

UNIVERSITY SENATE
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Introduced by: Undergraduate Academic Council and
University Planning and Policy Council

Date: November 21, 2005

UNIVERSITY-WIDE HONORS COLLEGE

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

1. That the attached Proposed for creation of a University-Wide Honors College be approved by the University Senate effective for the Fall 2007 term.
- 2.. That students admitted as freshmen for the Fall 2006 term who are able to complete the requirements of the Honors College be grand parented into the program.
- 3.. That this proposal be forwarded to the President for approval.

Rationale:

The UAC and UPC have carefully considered this proposal and believe that it credibly supports the University mission and goals cited in the document as well as addressing concerns raised at the UAC in its discussions of honors programs last year.

The UAC also wishes to note that it applauds the administration's willingness to support this undergraduate initiative.

Concerning the implementation date, although the proposal seeks approval of the Honors College for Fall 2007, many lower division honors courses or sections of courses already exist and it is anticipated that many students entering the University next fall will be able to remain on track for the new requirement and will be interested in joining the program the following year.

University-wide Honors College Proposal

The University at Albany is committed to excellence in undergraduate education. The creation of a University-wide, interdisciplinary Honors College as a centerpiece of this commitment is timely and necessary.

Current Situation

The Office of Undergraduate Studies oversees honors activities campus-wide through an Associate Dean for Honors Programs who is supported with only a half-time reduction in teaching and no designated staff support or real budget. These activities include: 1) managing the University Scholars Program¹; 2) coordinating the team-taught “Foundations of Great Ideas” courses; 3) collaborating with academic departments to mount department-based honors courses; 4) coordinating other academic programs and social gatherings, e.g., Honors Conference, trips to New York City and within the Capital Region; and 5) disseminating information about national and international scholarships, serving as campus representative and managing the nomination and application process for most of these scholarship programs.

Some components of honors activities function quite effectively. The University Scholars Program is a major feature of the University’s recruitment; many students are active in the Presidential Honors Society and contribute to co-curricular activities through the Presidential Scholars Leadership Council; efforts to promote undergraduate research have engaged numerous units in the administration and departments; and one can find a small number of well-functioning departmental honors programs on campus.

At the same time, the University has not invested substantially in honors activities outside of the University Scholars Program and most departmental honors programs essentially are inactive because they have not been a high priority in times of tight budget and little if any faculty growth. In addition, the University has not been successful in producing Rhodes, Marshall or Truman scholars.

The Honors College

The University-wide Honors College is designed to strengthen successful components of current programs and redress the deficiencies identified above.

Mission

The mission of the University-wide Honors College is:

- To contribute to the University’s goal of attracting an increased number of especially talented students with interests matching the programs of the University at Albany and to retain these students to graduation;
- To identify other academically talented undergraduate candidates and direct them to honors opportunities on the campus (this is a responsibility that is ideally shared by University teaching faculty and Advisement Services and Educational Opportunities Program advisors);
- To create a community of scholars—both students and faculty—who work together in a challenging academic environment and to stimulate high levels of academic achievement;
- To involve more faculty members in honors activities so that they are available individually as mentors to help students become active learners;
- To create a structured set of academic experiences comprising a clear “honors pathway” through which students can access the opportunities and enriched academic offerings of the University in a systematic and coherent fashion;
- To enhance the offerings of honors degree programs housed within academic departments, programs and schools;
- To prepare students to compete successfully in national and international scholarships as well as in admission to graduate and professional schools;
- To recognize and accommodate the different ways in which students can demonstrate distinctively high levels of academic achievement;

Structure

The University-wide Honors College will be housed in the Office of Undergraduate Studies. It will be administered by the Assistant Vice Provost for Honors, who reports to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, and the Honors College Governing Board. Members of the Governing Board include the deans of the College of Arts and Sciences, School of Business, College of Computing and Information, Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, School of Criminal Justice, School of Social Welfare, or their designees, and six teaching faculty who hold the rank of Distinguished Professor, Distinguished Service Professor, Distinguished Teaching Professor, or hold University awards for excellence in teaching. The six teaching faculty will be appointed by the Provost in consultation with the University Senate's Governance Council. The Governing Board may create subcommittees for specific purposes, such as curriculum, admission, and standards for "Honors Standing" to be met by Honors College students. The Governing Board will submit an annual report to the University Senate's Undergraduate Academic and University Planning and Policy Councils.

The responsibilities of the Assistant Vice Provost include:

- Managing the budget of the College;
- Mounting honors courses;
- Organizing co-curricular activities;
- Advising students and matching students with faculty mentors;
- Community building;
- Serving as liaison to honors housing and Undergraduate Admissions;
- Working with the Vice President for Development to identify potential means to enhance funding for the Honors College and related activities.

Student Body

Initially, 150 new students are to be admitted each year, using the process outlined below:

- As they are admitted to the University, University Scholars will be invited to apply for admission to the Honors College. This opportunity will be advertised in recruitment materials as well as in the scholarship award letters issued by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions:
 - o Recruits will be encouraged to apply for early admission to the University (this is already being done by recruiters);
 - o The Governing Board will determine the application process for admission to the Honors College, including criteria for admission, in consultation with UAC's Committee on Admissions and Academic Standing and the Office of Undergraduate Admissions.
- University Scholars already in residence at the University may apply. Frosh and sophomores who are not University Scholars may also apply. They would be evaluated for admissions on the basis of their work at University at Albany by the AVP for Honors and Governing Board. Admission is based on GPA, faculty letters as well as evidence of scholarship (e.g., sample of research paper or creative work).

Curriculum

Honors College students will be required to take six honors courses before their junior year. (Students admitted after one semester in residence will be required to take five courses; students admitted after two semesters will be required to take four courses.)

A senior thesis or creative project is required for all Honors College graduates.

At least eight honors courses per semester will be offered for honors students, across disciplines.

- Honors courses will be designated by the suffix "H";
- Honors courses will have a built-in e-portfolio component:
 - o The e-portfolio is a tool that students (and their faculty mentors) can use to archive, access, revise, collate and assess their learning experience, particularly their creative and/or research projects;
 - o The portfolios will reside on a dedicated server managed by CETL, similar to the way WebCT is being managed and maintained.

- For a course to be designated an honors course, it must meet one or more of the following requirements:
 - o Provide students with the opportunity for in-depth study of subject-matter that would not be possible in larger classes;
 - o Have a research and/or creative component;
 - o Have a service learning component.
- Among the 16+ courses offered every year are:
 - o Lower division courses that fulfill requirements for more than one major, especially in disciplines that have very structured requirements for the major. Consequently, departments with large number of intended majors will be encouraged to offer honors sections of introductory-level courses, similar to ACHM 130; ACHM 131; AMAT 118; AMAT 119; APHY 141; APHY 151; and APSY 102;
 - o Courses that meet one or more of the requirements in the General Education Program. These will be selected with a view to allow students to fulfill those requirements not typically available within the more common majors and minors.
- Faculty would receive TA support or field trips, materials, etc.
- Departments would be compensated for lost teaching;
- Articulation with departmental honors programs:
 - o All Honors College students will be enrolled in departmental honors program;
 - o All Honors College students will be matched with a faculty advisor in the major who will supervise the mandatory thesis or creative project;
 - o In departments without an honors program, the Assistant Vice Provost for Honors will help students devise a comparable 12-credit upper division honors curriculum² in the major. (This includes forming an advisement committee comprising three or more faculty in the student's major.)

Co-curricular Activities

In order to create a vibrant and viable living-learning community of scholars, Honors College experience is enriched by a diversity of co-curricular activities, including:

- Undergraduate research initiative (in collaboration with VP for Research);
- Annual Honors Conference featuring work by honors students. Non-honors students may apply to present their work and receive distinction for doing so;
- Information open house for national and international scholarship programs;
- Lecture series (open to the university community and the public);
- "Dinner With Faculty";
- Peer mentoring program.

¹ “University Scholars” include College Scholars, Douglass Scholars and Presidential Scholars. They enjoy the same benefits such as priority registration, enrollment in “Presidential Scholars Only” courses, etc. They differ in the amount of tuition reduction received.

² A “comparable honors” curriculum is characterized by opportunity for the student to study in-depth disciplinary/interdisciplinary subject matter, culminating in an honors thesis or project.