors; gender ratios by year; enrollment

counts per year; cumulative GPAs; removed or withdrawn status from the University; percentages of attrition by cohort year; percentage of graduates per cohort year; and the percentages disqualified or not enrolled in the University by cohort year.

Data analysis on the trends of National Merit Finalists came from a survey given to participants. The participants received notification by e-mail and regular U.S. mail that they would receive an important survey in September 2005. The surveys were collected throughout the months of October and November 2005. Participants who did not respond by e-mail or mail were contacted by telephone. The data were coded and entered into SPSS for descriptive statistics and Microsoft Word tables. SPSS is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 10.0 for Windows).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 focused on the purpose of this study, outlining the construct of the study along with the research questions to be answered. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature that is relevant to the study. Chapter 3 describes the methods and procedures used in the collection of data. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of data and its results. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the relevant research and literature related to the trends, attrition, and retention rates of National Merit Finalists in higher education. Additionally, the history of the National Merit Scholarship Corporation is traced, followed by the process of becoming a National Merit Finalist, as well as issues relating to the fairness of standardized testing.

History of the National Merit Scholarship Corporation

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) began in 1955. It is a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance. The first Merit Scholarship awards were given in 1956 to 555 students (Detweiler, 2005). The purpose of the NMSC is to recognize high achievers and award them scholarships. This is done through two programs-- the National Merit Scholarship Program and the National Achievement Scholarship Program. The National Merit Scholarship Program is a well-established and highly recognized program among students and colleges. According to the NMSC website (2005), the Merit Program conducts competitions for special scholarships sponsored by corporate and business organizations.

The NMSC has four main goals. According to the NMSC 2004 Annual Report, these goals include: identify and honor exceptionally able U.S. high school students and encourage them to pursue rigorous college studies; promote wider and deeper respect for learning in general and for extremely talented individuals in particular; encourage the pursuit of academic excellence at all levels of education; and stimulate increased support for the education of scholastically able students.

NMSC students come from nine thousand different high schools. These high schools show a wide array of differing characteristics ranging from very small to very large; public and private; rural, urban, and suburban; and some that offer honors or other accelerated programs such as dual enrollment or Advanced Placement/ International Baccalaureate (Roderick, 2004).

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation offers three distinct scholarships. Beginning in March and continuing to mid-June each year, NMSC notifies approximately 8,200 Finalists that they have been selected to receive a Merit Scholarship award.

According to the NMSC website, these three awards are:

- **National Merit \$2500 Scholarships**
Every Finalist competes for these single payment scholarships, which are awarded on a state representational basis. Winners are selected without consideration of family financial circumstances, college choice, or major and career plans.
- **Corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards**
Corporate sponsors designate their awards for children of their employees or members, for residents of a community where a company has operations, or for Finalists with career plans the sponsor wishes to encourage. These

scholarships may either be renewable for four years of undergraduate study or one-time awards.

Corporations sponsor scholarships to recognize and encourage academically talented students, foster loyalty among employees, initiate promising relationships between companies and students, and identify potential candidates for internships and employment.

- **College-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards**

Officials of each sponsor college select winners of their awards from Finalists who have been accepted for admission and have informed NMSC by the published deadlines that the sponsor college or university is their first choice. College-sponsored awards are renewable for up to four years of undergraduate study at the sponsor institution and provide stipends that range between \$500 and \$2,000 per year. Officials of each sponsor college select winners for their awards and determine the amount of the annual stipend within the specified range. College-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards are canceled if the winner decides not to attend the college financing the scholarship.

Merit Scholarship awards are supported by some 500 independent sponsors and by NMSC's own funds. Sponsor organizations include corporations and businesses, company foundations, professional associations, and colleges and universities.

The NMSC also awards other special scholarships. Every year, some 1,500 National Merit Program participants, who are outstanding but not Finalists, are awarded Special Scholarships provided by corporations and business organizations for students who meet the sponsor's criteria. To be considered for a Special Scholarship, students must meet the sponsor's criteria and entry requirements of the National Merit Scholarship Program. They also must submit an entry form to the sponsor organization. Subsequently, NMSC contacts a pool of high-scoring candidates through their respective high schools. These students and their school officials submit detailed scholarship applications. A committee of NMSC professional staff evaluates information about candidates' abilities, skills, and accomplishments and chooses winners of the sponsor's Special Scholarships. These scholarships may either be renewable for four years of undergraduate study or one-time awards (National Merit Scholarship Corporation, 2005).

High school students become eligible for these competitions by taking the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) during their junior year. The SAT, formerly known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, changed its name to the Scholastic Assessment Test in order not to be considered equivalent to an IQ test. Today, the test known as the SAT does not serve as an acronym for anything (Leider, 2002). Some schools encourage their sophomores to take the PSAT for guidance purposes, but these students will have to retake the test as juniors to enter the NMSC competition. By taking it early, students get a feel for the test and see where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

In the latest news, the next SAT test will be different based on the scoring criteria. There is now the addition of a third section to the standardized test long known for its 400-1600 point scale. The SAT has been the test that is synonymous with the college application process, and is now scored (as of March 2005) on a 600-2400 scale. In addition to adding the third writing section, there are changes below the surface of the remaining verbal and math components — no more verbal analogies or quantitative comparisons, for example (Marthers, 2005). The new SAT is 45 minutes longer than the previous three-hour version and includes an essay and a math section covering concepts in Algebra II (Aratani, 2005). According to President John Hitt of the University of Central Florida, the average SAT score for entering UCF freshmen for fall 2004 was 1176, and the 34 National Merits in the fall freshmen class was the second highest total in the state, behind only the University of Florida.

National Merit Finalists scored in the top one-half percent of high school seniors in their states on the Preliminary SAT- National Merit Scholar Qualifying Test. According to Jeanna Mastrodicasa from the University of Florida news desk, in 2004, the top 10 ranked participating schools followed by the number of recruited National Merit Finalists were:

1. Harvard University-378
2. University of Texas-258
3. Yale University-228
4. University of Florida-224
5. Stanford University-217
6. University of Chicago-182
7. Arizona State University-176
8. Rice University-173
9. University of Oklahoma-170
10. Princeton University-165

To become a National Merit Finalist, a student must be a full-time high school student, progressing toward graduation, and planning on a college career no later than the fall following high school graduation. A student must also be a United States citizen or a permanent resident who is in the process of becoming a citizen. The PSAT must be taken no later than the third year in grades 9 through 12. That includes students taking dual enrollment or Advanced Placement. According to the National Merit Scholarship Corporation website, the initial stages of the Merit Program are judged entirely based on a student's selection index. The selection index is the sum of the three PSAT scores: Math, Verbal, and Writing. The Singapore American School High School Counseling Office website states that each PSAT subtest ranges from 20 to 80—equivalent to the 200 to 800 SAT subtest scores. If a student had scores of 80 Math, 70 Verbal, and 65 Writing,

their selection index would be 215. In the 2006 National Merit Scholarship Corporation competition, the Selection Index in Florida was 215 (Davis, 2005).

Only an estimated 50,000 of the 1.3 million entrants with the highest PSAT scores are eligible for Merit Program recognition. In 2004, Florida alone had 54,515 program entrants (Roderick, 2004). In the spring, after the fall test is administered, high-scoring participants from every state are asked to name two universities/colleges to which they would like to be referred by NMSC. In September, these high scorers are notified through their schools that they have qualified as either a Commended Student or Semifinalist.

Based on NMSC data, the statistics show that approximately two-thirds of the 50,000 high-scorers will receive Letters of Commendation for their outstanding academic promise, but they will not continue on for the title of Finalist. These students are known as Commended Students. Approximately 16,000 students become Semifinalists. They are designated on a state representational basis. Semifinalists who meet academic and other requirements will be notified in February if they will advance to Finalist standing. Only Finalists are considered for Merit Scholarship awards. There are usually 8,000 Finalists. Competition for these Finalists is fierce throughout universities and colleges nationwide.

To ensure geographic diversity, the number of National Merit Semifinalists in each state is based on that state's share of the national population of graduating high school seniors. States with a larger amount of high achieving students have higher qualifying scores than other states and that keeps them from dominating the scholarship prizes (Schouten, 2004, p.1). Moving to somewhere such as South Dakota or Arkansas would improve a student's chance of winning a prestigious scholarship. Since their pools are smaller, the selection index would be lower. States with the highest scores also tend

to have higher per-pupil spending levels, larger teacher salaries, and higher proportions of public school teachers with advanced degrees (Scouten, 2004).

One of the largest scholarship management programs is the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. The NMSC seeks to identify and reward the top students in the nation. High school students who meet published entry/participation requirements enter these competitions by taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), usually as juniors (Peterson, 2005). The PSAT/NMSQT measures critical reading, math problem-solving, and writing skills (College Board, 2004). The fee for this test is eleven dollars. There are five sections on the test with twenty-five minutes allotted for each section. The SAT scale ranges from 200 to 800. In 2004, the average SAT scores for Merit Scholarship recipients were 748 verbal and 742 mathematics. The total average scores for other college-bound seniors were 508 verbal and 518 mathematics (Roderick, 2004).

National Merit Incentives, Expectations, & Trends

National Merit Finalists receive many promises from schools that are trying to recruit them. The real question is whether or not schools follow up on their promises once the students arrive at the school. Institutions expend considerable effort detailing what they expect of students, but it appears as though much less energy goes into determining what students expect of institutions (Miller, 2005). Other than monetary scholarship packages, some schools offer their National Merit Finalists free laptop computers, special software packages for their own computers, faculty mentors, internships, and coveted

research opportunities just to name a few. Students and their parents are becoming increasingly savvy and educated customers (Beede, 1999).

Students in higher education are viewed as customers. They have expectations of services that will be provided to them. Levitz and Noel (1989) cited that:

Expectations are critical because they serve as the points from which students make all qualitative judgments of an institution. If the actual experience is far more positive than students expected, their general levels of experience are likely to be very high. If the actual experience is more negative than the students expected, their general levels of satisfaction with the various facets of the educational experience are likely to be very low (p. 2).

The best approach is a proactive one that focuses on preventing student dissatisfaction and promotes student success and retention. Student satisfaction is what impacts institutional success by attracting and retaining students (Juillerat, 1995).

The utmost importance of financial aid packages as a factor in college enrollments is obvious to even the most casual observer. Geographic proximity of a college to a student's home is a large factor of why many students choose a particular college (Anderson, Bowman, & Tinto, 1972). However, when offered full tuition, room and board, students suddenly find themselves more willing to leave the comforts of a hometown to forge for new opportunities. Students who received scholarships and grants in their first year of college were more likely to remain enrolled than students who did not receive any (Porter, 1990). American colleges and universities are using merit aid as a vehicle to attract higher test score students and to improve their rankings (Ehrenberg, Zhang, & Levin, 2005). The federal Department of Education, state and local agencies, and the public continually request data on student success, placement, retention, attrition, and graduation rates for greater accountability (Linsey, 1997). Four-year public

institutions charged an average of \$10,636 for tuition and fees and room and board, an increase of 9.8% from 2002-03 (Schub & Ross, 2005).

Trends that continue to impact higher education include a decline in available resources, reduction in public support for increasing tuition costs, and accountability (Upcraft, 1989). As a result, institutions must demonstrate student success by measures that include retention and graduation rates (Sanders & Burton, 1996). A wide array of national trends has converged to highlight student financial aid. The decline in high school graduates and resultant competition among universities, the failure of federal and state financial aid programs to keep pace with college costs, the growing gap between disposable family income and college costs, and the issue of balancing budgets have all contributed to increased attention being given to financial aid in enrollment management (Hossler, 1991).

One of the benefits of being a National Merit Finalist is the scholarship packages that come along with the recognition. Almost every college and university today claims that ability to pay isn't a factor in its admission decision (Carpenter, 1992). Not all National Merit Finalists want to go directly into a university. Some prefer to stay closer to home and attend a nearby community college. The NMSC Director of Public Information, Elaine Detweiler, stated that Merit Scholarship payments can be used at regionally accredited community colleges during the recipients' first two years of undergraduate study. However, NMSC scholarship stipends are not payable for attendance at service academies, virtual universities, and certain institutions that are limited in their purposes or training. A college-sponsored award is renewable for up to

four years of undergraduate study at the sponsor institution but it does not transfer if the student decides to switch schools (College Board, 2004).

In 2004, private donors gave more than \$2.5 billion dollars in financial aid to help undergraduate students pay for college (Peterson, 2005). Surprisingly, students and families still have a hard time finding funding for higher education. The demand outnumbers the supply. Granted, there are numerous financial aid loan options for students, but along with those options comes a looming debt upon graduation. State support for higher education is lagging behind increased costs. Federal student aid continues to remain in a lean cycle (Berger, 1989).

This financial aid will always continue to be recognized as a strategic tool in attracting desired students to an institution. Colleges and universities tend to increase financial aid in order to keep rising tuitions affordable for as many students as possible and to compete with the financial aid packages offered by peer institutions (Taylor, Meyerson, & Massy, 1993). Financial aid packages enhance an institution's ability to attract students and achieve diversity. Students who drop out of college often report financial reasons for dropping out (Pascarella, 1982, p. 56). When asked if financial aid packages improve student retention, studies have repeatedly shown an affirmative response (Hossler, 1991, p. 51).

Over the past forty years, numerous organizations have established financial aid programs to help minorities finance the cost of higher education. The goal is to remove the financial barrier that has blocked many minority students in the past from attaining a degree. Student aid has increased in total value, but not enough to keep pace with tuition increases. Most of the growth has been in the form of student borrowing (Coomes, 2000).

The most popular forms of student financial aid consisted of Pell Grants, Perkins Loans, and Stafford Loans. According to the University of Central Florida's Financial Assistance webpage, the Pell Grant is for undergraduate students who have not yet completed a first baccalaureate course of study. Pell Grants are available for undergraduate students and do not need to be repaid (Garrett, 1993). The Perkins Loan makes funds available at a low interest rate loaned by your college or university, and a Stafford Loan also makes funds available at a low interest rate but through a bank (Garrett, 1993).

College and university administrators have been concerned about student enrollments for more than a decade. The attention directed at enrollments is attributable to several factors, including a declining pool of high school graduates, external demands for improvements in student persistence rates as one measure of institutional effectiveness, and enrollment goals that target special populations (minority students, National Merits, and so on). As a result, the issue of recruitment and retention has become a serious priority in higher education (Hossler, 1991, p.1). Porter (1990) found the 1950s and 1960s to be boom years in higher education while in the 1970s and 1980s, traditional college-age students (ages 18-24) began to decline. In fact, the greatest enrollment loss occurs during the first year and after the eighth semester for students in higher education (Porter, 1990). Higher education was forced to do a better job of recruiting and retaining students. It is not just financial aid packages that recruit students to a particular school. Other common factors included guidance counselors, friends, teacher recommendations, college brochures, websites, advertisements, and reference books (Kattner, 2001).

The University of Central Florida (UCF) located in Orlando, Florida, is a member institution of the State University System (SUS) of Florida. As of 2005, UCF is the largest undergraduate public university in Florida and second by total enrollment, trailing the University of Florida by fewer than 5,000 students. UCF awards bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctorates. The main campus is located approximately 13 miles from downtown Orlando and 55 miles from Daytona Beach, and there are twelve satellite campuses in eastern central Florida, though none is as large as the 1415 acre (5.73 km²) main campus.

UCF's official colors are gold (or yellow) and black, the various sports teams go by the name of "Golden Knights" and the official mascot is a gold-armored black knight named Knightro. The UCF academic logo, however, is the Pegasus. The University of Central Florida will be included for the first time in "The Best 361 Colleges: 2006 Edition," by The Princeton Review. The Princeton Review's

recognition comes as the academic quality of UCF students continues to rise. Freshmen admitted in 2004 posted average SAT scores of 1186, ACT scores of 26 and an average high school GPA of 3.84.

The university was established on 10 June 1963 when the State Legislature passed Bill 125. The first classes began in October 1968 with a class size of 1,948. UCF was known as Florida Technological University (or Florida Tech) until the name was changed on December 6, 1978 by the State Legislature. FTU's former rival, the Florida Institute of Technology, is now named Florida Tech. In 2003, UCF had the distinction of being the fastest growing University in the United States in terms of undergraduate enrollment, and as of 2005, more than 44,000 students attend the school. UCF is one of the Top 60 schools in the country that enroll the largest number of National Merit Scholars.

One of the founding goals of the university was to act as a support system for the Kennedy Space Center which is about 50 miles (80 km) away. Additionally, the nearby Central Florida Research Park which infuses research funds into the university and draws many interns and graduates from it, has a major focus of simulation as well space and defense related research. (Wikipedia, 2005).

Another way the University of Central Florida attracts National Merit Finalists is through the Burnett Honors College Summer Institute (BHCSI). The BHCSI is an intensive three-week residential program for gifted and high-achieving students who have interest in learning the foundations of computer science and computer technology. One of the most popular majors at this university for these students is Engineering and Computer Science, making this a valuable recruitment tool. The School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (SEECs) has about 4,300 undergraduate students and 1,100 graduate students pursuing degrees in Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, and Computer Engineering. By attracting these students early on in their high school careers to the campus, the students establish a bond with the university that often leads to a natural segway to come here for their higher education.

The Burnett Honors College Summer Institute program offers a mix of activities designed to maximize learning through hands-on, individualized instruction with outstanding instructors. It is also designed to expose students to broader topics in computer science through the distinguished lectures series where researchers speak about computing from pragmatic and academic points of view. Ten-thousand students are recruited based upon their PSAT scores and receive information about the program at their home. Approximately two dozen students are selected for this highly selective program. There has been a steady trend of two to three students from each summer class that chose to attend the University of Central Florida based on their experience in the BHCSI. Some students elect to attend the program up to three summers in a row! The Burnett Honors College at the University of Central Florida is the host and sponsor of the program.

Institutions compete heavily for National Merit Finalists for a multitude of reasons. One reason is that national published rankings can play an important role in the decision for an individual to attend a particular university. One of the most common sources of information for prospective students and their families is the *US News and World Report*. Additionally, many rankings are used for public relations purposes, promotional materials, governing boards, bragging rights, and higher education groups. The rankings often provide information on quality, accountability, and performance indicators for higher education institutions (Baltunis, 2002).

In 2002, a comparison study on the ten state university systems (SUS) in Florida was conducted by Catherine Baltunis to compare National Merit rankings amongst the SUS schools. The University of Central Florida ranked fourth among the ten state universities.

Table 2-1
2002 SUS RANKINGS

SUS Universities	Merit Scholars	Control Rank	National Rank
University of Florida	194	3	6
Florida A&M	62	14	35
Florida State University	54	18	44
University of Central Florida	32	35	74
University of South Florida	19	50	105
Florida Atlantic University	1	116	294
Florida Gulf Coast University	0	163	412
Florida International	0	163	412
University of North Florida	0	95	412
University of West Florida	0	163	412

It is interesting to note that despite having more National Merits at an institution, it does not necessarily equal to its academic ranking (see below). By comparing Table 2-1 with Table 22, the University of South Florida had 19 National Merit Scholars in 2002 and was ranked fifth in number of National Merits. Their overall academic ranking however, has them ranked in at third.

Table 2-2
2002 SUS OVERALL ACADEMIC RATINGS

University	Overall Academic Rating
University of Florida	3.98
Florida State University	3.91
University of South Florida	3.37
University of Central Florida	3.36
Florida Atlantic University	3.26
Florida International University	3.21
University of North Florida	3.20
Florida A&M	3.19
University of West Florida	3.16

In 2006, the US News and World Report rated the University of Central Florida as one of America's Best Colleges. They stated that UCF is the second largest producer of bachelor's degrees and National Merit Scholars in the state of Florida. UCF is a leader in undergraduate education offering world-renowned faculty, cutting-edge technology, research opportunities and innovative corporate partnerships in the best job market in the state and the third best in the nation.

According to the U.S. News and World Report (2005), the University of Florida ranked second nationally in National Merit Scholars and fourth nationally in National Achievement Scholars. With 259 National Merit Scholars recruited, UF is ranked first among public institutions and behind only Harvard University in recruiting National Merit Scholars within its 2004-05 freshmen class. That means more National Merit Scholars went to Florida than to colleges like Yale, Stanford or the University of Michigan (Karp, 2005). What most people do not read though is that the University of

Florida also works harder to attract these students by awarding more National Merit scholarships than any other university in the nation. Can't this be viewed as 'bribing' students in order to get rankings? Gloria Davis from the NMSC stated that judging a school by the number of National Merit Scholars is "inappropriate" and can lead to "invalid conclusions." However, institutions of higher education still compete to get these numbers.

The number of National Merit Scholars and National Achievement Scholars reflects the overall quality of an entering class (One Florida, 2005). More cream-of-the-crop minority students are being attracted to Ivy League schools such as Harvard and Howard universities. Even though UF has more National Merits than Yale, these students only make up 4% of the population. The freshmen class at Yale consisted of one-fifth of National Merits (Karp, 2005). National Merit students are being offered full rides and the world of opportunity is at their fingertips. It is becoming a mere question nowadays as to what a college can offer the student to get him or her to attend their institution. There are exceptions. Harvard for example, does not offer a dime to its National Merits.

High school personnel are very proud of their NMSC recognized students and consider the recognition a significant distinction for students as well as an indication of school success and academic excellence (Roderick, 2004). Colleges prefer to recruit National Merit Finalists for a multitude of reasons. Good students are at a premium. Bright students attract good faculty, which attracts grant and research money and helps build a college's reputation (Leider, 2002). The better the school's reputation, the easier it is to attract even more high achieving students. According to Leider, high achieving students are more likely to attain a degree, brag about their alma mater, and become

possible future donors. Access to higher educational opportunity for young people from a wide range of economic, cultural, scholastic, racial, and religious backgrounds was a hallmark of the state university and land-grant movement (Thackrey, 1971). This is a value still held in today's world.

National Merit Finalists are often thought of as intellectually gifted and high achieving. The definition of the word "gifted" (Glover, 2005) used in Public Law 97-35, the U.S. Office of Education, Public Law 91-230, Section 806 states: "children who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership capacity, or specific academic fields and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities." The 1999 Webster's Dictionary defines gifted as having exceptionally high intelligence. Baruch, Biener, and Barnett (1987) found that high achieving students suffer from what is known as "role overload (typically defined as having too much to do) and role conflict (typically defined as feeling pulled apart by conflicting demands)" (p. 131).

High achieving students often have a fear of failure. In the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College, Director Dr. Madi Dogariu (2005) estimated that 25% of students will be removed or withdrawn each year from the College based on their academic performance. Success for students in higher education is often defined in terms of making the transition to the college student role (Clark, 2005). These gifted students often have a fear of arriving at wrong conclusions which in turn prevents them from taking a positive action. A young person who is struggling with a dilemma may become intimidated or confused and thus unable to act (Perlman, 1969). Gifted students often

develop a feeling of boredom in class and suffer isolation from their peers for being ‘different’ (Kulik & Kulik, 1984). It takes time to establish one’s own networks of support, and many new students are cut off from previous sources of help (Earwaker, 1992). Not every honors and/or gifted student is well adjusted, emotionally stable, or highly motivated (Gallagher, 1980). According to Cope & Hannah (1975), the first year in higher education is cited as the most critical year in which students may drop out. Approximately 10% of freshmen drop out during the start of the second semester. Freshmen and sophomore years tend to continually have the highest attrition rates (Beal & Noel, 1980). Higher education is a period of self-discovery (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001) and students realize at some point during their college careers that college isn’t for everyone. Brown (1960) stated that “when human talent is wasted, everyone is deprived; when it is rightly developed, everyone benefits.”

The 2003-04 National Merit Scholarship Corporation Annual Report showed that National Merit students also tend to be involved in extracurricular activities in both high school and college. The percentage of each extracurricular activity is as follows:

	<u>% participating</u>
Community or service activity.....	66
Academic honor society.....	59
Music: instrumental.....	44
Science or mathematics activity.....	42
Religious activity or organization.....	37
Foreign language activity.....	37
Work: part-time job, not school related.....	35
Athletics: varsity.....	35
Athletics: intramural.....	35
Computer activity.....	25
Government or political activity.....	24
Journalism or literary activity.....	24
Debate or public speaking.....	23
Theatre activity.....	23

According to Parnell (1990), there are no dumb students and there are no smart students, just students that acquire knowledge at different rates. One common ailment that many National Merits suffer from is Perfectionism. Perfectionism is a characteristic commonly associated with gifted individuals (Neumeister, 2004). Hanich and Jordan (2004) concluded that children view their abilities favorably during the early years, and their competence perceptions decline as they continue on through school. Reasons for this can include self doubt that comes along with adolescence, peer pressure, teacher ratings and family perceptions.

According to the Counseling and Mental Health Center at the University of Texas at Austin (2005), perfectionism is not a healthy pursuit of excellence. There are big differences between perfectionists and healthy achievers. Perfectionists believe that mistakes must never be made and that the highest standards of performance must always be achieved. The healthy high achiever has drive, while the perfectionist is driven. James Messina from Coping.org states that perfectionists are often riddled with misconceptions. These include the beliefs that:

- Everything in life must be done to your level of perfection, which is often higher than anyone else's.
- It is unacceptable to make a mistake.
- You must always reach the ideal no matter what.
- If those in authority say this is the way it is supposed to be, then that is the way it is supposed to be.
- You are a loser if you cannot be perfect.
- It is what you achieve rather than who you are that is important.
- I have no value in life unless I am successful.
- There is no sense in trying to do something unless I can do it perfectly, e.g., "I don't attempt things I can't do well."

- If I have a failure or experience a set back in my efforts to change then I should give up.
- The ideal is what is real; unless I reach the ideal I am a failure.
- There are so many roadblocks and pitfalls to keep me from succeeding. It is better just to give up and forget my goal.
- Unless I am ``Number One" there is no sense in trying. Everyone knows what ``Number Two" is. To win is the only acceptable goal.
- If you screw up in your efforts to achieve a goal, just give up. It must be too hard to achieve.
- You must always strive to reach the ideal in everything you do because it is in the achievement of the ideal that you give meaning to your life.
- Don't ever let anyone know what goal you're working on. That way they won't consider you a failure if you don't reach it.
- If you can't do it right the first time, why try to do it at all?
- There is only one way to reach a goal: the right way.
- It takes too much effort and energy to reach a goal. I save myself the aggravation and discouragement by not setting goals for myself.
- I'll never be able to change and grow the way I want to, so why try.
- I am a human being prone to error, frailty and imperfections; therefore, I won't be able to accomplish things in a perfect or ideal way. I'll just give up on achieving any of my goals or desires.

When National Merits were asked about the disadvantages of being labeled as gifted, there were common complaints that were cited. These students often complained that everything in high school was too easy; everyone expected them to excel in everything; other students treated them differently; and that there were few people who actually understood them and their feelings (Galbraith, 1985). Statistics have shown the Honors and/or gifted students, including National Merits, are consistently the ones with higher scores on college entrance exams (Robinson & Jones, 1986). Many honors and/or gifted students will put forth minimum effort in their pursuit of academic achievement. These students have never had to study and as a consequence; do not really know how once they get to college (Randall & Copeland, Fall-Winter, 1986-1987). Learning has always come easy to them in high school.

A common college and university solution for these complaints are to get these gifted students into their Honors Programs and Colleges. According to the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College website, the most important benefit that Honors College students enjoy is being a part of a wonderful group of peers who share similar educational and civic values. Honors students have the advantage of a distinguished learning environment, enhanced resources, civic engagement, an Honors community and special recognition designed to help them achieve academically and grow into well-rounded individuals. The smaller class sizes of similar academically minded students helps create an inviting, safe, family atmosphere. According to Tinto's Theory of Student Departure, student persistence in a particular institution is directly related to the degree to which the student is successfully integrated into the academic and social environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This is where Tinto's theory ties into the purpose of honors programs.

In Tinto's (1993) theory of institutional departure, he suggested that a college consists of two subcultures- academic and social. The academic subculture focuses on the formal education aspect, including the faculty and staff, and anything else that relates to the educating of a student (such as classrooms and laboratories). The social subculture of Tinto's theory consists of everything outside of the daily academic realm. A student's experience with these two subcultures will influence his or her decision regarding departure from an institution. Students who are involved both academically and socially are more likely to stay involved with and committed to an institution through graduation (Tinto, 1993). Tinto was a firm believer on the importance of the entire college

environment and its effect on student persistence. Astin, along with Tinto, viewed student involvement as integral to the academic and personal development of college students (Astin, 1977).

In 1956, Ann Roe had a theory that was often referred to as a needs- theory approach. She focused on differences in personality, aptitude, intelligence, and background and how they influenced an individual's career choice. Roe theorized that early childhood experiences play an important role in finding satisfaction in one's chosen field (Zunker, 1998). If Ann Roe's theory is correct, would an individual's guardians truly have an effect on satisfaction levels of a chosen field? Wouldn't this also be evident if there were multiple siblings? Hypothetically, if a family had three siblings and one became a National Merit Finalist, wouldn't the other two become National Merit Finalists as well if their environment had never changed and each were treated equally?

Another conflicting theory is John Holland's modal personality style. Holland's theory suggests that an individual chooses a career to satisfy one's preferred modal personal orientation (Zunker, 1998). An anti-social person would choose to work in an enclosed cubicle setting whereas a social person would opt for a more visible, group oriented setting. Then why is it that there are National Merit Finalists who consider themselves anti-social who are teaching large groups of children while there are social National Merit Finalists who can be found working in a solitary confined crime lab by themselves? In a 1994 study conducted by Parcel and Menaghan, there was no relationship found between maternal employment and a child's social behavior. These facts prove that these theories are not one-hundred percent accurate.

In 1993, Astin found that interactions between students and faculty that occurs outside of the classroom, increases student satisfaction in regards to quality of instruction, individual support services, and academic attainment. Astin also found that peer groups are the most influential source on growth and development during the undergraduate years. This is another example of why programs such as the UCF Burnett Honors College Alumni E-mail Mentor program is so beneficial to current students in higher education, especially National Merit Finalists. By matching current students with an alumni peer who has already gone through their degree program, the current student receives a safe and easy environment to meet more people and get answers to their questions.

In 1987, Chickering wrote about results of numerous cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of college students. He found that when students go off to college, changes occur in their attitudes, interests, values, future plans and aspirations, personal integration, and intellectual ability.

According to Chickering (1987), college students must quickly develop interpersonal competence. Most tasks require a cooperative effort, and the effectiveness of a task relies upon the ability to work with others. Chickering goes on to say that an individual who is crude in a social setting or relationship, is basically handicapped socially. There are people in this world who are so intelligent, but can not deal with other people in an effective manner.

There has been numerous research studies conducted on the reasons students in higher education fail or drop out. Contrary to popular belief, just because a student is in an Honors program or is considered gifted does not automatically mean that those students will be able to successfully complete a course simply because they are intelligent

(Randall & Copeland, Fall-Winter, 1986-1987). Students sometimes stop going to class because they believe they are smarter than everyone else, they do not feel challenged enough and stop attending, or they do not feel the need to study and end up doing poorly. As the proportion of students in the population rises and institutions of higher education grow in size, there is a real risk that student needs and difficulties will disappear from view. Students have always had problems, but current trends mean that they may now be more acute, harder to alleviate, and perhaps more difficult to identify (Earwaker, 1992). Students experience new stresses such as living away from home for the first time, developing self and time management skills, finding transportation, handling finances, leaving their high school friends behind, searching for an identity, and becoming the small fish in the big pond again. Many students have difficulty coping with the problems created by these pressures (Perlman, 1969). For some, college can be a time of unsurpassed struggles, pain, and disillusionment (Mach, 2004). West (1991) identifies four main reasons for students dropping out. They include academic, behavioral, family, and psychological reasons. The personal and academic transitions to college are great ones, and even high-ability students do not always automatically make the transition smoothly (Hirsch, 2001).

With increasing enrollments, there have been few reasons for most colleges and universities to determine and satisfy the needs of their students and stakeholders (Sorensen, Furst-Bowe, & Moen, 2005). To stay competitive, institutions can no longer afford to disregard the expectations of their students and stakeholders. If students do not feel that they have received what they contracted for at the recruitment and enrollment stage, they will make their voices heard on campus, in state legislatures, the media, and

even the courts (Ardaiolo, Bender, & Roberts, 2005). In order for colleges or universities to maintain their reputations, they have to follow through on their promises made to students during the recruitment process.

The University of Central Florida website (www.ucf.edu) reinforces the fact that it is currently ranked among the top 70 schools in the nation in National Merit Finalist enrollment. The combination of strong academic programs, prime campus location, and generous scholarship packages help in the achievement of this accomplishment.

According to an interview with Christopher Lynch, former Director of the Scholars Program in Undergraduate Admissions at the University of Central Florida, “UCF attracts stronger (based on test scores and high school GPAs) and more talented groups of incoming freshmen each year. More and more students are putting UCF at the top of their list.”

Perks for National Merit Finalists at UCF include the cost of tuition for four years, a free laptop, an invitation to join the prestigious Burnett Honors College, guaranteed admission to the LEAD Scholars Program, priority registration, a special orientation program, and a stipend for student travel. These students are also invited to special events such as the annual National Merit Reception through the Burnett Honors College. National Merit Finalists are also matched with faculty mentors to help ease the transition to college and increase networking opportunities. According to Ramist (1981), interaction between faculty and students is one of the most important ways to retain students. Mentoring has been identified as a strategic tool to aid in facilitating the professional growth and development of students (Tillman, 2002).

According to the University of Central Florida's Undergraduate Admissions website (2005), the National Merit Scholarship money may be used in addition to the Florida Bright Futures, Florida Pre-Paid, private scholarships, and in some cases need-based assistance. It will first be applied to tuition and fees, but can also cover part, or all, of the cost of on-campus housing when combined with other awards. If any scholarship funds remain after payment of tuition and fees, they are disbursed directly to the student at the beginning of each fall and spring semester.

Most colleges have followed the traditional recruitment practices such as distributing printed material about the university, visiting the high schools and meeting with college bound students, and giving campus tours to attract new students (Mueller, 1961, p. 155). To stay effective, institutions today must put more effort into recruitment due to the fierce competition among schools to attract the most highly regarded students. Florida is facing a continual increase in enrollment growth in higher education, and competition among the Florida schools for these high achieving students is expected (Western Interstate Commissions for Higher Education, Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association, and The College Board, 1993).

National Merit Finalists continue to see the University of Central Florida as one of the leading institutions in the state of Florida. In 2001, it was ranked third in the state in the amount of recruited National Merit enrollments. The data from the University of Central Florida Office of Academic Development and Retention (personal interview with Kathleen Connelly on June 12, 2002) showed that, since 1987, the university has tracked 287 National Merit Semifinalists and Finalists in attendance at the University. Of these 287 students, 201 were Caucasian, 22 were African-American, 37 were Hispanic, 26

were Asian, and one chose not to divulge that information. The average ACT score for this cohort was 31. The average SAT score was 1300-1450. There have been 107 females and 180 males. Their average high school GPA was between a 3.6 and 4.2. Thirty-six were from out of state.

There are numerous college students who maintain 4.0 GPA's throughout their college careers but, because they did not take standardized tests well, they were not eligible for the National Merit scholarships. This is especially disheartening when you see current National Merit Finalists not thriving in regard to their academic potential.

Standardized Testing Bias

Is standardized testing culture biased? According to the Educational Testing Service, the following data would lead people to believe so:

Table 2-3
ETS SAT SCORES AND RACE

Average SAT Scores as a Factor of Race

Race	SAT Verbal	SAT Math	Combined Scores
Asian	498	560	1,058
White	527	528	1,055
American Indian	484	481	965
Hispanic	463	464	927
Black	434	422	856

(Asher, 2000, p. 124)

In comparing the combined scores between Asian and Black students, there is over a 200-point difference. It is also noteworthy to see that out of 287 students tracked

as National Merit Semifinalists and Finalists at the University of Central Florida, 201 are white (personal interview with Kathleen Connelly, June 12, 2002). SAT scores appear to be a contributing factor to low minority enrollment of National Merits. The ACT and SAT are the most used tests for determining whether or not a student will get into a given college (Courts & McInerney, 1993). According to Leider (2002), the College Board maintains that the SAT is not culturally biased. The PSAT is not universally offered. Each question is carefully analyzed and questions posing difficulties for any one “subgroup” are discarded. The College Board asserts “score differences among groups are not the result of bias on the SAT but reflect the unequal educational opportunities that still exist in our country.” Crouse and Trusheim (1988) ask if the SATs are intended to indicate a student’s aptitude for success in college, and neither the verbal nor the math scores effectively predict success or failure, then why are these tests being used?

A continual challenge in higher education is trying to change the demographics in America. The majority of National Merit Finalists are Caucasian males. On almost every indicator of achievement, including grades, standardized tests, and college attendance, minorities do not achieve at the same levels as non-minorities (Olszewski-Kubilius, et al, 2004). As long as the NMSC continues to use the PSAT as the qualifier to become a National Merit Finalist, there is not much that can be done to change the disparity among races and genders other than changing the requirements set forth by the NMSC. This leads to a significant waste of talent and ability. Some argue that identifying students (such as a National Merit Finalist) invokes the practices of exclusion vs. inclusion (Reay et al, 2001). Higher education seems to be instituting a process of unequal opportunities in which students are being segregated into intellectual divisions of less intelligent,

average, or highly intelligent (Vincent, 2003). Is it right to divide and reward students solely based on their test scores?

Are colleges improving on their diversity profiles? The preliminary fall 2005 diversity profile for the University of Central Florida (shown below) still shows white, non-Hispanic students as the majority of the campus population. This is even more evident in the National Merit Finalist diversity population as shown in chapter four.

Table 2-4
UNIVERSITY DIVERSITY PROFILE AT UCF (FALL 2005)

Classification	Enrolled	Percent
Indian-Alaskan	185	.42%
Black, Non-Hispanic	3,789	8.70%
White, Non-Hispanic	30,523	70.13%
Asian-Pacific Islander	2,243	5.15%
Hispanic	5,544	12.73%
Non-Resident Alien	1,251	2.87%
Not Reported	1,418	
Total	44,953	

(Table from UCF Current Facts found at <http://www.iroffice.ucf.edu/character/current.html>)

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) develops and reviews tests to ensure that they do not disadvantage examinees of a particular race, sex, cultural background, or ethnic group. ETS members are drawn from all regions of the country. According to the

College Board (2004), they eliminate any wording that might be offensive to any examinees and to ensure that the test includes references to men and women, as well as individuals from a variety of races and cultural backgrounds. The College Board continues to hold its ground by stating that the differences in test performance among various groups can be attributed to many factors, such as long-term educational preparation; the test itself reflects such differences but is not the cause.

Nearly every college in America accepts the SAT or Subject Tests as a part of its admissions process. That's why more than two million students take the SAT every year (College Board, 2005). Colleges use more than your SAT scores when making admission decisions. Your high school record is most important, and colleges may also consider essays, recommendations, interviews, and your involvement in extracurricular activities (College Board, 2005). Studies by Bayley and Oden (1955) documented that higher test scoring persons, in comparison with lower test scoring peers, increase faster in measured ability. They showed that the greatest development in mental ability during college is to be expected from those who are most highly developed at entrance. This is yet another reason why colleges choose to rely on test scores.

One university is verbalizing its distaste towards the NMSC eligibility requirements. The University of California's faculty committee says that it is unfair how the NMSC awards scholarships to individuals regardless of need. This past spring, in response to the criticism from the University of California, arguing that the PSAT is unfair, the College Board introduced a new version of the SAT (Trounson, 2005). Test scores have a mixed history at predicting academic success in colleges. Most notably, Bates College discovered 20 years ago that SAT scores were of no value in its admission

matrix and stopped requiring those (Marthers, 2005). Now, at least one dozen respected national liberal arts colleges make submission of standardized tests like the SAT and ACT optional. Marthers (2005) notes that internal studies at Reed show that grades and the rigor of courses selected in high school are the best predictors of success in the college's curriculum.

The new SAT is divided into three sections, each with an equal weight of a score of 800. Instead of a perfect 1600 SAT, the new perfect score would be 2400. This UC committee and the Board of Admissions have asked the university's top officials to reconsider their participation in the program. The California faculty committee has stated that the College Board (the PSAT's sponsor), has never scientifically proven that the test was an indicator for actual student merit or for success in college (Arenson, 2005, p. 14). It can be argued that the PSAT only rewards good test takers. The UC faculty committee said that data on SAT results suggest the PSAT, as used by the scholarship program, "overwhelmingly favors a narrow group of affluent students attending well-endowed high schools, maximizing rather than minimizing adverse negative impact on disadvantaged students" (Locke, 2005, p.1). Worse yet, since PSAT & SAT scores weigh into financial aid distribution, they perpetuate the problem of unequal educational opportunity, regardless of the care taken to ensure fairness (Leider, 2002).

Individual characteristics such as age and gender have been shown to directly impact and affect a college student's development of educational expectations (Tinto, 1975). In a 1981 study conducted by Ramist, men were more likely than women to complete a degree. Times have changed. For example, in 2004 according to the University of Central Florida website, UCF had a 55.65% female enrollment and a

44.35% male enrollment. Females are out numbering the males in both the undergraduate and graduate program. Each year, the number of male National Merit Finalists outnumbers the amount of female National Merit Finalists at UCF. This could also be due to the fact that nationwide, generally college attendance rates for males exceeds those for females (Anderson, Bowman, & Tinto, 1972). According to Hendershott, Wright and Henderson (1992), gender was the most important predictor for overall student satisfaction.

Over a decade ago (1994), people complained to the United States Department of Education that the NMSC selection process was biased against females, since males typically scored higher on the PSAT and SAT even though females consistently had better high school grades. In comparison, a study by Smith-Winberry and Tomlinson-Keasey (1982) showed that gifted/honors females were better adjusted socially and academically. In a study conducted by Sanders and Burton (1996), men were more satisfied with their academic satisfaction while women were found to be more interested in an academic social life. Another surprising fact was that research has shown that women are less likely than men to apply for scholarships (Kempner and Tierny, 1996).

The College Board's solution was to add a writing test to the PSAT so that more females would be more likely to qualify (Arenson, 2005, p. 14). That solution may have leveled the playing field among females and males; however, the NMSC still declines to release data on the racial and ethnic distribution of awards. The University of California committee said the scholarship selection process is biased against underrepresented minority and low income students (Trounson, 2005, p.4). In an e-mail correspondence with Elaine Detweiler (2005), the Director of Public Information for the National Merit

Scholarship Corporation, it was confirmed that the NMSC does not track whether or not National Merit Finalists have a disability (hearing, learning, physical, or visual).

Disability does not play a factor in the selection of National Merits yet it would make for a fascinating study.

Rick Turner, the Dean of the University of Virginia for African-American Affairs, stated that the scores on the SAT have a great deal to do with the person's economic status, and that is going to have an enormous impact on poor students, regardless of their color. The NMSC harms minority students because many are often unable to either afford the exams or enroll in prep courses. Turner also stated that statistics have historically shown that children who are better off economically receive the highest test scores (Dresnick, 2005, p.1). Despite controversy that the awards go disproportionately to white students, the College Board continues to use the PSAT as the qualifying exam for National Merit scholarships. Research performed by Patrick Hayashi finds that 99.7 percent of black, Hispanic, and American Indian students are eliminated at the first cutoff (Selingo, 2005, p. 46). Rejected white applicants claim bias when schools admit minority students with lower scores; rejected minority applicants claim bias when schools make admission decisions based on racially-disparate testing. Both positions have merit (Leider, 2002). Why is it that a higher education institution such as the University of Central Florida (2005) is 70.49% Caucasian while minority enrollments at the Florida community colleges are expected to be 53% minority in 2010 (Ellis & Stebbins, 1996)? That is a rather large disparity. Retention rates of minority students are low, but the numbers show that these students are interested in higher education (Parker, 1998). We just need to find better ways to get them there.

Students are typically admitted into higher education because of high test scores and course work. According to the Council of Graduate Schools (1995, cited in Bargar & Duncan, 1982, p. 1), the central purpose of education is to prepare a student for a lifetime of intellectual inquiry. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that schools make adequate yearly progress in closing achievement gaps. Research shows that smaller class sizes aids in academic achievement. Then why is it that in K-12, students are usually assigned to smaller classes precisely because their achievement is low yet in higher education, if you have high achievement you are awarded with smaller class sizes (Nye & Hedges, 2004)? Those are two different groups both employing the same model of class size as an aid.

Students have always reported differences in terms of how interesting, difficult, and valuable they perceive various school subjects (Duckworth & Entwistle, 1974). Hence why, in higher education students are provided with a plethora of majors to choose from. However, the majority of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida choose to major in Engineering and Computer Science. Is this due to a national trend in the field or is it because this university excels in the Engineering and Computer Science program?

The historic Civil Rights Act of 1964 set the stage for the diversifying of campuses (Moneta and Kuh, 2005). Most institutions today have made considerable progress in increasing the numbers of students from historically underrepresented groups. Recent reports suggest that today's students are more diverse than ever before and want to acquire job skills more than general knowledge (Levine & Cureton, 1998). However, each year record numbers of students are less prepared for higher education (Kuh,

Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). Women now outnumber men in higher education, and more students from historically underrepresented groups are attending college (Woodard, Love, & Komives, 2000). Studies have shown that minority students are more likely than non-minority students to withdraw from higher education (Tinto, 1987). Townsend (1999) stated that Caucasian students are more consistent in terms of retention and graduation rates than minority students, but that is also because of the number of Caucasian students as opposed to the number of minority students. If a school is 70% Caucasian, of course you are going to have higher graduation rates of Caucasian than minority students.

In 1997, African-American students represented only 9% of those enrolled in universities and colleges, and only 5% earning bachelor's degrees while only 2% earned doctorates (in science and engineering). Research has consistently shown that African-American students' lack of academic success has been caused by poor academic preparation (based on the student and his or her high school), lack of academic support systems, and a lack of a social support system (role models, mentors) (Frierson, 1997). African-American students, along with other minority students, have the talent and academic capabilities to succeed in higher education. They just need the knowledge of the process of applying, finding support systems and role models, and locating funding.

Statistics indicate that the percentage of college students receiving bachelor's degrees has remained relatively constant over the past twenty-five years. Additionally, it now takes on average five years to get a four-year college degree (Conley, 2005). These statistics do not take into account that many high achieving students choose to double major, which in turn leads to even more time in college.

There has not been very much research conducted on the recruitment and retention of National Merit Finalists in higher education. Colleges and universities all want these high achieving students, yet each institution practices its own recruitment policy and simply hopes that it is working. By looking at the trends of this population, it should reveal common elements that will aid in a formulated recruitment procedure and help to better understand this population.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter 2 was to provide a review of literature and related research on National Merit Finalists. This chapter examined the history of the National Merit Scholarship Corporation; National Merit incentives, expectations, & trends; and standardized testing bias. This chapter has referenced work discussing trends, attrition, and retention in higher education. Chapter 3 summarizes the methodology and procedures used for data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This data collection was initiated in the fall of 2005 by the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College. Data from the College's FileMaker 8.0 database were examined along with a survey. The final analysis of the data, conclusions, and recommendations were presented in the spring of 2006.

An overview of the methodology used to collect data for the examination of trends, attrition, and retention rates of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida from 1997-2005 is provided in this chapter. The problem statement, population, research questions, instrumentation, data collection, and summary of this study are also described.

Problem Statement

Not all institutions track National Merit Finalist data. Institutions are also very territorial about this kind of information due to the fact that it contains descriptions of the National Merit Finalist recruitment packages that they offer. They do not want competing schools to know what they are offering for fear that the competing institutions will rebut with more enticing offers to prospective students.

The problem of this study is three-fold. First, there is no current literature or research on effective recruitment of National Merit Finalists. How will schools know what methods to try and what methods to avoid? The National Merit Scholarship Corporation is the only place that tracks certain statistics of National Merit Finalists but because of their heavy case loads, they cannot share all of this information with the public. Second, institutions do not share information about the types of recruitment packages they offer in fear that their competitors will make a better offer. Students do not know what each school could offer them unless they apply to that school, which can be a costly process. There is also no accountability to actually see if these students received what they were promised. Third, no one, including the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, tracks National Merit Finalists with disabilities. The goal of this research study was to identify current trends among the University of Central Florida's National Merit Finalists and to examine the retention and attrition rates to establish patterns that could help aid in the future recruitment and retention of this population.

Population

The population of this study consisted of the one hundred ninety-eight National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida from the fall of 1997 to the fall of 2005. The participants represent the various academic colleges at the University and not one particular major. All but one of the participants were FTIC (First Time in College) students.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is a National Merit Finalist?
2. What types of incentive were offered to National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida?
3. What are some of the demographic and academic trends among the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida (majors, gender ratios, ethnicity, etc.)?
4. Is the method of selecting National Merit Finalists fair?

Instrumentation

For this study, data analysis on the retention and attrition rates came from the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College database (FileMaker 8.0). The data is updated at the end of each fall and spring semester. The data examined characteristics such as grade point averages (high school and college); valedictorian and salutatorian status; test scores (SAT and ACT); Honors in the Major (undergraduate thesis) students; Honors and university status (withdrawn, probation, removed, disqualified, enrolled, graduated); Honors college attrition; university attrition; ethnicity; gender ratios; majors; and, prestigious scholarships awarded in college.

Data analysis on the trends of National Merit Finalists came from a survey given to participants in September 2005. The custom developed survey consisted of nineteen questions, with both multiple choice items and qualitative response items. The survey

questionnaire covered topics such as types of scholarship packages that National Merit Finalists were offered; the reasons students chose the University of Central Florida over other universities; college recruitment processes; hours studied for the PSAT; siblings; perceptions; number of times students changed their majors; job status; transportation; computer attainment; disability; and, disadvantages of being labeled as a National Merit Finalist. Participants could complete the survey without administrative/faculty intervention or interaction.

The participants received notification by regular mail that they would receive an important survey in September 2005, found in Appendix A (pre-survey letter). Addresses were collected from the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College FileMaker database. The surveys (Appendix G) were mailed out with the survey cover letters (Appendix B) and the return postcard (Appendix E). The survey cover letter explained the purpose of the study and also served as a student consent form to participate in the survey research. A postcard thank you reminder (Appendix C) was sent out at the end of September 2005 to thank students for completing the survey or to remind them to send it in if they have not yet done so already. A replacement questionnaire letter (Appendix D) and survey were mailed in early October 2005. A final contact letter (Appendix F) was sent in mid October 2005. Students returned the surveys by mail or by dropping them off at The Burnett Honors College. The surveys were collected throughout the months of September and October, 2005. The data was coded and entered into SPSS for descriptive statistics and Microsoft Word tables. SPSS is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 10.0 for Windows).

Data Collection

The Institutional Review Board approved this study on September 8, 2005. Pre-survey letters (Appendix A) were mailed out on September 12, 2005 to the one hundred ninety-eight National Merit Finalists who attend(ed) the University of Central Florida between the years of 1997-2005 as First Time in College Students (FTIC). Participants were then mailed a survey cover letter (Appendix B), the survey (Appendix G), and a return postcard (Appendix E) on September 19, 2005. A postcard thank you reminder was sent out to all participants on September 28, 2005. To encourage participants to respond, a replacement questionnaire letter (Appendix D) and survey were mailed out on October 5, 2005. A final contact letter (Appendix F) was mailed on October 14, 2005.

Numerous participants who were still current students at the University of Central Florida dropped off their completed surveys in The Burnett Honors College. Other participants opted to e-mail their responses back. The remaining participants mailed their responses back. Of the 198 National Merit Finalists in the population, 68 did not respond to the survey. The survey had a response rate of 66%.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, only specific survey answers related to the research questions were utilized in the analysis of data. Each of the survey questions that corresponds to this study's research questions are discussed in this section. The data was tabulated and summarized by the researcher based on the results of the surveys completed by the National Merit Finalists and from the data drawn from the FileMaker database.

Analyses of the student demographic characteristics were extracted from FileMaker database and not from the surveys in order to keep anonymity. Descriptive analyses were utilized to address the four research questions. The data was coded and entered into SPSS for descriptive statistics and Microsoft Word tables. SPSS is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 10.0 for Windows).

Analysis for Research Question 1 (What is a National Merit Finalist?) was explored through the Literature Review that traces the history of the National Merit Scholarship Corporation and its requirements and procedures to become a National Merit Finalist. Analysis of data for Research Question 2 (What types of incentives are offered to National Merit Finalists?) is explored through survey questions number 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 17, and 19. The Literature Review also touches upon the research question by describing the incentives that the University of Central Florida offers. Research Question 3 (What are some of the demographic and academic trends among National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida?) was addressed through survey questions 1, 6, and 9. Research Question 3 data was also pulled from the FileMaker database (such as majors, gender, ethnicity, GPA, etc). Research Question 4 (Is the method of selecting National Merit Finalists fair?) was explored through the Literature Review as well as through survey question 10. Conclusions were also pulled by comparing participants' college GPAs to their SAT scores from the FileMaker database to see if there was a correlation.

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to identify current trends among the University of Central Florida's National Merit Finalists and to examine the retention and attrition rates to establish patterns that could help aid in the future recruitment and retention of this population. Data analysis was done in order to make quantitative and qualitative statements about National Merit Finalist trends, attrition, and retention. The data collected from the FileMaker database provided an in-depth look at the academic trends and biographical data. The survey generated meaningful data that aided in pinpointing trends, commonalities and personal perceptions for this population.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine the trends, attrition and retention rates of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida. This study sought to answer these four research questions:

1. What is a National Merit Finalist?
2. What types of incentive were offered to National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida?
3. What are some of the demographic and academic trends among the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida (majors, gender ratios, ethnicity, etc.)?
4. Is the method of selecting National Merit Finalists fair?

Data on National Merit Finalists were collected by two methods. The first method was a survey (Appendix G) sent to all current and graduated National Merit Finalists who attended the University of Central Florida between August 1997 and December 2005.

The second method of data collection was through the Filemaker database which is housed in the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College. The data was coded and entered into SPSS for descriptive statistics and Microsoft Word tables. SPSS is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 10.0 for Windows). Of the 198 National Merit Finalists in the population, 68 did not respond to the survey. The survey

had a response rate of 66%. This chapter provides results of the analysis of data. Results of this study have been organized using narratives, tabular and graphical examples based on the four research questions.

Research Question 1

What is a National Merit Finalist?

To become a National Merit Finalist, a student must be a full-time high school student, progressing toward graduation, and planning on a college career no later than the fall following high school graduation. A student must also be a United States citizen or a permanent resident who is in the process of becoming a citizen. The PSAT must be taken no later than the third year in grades 9 through 12. According to the National Merit Scholarship Corporation website, the initial stages of the Merit Program are judged entirely based on a student's selection index. The selection index is the sum of the three PSAT scores: Math, Verbal, and Writing. There are usually 8,000 Finalists each year.

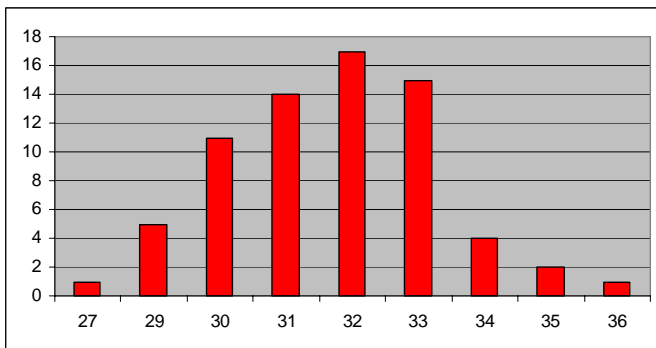
The participants of this study included the one hundred ninety-eight National Merit Finalists enrolled at the University of Central Florida between the years 1997 and 2005. The participants represented the various academic colleges at the University and not one particular major. All but one of the participants came to the University of Central Florida as FTIC (First Time in College) students.

The academic characteristics of National Merit Finalist at the University of Central Florida are represented in the tables below.

Table 4-1
ACT SCORES

ACT Score	Number of Students
27	1
29	5
30	11
31	14
32	17
33	15
34	4
35	2
36	1

Table 4-2
ACT GRAPH



Tables 4-1 and 4-2 depict the ACT (American College Test) results that the University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists scored. The participants' scores ranged from 27 to 36. A score of 36 is the highest score attainable. Not all National Merit Finalists choose to take the ACT. Only 70 of the 198 participants had ACT scores listed in the Burnett Honors College Filemaker database.

Table 4-3
SAT SCORES

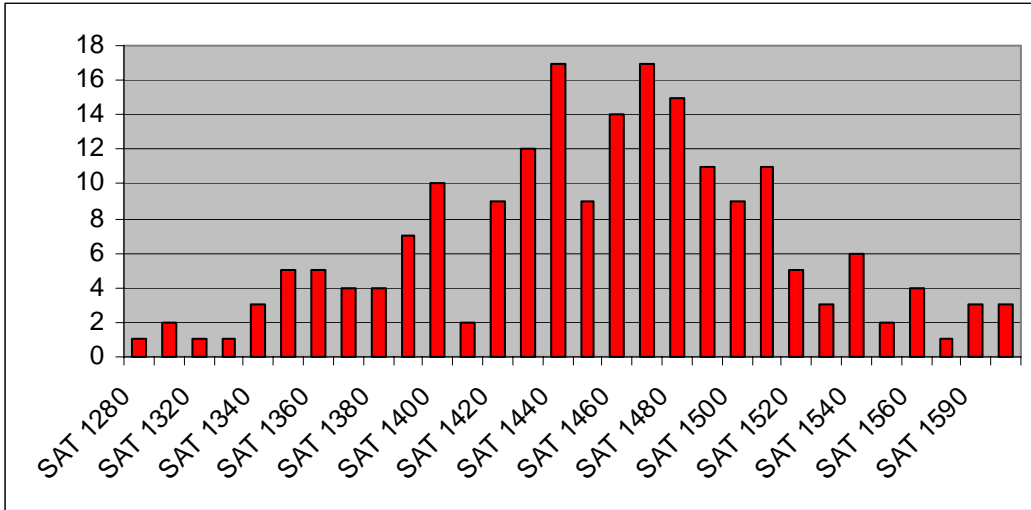


Table 4-3 depicts the SAT (formerly known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test) results that the University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists scored. The participants' scores ranged from 1280 to a perfect 1600 (by three participants). SAT scores were found for 196 of the 198 participants. The majority of participants scored in the mid 1400 range.

Table 4-4
UCF GPA (as of Spring 2006)

Cohort Year	Number Entered	4.0 GPA	3.6-3.99 GPA	3.0-3.5 GPA	<3.0 GPA
1997	6	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	3 (50%)
1998	16	0 (0%)	6 (38%)	5 (31%)	5 (31%)
1999	15	2 (13%)	7 (47%)	5 (33%)	1 (7%)
2000	30	2 (7%)	15 (50%)	10 (33%)	3 (10%)
2001	24	2 (8%)	9 (38%)	11 (46%)	2 (8%)
2002	24	2 (8%)	10 (42%)	9 (38%)	3 (12%)
2003	34	1 (4%)	14 (41%)	10 (29%)	9 (26%)
2004	29	2 (7%)	18 (62%)	7 (24%)	2 (7%)
2005	20	6 (30%)	7 (35%)	6 (30%)	1 (5%)

Table 4-4 shows National Merit Finalists' cumulative UCF GPAs per cohort year.

The numbers under the GPAs represent the amount of National Merit Finalists that fall within that GPA range and the percentage with that GPA per cohort year as of spring 2006.

Table 4-5
CUMULATIVE HONORS ATTRITION

Cohort Year	Number Entered	Number Removed/Withdrawn	% Attrition
1997	6	3	50%
1998	16	9	56%
1999	15	11	73%
2000	30	13	43%
2001	24	12	50%
2002	24	6	25%
2003	34	10	29%
2004	29	2	7%
2005	20	0	0

Table 4-5 shows the number of National Merit Finalists per year who were either removed or withdrew from the Burnett Honors College. The percentage on the right side of the table shows the attrition rate by year for each entering class of National Merit Finalists.

Table 4-6
 CUMULATIVE HONORS STATUS (as of Spring 2006)

Cohort Year	Number Entered	Removed	Withdrawn	Probation	Extended Probation	Graduated
1997	6	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (50%)
1998	16	3 (19%)	6 (38%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (43%)
1999	15	2 (13%)	9 (60%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (27%)
2000	30	4 (13%)	9 (30%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	17 (57%)
2001	24	3 (13%)	9 (38%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (38%)
2002	24	3 (13%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)
2003	34	9 (26%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2004	29	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2005	20	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (15%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 4-6 shows the percentages of National Merit Finalists in the Burnett Honors College who were removed, withdrawn, placed on probation or extended probation, or graduated. Each column shows the number of National Merit Finalists in that category along with the percentage for that cohort year.

Table 4-7
 CUMULATIVE UCF STATUS (as of Spring 2006)

Cohort Year	Number Entered	Graduated	Disqualified	Not enrolled	GPA <3.0
1997	6	4 (67%)	2 (33%)	0 (0%)	3 (50%)
1998	16	13 (81%)	0 (0%)	3 (19%)	5 (31%)
1999	15	14 (93%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)
2000	30	25 (83%)	0 (0%)	4 (13%)	3 (10%)
2001	24	17 (71%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)
2002	24	2 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	3 (13%)
2003	34	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	9 (26%)
2004	29	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)
2005	20	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)

Table 4-7 shows the percentages of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida who either graduated, were disqualified, are currently not enrolled, and

those with a GPA below a 3.000. Each column shows the number of National Merit Finalists in that category along with the percentage for that cohort year.

Table 4-8
ACADEMIC COLLEGES, MAJORS, & PERCENTAGES

	College	Major	Cumulative Majors
1997			
1	Arts & Humanities	English	
2	Arts & Humanities	English	33% A&H
3	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	17% Business
4	Business Administration	Accounting	33% Engr & CS
5	College of Sciences	Psychology BA	17% Science
6	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
1998			
1	Arts & Humanities	Liberal Studies	
2	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
3	Arts & Humanities	Liberal Studies	
4	Business Administration	Management	
5	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
6	Arts & Humanities	Liberal Studies	31% A&H
7	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	6% Business
8	College of Sciences	Psychology	44% Engr & CS
9	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	19% Science
10	Arts & Humanities	Liberal Studies	
11	College of Sciences	Political Science	
12	Arts & Humanities	Advertising/PR	
13	College of Sciences	Political Science	
14	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
15	Engineering & CS	Electrical Engineering	
16	Engineering & CS	Aerospace Engineering	
1999			
1	College of Sciences	Forensic Science	
2	College of Sciences	Journalism	
3	Arts & Humanities	Art	
4	Business Administration	Accounting	
5	Arts & Humanities	Spanish	

6	Engineering & CS	Information Technology	33% A&H
7	Arts & Humanities	Digital Media	13% Business
8	Arts & Humanities	Art (BFA)	27% Engr & CS
9	College of Sciences	Chemistry	27% Science
10	Arts & Humanities	Digital Media	
11	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
12	Business Administration	Economics	
13	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
14	College of Sciences	Political Science	
15	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
2000			
1	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
2	Arts & Humanities	Digital Media	
3	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	
4	Business Administration	Economics	
5	College of Sciences	Sociology	
6	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
7	Business Administration	Finance	
8	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	
9	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
10	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
11	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
12	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
13	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	13% A&H
14	College of Sciences	Psychology	13% Business
15	Engineering & CS	Civil Engineering	64% Engr & CS
16	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	10% Science
17	Arts & Humanities	English	
18	Arts & Humanities	Liberal Studies	
19	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	
20	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
21	Business Administration	Accounting	
22	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
23	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	
24	Business Administration	Economics	
25	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
26	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
27	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
28	College of Sciences	Mathematics	
29	Arts & Humanities	Liberal Studies	

30	Engineering & CS	Electrical Engineering	
2001			
1	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
2	College of Sciences	Anthropology	
3	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
4	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
5	Business Administration	Marketing	
6	Business Administration	Accounting	
7	College of Sciences	Forensic Science	
8	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
9	Arts & Humanities	Digital Media	4% A&H
10	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	4% Biomed
11	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	13% Business
12	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	4% CoHPA
13	Education	Math Education	4% Education
14	Business Administration	Accounting	58% Engr & CS
15	Engineering & CS	Civil Engineering	13% Science
16	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
17	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
18	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
19	College of Sciences	Biology	
20	Health and Public Aff.	Criminal Justice	
21	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
22	Engineering & CS	Electrical Engineering	
23	Biomedical Sciences	Micro & Molecular Bio	
24	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	
2002			
1	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
2	Engineering & CS	Electrical Engineering	
3	Engineering & CS	Information Technology	
4	Health and Public Aff.	Social Work	
5	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
6	College of Sciences	Psychology	
7	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
8	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
9	Engineering & CS	Industrial Engineering	17% A&H
10	Arts & Humanities	English	4% Business
11	Engineering & CS	Information Technology	4% CoHPA
12	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	62% Engr & CS
13	Arts & Humanities	English	13% Science

14	Engineering & CS	Aerospace Engineering	
15	College of Sciences	Physics	
16	Engineering & CS	Industrial Engineering	
17	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
18	Business Administration	Economics	
19	Arts & Humanities	English	
20	College of Sciences	Political Science	
21	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
22	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
23	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
24	Arts & Humanities	Spanish	
2003			
1	Arts & Humanities	Philosophy	
2	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
3	Rosen School	Hospitality	
4	Business Administration	Accounting	
5	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
6	Arts & Humanities	English	
7	Engineering & CS	Aerospace Engineering	
8	College of Sciences	Political Science	24% A&H
9	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	8% Biomed
10	Engineering & CS	Aerospace Engineering	6% Business
11	Arts & Humanities	Film	3% Education
12	Arts & Humanities	Digital Media	29% Engr & CS
13	Education	Elementary Education	3% CoHPA
14	College of Sciences	Mathematics	3% Rosen
15	College of Sciences	Biology	24% Science
16	Arts & Humanities	Film	
17	Engineering & CS	Civil Engineering	
18	College of Sciences	Physics	
19	Biomedical Sciences	Micro & Molecular Bio	
20	College of Sciences	Psychology	
21	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	
22	Arts & Humanities	History	
23	Engineering & CS	Aerospace Engineering	
24	Arts & Humanities	English	
25	Engineering & CS	Civil Engineering	
26	Arts & Humanities	Liberal Studies	
27	College of Sciences	Radio/ TV	
28	College of Sciences	Psychology	

29	Biomedical Sciences	Micro & Molecular Bio	
30	Biomedical Sciences	Micro & Molecular Bio	
31	College of Sciences	Mathematics	
32	Business Administration	Marketing	
33	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
34	Health and Public Aff.	Nursing	
2004			
1	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	
2	College of Sciences	Political Science	
3	College of Sciences	Mathematics	
4	Arts & Humanities	Film Pending	
5	College of Sciences	Physics	
6	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
7	Arts & Humanities	English	
8	College of Sciences	Political Science	
9	Arts & Humanities	English	
10	Arts & Humanities	History	
11	Arts & Humanities	Humanities	24% A&H
12	College of Sciences	Mathematics	10% Biomed
13	Arts & Humanities	Film	7% Business
14	College of Sciences	Radio/ TV	17% Engr & CS
15	Health and Public Aff.	Social Work Pending	4% Health
16	College of Sciences	Physics	38% Science
17	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	
18	Biomedical Sciences	Micro Molecular Bio	
19	Business Administration	Business	
20	Engineering & CS	Information Technology	
21	College of Sciences	Sociology	
22	College of Sciences	Physics	
23	Biomedical Sciences	Micro Molecular Bio	
24	College of Sciences	Political Science	
25	Arts & Humanities	History	
26	College of Sciences	Political Science	
27	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
28	Biomedical Sciences	Micro Molecular Bio	
29	Business Administration	Accounting	
2005			
1	Engineering & CS	Mechanical Engineering	
2	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
3	College of Sciences	Radio/ TV	

4	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	
5	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
6	Engineering & CS	Electrical Engineering	
7	Biomedical Sciences	Micro Molecular Bio	10% A&H
8	Engineering & CS	Electrical Engineering	10% Biomed
9	Engineering & CS	Computer Engineering	65% Engr & CS
10	College of Sciences	Anthropology	10% Science
11	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	5% Undec.
12	Arts & Humanities	Music	
13	Engineering & CS	Industrial Engineering	
14	Arts & Humanities	Theater	
15	Engineering & CS	Aerospace Engineering	
16	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
17	Undeclared College	Undecided	
18	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
19	Engineering & CS	Computer Science	
20	Biomedical Sciences	Micro Molecular Bio	

Table 4-8 depicts the various academic colleges and majors of the University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists. The academic colleges that are represented by our participants include the College of Arts and Humanities, Burnett College of Biomedical Sciences, College of Business Administration, College of Education, College of Engineering and Computer Science, College of Health and Public Affairs, Rosen College of Hospitality Management, and the College of Sciences. Only one freshman participant was listed as undecided. The College of Engineering and Computer Science attracts 45% of the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida.

Research Question 2

What types of incentives are offered to National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida?

Survey Question 2: Did other colleges offer you better National Merit Scholarship packages?

To find out if the University of Central Florida was offering its National Merit Finalists competitive incentive scholarship packages compared to other universities, respondents were asked if other colleges offered them better National Merit scholarship packages. The results are shown in Tables 4-9.

Results show that 19 of the 130 surveyed were offered better scholarship packages to attend other institutions of higher education as shown in Table 4-9b. The majority of the population surveyed (83.8%) responded that they did not receive better scholarship offers from other institutions. Only 1 out of the 130 respondents did not answer this question.

Table 4-9: OFFERED BETTER PACKAGES

TABLE 4-9a
OFFERED BETTER PACKAGES

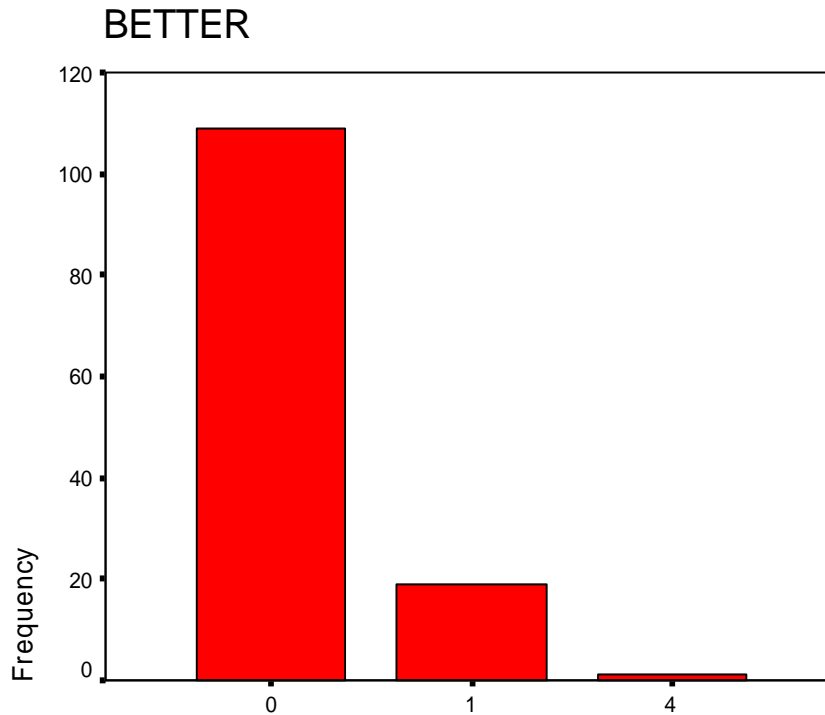
N	Valid	129
	Missing	1

TABLE 4-9b
OFFERED BETTER PACKAGES

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	109	83.8	84.5	84.5
	1	19	14.6	14.7	99.2
	4	1	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	129	99.2	100.0	
Missing		1	.8		
Total		130	100.0		

Respondents entered 0 for UCF offering the better scholarship package, 1 for other colleges offering better scholarship packages than UCF, and 4 signifies no response.

TABLE 4-9c
OFFERED BETTER PACKAGES



Respondents entered 0 for UCF offering the better scholarship package, 1 for other colleges offering better scholarship packages than UCF, and 4 signifies no response.

Survey Question 3: If other colleges offered you better National Merit scholarship packages, what did they offer you?

Respondents who felt that they were offered better scholarship packages from other institutions were asked what other incentives they were offered. Response choices were: 0 not applicable, 1 more money, 2 a car, 3 better laptops, or 4 other. Only 1 out of the 130 respondents did not answer this question.

Results show that 14.6% of the 130 surveyed were offered more money to attend other institutions of higher education as shown in Table 14b. This question was not applicable for 83.8% of the population surveyed. Only .8% responded with ‘other.’ The response of ‘other’ in Table 4-9c included plane tickets to fly home for the winter holidays.

Table 4-10: OTHER OFFERS

**TABLE 4-10a
OTHER OFFERS**

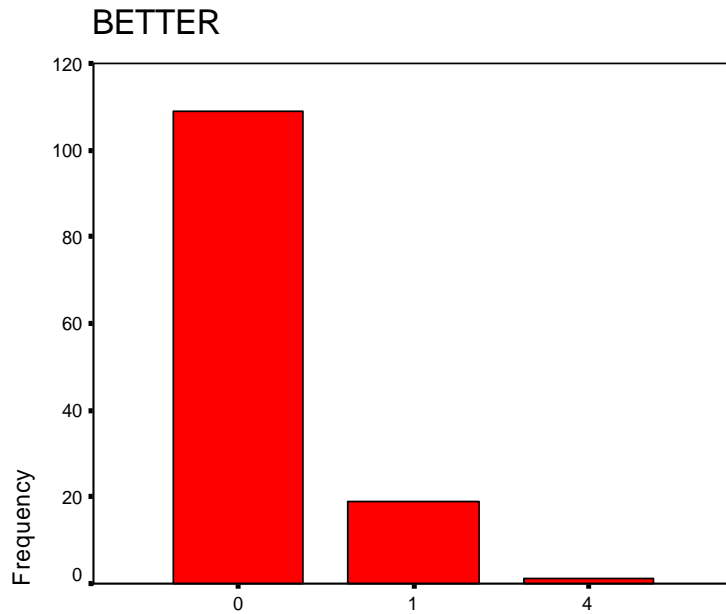
N	Valid	129
	Missing	1

**TABLE 4-10b
OTHER OFFERS**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0= n/a	109	83.8	84.5	84.5
	1= more money	19	14.6	14.7	99.2
	4= other	1	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	129	99.2	100.0	
Missing		1	.8		
Total		130	100.0		

Respondents entered 0 for not applicable, 1 for more money, 2 for a car, 3 for better laptops, or 4 for other.

TABLE 4-10c
OTHER OFFERS



Respondents entered 0 for not applicable, 1 for more money, 2 for a car, 3 for better laptops, or 4 for other.

Survey Question 4: What other types of scholarships or financial aid did you get?

University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists were surveyed to find out how many received particular scholarships in addition to their NMSC package. Scholarship response choices were: 0 for not applicable, 1 for Florida Prepaid, 2 for Bright Futures, 3 for Florida Academic Scholar, and 4 for Other.

Table 4-11: OTHER SCHOLARSHIPS

TABLE 4-11a
OTHER SCHOLARSHIPS

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

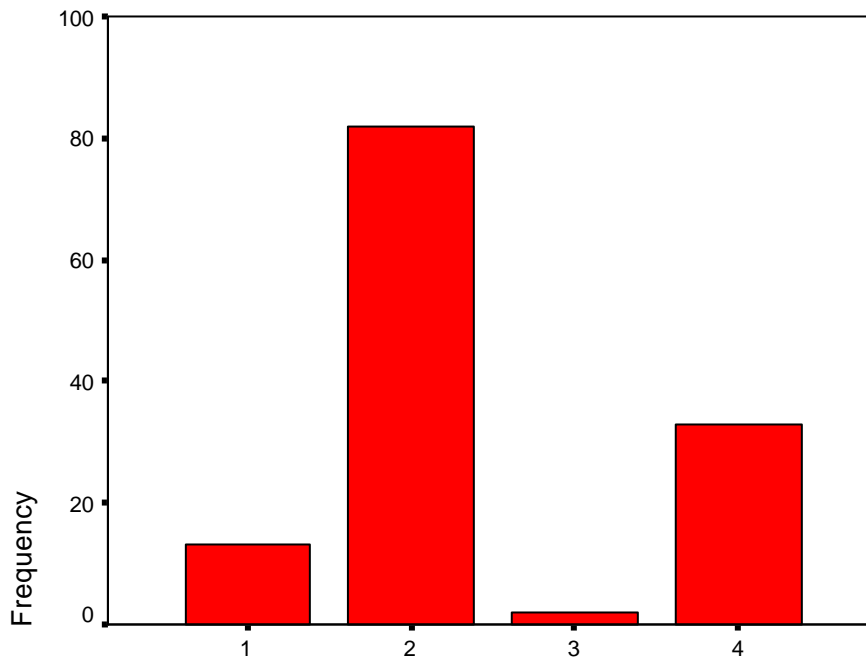
TABLE 4-11b
OTHER SCHOLARSHIPS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= Prepaid	13	10.0	10.0	10.0
	2= Bright	82	63.1	63.1	73.1
	3= FL Academic	2	1.5	1.5	74.6
	4= other	33	25.4	25.4	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Respondents entered 0 for not applicable, 1 for Florida Prepaid, 2 for Bright Futures, 3 for Florida Academic Scholar, and 4 for Other (smaller scholarships sponsored by various companies and organizations).

TABLE 4-11c

OTHER SCHOLARSHIPS



Respondents entered 1 for Florida Prepaid, 2 for Bright Futures, 3 for Florida Academic Scholar, and 4 for Other (smaller scholarships sponsored by various companies and organizations).

Results show that 10% of the 130 surveyed received Florida Prepaid to help pay for college as shown in Table 4-11b. A large 63.1% of the survey respondents received Florida Bright Futures scholarships. Only 1.5% received Florida Academic scholarships while 25.4% received other scholarships through various companies and organizations. All one hundred and thirty participants responded to this question.

Survey Question 7: Did you feel as though you received preferential treatment from various colleges during the recruitment process as a result of being a National Merit Finalist?

To learn if National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida felt as though they had received preferential treatment during the recruitment stage, participants were asked to respond with a 1 for yes or a 2 for no. Preferential treatment was considered to include late acceptance, priority housing, airfare, special invitations, phone calls, and anything else that made the respondent feel wanted by this particular campus.

Table 4-12: PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

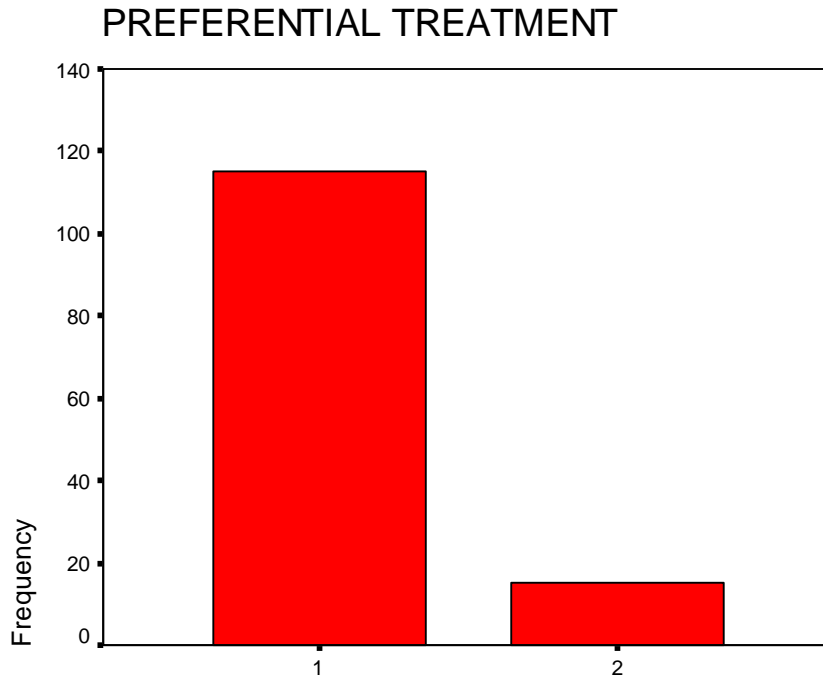
**TABLE 4-12a
PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT**

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

**TABLE 4-12b
PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	115	88.5	88.5	88.5
	2= no	15	11.5	11.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-12c



Respondents entered 1 for yes and 2 for no.

All one hundred thirty respondents replied to this particular question. 88.5% of the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida felt that they had received preferential treatment during the recruitment stage (Table 4-12b). The remaining 11.5% applied themselves and did not feel as though they received preferential treatment.

Survey Question 11: Approximately how much scholarship money per year were you awarded by UCF for being a National Merit Finalist?

There is not a set structure for the amount of money that an institution can award a prospective National Merit Finalist. In order to see if National Merit Finalists were

awarded approximately the same scholarship packages, respondents were asked approximately how much money per year they had received. Respondents entered a 1 for less than \$500 per year, 2 for \$500- \$1,000 per year, 3 for \$1,001- \$2,000 per year, and 4 for more than \$2,000 per year.

Table 4-13: HOW MUCH PER YEAR

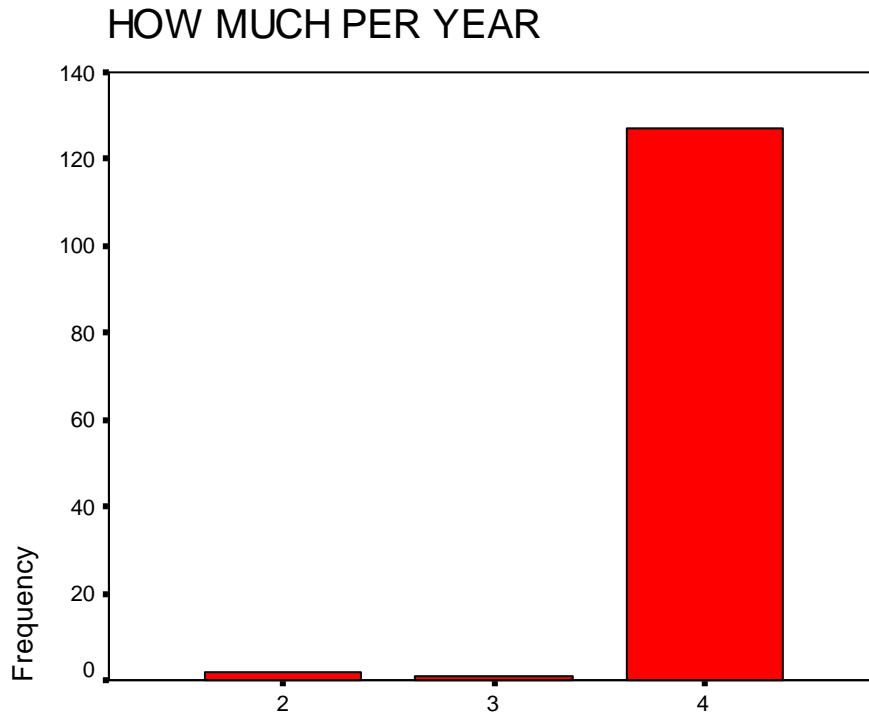
TABLE 4-13a
HOW MUCH PER YEAR

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-13b
HOW MUCH PER YEAR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2= \$500- \$1,000	2	1.5	1.5	1.5
	3= \$1,001- \$2,000	1	.8	.8	2.3
	4 > \$2,000	127	97.7	97.7	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-13c



Respondents entered a 1 for less than \$500 per year, 2 for \$500- \$1,000 per year, 3 for \$1,001- \$2,000 per year, and 4 for more than \$2,000 per year.

Not one respondent received a scholarship for less than \$500 per year. Two respondents (1.5%) received between \$500- \$1,000, .8% of respondents received between \$1,001- \$2,000, and 97.7% received \$2,000 or more per year for being a National Merit Finalist.

Research Question 16: Did you have your own computer or laptop before coming to UCF?

One very popular incentive used to attract National Merit Finalists is the promise of a laptop computer. Respondents were surveyed to see if they owned a computer and if they did, whether or not they brought it with them to college.

Table 4-14: OWN COMP UTER

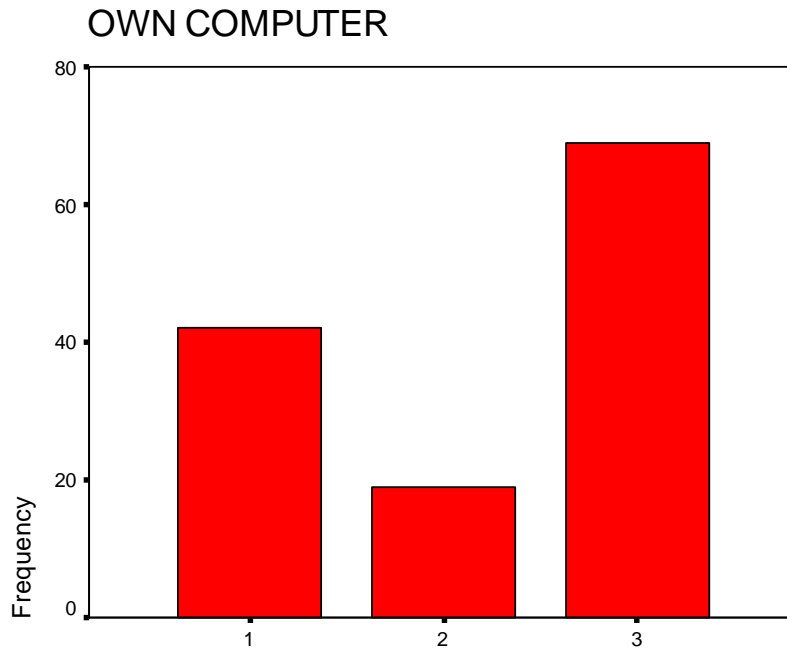
TABLE 4-14a
OWN COMP UTER

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-14b
OWN COMPUTER

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= no	42	32.3	32.3	32.3
	2= yes but did not bring it	19	14.6	14.6	46.9
	3= yes and brought it	69	53.1	53.1	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-14c



Respondents entered 1 for no, 2 for yes but did not bring their computer with them, and 3 for yes and brought their computer with them.

The majority of the respondents (53.1%) owned and brought their own computer with them to college (Table 4-14b). In comparison, only 14.6% of the respondents did not bring their computer with them to college while another 32.3% did not have a computer before coming to college.

Survey Question 17: Did you receive a computer or laptop from UCF as part of your National Merit Finalist incentive?

Table 4-15: TABLE 19

TABLE 4-15a
UCF LAPTOP

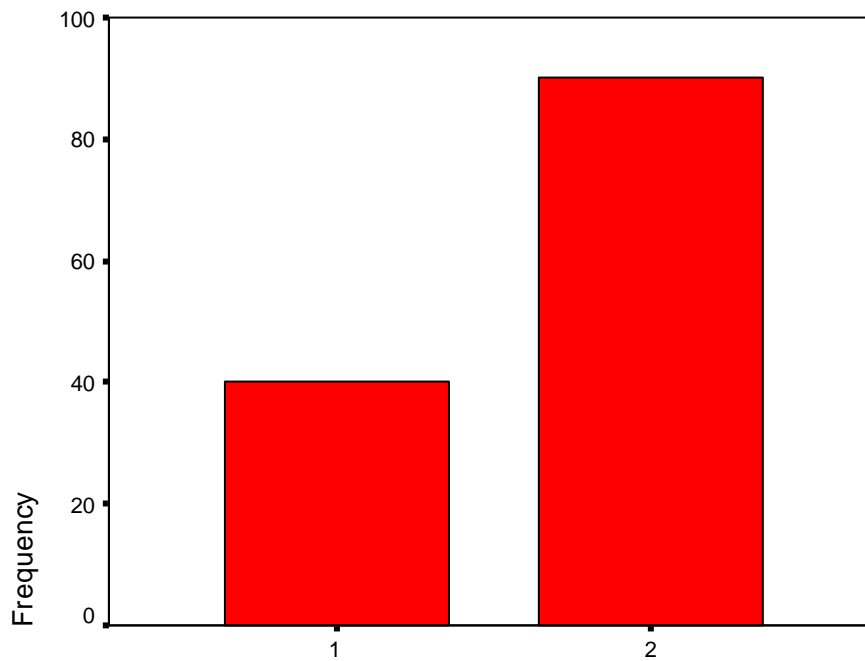
N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-15b
UCF LAPTOP

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= no	40	30.8	30.8	30.8
	2= yes	90	69.2	69.2	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-15c

UCF LAPTOP



Respondents entered 1 for no and 2 for yes.

The majority of the respondents (69.2%) received a free laptop from the University of Central Florida once they enrolled (Table 4-15b). In comparison, only 30.8% of the respondents either did not receive or did not know about the free laptop incentive.

Research Question 3

What are some of the demographic and academic trends among the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida (majors, gender ratios, ethnicity, etc.)?

Survey Question 1: Do you have any siblings or parents who are also National Merit Finalists?

In order to explore the possibility of a hereditary trend among family members and students classified as a National Merit Finalists, respondents were asked if they have any siblings or parents who are also National Merit Finalists. The results are shown in Tables 4-16b and 4-16c.

Table 4-16: FAMILY

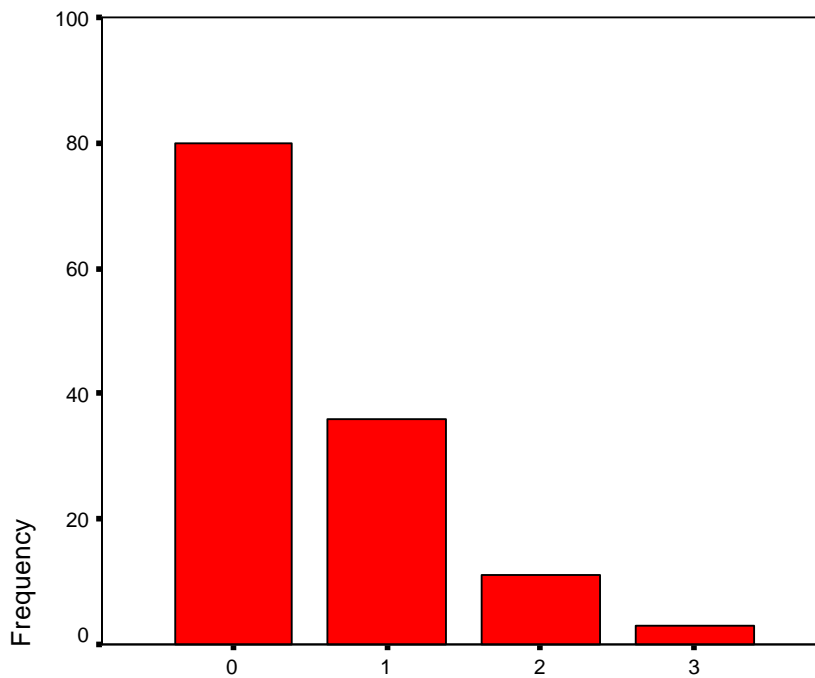
TABLE 4-16a
FAMILY

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-16b
FAMILY

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0= sibling not NMF	80	61.5	61.5	61.5
	1= no siblings	36	27.7	27.7	89.2
	2= sibling is a NMF	11	8.5	8.5	97.7
	3= parent was a NMF	3	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-16c
FAMILY



Respondents entered 0 for has siblings but none are National Merit Finalists, 1 for no siblings, 2 for yes they have a National Merit Finalist sibling, and 3 for yes they have a parent who was a National Merit Finalist.

The majority of the respondents (61.5%) stated that they had a sibling who was not a National Merit Finalist (Table 4-16b). Those without a sibling consisted of 27.7%. Only 8.5% had a sibling that was also labeled as a National Merit Finalist. A mere 2.3% stated that they had a parent who was a National Merit Finalists.

Survey Question 6: Have you ever been diagnosed with a hearing, learning, physical, or visual disability?

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation does not track data on National Merit Scholars with disabilities. Respondents were surveyed to track any trends on types of disabilities that might be common for this population at the University of Central Florida (Tables 4-17a- 4-17g).

Table 4-17: DISABILITY

**TABLE 4-17a
DISABILITY**

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

**TABLE 4-17b
DISABILITY**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= hearing	2	1.5	1.5	1.5
	2= learning	3	2.3	2.3	3.8
	3= physical	1	.8	.8	4.6
	4= visual	9	6.9	6.9	11.5
	5= none	115	88.5	88.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Respondents entered 1 for hearing impairment, 2 for learning impairment, 3 for physical impairment, 4 for visual impairment, and 5 for no impairment.

TABLE 4-17c
HEARING

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	2	1.5	1.5	1.5
	2= no	128	98.5	98.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-17d
LEARNING

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	3	2.3	2.3	2.3
	2= no	127	97.7	97.7	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

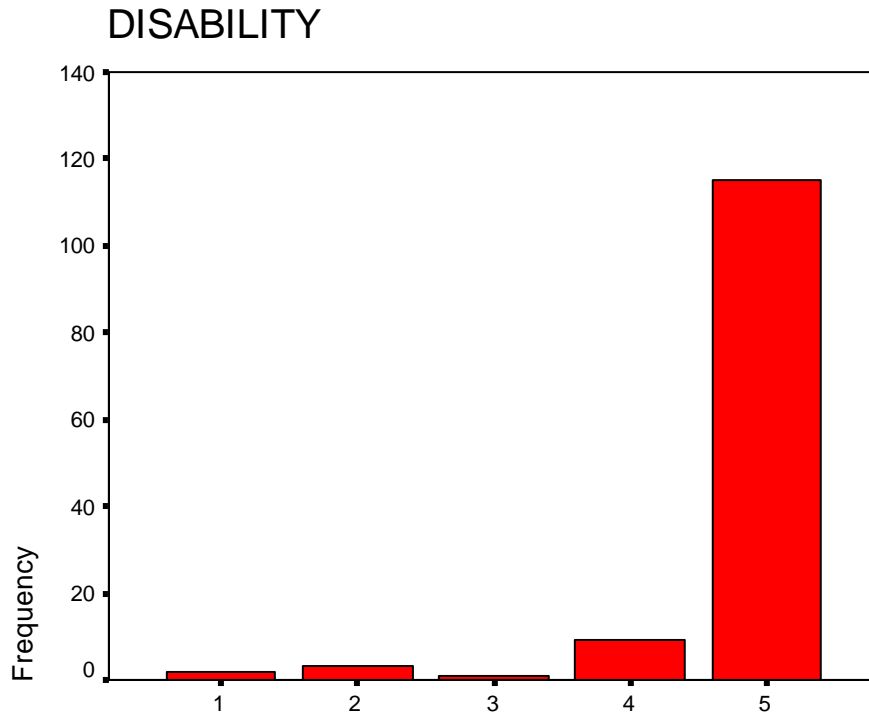
TABLE 4-17e
PHYSICAL

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	1	.8	.8	.8
	2= no	129	99.2	99.2	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Table 4-17f
VISUAL

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	9	6.9	6.9	6.9
	2= no	121	93.1	93.1	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-17g



Respondents entered 1 for hearing impairment, 2 for learning impairment, 3 for physical impairment, 4 for visual impairment, and 5 for no impairment.

Results show that 6.9% of the 130 surveyed considered themselves to have a visual disability. 2.3% of the respondents claimed that they have a documented learning disability. Another 1.5% stated that they have a hearing impairment while only .8% stated to have a physical disability. The remaining 88.5% as shown in Table 4-17b stated that they did not have any documented type of disability.

Survey Question 5: Why did you choose UCF over other colleges?

To explore possible reasons that National Merit Finalists chose the University of Central Florida over other institutions of higher education, respondents were asked if they had chosen UCF based upon any of the following possibilities: school reputation, location, friends already at UCF, scholarship money offered to them, or degree program offerings.

Table 4-18: REASONS

TABLE 4-18a
REASONS

		1 REPUTAT	2 LOCATION	3 FRIENDS	4 MONEY	5 DEGREES
N	Valid	130	130	130	130	130
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0

TABLE 4-18b
REPUTATION

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	37	28.5	28.5	28.5
	2= no	93	71.5	71.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-18c
LOCATION

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	99	76.2	76.2	76.2
	2= no	31	23.8	23.8	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-18d
FRIENDS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	41	31.5	31.5	31.5
	2= no	89	68.5	68.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-18e
MONEY

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	115	88.5	88.5	88.5
	2= no	15	11.5	11.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-18f
DEGREES

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	76	58.5	58.5	58.5
	2= no	54	41.5	41.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

All one hundred thirty respondents replied to this particular question. In regard to campus reputation, Table 4-18b shows that 28.5% of the respondents partially chose to attend the University of Central Florida based on the school's reputation. Ninety-three respondents (71.5%) stated that school reputation was not an influencing factor for choosing this school. In terms of location (Table 4-18c), 76.2% of the respondents chose

UCF because of where it was located while 23.8% said that the location did not influence them. Having friends who already were in attendance at UCF influenced 31.5% (Table 4-18d) of the respondents but was not a factor for the other 68.5%. The most influential reason why National Merit Finalists were choosing UCF was based upon the financial scholarship packages (Table 4-18e) they were offered (88.5%). Degree offerings (Table 4-18f) were another important factor for choosing UCF for 58.5% of our respondents.

Table 4-19
GENDER

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
33% Female	38% Female	40% Female	27% Female	17% Female
67% Male	62% Male	60% Male	73% Male	83% Male
2002	2003	2004	2005	
33% Female	38% Female	41% Female	40% Female	
67% Male	62% Male	59% Male	60% Male	

Table 4-19 depicts the gender ratios by each cohort year. Consistently, each year has been male dominated at the University of Central Florida.

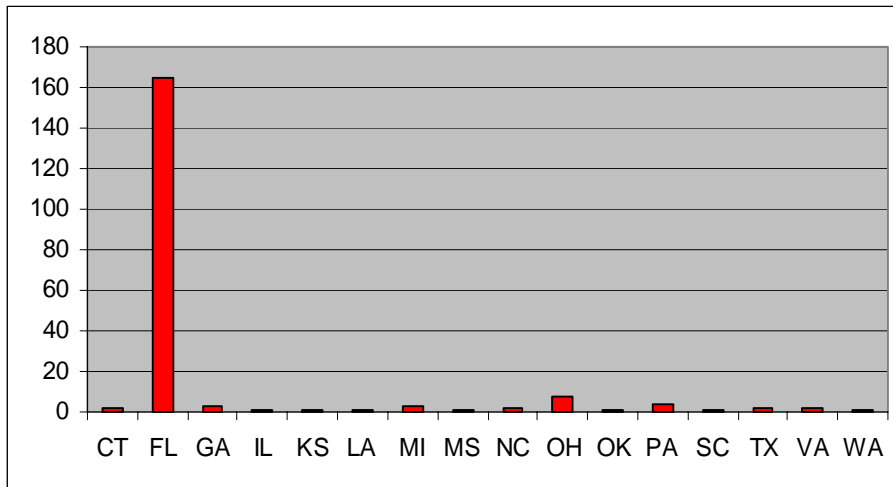
Tables 4-20a and 4-20b depicts the hometown states that the University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists came from before attending this university. Florida (83%) was the most dominant response followed by Ohio (4%). Responses were collected from all 198 participants.

Table 4-20
STATES

TABLE 4-20a
STATES

STATES	
CT	2
FL	165
GA	3
IL	1
KS	1
LA	1
MI	3
MS	1
NC	2
OH	8
OK	1
PA	4
SC	1
TX	2
VA	2
WA	1

TABLE 4-20b
STATES



Tables 4-21a and 4-21b depict the number of University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists who were deemed salutatorian or valedictorian of their high

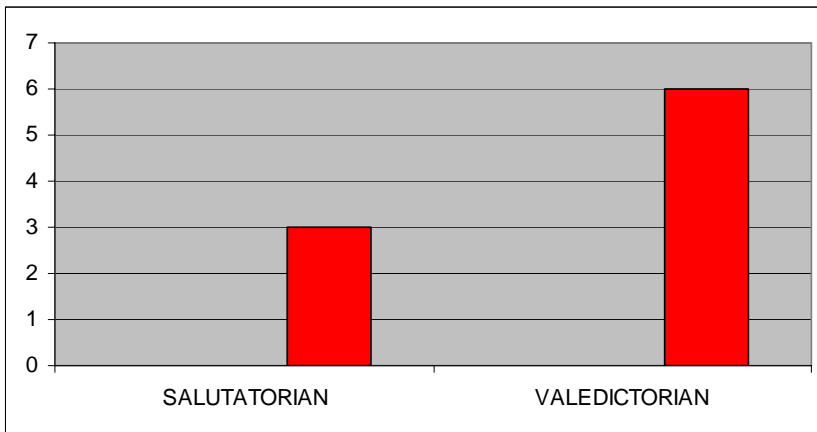
school. The tables show that there were three salutatorians and twice as many (six) valedictorians.

Table 4-21
SALUTATORIAN & VALEDICTORIAN

TABLES 4-21a
SALUTATORIAN & VALEDICTORIAN

Salutatorian	3
Valedictorian	6

TABLES 4-21b
SALUTATORIAN & VALEDICTORIAN



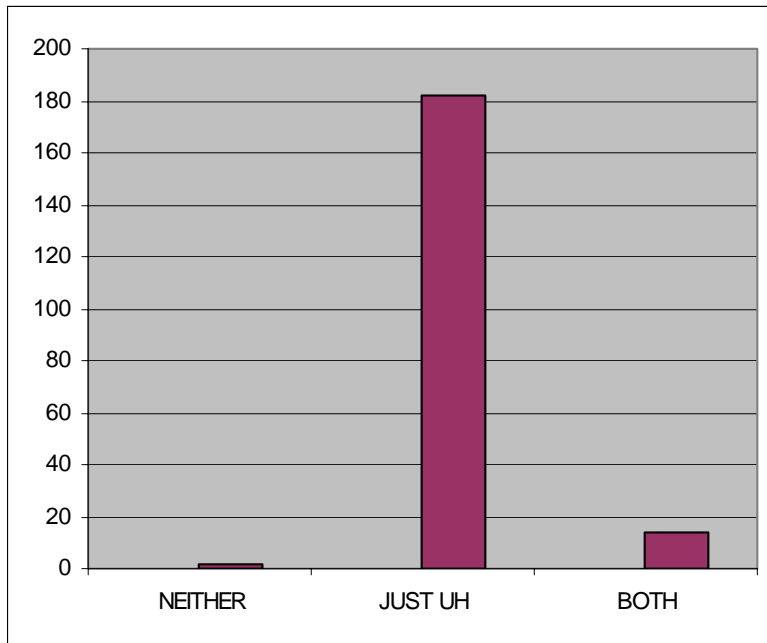
Tables 4-22a and 4-22b depicts the number of National Merit Finalists who did not enroll in the Burnett Honors College, those who did University Honors, and those who did both University Honors and Honors in the Major (note: Honors in the Major is a program where undergraduate students write a thesis). Only 2 of the 198 participants did not join the Burnett Honors College. Their reasoning was that they thought it would be harder and take longer to graduate.

Table 4-22
UNIVERSITY HONORS & HONORS IN THE MAJOR

TABLE 4-22a
UNIVERSITY HONORS & HONORS IN THE MAJOR

Univ. Honors &/or Honors in Major	
Neither	2
Just UH	182
Both	14

TABLE 4-22b
UNIVERSITY HONORS & HONORS IN THE MAJOR



Survey Question 9: How were you recruited in high school by UCF?

In order to better understand effectively how National Merit Finalists felt that they were recruited to the University of Central Florida, participants were asked if they had

received a phone call from UCF; if they had received an e-mail from a UCF Admissions counselor; if they had received mail from UCF; if someone from UCF spoke at their high school; if their high school counselor suggested UCF; or if they initiated the contact with the university (Tables 4-23a- 4-23g).

Table 4-23
RECRUITMENT

TABLE 4-23a
RECRUITMENT

		PHONE	EMAIL	MAIL	HS	COUNSELOR	YOU
N	Valid	130	130	130	130	130	130
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0

TABLE 4-23b
PHONE

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	56	43.1	43.1	43.1
	2= no	74	56.9	56.9	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-23c
E-MAIL

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	48	36.9	36.9	36.9
	2= no	82	63.1	63.1	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-23d
MAIL

Valid	1= yes	100	76.9	76.9	76.9
	2= no	30	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-23e
SPOKE AT HIGH SCHOOL

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1=yes	27	20.8	20.8	20.8
	2= no	103	79.2	79.2	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-23f
COUNSELOR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	12	9.2	9.2	9.2
	2= no	118	90.8	90.8	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-23g
YOU

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= yes	69	53.1	53.1	53.1
	2= no	61	46.9	46.9	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

All 130 participants responded to this survey question. A large 76.9% (Table 4-23d) did recall receiving mail sent to them from UCF. A majority of the students knew they wanted to attend UCF from the start and 53.1% said that they had initiated the contact. Only 9.2% of the participants had heard about UCF through their high school counselor. Twenty-seven respondents (20.8%) recalled someone from UCF speaking at

their high school. A surprising 36.9% stated that they had been contacted by UCF through e-mail while 43.1% had received a phone call from the University.

Survey Question 12: Do you feel that other National Merit Finalists you have met at UCF are less intelligent, about the same, or more intelligent than you are?

In order to assess National Merit Finalists’ perceptions on their intelligence level in comparison to other National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida, participants were asked if they felt less intelligent, about the same, or more intelligent than their counterparts.

Table 4-24
INTELLIGENCE

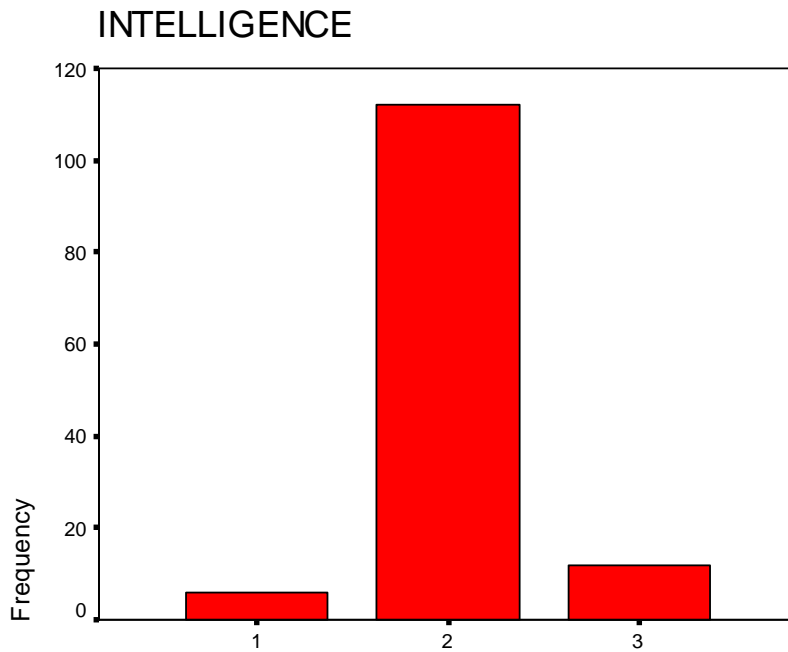
TABLE 4-24a
INTELLIGENCE

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-24b
INTELLIGENCE

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= less	6	4.6	4.6	4.6
	2= same	112	86.2	86.2	90.8
	3= more	12	9.2	9.2	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-24c



Respondents entered 1 for less intelligent than themselves, 2 for about the same level of intelligence, and 3 more intelligent than themselves.

All 130 participants responded to this question. A dominant 86.2 % (Table 4-24b) felt that they were at the same intelligence level as other National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida. Only 9.2% felt that they were smarter than other National Merit Finalists who they have met at this university. The remaining 4.6% felt that they were less intelligent than other National Merit Finalists that they have met at this university.

Survey Question 13: How many times in your UCF college career have you changed your major?

In order to better understand if there was a trend among National Merit Finalists regarding how often they changed their majors, participants were asked how often they have changed their major while at the University of Central Florida.

Table 4-25
MAJOR

TABLE 4-25a
MAJOR

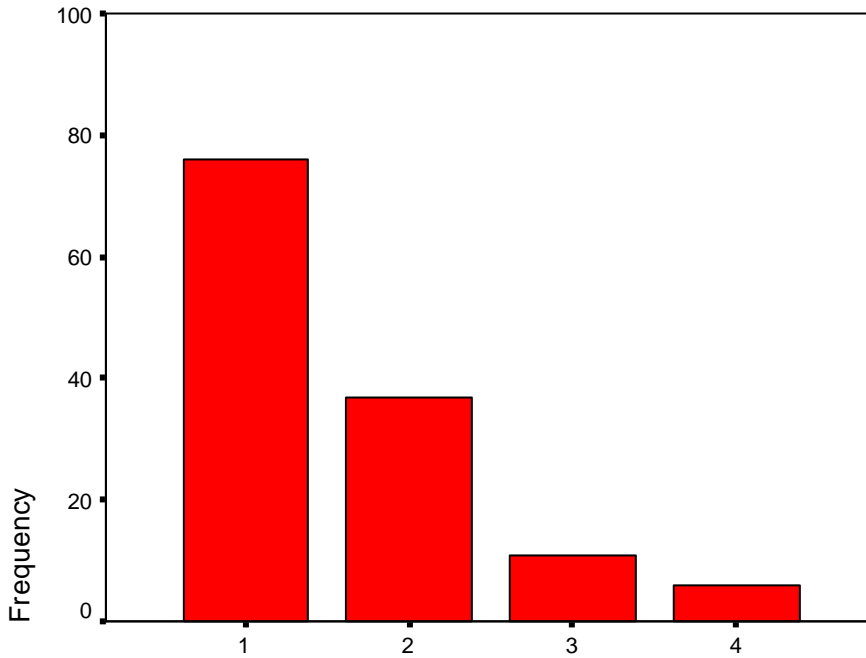
N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-25b
MAJOR

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= never	76	58.5	58.5	58.5
	2= once	37	28.5	28.5	86.9
	3= twice	11	8.5	8.5	95.4
	4= >twice	6	4.6	4.6	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-25c

MAJOR



Respondents entered 1 for never changed their major, 2 for changing their major once, 3 for changing their major two times, and 4 changing their major more than two times during their undergraduate career.

All 130 participants responded to this question. A strong 58.5% of the participants claimed that they had never changed their major. Only 28.5% (Table 4-25b) changed their major once. Some participants (8.5%) changed their major twice while 4.6% changed their major 3 or more times.

Survey Question 14: During your freshman year at UCF, did you hold a job?

Despite receiving National Merit scholarships, participants were asked if they had held jobs during their freshmen years of college to earn extra money.

Table 4-26
JOB

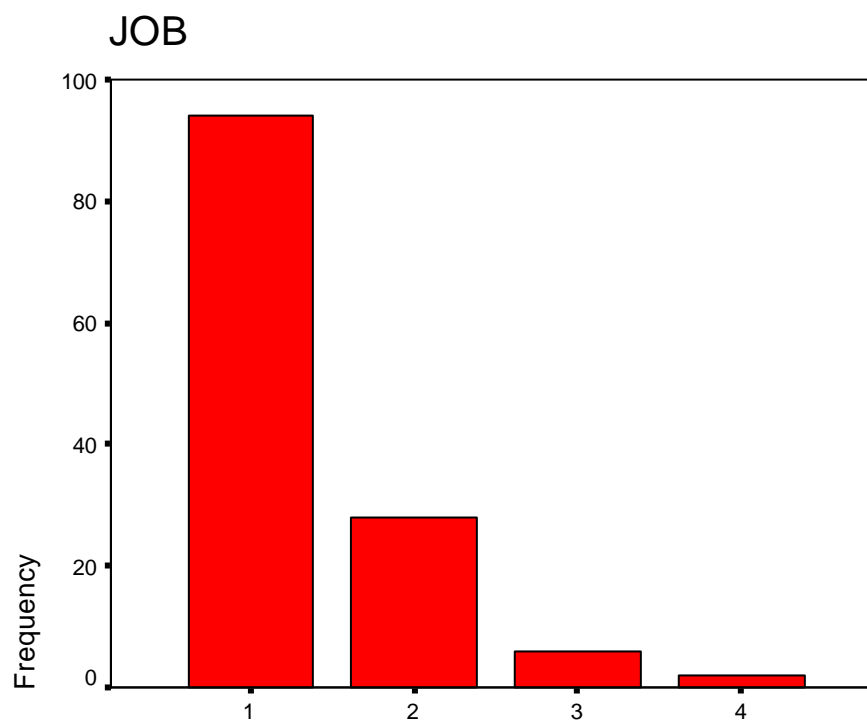
TABLE 4-26a
JOB

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-26b
JOB

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= no job	94	72.3	72.3	72.3
	2= part time	28	21.5	21.5	93.8
	3= >1 job	6	4.6	4.6	98.5
	4= full time	2	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-26c



Respondents entered 1 for no job during college, 2 for holding a part time during college, 3 for part time & more than one job during college, and 4 for holding a full time job during college.

All 130 participants answered this question. Table 4-26b shows the majority of participants (72.3%) did not hold a job during their freshmen year. For those with part time jobs during their first year in college, 21.5% worked. Six participants (4.6%) held more than one part time job and a mere 1.5% worked full time during their freshmen year.

Survey Question 15: During your freshman year at UCF, what was your primary mode of transportation to class?

In order to explore the possibilities of transportation as a recruitment incentive, participants were asked if their main mode of transportation at the University of Central Florida was walking; biking; taking the free shuttle bus; riding the Lynx city bus; driving; or having a friend/family member take them to school each day.

Table 4-27
TRANSPORTATION

TABLE 4-27a
TRANSPORTATION

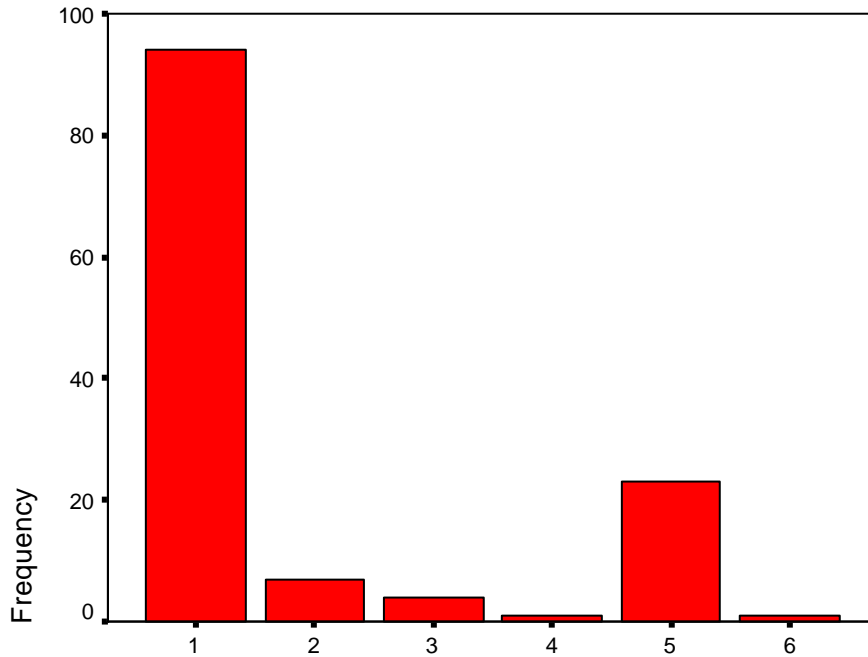
N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-27b
TRANSPORTATION

	6= friend	1	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	
Valid	1= walk	94	72.3	72.3	72.3
	2= bike	7	5.4	5.4	77.7
	3= shuttle	4	3.1	3.1	80.8
	4= Lynx	1	.8	.8	81.5
	5= car	23	17.7	17.7	99.2

TABLE 4-27c

TRANSPORTATION



Respondents entered 1 for walk, 2 for bike, 3 for shuttle bus, 4 for lynx bus, 5 for car, 6 for friend/family, 7 for rollerblades, and 8 for a skateboard.

All 130 participants responded to this question. Table 4-27b shows the majority of participants (72.3%) walked to school while 17.7% drove themselves. None of the participants claimed to rollerblade or skateboard to the university. Seven participants (5.4%) preferred to bike to campus while 3.1% used the campuses' free shuttle bus system. An equal .8% either took the Lynx city bus or had a friend/family member take them to the university.

Survey Question 18: What would you say is a disadvantage of being a National Merit Finalist?

In order to better understand what negative connotations National Merit Finalists have for being labeled as such, participants were asked what they felt the disadvantages are for being a National Merit Finalist.

Table 4-28
DISADVANTAGES

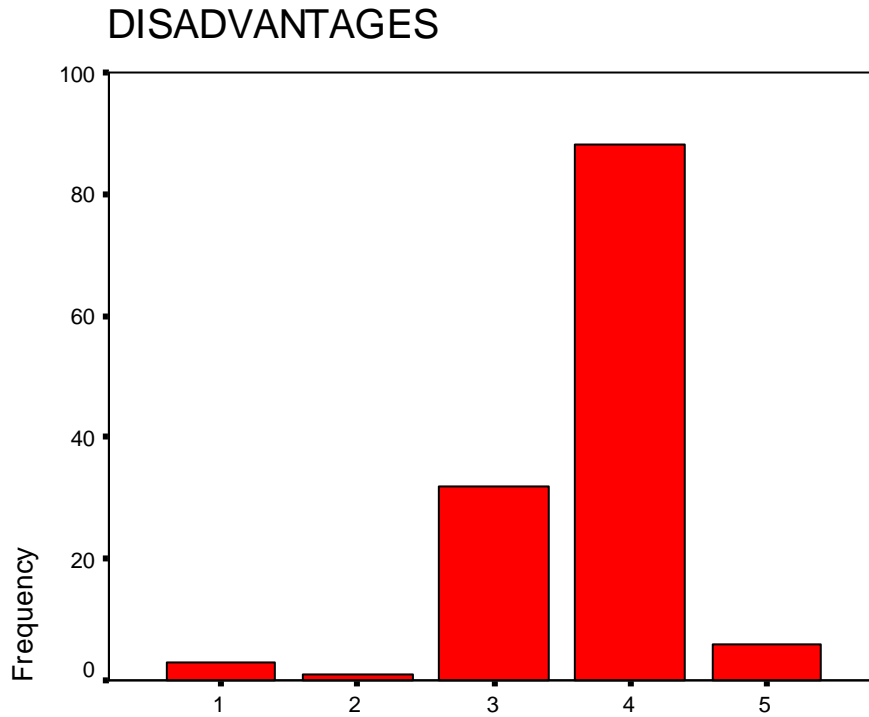
TABLE 4-28a
DISADVANTAGES

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-28b
DISADVANTAGES

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= expectations	3	2.3	2.3	2.3
	2= nerd	1	.8	.8	3.1
	3= pressure	32	24.6	24.6	27.7
	4= none	88	67.7	67.7	95.4
	5= other	6	4.6	4.6	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-28c



Respondents entered 1 for higher expectations from teachers, 2 for being stereotyped as a ‘nerd’, 3 for a greater pressure to succeed, 4 for no disadvantages, and 5 for other disadvantages.

All 130 participants responded to this question. Table 4-28b shows the majority of participants (67.7%) felt that there were no disadvantages to being labeled as a National Merit Finalist. Almost 25% felt a greater pressure to succeed while 2.3% felt that their professors had higher expectations for them in comparison to their classmates. Only 1 participant (.8%) felt stereotyped as a nerd.

The table below (Table 4-29) compares National Merit Finalists’ Burnett Honors College attrition rates to the University of Central Florida’s attrition rates. Data on all 198 participants were collected from the Filemaker database. In total, four National Merit Finalists were disqualified from the University based on their academic performance.

Due to the GPA requirements, each year the Honors attrition rate is higher than the university's attrition rate.

Table 4-29:
HONORS ATTRITION VS. UCF ATTRITION

	Data as of	28-Dec-05			
	HONORS STATUS	UCF STATUS	UCF GPA	HONORS ATTRITION	UCF ATTRITION
1997					
1	Removed	Disqualified	1.919	50%	33%
2	Graduated	Graduated	4		
3	Removed	Graduated	2.604		
4	Graduated	Graduated	3.82		
5	Graduated	Graduated	3.495		
6	Removed	Disqualified	1.73		
1998					
1	Graduated	Graduated	3.637	56%	19%
2	Graduated	Graduated	3.764		
3	Graduated	Graduated	3.523		
4	Graduated	Graduated	3.935		
5	Graduated	Graduated	3.973		
6	Withdrew	Graduated	3.517		
7	Withdrew	Not enrolled	2.079		
8	Graduated	Graduated	3.797		
9	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.417		
10	Removed	Graduated	2.68		
11	Withdrew	Graduated	3.369		
12	Graduated	Graduated	3.786		
13	Withdrew	Not enrolled	2.125		
14	Removed	Graduated	3.176		
15	Removed	Graduated	2.422		
16	Withdrew	Not enrolled	2.733		
1999					
1	Graduated	Graduated	3.746		
2	Withdrawn	Not enrolled	4		
3	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.797		
4	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.229		

5	Graduated	Graduated	4	73%	7%		
6	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.313				
7	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.631				
8	Graduated	Graduated	3.966				
9	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.335				
10	Removed	Graduated	3.47				
11	Graduated	Graduated	3.85				
12	Removed	Graduated	2.477				
13	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.834				
14	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.575				
15	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.74				
2000							
1	Graduated	Graduated	4			43%	13%
2	Graduated	Graduated	3.969				
3	Graduated	Graduated	3.586				
4	Graduated	Graduated	3.32				
5	Graduated	Graduated	3.979				
6	Graduated	Graduated	3.811				
7	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.439				
8	Graduated	Graduated	3.839				
9	Withdrawn	Not enrolled	3.193				
10	Graduated	Graduated	3.993				
11	Withdrawn	Not enrolled	3.741				
12	Graduated	Graduated	3.774				
13	Removed	Not enrolled	2.767				
14	Withdrawn	Not enrolled	3.412				
15	Graduated	Graduated	3.268				
16	Graduated	Graduated	4				
17	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.63				
18	Graduated	Graduated	3.635				
19	Removed	Graduated	2.581				
20	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.869				
21	Graduated	Graduated	3.993				
22	Removed	Active	2.233				
23	Graduated	Graduated	3.6				
24	Graduated	Graduated	3.52				
25	Graduated	Graduated	3.96				
26	Removed	Graduated	3.014				
27	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.377				
28	Graduated	Graduated	3.89				

29	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.427		
30	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.917		
2001					
1	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.572	50%	8%
2	Removed	Not enrolled	3.062		
3	Graduated	Graduated	3.545		
4	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.589		
5	Graduated	Graduated	3.569		
6	Removed	Active	2.886		
7	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.808		
8	Graduated	Graduated	3.341		
9	Active	Active	3.976		
10	Active	Active	3.837		
11	Graduated	Graduated	3.492		
12	Active	Active	3.564		
13	Withdrawn	Not enrolled	3.784		
14	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.912		
15	Graduated	Graduated	3.889		
16	Removed	Active	2.73		
17	Graduated	Graduated	3.605		
18	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.585		
19	Withdrawn	Graduated	3.359		
20	Graduated	Graduated	3.986		
21	Withdrawn	Graduated	4		
22	Withdrawn	Graduated	4		
23	Graduated	Graduated	3.602		
24	Graduated	Graduated	3.341		
2002					
1	Active	Active	3.218		
2	Withdrawn	Not enrolled	2.815		
3	Active	Active	3.212		
4	Active	Active	3.89		
5	Active	Active	3.115		
6	Active	Active	3.887		
7	Withdrawn	Active	3.483		
8	Active	Active	3.76		
9	Removed	Active	2.938		
10	Active	Active	3.949		
11	Never In	Active	3.87		
12	Graduated	Graduated	3.798		

13	Graduated	Graduated	3.875	25%	4%
14	Withdrawn	Active	3.45		
15	Active	Active	3.971		
16	Removed	Active	3.185		
17	Active	Active	3.505		
18	Removed	Active	2.436		
19	Active	Active	4		
20	Active	Active	4		
21	Active	Active	3.645		
22	Active	Active	3.312		
23	Active	Active	3.448		
24	Active	Active	3.685		
2003					
1	Removed	Active	2.948	29%	6%
2	Active	Active	3.823		
3	Active	Active	3.567		
4	Active	Active	3.977		
5	Active	Active	3.261		
6	Active	Active	4		
7	Active	Active	3.541		
8	Active	Active	3.845		
9	Active	Active	3.597		
10	Active	Active	3.744		
11	Active	Active	3.83		
12	Removed	Active	3.401		
13	Active	Active	3.991		
14	Active	Active	3.914		
15	Active	Active	3.411		
16	Never In	Active	1.715		
17	Active	Active	3.42		
18	Active	Active	3.582		
19	Active	Active	3.681		
20	Active	Active	3.875		
21	Removed	Probation	1.949		
22	Active	Active	3.943		
23	Removed	Active	2.972		
24	Removed	Active	2.387		
25	Withdrawn	Not enrolled	2.341		
26	Active	Active	3.643		
27	Active	Active	3.885		

28	Removed	Probation	1.996		
29	Active	Active	3.91		
30	Removed	Disqualified	0.239		
31	Removed	Active	2.574		
32	Active	Active	3.577		
33	Active	Active	3.712		
34	Removed	Active	3.196		
2004					
1	Active	Active	3.817	7%	3%
2	Active	Active	3.813		
3	Active	Active	3.984		
4	Removed	Active	2.386		
5	Active	Active	3.638		
6	Active	Active	3.35		
7	Active	Active	3.75		
8	Active	Active	3.691		
9	Active	Active	3.865		
10	Active	Active	3.869		
11	Active	Active	4		
12	Active	Active	3.133		
13	Active	Active	3.625		
14	Active	Active	3.983		
15	Active	Active	3.862		
16	Active	Active	3.244		
17	Active	Active	3.899		
18	Active	Active	3.945		
19	Active	Active	3.211		
20	Removed	Disqualified	1.675		
21	Active	Active	3.256		
22	Active	Active	3.969		
23	Active	Active	4		
24	Active	Active	3.775		
25	Active	Active	3.723		
26	Active	Active	3.581		
27	Active	Active	3.631		
28	Active	Active	3.465		
29	Active	Active	3.923		
2005					
1	Active	Active	4		
2	Active	Active	3.636		

3	Active	Active	4	0%	0%
4	Active	Active	4		
5	Active	Active	3.596		
6	Active	Active	3.75		
7	Active	Active	4		
8	Active	Active	3.604		
9	H. Prob	Active	2.727		
10	Active	Active	4		
11	Active	Active	3.308		
12	H. Prob	Active	3.077		
13	Active	Active	3.574		
14	Active	Active	3.868		
15	Active	Active	3.594		
16	Active	Active	3.842		
17	Active	Active	3.875		
18	Active	Active	3.724		
19	H. Prob	Active	3.038		
20	Active	Active	4		

(Note: H. Prob stands for Honors probation.)

Research Question 4

Is the method of selecting National Merit Finalists fair?

Survey Question 10: How long would you estimate you studied for the PSAT?

To dispute the rumor that National Merit Finalists are just good test takers and do not study for the PSAT, participants were asked how long they had studied for the PSAT.

Table 4-30
PSAT

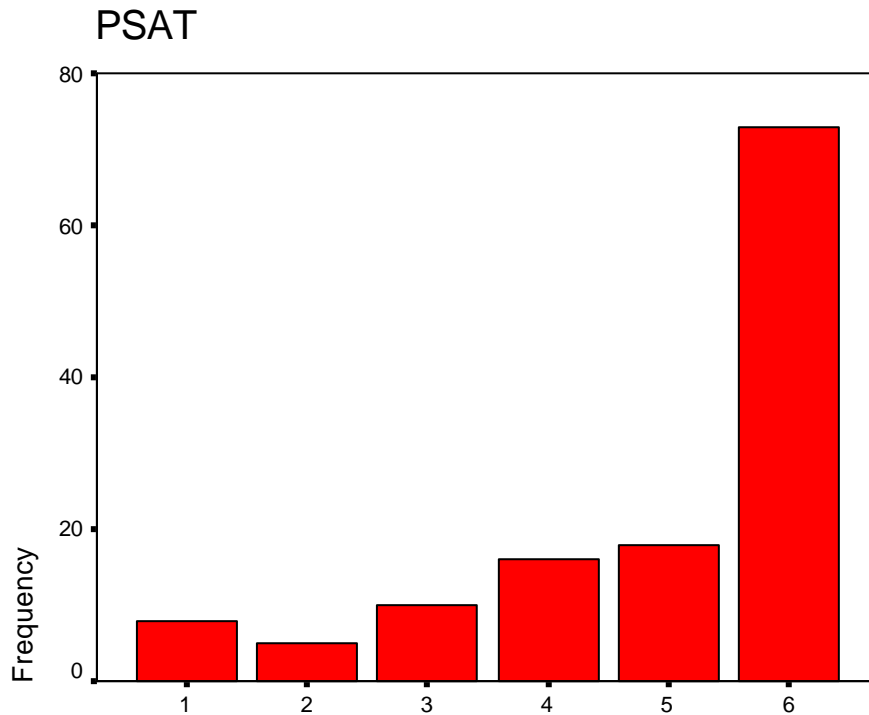
TABLE 4-30a
PSAT

N	Valid	130
	Missing	0

TABLE 4-30b
PSAT

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1= one hour	8	6.2	6.2	6.2
	2= one day	5	3.8	3.8	10.0
	3= for a week	10	7.7	7.7	17.7
	4= weeks	16	12.3	12.3	30.0
	5= prep class	18	13.8	13.8	43.8
	6= not at all	73	56.2	56.2	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 4-30c



Respondents entered 1 if they studied for the PSAT for about an hour, 2 if they studied for one day, 3 if they studied for a few hours over a course of a week, 4 if they studied for a few hours over several weeks, 5 if they took a prep class as well as studied, and 6 if they did not study at all.

All 130 participants responded to this question. Results show (Table 4-30b) a majority of 56.2% of the respondents stated that they did not study at all for the PSAT. Eighteen of the respondents (13.8%) took a prep course for the PSAT. Sixteen of the participants (12.3%) studied a few hours over a course of several weeks. Ten participants (7.7%) studied several hours over a week while 6.2% studied for only one hour and 3.8% studied for one day.

In order to determine whether or not the method of selection of National Merit Finalists is fair, ethnicity ratios were examined to show if a particular population outweighed another.

Table 4-31
ETHNICITY

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
17%Asian	100% White	7% Hispanic	100% White	8% Asian PI
17% Hispanic		93% White		92% White
66% White				
2002	2003	2004	2005	
4% Asian PI	3% Asian	3.5% Asian	10% Asian	
4% Hispanic	3% Black	3.5% Black	5% Black	
92% White	6% Hispanic	7% Hispanic	5% Hispanic	
	88% White	86% White	80% White	

Table 4-31 clearly shows that each year, there was a significantly larger population of White National Merit Finalists over any other population which may lead some people to conclude that the selection method is biased.

CHAPTER FIVE:
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the trends, attrition, and retention rates of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida between the years of 1997 to 2005. Comparisons of student expectations and experiences were analyzed. There was a focus on actions being taken to retain these students as well as an in-depth look at recruitment methods which worked for this population. This study could provide relevant data to assist future higher education administrators in determining ways to increase retention and decrease attrition of National Merit Finalists at their respective universities.

Statement of the Problem

Not all institutions track National Merit Finalist data. Institutions are also very territorial about this kind of information due to the fact that it contains descriptions of their National Merit Finalist recruitment packages. Other institutions do not want competing schools to know what they are offering for fear that the competing institutions will rebut with more enticing offers to prospective students.

The problem addressed in this study is three-fold. First, there is no current literature or research on effective recruitment of National Merit Finalists. How will schools know what methods to try and what methods to avoid? The National Merit Scholarship Corporation is the only institution that tracks certain statistics of National Merit Finalists, but because of their heavy case loads they cannot share all of this

information with the public. Second, institutions do not share information about the types of recruitment packages they offer in fear that their competitors will make a better offer. Students do not know what each school could offer them unless they apply to that school, which can be a costly process. There is also no accountability to actually see if these students receive what they are promised. Third, no one, including the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, tracks National Merit Finalists with disabilities.

Sample and Data Collection

The participants of this study included the one hundred ninety-eight National Merit Finalists enrolled at the University of Central Florida between the years 1997 and 2005. The participants represented the various academic colleges at the University and not one particular major. All but one of the participants came to the University of Central Florida as FTIC (First Time in College) students.

For this study, data analysis on the retention and attrition rates came from the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College database (FileMaker). The data was updated at the end of each fall and spring semester. This information provided a look at the National Merit Finalists' choices of majors; gender ratios by year; enrollment counts per year; cumulative GPA's; removed or withdrawn status from the University; percentages of attrition by cohort year; percentage of graduates per cohort year; and the percentages disqualified or not enrolled in the University by cohort year.

Data analysis on the trends of National Merit Finalists came from a survey (Appendix G) given to participants. The participants received notification by e-mail and

United States mail that they would receive an important survey in September, 2005. The surveys were collected throughout the months of October and November, 2005.

Participants who did not respond by e-mail or U.S. mail were contacted by telephone.

The data was coded and entered into SPSS for descriptive statistics and Microsoft Word tables. SPSS is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 10.0 for Windows).

Instrumentation

The survey questionnaire (Appendix G) was an original instrument designed by this researcher on behalf of the Burnett Honors College at the University of Central Florida. The survey was designed to collect data on the National Merit Finalists who attend the University of Central Florida. The data collected focused on National Merit Finalists' perceptions and trends in relation to their experiences and time at the University of Central Florida.

Filemaker was founded in 1998 and is a subsidiary of Apple Computer, Inc. This database was designed to serve as an information management sharing system for departments that need to share and access data of all types. It is a secure way to share information with coworkers and clients over a network. Filemaker is used to store and archive virtually unlimited amounts of data. It is the preferred method of the Burnett Honors College to manage and track student data.

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

The summary of findings and discussion of the data collected from the survey (Appendix G) and Filemaker database for the four research questions of this study are presented below:

Research Question 1

What is a National Merit Finalist?

ACT Scores

Data to depict an average ACT score for National Merit Finalist at the University of Central Florida was extracted from the Filemaker database housed in the Burnett Honors College. A score of 36 is the highest score attainable. Only 35% (Table 4-1) of this population listed an ACT score. Findings indicated that the average ACT score for this sample population was 32. According to the University of Central Florida website (2005), the average ACT score was 25. For Burnett Honors College students at the University of Central Florida, the average ACT score in 2005 was 29. The national average ACT score in 2005 and 2004 was 20.9 (www.act.org). This shows that UCF students are 5 points above the national average ACT score while UCF Burnett Honors College students are 9 points above the national average. National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida are 11.1 points above the national average.

SAT Scores

Table 4-3 depicts the SAT (formerly known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test) results and shows participants' scores ranged from 1280 to a perfect 1600 for this sample. A large percentage (99%) of our participants had an SAT score as opposed to only 35% who had an ACT score. The majority of participants from this sample scored in the mid 1400 range on the SAT. Burnett Honors College students at the University of Central Florida have an average SAT score of 1340. The average SAT score for University of Central Florida students in 2005 was 1178. According to the College Board (2005), the average SAT score for 2005 was 1028 (verbal score of 508 and math score of 520). In 2004, the average SAT score was 1026 (verbal score of 508 and math score of 518). In comparison to the 2005 national average SAT score of 1028, the general population at the University of Central Florida scored 150 points above the national average. University of Central Florida Burnett Honors College students are 312 points above the average while National Merit Finalists at the University are over 400 points above the national average.

UCF GPA

There was not a significant trend among cohort years in terms of UCF grade point averages. For the entering class of 1997, according to Table 4-4, half of participants (50%) had a GPA of less than 3.0. For the cohort year of 1998, the highest percentage of grades landed between a 3.600- 3.999 (38%). The same was true for 1999 (47%) and 2000 (50%). In 2001, the highest percentage of grades slipped to 3.000-3.599 (46%). The average 3.6- 3.999 returned for cohort years 2002 (42%), 2003 (41%), 2004 (62%), and

2005 (35%). For cohort years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005 the average grade for National Merit Finalists was an A (3.6 to 3.999). For cohort year 1997, the average grade was a C or lower (50%) as shown in Table 4-4. For cohort year 2001, the average grade point average fell between 3.000 and 3.599 (46%) which is a B average. University of Central Florida Burnett Honors College students must maintain a 3.2 UCF GPA and a 3.0 Honors GPA (based on their Honors courses only) to remain in good standing. Data was not available on the average UCF student GPA. However, the national average undergraduate GPA in public colleges and universities in 2002-2003 was 2.97 (<http://gradeinflation.com>).

Cumulative Honors Attrition

Table 4-5 shows the number of National Merit Finalists per year that were either removed or withdrawn from the Burnett Honors College. A student can be in good standing with the University but removed from Honors for various reasons, including but not limited to: not enrolling in an Honors course in over two semesters; low UCF (3.2) or Honors (3.0) GPA; scheduling conflicts due to double/triple majoring; and completing University graduation requirements but not the Burnett Honors College requirements. In 1997 (50%), 1998 (56%), and 1999 (73%), the Burnett Honors College lost more than half of its National Merit Finalists per cohort year. These numbers do not necessarily translate into high attrition rates due to program difficulty. For cohort year 2000, the attrition percentage fell down to 43% but returned to 50% for cohort year 2001. The percentage of attrition declined by nearly half for cohort years 2002 (25%) and 2003

(29%). An attrition rate of 7% is shown for 2004. The Burnett Honors College has not lost any of its 2005 cohort year students as of spring, 2006. However, data from 2004 and 2005 should not be taken into account since these students have not had a significant amount of time to acquire as many credit hours as the 1997 to 2003 incoming students.

Cumulative Honors Status

Table 4-6 shows the percentages of National Merit Finalists in the Burnett Honors College who were removed, withdrawn, placed on probation or extended probation, or graduated. Of the nine cohort years examined (1997 to 2005), the cohort years of 1997 to 2001 are the most plausible to have participants graduating based upon an average four to five years to attain a degree. In terms of percentages of National Merit Finalists who graduated from the University of Central Florida and from the Burnett Honors College, the cohort year for 1997 had 50% graduate; 1993 had 43%; 1999 had 27%; 2000 had 57%; and 2001 is currently at 38%.

In regard to academic probation (overall UCF GPA less than 3.2 and/or Honors GPA less than 3.0), it is positive to see that none of the Honors National Merit Finalists were on extended probation (Table 4-6). For cohort year 2002, 4% are on probation. For cohort year 2005, 15% are on probation. None of the participants from cohort years 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2004 were on Honors probation at the time of this study.

In comparing Table 4-6 and Table 4-7, results show that UCF graduated more National Merit Finalists than the Burnett Honors College. Again, this can be explained by

the fact that a student can be in good standing with the University but removed from Honors for various reasons, including but not limited to: not enrolling in an Honors course in over two semesters; low UCF (3.2) or Honors (3.0) GPA; scheduling conflicts due to double/triple majoring; and completing University graduation requirements but not the Burnett Honors College requirements. For cohort year 1997, UCF graduated 67% of that class while only 50% graduated from the Honors College. In 1998, 81% graduated from UCF while only 43% graduated from Honors. In 1999, it was 93% versus 27%. In 2000, it was 83% versus 57%. In 2001, it was 71% versus 38%.

It is not common for students to become disqualified from the University, especially National Merit Finalists. A student is disqualified from the University of Central Florida upon failure to achieve a minimum 2.0 GPA during the subsequent term after being on probation. A student who is disqualified may not enroll at the University for two semesters following disqualification. Readmission after two semesters is not automatic. Disqualified students are normally expected to complete the Florida AA degree before petitioning for readmission. Table 4-7 shows that 2 students (23%) from the 1997 cohort year were disqualified. One student (3%) from 2003 and one (3%) from 2004 were also disqualified.

Some students had a status of “not enrolled” which means they did not sign up for a class in over two semesters. This number does not normally exceed more than four students per cohort year. For those not enrolled (Table 4-7), 1998 had 19%; 1999 had 7%; 2000 had 13%; 2001 had 8%; 2002 had 4%; and 2003 had 3%. For cohort years 1997, 2004, and 2005, no one was listed as not enrolled.

Academic Colleges and Majors

The University of Central Florida consists of the following academic colleges: Arts and Humanities; Biomedical Sciences; Burnett Honors College; Business Administration; Education; Engineering and Computer Science; Health and Public Affairs; Rosen College of Hospitality Management; Optics and Photonics; and Sciences.

According to Table 4-8, in 1997 the majority of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida either majored in Arts and Humanities (33%) or Engineering and Computer Science (33%) followed by Business (17%) and Science (17%). In 1998, the majority of National Merit Finalists majored in Engineering and Computer Science (44%) followed by Arts and Humanities (31%). In 1999, the majority of National Merit Finalists majored in Arts and Humanities (33%) followed by Engineering and Computer Science (27%) and Science (27%). In 2000, 64% majored in Engineering and Computer Science, followed by 13% in Arts and Humanities as well as Business. In 2001, the trend continued with the majority of 58% majoring in Engineering and Computer Science followed by 13% in both Business and Science. Engineering and Computer Science continued to take the lead in 2002 with 62% followed by 17% in Arts and Humanities.

More variety of college choices started to appear in 2003, yet Engineering and Computer Science still led with 29%. Arts and Humanities along with Science followed close behind, both with 24%. The first sign of change in the Engineering and Computer Science trend came in 2004 when 38% majored in the College of Science. Some Burnett Honors College faculty members attribute this change to popular television shows among

this age population such as CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, Bones, and Forensic Files. However, in 2005, 65% majored in Engineering and Computer Science.

The majority of National Merit Finalists who chose the University of Central Florida majored in Engineering and Computer Science, followed by Arts and Humanities and the College of Science. The colleges with the least representation of National Merit Finalists include Education, Health and Public Affairs, and the Rosen College of Hospitality Management. The College of Optics and Photonics is a graduate program and this study only explored our undergraduate population of National Merit Finalists. In comparison to the other Florida universities, the top five undergraduate majors in 2005 according to the Board of Governors website (2005) were: Business Management; Education; Health Professions; Engineering; and Life Sciences.

Based on the above data, the average National Merit Finalist at the University of Central Florida had an ACT score of 32; an SAT score in the mid 1400s; a GPA between 3.000 and 3.999 (A or B average); had approximately a 13% chance of being removed from Honors based on the 26 out of 198 that are currently removed; had approximately a 19% chance of being withdrawn from Honors based on the 37 out of 198 that are currently withdrawn; has a 2% chance of going on Honors probation based on the 4 out of 198 students that did so; had a 2% chance of being disqualified from the University based on the 4 out of 198 students that did so; and would likely major in Engineering and Computer Science, Arts and Humanities, or Science.

Research Question 2

What types of incentives are offered to National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida?

Better Scholarship Packages

To ascertain if the University of Central Florida was offering its National Merit Finalists competitive incentive scholarship packages compared to other universities, respondents were asked if other colleges offered them better National Merit Scholarship packages; what other types of packages were offered; if they felt they received preferential treatment; how much money they were awarded by UCF; and if they had a computer or if they received one from UCF. The results were measured by survey questions 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 16, and 17.

Table 4-9b (survey question 2) shows that 83.1% of the respondents felt that other schools did not offer them more enticing packages than the University of Central Florida. Only 16.2% felt that they received better scholarship package offers from other schools, but they still chose the University of Central Florida over all of the other universities. Data on other universities' scholarship packages was not available for comparisons.

Other Offers

Survey question 3 asked respondents to list what types of packages other schools offered them if they were offered better scholarship packages than the University of Central Florida's. Results show (Table 4-10b) that 14.6% of the 130 surveyed (one

participant did not respond) were offered more money to attend other institutions of higher education as shown in Table 4-10b. This question was not applicable for 83.8% of the population surveyed who responded that they did not receive better scholarship packages from other institutions (survey question 2). Only .8% responded with ‘other.’ The response of ‘other’ in Table 4-10b and 4-10c included plane tickets to fly home for the winter holidays. None of the participants received offers for a car or better computer equipment.

Other Scholarships

University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists were surveyed (survey question 4) to find out how many received particular scholarships in addition to their National Merit Scholarship Corporation packages while at the University of Central Florida. Results show that only 10% of the 130 surveyed received Florida Prepaid to help pay for college as shown in Table 4-11b. In spring 2005, the Florida Prepaid College plan set a new record by selling its one millionth plan (College Board, 2005).

A large percentage (63.1%) of the survey respondents received Florida Bright Futures scholarships. This is a huge incentive for many National Merit Finalists who live in Florida. Bright Futures is a lottery-funded scholarship program that rewards students for their academic achievements during high school by providing funding for them to pursue postsecondary educational and career goals, but only in Florida. It is an incentive for Florida’s best and brightest to attend state universities. According to the Florida Department of Education (2006), during 2004-05, over 130,000 Florida students received funding for a Florida Bright Futures Scholarship. Only 1.5% received Florida Academic

scholarships while 25.4% received other scholarships through various companies and organizations.

Preferential Treatment

Survey question 7 sought to examine if National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida felt as though they had received preferential treatment during the recruitment stage. Preferential treatment was considered to include late acceptance, priority housing, airfare, special invitations, phone calls, and anything else that made the respondent feel wanted by this particular campus. A significant 88.5% of the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida felt that they had received preferential treatment during the recruitment stage for being a National Merit Finalist (Table 4-12b). The remaining 11.5% applied to the university themselves and did feel as though they received preferential treatment during the recruitment stage.

How Much Per Year

In order to see if National Merit Finalists were awarded approximately the same scholarship packages, respondents were asked (survey question 11) approximately how much money per year they had received. Response options included these figures: less than \$500 per year; \$500- \$1,000 per year; \$1,001- \$2,000 per year; and more than \$2,000 per year. Table 4-13b shows that not one respondent received a scholarship for less than \$500 per year. Two respondents (1.5%) received between \$500- \$1,000, .8% of respondents received between \$1,001- \$2,000, and 97.7% received \$2,000 or more per year for being a National Merit Finalist. Exact data on award amounts could not be

collected from the Office of Student Financial Assistance due to the sensitivity of the information.

Own Computer

Respondents were surveyed (survey question 16) to see if they owned a computer before coming to college and, if they did, whether or not they brought it with them to college. Response options were: no; yes, they owned a laptop but did not bring it with them; and yes, they owned one and they brought the laptop with them. The majority of the respondents (53.1%) owned a computer and brought it with them to college (Table 4-14b). In comparison, only 14.6% of the respondents did not bring their computer with them to college while another 32.3% did not have a computer before coming to college.

UCF Laptop

The most popular incentive at the University of Central Florida among its National Merit Finalists is the incentive of a free laptop computer given during the start of the freshman year. Despite more than half of the respondents owning a computer before attending college, the incentive for a new laptop was still an attractive offer due to computer upgrades (such as portability, increased processing speed, and more memory than what they currently had). The majority of the respondents (69.2%) received a free laptop from the University of Central Florida once they enrolled (Table 4-15b). In comparison, only 30.8% of the respondents either did not receive or know about the free laptop incentive.

Research Question 3

What are some of the demographic, academic, and other trends among the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida (majors, gender ratios, etc.)?

Family

In order to explore the possibility of a trend among family members and students classified as a National Merit Finalists, respondents were asked (survey question 1) if they have any siblings or parents who are also National Merit Finalists. Response options included the following: has a sibling(s) but is not a National Merit Finalists; no siblings; yes, they have a National Merit Finalist sibling; and yes, they have a parent who was a National Merit Finalist. The majority of the respondents (61.5%) stated that they had a sibling who was not a National Merit Finalist (Table 4-16b). Those without a sibling consisted of 27.7%. Only 8.5% had a sibling that was also labeled as a National Merit Finalist. A mere 2.3% stated that they had a parent who was a National Merit Finalists.

Disability

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation does not track data on National Merit Scholars with disabilities. Respondents were surveyed (survey question 6) to track any trends on types of disabilities that might be common for this population at the University of Central Florida (Tables 4-17a- 4-17g). Response options consisted of: hearing impairment; learning impairment; physical impairment; visual impairment; and no impairment. Results show that 6.9% of the 130 surveyed considered themselves to have a visual disability (Table 4-17f). A small 2.3% of the respondents claimed that they have a documented learning disability (Table 4-17d). Another 1.5% (Table 4-17c) stated that

they have a hearing impairment while only .8% (Table 4-17e) stated that they have a physical disability. The remaining 88.5% as shown in Table 4-17b stated that they did not have any documented type of disability.

Reasons

To explore possible reasons that National Merit Finalists chose the University of Central Florida over other institutions of higher education, survey question 5 asked respondents if they had chosen UCF based upon any of the following criteria: school reputation, location, friends already at UCF, scholarship money offered to them, or degree program offerings. In regard to campus reputation, Table 4-18b shows that 28.5% of the respondents partially chose to attend the University of Central Florida based on the school's reputation.

Ninety-three respondents (71.5%) stated that school reputation was not an influencing factor for choosing this school. In terms of geography (Table 4-18c), 76.2% of the respondents chose UCF because of where it was located while 23.8% said that this did not influence them. Having friends who already were in attendance at UCF influenced 31.5% (Table 4-18d) of the respondents but was not a factor for the other 68.5%. The most influential reason why National Merit Finalists were choosing UCF was based upon the financial scholarship packages (Table 4-18e) they were offered (88.5%). Degree offerings (Table 4-18f) were another important factor for choosing UCF for 58.5% of the respondents.

Gender

In regard to gender, Table 4-19 depicts the National Merit Finalists' gender ratios by each cohort year. Consistently, each year has been male dominated at the University of Central Florida. In 1997, it was 33% female and 67% male. There was a slight rise for the female population in 1998 when it was 38% female and 62% male. Another climb in the female population was evident in 1999 when it was 40% female and 60% male. However, there was a significant decline in the National Merit Finalist female population in 2000 when it was only 27% female as opposed to 73% male. The population was at an all time low for females in 2001 when it was 17% female and 83% male. In 2002, the population was 33% female and 67% male. A slight increase in the female population appeared again in 2003 with a 38% female to 62% male ratio. 2004 showed another increase with 41% female to 59% male ratio. In 2005, there was a 40% female to 60% male ratio of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida. In comparison, the average enrollment by gender at the University of Central Florida is 44% male and 56% female. Similarly, according to the Board of Governors website (2005), the average gender ratio for all Florida state universities was 43% male and 57% female. However, the National Merit Finalist gender ration at the University of Central Florida is 66% male and 34% female.

States

In order to determine if a trend exists in hometown states among the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida, data was collected from the Filemaker database to determine what states the participants came from before attending UCF.

According to the UCF website, the general population for this university consists of 94.6% in-state students while 5.4% are out-of-state students. Tables 4-20a and 4-20b depict the hometown states. National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida were primarily from Florida (83%), followed by Ohio (4%). Responses were collected from all 198 participants. National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida only represent 16 states: Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. According to the UCF website (2005), the top feeder states for the University as a whole consist of Georgia, Illinois, Maine, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia. The common states between where UCF National Merit Finalists and the general UCF population are coming from in 2005 were Georgia, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia.

Salutatorian or Valedictorian

Using the Filemaker database, the possibility of a trend showing whether or not National Merit Finalists tend to be their high school salutatorian or valedictorian was explored. Tables 4-21a and 4-21b depict the number of University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists who were deemed salutatorian or valedictorian of their high school. The tables show that there were three salutatorians (1.5% of the National Merit Finalists) and twice as many (six) valedictorians (3% of the National Merit Finalists). Data was not found on how many UCF students were salutatorians or valedictorians. However, of the 5,498 student records in the UCF Burnett Honors College database, 41

were listed as salutatorians (.007%) and 60 were listed as valedictorians (1%). Data on what colleges and universities salutatorians and valedictorians choose could not be found.

University Honors and Honors in the Major

Data was analyzed from the Filemaker database to explore whether or not National Merit participants enrolled in the Burnett Honors College; if these enrollees chose only the University Honors program; or if these chose both the University Honors program in addition to Honors in the Major (where they write an undergraduate thesis).

Only 2 (1%) of the 198 participants (Table 4-22) did not join the Burnett Honors College. Their reasoning was that they thought it would be harder and take longer to graduate. Only 7% of the University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists chose to do both University Honors and Honors in the Major. Participating in just the University Honors program is the most popular choice among the National Merit Finalists at UCF.

Recruitment

In order to better understand effectively how National Merit Finalists felt that they were recruited to the University of Central Florida, participants were asked (survey question 9) if they had received a phone call from UCF; if they had received an e-mail from a UCF Admissions counselor; if they had received mail from UCF; if someone from UCF spoke at their high school; if their high school counselor suggested UCF; or if they initiated the contact with the university. A large 76.9% (Table 4-23d) did recall receiving mail sent to them from UCF. A majority of the students knew they wanted to attend UCF from the start and 53.1% said that they had initiated the contact. Only 9.2% of the participants had heard about UCF through their high school counselor. Twenty-seven

respondents (20.8%) recalled someone from UCF speaking at their high school. A surprising 36.9% stated that they had been contacted by UCF through e-mail while 43.1% had received a phone call from the university. High school counselors seem to be the least effective tool for recruiting National Merit Finalists to UCF (9.2%) as shown in Table 27f while regular mail (76.9%) still remains the most effective recruitment tool as shown in Table 4-23d. According to the 2002 state university system rankings in Florida (Table 2-1), the University of Central Florida ranked fourth in the number of National Merit Finalists.

Intelligence

In order to assess National Merit Finalists' perceptions of their intelligence level in comparison to other National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida, participants were asked (survey question 12) if they felt less intelligent, about the same, or more intelligent than their counterparts. A dominant 86.2 % (Table 4-24b) felt that they were at the same intelligence level as other National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida. Approximately 9.2% felt that they were smarter than other National Merit Finalists whom they have met at this university. Only 4.6% felt that they were less intelligent than other National Merit Finalists they have met at the University of Central Florida.

Major

In order to better understand if there were trends among National Merit Finalists regarding how often they changed their majors, participants were asked (survey question 13) how often they have done so while at the University of Central Florida. Response

options included these: never changed their major; changed their major once; changed their major two times; and changed their major more than two times during their undergraduate career. A majority 58.5% of the participants claimed that they never changed their major. Only 28.5% (Table 4-25b) changed their major once. Some participants (8.5%) changed their major twice while 4.6% changed their major 3 or more times. According to the Office of Academic Affairs at the University of California, it is estimated that between 20% to 50% of all entering college students are undecided about their major, while 50% to 70% of college students will change their majors at least once. It is interesting to compare the 58.5% of UCF National Merit Finalists who never changed their major in comparison to the 50 to 70% of college students nationwide who did.

Job

Despite receiving National Merit scholarships, participants were asked (survey question 14) if they had held jobs during their freshman years of college to earn extra money. Response options included these: held no job during college; held a part-time during college; held a part time & more than one job during college; and held a full time job during college. Table 4-26b shows the majority of participants (72.3%) did not hold a job during their freshmen year. For those with part-time jobs during their first year in college, 21.5% worked. Six participants (4.6%) held more than one part time job and a mere 1.5% worked full time during their freshman year. One explanation for college students having to work is lack of money. However, between the National Merit

scholarship and the combination of other scholarships such as Florida Bright Futures, the participants sometimes make money going to school (hence not needing a job).

Transportation

In order to explore the possibilities of transportation as a recruitment incentive, participants were asked (survey question 15) if their main mode of transportation at the University of Central Florida was walking; biking; taking the free shuttle bus; riding the Lynx city bus; driving; or having a friend/family member take them to school each day. Table 4-27b shows the majority of participants (72.3%) walked to school while 17.7% drove themselves. None of the participants claimed to rollerblade or skateboard to the university. Seven participants (5.4%) preferred to ride their bicycle to campus while 3.1% used the university's free shuttle bus system. An equal .8% either took the Lynx city bus or had a friend/family member take them to the university. The most common mode of transportation for National Merit Finalists was walking.

Disadvantages

In order to better understand what negative connotations National Merit Finalists have for being labeled as such, participants were asked (survey question 18) what they felt the disadvantages are for being a National Merit Finalist. Response options included the following: higher expectations from teachers; being stereotyped as a “nerd”; a greater pressure to succeed; there are no disadvantages; and ‘other’ disadvantages. Table 4-28b shows the majority of participants (67.7%) felt that there were no disadvantages to being labeled as a National Merit Finalist. Almost 25% felt a greater pressure to succeed while

2.3% felt that their professors had higher expectations for them in comparison to their classmates. Only 1 participant (.8%) felt stereotyped as a “nerd.”

Honors Attrition and UCF Attrition

In regard to attrition, Table 4-29 compares Burnett Honors College National Merit Finalists’ attrition rates to the University of Central Florida’s National Merit Finalists’ attrition rates. Data on all 198 participants was collected from the Filemaker database. In total, four National Merit Finalists were disqualified from the University based on their academic performance. Due to the GPA requirements, each year the Honors attrition rate is higher than the university’s attrition rate.

The data below exhibits the attrition rates between the Burnett Honors College National Merit Finalists’ and the University of Central Florida’s National Merit Finalists’ by cohort year:

Table 5-1
ATTRITION

	Honors	UCF
1997	50%	33%
1998	56%	19%
1999	73%	7%
2000	43%	13%
2001	50%	8%
2002	25%	4%
2003	29%	6%
2004	7%	3%
2005	0%	0%

An attrition rate of 7% is shown in the Burnett Honors College and 3% for the University for 2004. However, data from 2004 and 2005 should not be taken into account

since these students have not had a significant amount of time to acquire as many credit hours as the 1997 to 2003 incoming students. Results show that UCF graduates more National Merit Finalists than the Burnett Honors College. Again, this can be explained by the fact that a student can be in good standing with the University but removed from Honors for various reasons, including but not limited to: not enrolling in an Honors course in over two semesters; low UCF (3.2) or Honors (3.0) GPA; scheduling conflicts due to double/triple majoring; and completing University graduation requirements but not the Burnett Honors College requirements.

Research Question 4

Is the method of selecting National Merit Finalists fair?

PSAT/SAT

To dispute the rumor that National Merit Finalists are just good test takers and do not study for the PSAT, participants were asked (survey question 10) how long they studied for the PSAT. Response options included the following: studied for the PSAT for about an hour; studied for one day; studied for a few hours over a course of a week; studied for a few hours over several weeks; took a prep class as well as studied; and did not study at all. Results show (Table 4-30b) a majority of 56.2% of the respondents stated that they did not study at all for the PSAT. Eighteen of the respondents (13.8%) took a prep course for the PSAT. Sixteen of the participants (12.3%) studied a few hours over a course of several weeks. Ten participants (7.7%) studied several hours over a week while

6.2% studied for only one hour and 3.8% studied for one day. Nationally, males scored 44 points higher than females in 2004 (Associated Press, 2004).

Ethnicity

In order to determine whether or not the method of selection of National Merit Finalists is fair, ethnicity ratios were examined from the Filemaker database to show if a particular ethnicity of the sample outweighed another. Only four different ethnicities were represented from the National Merit Finalist sample at the University of Central Florida. Those ethnicities were: African-American, Asian, Hispanic, and White. Table 4-31 clearly shows that each year, there was a significantly larger population of white National Merit Finalists over any other population. In consecutive years from 1997 to 2005, the White/Caucasian population of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida was at 66%, 100%, 93%, 100%, 92%, 92%, 88%, 86%, and 80%.

African-American National Merit Finalists have consistently been the least represented population in this group at the University of Central Florida. In comparison to the University's 2005 diversity profile, African-Americans represented 8.71% of the total student population while only 5% of the National Merit Finalists from this sample were African-American. The University's White/Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic profile for 2005 were 70.07%, 5.16%, and 12.78% respectively. In comparison to the National Merit Finalists' at UCF profile for 2005, it was 80% White/Caucasian, 10% Asian, and 5% Hispanic (Table 35). The differences between the University gender profile and the National Merit Finalist profile at the University (in terms of the four ethnicities in Table 4-31) ranged between 3 to 10%. According to the Board of Governors' 2005 gender

profile for enrollment throughout Florida, 14% were African-American, 5% were Asian, 16% were Hispanic, and 59% were White/Caucasian. This data might lead some people to conclude that the selection method is biased.

National SAT score trends among various racial groups in 2004 were as follows: Mexican-Americans' scores rose nine points to 909. Scores from those identifying themselves as Puerto Ricans were flat at 909; African-Americans were flat at 857; Whites' scores fell four points to 1,061; and Asian-Americans' scores were up 1 point at 1,084 (Associated Press, 2004).

Conclusions

Given the students' responses, it was concluded that:

- The average ACT score for this population was 32. For the Burnett Honors College students, the average ACT score was 29. The majority of participants scored in the mid 1400 range on the SAT. For the Burnett Honors College students, the average SAT score was 1340. The average SAT score for University of Central Florida students in 2005 was 1178. According to the College Board (2005), the average SAT score for 2005 was 1028. Only 35% of our participants had ACT scores while 99% had an SAT score. The SAT is more widely accepted as a means for determining National Merit Scholarship Corporation status as opposed to the ACT. In comparison to the 2005 national average SAT score of 1028, the general population at the University of Central Florida scored 150 points above the national average. University of Central Florida Burnett Honors College students are 312 points above

the average while National Merit Finalists at the University are over 400 points above the national average.

- There was not a significant trend among cohort years in terms of UCF grade point averages. There was not one instance between 1997 and 2005 where a 4.0 GPA was the dominant percentage. The majority of National Merit Finalists have a GPA between 3.600 and 3.999 followed by those with a GPA between 3.000 and 3.599. On average, the attrition rate of National Merit Finalists in the Burnett Honors College fluctuates between 25% and 50% per cohort year.

It was also revealed that UCF graduates more National Merit Finalists than the Burnett Honors College. Over the course of the eight years, only 2% of this population became disqualified from the university. Only 6% of this population is not currently enrolled at the university near the completion of his or her undergraduate degree. The majority of National Merit Finalists who chose the University of Central Florida majored in Engineering and Computer Science, followed by Arts and Humanities and the College of Science. The colleges with the least representation of National Merit Finalists include Education, Health and Public Affairs, and the Rosen College of Hospitality Management.

- The majority of the population surveyed (83.8%) responded that they did not receive better scholarship offers from other institutions. Only 14.6% of the 130 surveyed were offered more money to attend other institutions of higher education. This means that the University of Central Florida is extremely competitive with other institutions of higher education in regard to scholarship packages. A surprising 90% of those surveyed did not participate in the Florida Pre-Paid program. However, 63.1% of the

survey respondents received (and depend on) the Florida Bright Futures scholarships. Florida Bright Futures is a large factor in explaining why so many of Florida's National Merit Finalists choose to stay in the state for higher education. It is the state's way of keeping Florida's best and brightest in Florida.

- A large percentage (88.5%) of the National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida felt that they had received preferential treatment during the recruitment stage for being a National Merit Finalist (Table 4-12b). This confirms that the University of Central Florida is succeeding in making its National Merit Finalists feel special during the recruitment stage. The University of Central Florida ranked fourth in the number of enrolled National Merit Finalists among the ten state universities (Table 2-1).
- Table 4-13b shows that not one respondent received a scholarship for less than \$500 per year. Two respondents (1.5%) received between \$500- \$1,000, .8% of respondents received between \$1,001- \$2,000, and 97.7% received \$2,000 or more per year for being a National Merit Finalist. This confirms the notion that National Merit Finalists are receiving scholarship packages for being labeled as such.
- The majority of the respondents (53.1%) owned and brought their own computers with them to college (Table 4-14b). In comparison, only 14.6% of the respondents did not bring their computers with them to college while another 32.3% did not have computers before coming to college. Despite more than half of the respondents already owning and bringing their own computers to college, the incentive of a free laptop computer was still accepted by 69.2% of the respondents. It can be concluded that respondents see having two computers as a positive asset. For the 30.8% of the

respondents who did not receive or know about the free laptop incentive, each of them stated that if they had known about it, they would have acted on the opportunity. The institution is now taking more stringent steps toward ensuring that none of the future National Merit Finalists are left out from this opportunity.

- The majority of the respondents (61.5%) stated that they had a sibling who was not a National Merit Finalist (Table 4-16b). Those without a sibling consisted of 27.7%. Only 8.5% had a sibling who was also labeled as a National Merit Finalist. A mere 2.3% stated that they had a parent who was a National Merit Finalists. It can be concluded from this small sample that having one child who is a National Merit Finalist does not guarantee that any of his or her siblings will also become a National Merit Finalist.
- A small 2.3% of the respondents claimed that they have a documented learning disability (Table 4-17d). Another 1.5% (Table 4-17c) stated that they have a hearing impairment while only .8% (Table 4-17e) stated that they have a physical disability. The most common disability among this population at the University of Central Florida consists of visual impairments (6.9%). The remaining 88.5% as shown in Table 4-17b stated that they did not have any documented type of disability. It can be concluded that the majority of National Merit Finalists from this sample at the University of Central Florida do not have a hearing, learning, physical, or visual disability. Nevertheless, it is data that the National Merit Scholarship Corporation should consider tracking and sharing.
- The most influential reason that National Merit Finalists were choosing UCF was based upon the financial scholarship packages (Table 4-18e) they were offered

(88.5%). In terms of geography (Table 4-18c), 76.2% of the respondents chose UCF because of its location while 23.8% said that this did not influence them.

In regard to campus reputation, Table 4-18b shows that 28.5% of the respondents chose to attend the University of Central Florida partially based on the school's reputation. Ninety-three respondents (71.5%) stated that school reputation was not an influencing factor for choosing this school. Having friends who already were in attendance at UCF influenced 31.5% (Table 4-18d) of the respondents but was not a factor for the other 68.5%. Degree offerings (Table 4-18f) were another important factor for choosing UCF for 58.5% of our respondents. It can be concluded that the University of Central Florida's location will continue to be a draw for this population.

- For years 1997 to 2005, there were a significantly higher percentage of male National Merit Finalists in comparison to females. Two factors might account for this discrepancy. First, males scored 44 points higher nationally than females in 2004; however, the SAT was changed in 2005 so a change might be seen in these numbers in 2006 (Associated Press, 2004). Second, based on the University's degree offerings, the male dominated Engineering and Computer Science field has been the number one draw for the majority of the National Merit Finalists for this institution. In 2005, the College of Engineering and Computer Science had an incoming freshmen class consisting of 778 males and 111 females. Historically, there have been more males than females in this particular academic discipline, which also holds true for the male to female ratio of National Merit Finalists in this study.
- It was concluded that the majority of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida come from Florida (83%) and Ohio (4%). Only 16 states are

represented as hometown states for UCF National Merit Finalists who enrolled between 1997 and 2005.

- It was concluded that the majority of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida do not tend to be their high school salutatorian or valedictorian. Tables 4-21a and 4-21b show that there were three salutatorians (1.5% of the National Merit Finalists) and twice as many (six) valedictorians (3% of the National Merit Finalists). Data was not found on how many UCF students were salutatorians or valedictorians. However, of the 5,498 student records in the UCF Burnett Honors College database, 41 were listed as salutatorians (.007%) and 60 were listed as valedictorians (1%).
- It was concluded that 2 of the 198 participants did not join the Burnett Honors College. Their reasoning was that they thought it would be harder and take longer to graduate.
- It was concluded that the majority (99%) of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida were in the Burnett Honors College's University Honors program. Only 7% of the University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists chose to do both University Honors (just course work) and Honors in the Major (course work and an undergraduate thesis). It is more popular among this population to do just the one University Honors program as opposed to both.
- In regard to recruitment, it was concluded that the majority of participants (76.9%) (Table 4-23d) recall receiving mail sent to them from UCF. High school counselors seem to be the least effective tool for recruiting National Merit Finalists to UCF (9.2%) as shown in Table 4-23f.

- It was concluded that most participants (86.2 %) in this study felt that they are at the same intelligence level as other National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida (Table 4-24b).
- It was concluded that the majority (58.5%) of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida never change their major. However, it is estimated that between 20 to 50% of all entering college students nationwide are undecided about their major, while 50% to 70% of college students will change their majors at least once (Student Academic Affairs, 2005).
- It was concluded that the most common mode of transportation for National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida was walking. The second most popular mode of transportation for this population was automobile driving followed by taking the free shuttle bus service. It would not be viable to offer rollerblades or skateboards as an additional incentive since no one in this population claimed to use either of those choices as a mode of transportation.
- It was concluded that the majority (72.3%) of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida do not hold a job during their freshman year.
- It was concluded that the majority (67.7%) of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida do not feel that there are disadvantages toward being labeled as such. However, 24.6% report feeling a greater pressure to succeed from parents and teachers.
- It was concluded that four National Merit Finalists were disqualified from the University based on their academic performance between the years of 1997 to 2005. In addition, each year the Honors attrition rate is higher than the University's attrition

rate. This can be partially explained by the fact that a student can be in good standing with the University but removed from Honors for various reasons, including but not limited to: not enrolling in an Honors course in over two semesters; low UCF (3.2) or Honors (3.0) GPA; scheduling conflicts due to double/triple majoring; and completing University graduation requirements but not the Burnett Honors College requirements.

- It was concluded that the majority (56.2%) of National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida did not study at all for the PSAT/SAT. This might lead some people to conclude that the National Merit Scholarship Corporation awards “good test takers.” The majority of participants from this sample scored in the mid 1400 range on the SAT. Burnett Honors College students at the University of Central Florida have an average SAT score of 1340. The average SAT score for University of Central Florida students in 2005 was 1178. The national average SAT score for 2005 was 1028. In 2004, the national average SAT score was 1026. In comparison to the 2005 national average SAT score of 1028, the general population at the University of Central Florida scored 150 points above the national average. University of Central Florida Burnett Honors College students are 312 points above the national average while National Merit Finalists at the University are over 400 points above the national average.
- It was concluded that there are only four different ethnicities represented by National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida between the years of 1997 to 2005. Those ethnicities included: Asian; African-American; Hispanic; and White/Caucasian. African-American National Merit Finalists have consistently been

the least represented population in this group. The differences between the University ethnicity profile and the National Merit Finalist profile at the University (in terms of the four ethnicities in Table 4-31) ranged between 3 to 10%. This data might lead some people to conclude that the selection criteria to become a National Merit Finalist are biased due to the disproportionate numbers between ethnicities, yet the ethnicity ratios are about the same between the sample population and the University. The largest disparity was between the enrollments of White/Caucasians at the University of Central Florida in 2005 at 70.07% compared to the Board of Governors stated enrollment of 59% White/Caucasian across the Florida universities. However, with the recent change to the SAT (which now has a high score of 2400 as opposed to 1600) this form of bias might change in the coming years.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The average person might have assumed that National Merit Finalists studied for the PSAT/SAT and maintained an A average throughout college. They might have also believed that there would be a somewhat even distribution of participants across the various majors/colleges; National Merit Finalists were rarely removed from the Burnett Honors College let alone the university; they drove themselves to school; they were from states all across the country; and they held on campus jobs during their freshmen years. However, according to the analysis of data, little of this is true.

What I found was that the differences between what the average person might assume about this population and the actual findings can be attributed to the general stereotypes that people have of ‘smart’ students (National Merit Finalists). It is

recommended that core changes continue to be made to the PSAT and SAT in order to equalize the scores between males and females. There needs to be additional improvement to the PSAT/SAT in order to decrease the disproportionate scores among the different ethnicities and genders. There is no excusable rationale for having two semi-recent years of 100% White/Caucasian National Merit Finalists at the University of Central Florida. It is questionable to have such a lack of diversity among National Merit Finalists, yet the primary criteria to become a National Merit Finalists rests on PSAT/SAT scores. Additionally, recruitment by the University to strategically target more female National Merit Finalists for enrollment should be emphasized. Recruitment strategies to enroll more National Merit Finalists from the 34 unrepresented states at UCF should also be explored. A contact person should also be included on the University of Central Florida website link for National Merit Finalists.

Other recommendations include continuing to make the currently enrolled National Merit Finalists feel special throughout their enrollment. Numerous participants reported that once they enrolled, they felt they were forgotten. This can be remedied by simple birthday e-mails, special receptions just for this population, offerings of student assistantships, and matching upper classmen participants with faculty mentors. The free laptop incentive should be continued; however, students should receive either an e-mail or a letter to check up on the status of their laptop and it should include a help desk number in case they do encounter problems. Finally, since high school counselors were the least popular method of recruitment for this population, the University may want to look into hosting workshops for high school guidance counselors so they can learn more about the opportunities that UCF has to offer. It is important for institutions of higher

education to realize that simply enrolling in a university as a National Merit Finalist does not guarantee success for that student.

Recommendations for Future Research

Analysis of the data for this study led to the development of findings, implications, and conclusions for future practice. The following recommendations for future research are proposed:

1. A study could be undertaken to examine National Merit Finalists trends, attrition and retention rates at other Florida universities or even nationwide.
2. A statewide study could be undertaken to further examine the trends in choice of majors among this population; particularly between males and females.
3. A follow-up study could be taken at the University of Central Florida to examine whether or not the new SAT (with a maximum score of 2400 as opposed to 1600) will have decreased gender and ethnicity biases among those chosen as National Merit Finalists.
4. A study could be conducted to see how many of the National Merit Finalists from this population chose to go on to graduate school, and if so, which schools and graduate programs were chosen.
5. It is recommended that a follow up study be conducted on this population in order to further examine students' satisfaction levels with the University of Central Florida and how they were treated as National Merit Finalists.

6. A study could be conducted to research what types of clubs and organizations this population was involved with and whether or not that amount of involvement had an effect on their academic success.
7. It is recommended that the National Merit Scholarship Corporation engage in data collection of participants' disabilities. This information could be used to help match these individuals with more scholarship opportunities and services.
8. With the clearly enormous potential of National Merit Finalist students, it is important to look at these issues closely, so that the promise they possess may indeed be fulfilled.

APPENDIX A
PRE-SURVEY LETTER

Jill Norburn
PO Box 161800
Orlando, FL 32816-1800
(407) 823-4360
FAX (407) 823-6583
jnorburn@mail.ucf.edu

September 12, 2005

Nat L. Merit
823 UCF Way
Orlando, FL 32816-1000

Dear Nat:

A few days from now you will receive in the mail a request to fill out a brief questionnaire for an important research project being conducted for the University of Central Florida.

It concerns trends and satisfaction levels of National Merit Finalists who attend this University. This study is part of an effort to learn what draws students like you to our campus, and whether they are happy or unhappy with their decision.

I am writing in advance because evidence has shown that many people like to know ahead of time that they will be contacted. This study is an important one that will help make being a National Merit Finalist at the University of Central Florida more enjoyable, profitable, and easier. By understanding what you expected, wanted, and received, I hope to make this campus an even better choice for current and future National Merit Finalists.

Nat, thank you in advance for your time and consideration. It is only with the generous help of people like you that my research can be successful. Your input is extremely important to me and will help other National Merit Finalists have a smooth and enjoyable transition in the future

Sincerely,

Jill Norburn
Director of Honors Student Affairs

P.S. I will be enclosing a small token of appreciation with the questionnaire as a way of saying thank you.

APPENDIX B
SURVEY COVER LETTER

Jill Norburn
PO Box 161800
Orlando, FL 32816-1800
(407) 823-4360
FAX (407) 823-6583
jnorburn@mail.ucf.edu

Nat L. Merit
823 UCF Way
Orlando, FL 32816-1000

September 19, 2005

Dear Nat:

I am writing to ask for your help in a study of National Merit Finalist trends being conducted at the University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College. This study is part of an effort to learn what draws students like you to our campus, and whether they are happy or unhappy with their decision. Through this study, I hope to find ways to increase satisfaction levels of our National Merit Finalists with our campus.

It is my understanding that you are a National Merit Finalist. I am contacting all University of Central Florida National Merit Finalists to survey trends, whether services or packages promised are being delivered, and overall satisfaction levels with our campus.

Results from this survey will be used to help make being a National Merit Finalist at the University of Central Florida more enjoyable, profitable, and easier. By understanding what you expected, wanted, and received, I hope to make this campus an even better choice for current and future National Merit Finalists.

Your answers are completely confidential and will be released only as summaries in which no individual's answers can be identified. When you return your completed questionnaire, your name will be deleted from the mailing list and never connected to your answers in any way. This survey is voluntary. This survey will only take a few minutes of your time. If for some reason you prefer not to respond, please let me know by returning the blank questionnaire in the enclosed stamped envelope, or by e-mailing me at the e-mail address above.

I have enclosed a small token of appreciation as a way of saying thank you for your help.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, I would be happy to talk with you. My telephone number and e-mail address are located at the top of this letterhead.

Nat, I really appreciate your help with this survey and the fact that you are taking the time out of your busy schedule to share your opinions. Your input is extremely important to me and will help other National Merit Finalists have a smooth and enjoyable transition in the future. Thank you so much for helping me with this important study.

Sincerely,

Jill Norburn
Director of Honors Student Affairs

APPENDIX C

POSTCARD THANK YOU REMINDER

September 28, 2005

Dear Nat,

Last week a questionnaire seeking your opinions about being a National Merit Finalist at the University of Central Florida was mailed to you.

If you have already completed and returned the questionnaire, please accept my sincere thanks. If not, please do so today. I am especially grateful for your help because it is only by asking people like you to share your experiences that we can understand why National Merit Finalists choose our campus, and how we can make it a more enjoyable experience for them.

If you did not receive a questionnaire, or if it was misplaced, please contact me at either (407) 823-4360 or jnorburn@mail.ucf.edu and I will get another one in the mail to you today. Thank you!

Jill E. Norburn, Director of Honors Student Affairs
University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College
PO Box 161800, Bldg. 95 Suite 101
Orlando, FL 32816-1800

APPENDIX D
REPLACEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE LETTER

Jill Norburn
PO Box 161800
Orlando, FL 32816-1800
(407) 823-4360
FAX (407) 823-6583
jnorburn@mail.ucf.edu

Nat L. Merit
823 UCF Way
Orlando, FL 32816-1000

October 5, 2005

Dear Nat:

About two weeks ago I sent a questionnaire to you that asked about your experiences as a National Merit Finalist at the University of Central Florida. To the best of my knowledge, it has not been returned yet.

The comments of people who have already responded include a wide variety of trends and levels of satisfaction among our National Merit Finalists. Many have described their experiences, both good and bad, in their decision to attend this campus. I think the results are going to be very useful to help make being a National Merit Finalist at the University of Central Florida more enjoyable, profitable, and easier.

I am writing to you again because of the importance that your questionnaire has for helping to get accurate results. Our campus has a limited number of National Merit Finalists so your opinions are extremely important and needed to ensure that the results are truly representative.

A few people have written to say that they should not have received the questionnaire because they are not National Merit Finalists. If this applies to you, please let me know on the cover of the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope so that we can delete your name from the mailing list.

A questionnaire identification number is printed on the back cover of the questionnaire so that I can check your name off of the mailing list when it is returned. The list of names is then destroyed so that individual names can never be connected to the results in any way. Protecting the confidentiality of your answers is very important to me, as well as the University.

I hope that you will fill out and return the questionnaire soon, but if for any reason you prefer not to answer it, please let me know by returning a note or blank questionnaire in the enclosed stamped envelope. Thanks again, Nat. I really appreciate you taking the time out to help me with this important study.

Sincerely,

Jill Norburn
Director of Honors Student Affairs

P.S. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. My direct telephone number is (407) 823- 4360 and my e-mail address is jnorburn@mail.ucf.edu

APPENDIX E

RETURN POSTCARD

(SENT WITH COVER LETTER & QUESTIONNAIRE)



Questionnaire #111

Please check the box that applies to you:

- This postcard is being returned to let you know that my questionnaire has been completed.**
- This postcard is being returned to let you know that I would not like to participate in this study.**

Your name (please print)

Thank you very much for your help with this important study.

**Jill E. Norburn
Director of Honors Student Affairs
University of Central Florida's Burnett Honors College**

APPENDIX F
FINAL CONTACT LETTER

Jill Norburn
PO Box 161800
Orlando, FL 32816-1800
(407) 823-4360
FAX (407) 823-6583
jnorburn@mail.ucf.edu

Nat L. Merit
823 UCF Way
Orlando, FL 32816-1000

November 19, 2005

Dear Nat:

During the last two months I have sent you several mailings about an important research study that I am conducting at the University of Central Florida regarding National Merit Finalists.

The purpose of this study is to learn what draws students like you to our campus, and whether they are happy or unhappy with their decision. Through this study, I hope to find ways to increase satisfaction levels of our National Merit Finalists with our campus.

The study is drawing to a close, and this is the last contact that will be made. I am writing to you again because of the importance that your questionnaire has for helping to get accurate results. Our campus has a limited number of National Merit Finalists so your opinions are extremely important and needed to ensure that the results are truly representative.

I am sending this final letter by priority mail because of my concern that people who have not responded may have different experiences than those who have. Hearing from everyone in this small population helps assure that the survey results are as accurate as possible.

I also want to assure you that your response to this survey is voluntary, and if you prefer not to respond that's fine. If you are not a National Merit Finalist, and you feel that I have made a mistake including you in this study, please let me know by returning the blank questionnaire with a note indicating so. I would greatly appreciate it.

Finally, I appreciate your willingness to consider my request as we conclude this effort to better understand what draws students like you to our campus, and whether they are happy or unhappy with their decision. Nat, thank you again for your time and help.

Sincerely,

Jill Norburn
Director of Honors Student Affairs

APPENDIX G
SURVEY

UCF National Merit Finalist Survey

Please mark an X in the box next to the appropriate answer.

► **START HERE**

1. Do you have any siblings or parents who are also National Merit Finalists?

- I do not have any siblings
- Yes, I have a sibling who is a National Merit Finalist.
- Yes, I have a parent who is a National Merit Finalist.

2. Did other colleges offer you *better* National Merit Scholarship packages?

- Yes (Please go to #3)
- No (Please go to #4)

3. (If yes), please list what else they offered you (such as how much more money, laptops, a car, etc.). _____

4. What other types of scholarships or financial aid did you get? _____

5. Why did you choose UCF over other colleges? (Please select one answer for each choice.)

- | | Yes | No |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Campus reputation ----- | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Location ----- | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My friends attend UCF ----- | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Scholarship packages ----- | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Degree (major) offerings ----- | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. Have you ever been diagnosed with any of the following?

- | | Yes | No |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Hearing disability ----- | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Learning disability ----- | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Physical disability ----- | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Visual disability ----- | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. Did you feel as though you received preferential treatment from various colleges during the recruitment process as a result of being a National Merit Finalist?

- Yes (Please go to #8)
- No (Please go to #9)

Please continue on next page.

► **Continue here.**

8. (If yes), please give an example of how you were treated differently from other applicants.

9. How were you recruited in high school by UCF? (Please select one answer for each choice.)

	Yes	No
Phone calls-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E-mails -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mail-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spoke at your high school -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High school guidance counselor-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You initiated the contact through either campus visit, phone call or E-mail -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. How long would you estimate you studied for the PSAT? (Please select one.)

- About an hour
- One day
- A few hours over a course of a week
- A few hours over several weeks
- I took a preparation course as well as studied
- I did not study at all.

11. Approximately how much scholarship money per year were you awarded by UCF for being a National Merit Finalist?

- Less than \$500 per year
- \$500-\$1,000 per year
- \$1,001- \$2,000 per year
- More than \$2,000 per year

12. Do you feel that other National Merit Finalists you have met at UCF are less intelligent, about the same, or more intelligent than you are?

- Less intelligent than I am
- About the same as I am
- More intelligent than I am

13. How many times in your UCF college career have you changed your major?

- Never
- Once
- Two times
- More than two times

Please continue on next page.

► **Continue here.**

14. During your freshman year at UCF, did you hold a job? (Please choose the option that BEST applies to you.)

- No, I did not work.
- Yes, part-time
- Yes, part-time but more than one job at a time
- Yes, full-time

15. During your freshman year at UCF, what was your Primary mode of transportation to class? (Please select one.)

- Walk
- Car
- Bike
- Friend/family would drive me
- Free Shuttle bus
- Rollerblade
- Public bus (such as Lynx)
- Skateboard

16. Did you have your own computer or laptop before coming to UCF?

- No, I did not have my own computer or laptop.
- Yes, I did have my own computer or laptop **BUT** I did not bring it to college.
- Yes, I did have my own computer or laptop **AND** I brought it to college with me.

17. Did you receive a computer or laptop from UCF as part of your National Merit Finalist incentive?

- No, I never received a computer or laptop from UCF.
- Yes, I received a computer or laptop from UCF.

18. What would you say is a disadvantage of being a National Merit Finalist? (Please choose the option that BEST applies to you.)

- Higher expectations from teachers
- Stereotyped by peers as nerdy
- Greater pressure to succeed
- There are no disadvantages that I have experienced
- Other: _____

19. In your opinion, what kind of reasonable recruitment packages do you think UCF should offer prospective National Merit Finalists in order to increase this population here at UCF? _____

Please send to Jill Norburn in the attached return envelope, UCF PO Box 161800, BHC 101 Orlando, FL 32816-1800 or fax to (407) 823-6583, or jnorburn@mail.ucf.edu.

Thank You!!!



APPENDIX H
IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research & Commercialization

September 7, 2005

Jill E. Norburn
758 Appleton Place
Oviedo, FL 32765

Dear Ms. Norburn:

With reference to your protocol #05-2834 entitled, "**The Chosen Few: National Merit Scholars at the University of Central Florida – Trends, Attrition, and Retention,**" I am enclosing for your records the approved, expedited document of the UCFIRB Form you had submitted to our office. **This study was approved by the Chairman on 9/05/05. The expiration date for this study will be 9/04/06.** Should there be a need to extend this study, a Continuing Review form must be submitted to the IRB Office for review by the Chairman or full IRB at least one month prior to the expiration date. This is the responsibility of the investigator. **Please notify the IRB when you have completed this study.**

Please be advised that this approval is given for one year. Should there be any addendums or administrative changes to the already approved protocol, they must also be submitted to the Board through use of the Addendum/Modification Request form. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 407-823-2901.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors.

Cordially,

Barbara Ward
Barbara Ward, CIM
UCF IRB Coordinator
(FWA00000351, IRB00001138)

Copy: IRB file
LeVester Tubbs, Ph.D.

BW:jm

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