

**Program Review
Weber State University
Honors Program
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Reviewers

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Program Description

The Honors Program at Weber State University provides challenging interdisciplinary learning opportunities for students from a wide variety of majors. The diversity of fields and interests among students in an Honors class is an asset in developing students who are prepared to deal with diverse ideas and peoples.

The Honors Program is a center for leadership opportunities. Through their courses and through the Honors Student Advisory Board, honors students are involved in a variety of leadership skills including team building, public speaking, networking, time management, and publicity and promotion.

Faculty & Staff

The Honors Program has a half-time director who is a tenured professor of English and two full-time staff members who assist with advising and secretarial support. Faculty are drawn from across the campus and typically teach a single class in a semester. The departments from which the faculty are drawn receive funds to hire adjuncts to replace the faculty who are involved in instructing Honors classes.

Students

The Honors Program offers general education and elective courses in a number of disciplines, but does not offer any stand alone degrees. Consequently, while the Honors Program at Weber State is considered an academic department, it does not have any students who can be identified as “Honors” majors or minors.

Observations and Recommendations

A. Council of Directors

Better integration of the Honors Program into the wider campus community would be facilitated by the formation of a Council of Directors made up of the Director of the Honors Program, the Undergraduate Research Program Director, the Bachelor of Integrated Studies Director, and the Director for the Civic Advocacy Program to exploit the obvious potential for cooperation for the benefit of these programs and the students they serve.

B. Major Scholarship Competition Preparation

Major competitive national scholarships should not be seen as being beyond the reach of outstanding Honors Program students at Weber State University. At many institutions the Honors Program Office serves as the focal point for information about such scholarships.

C. Honors Program Staffing and Budget

The Honors Program budget line is less than adequate in terms of potential for growing the program as desired by the President, Provost, Associate Provost, and Honors Director. The faculty buyout rate at the rate of \$973.00 per credit hour (adjunct rate) does little to give the department chair an incentive to participate willingly by releasing faculty from departmental responsibilities to teach honors courses.

Much of the admirable work done in the Honors Program is funded not by state dollars but by private gifts that go into different accounts available to the Honors Program but are not guaranteed to be repeated in subsequent years. Were those gifts not to be made in subsequent years, Honors Program activities would grind to a halt.

At present, the Honors Director has no additional resources with which to work with deans and department chairs to bring about expansion of honors course offerings. A significant infusion of funding in response to specific plans for the use of these dollars will be necessary over the next few years to make honors education available to top-tier students regardless of undergraduate college and major.

D. Honors Director Position

Although Provost Vaughan indicated in our meeting that he is an advocate of renewable three-year terms with a maximum of nine years before bringing in “new blood,” and while there are some arguments to be made for forced change that sometimes is necessary to bring in fresh ideas and new energy, there are as many strong arguments to be made for longevity and stability in Honors Program administration. The visiting team can attest to the fact that Honors College Deans and Honors Program Directors at other institutions with more fully developed honors operations who remain in their positions for a number of years have a greater rate of success and national visibility than those whose commitment to Honors is only for a short period.

E. Facilities

The facilities of the Honors Program located in the University library are excellent, having recently been refurnished with funds provided by the Provost. One shortcoming of the Honors Program space is that it is not available for student use outside regular business hours. At many institutions provisions are made to keep similar spaces open after hours, and we recommend that the Honors Program consider hiring a responsible honors work-study student to keep the facility open in the evening.

F. Honors Program Steering Committee

The Director has selected a three-person Honors Program Steering Committee to give advice on the development of the program, and by all reports she has selected excellent people with wide university experience to serve on the Steering Committee. We believe this to be a good beginning, but the Steering Committee at present is too small to be fully representative of campus or to encourage campus-wide buy-in. We recommend careful consideration of expansion of the Steering Committee to include representatives from all of the colleges on campus as well as key support units such as the Admissions Office without becoming so large that it is unworkable.

G. Honors Student Advisory Board

The Honors Student Advisory Board (HSAB) is primarily an “activities” group with varied level of success over the years—something that is not particularly surprising to the external reviewers. The President is chosen by the Honors Program Director, and then the other members of the HSAB are chosen by the President, Honors Director, and Honors Program staff. We fear that this system of selection is problematic and lends itself to at least the perception that the HSAB is made up of the “privileged few” in the Honors Program. Assuming that a truly representative group is desired, we recommend careful consideration of a model under which members of the HSAB are selected from the undergraduate colleges, either through election within those colleges or selection by the dean of the college. As was the

case with the Honors Program Steering Committee, we believe it to be appropriate that other units on campus feel “ownership” in the Honors Student Advisory Board.

H. Honors Curriculum

Interdisciplinary work is hallmark of many, and probably most, honors programs across the nation. We were impressed by the quality of some of the interdisciplinary honors courses in the Honors Program at Weber State University. For example, we encouraged Dr. Dan Bedford to prepare an article for peer review and possible publication in *Honors in Practice* or the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* about the Great Salt Lake honors course and Dr. Craig Bergeson to do so at the conclusion of his honors course on the Spanish civil war. The Honors Director is reaching out to bring more faculty into honors courses, having reactivated the Eccles Fellows program with excellent results.

While interdisciplinary honors courses should remain a key component in the Honors Program, there are other possibilities for developing the honors curriculum. The English Department already offers honors sections in freshman composition, and other departments might well do the same in large-enrollment survey courses.

Another possibility, mentioned as an honors experience at Weber State University by one of the honors alumni, is the development of professor-led discussion groups for honors students outside the setting of a large survey course to provide an extra “honors dimension” to that course. Although this option seems to have faded away, it is worthy of consideration for reinstatement.

Rather than limiting honors students to a set of formal curricular requirements, many honors programs make use of other learning experiences in lieu of some of the honors hours required for graduation. Research-based independent study, off-campus internships, study abroad, service learning, and other experiential learning are valued by honors program across the nation, and this is demonstrated by making it possible to count them toward Honors Program requirements. Particularly in light of the undergraduate research and service learning initiatives at Weber State University, the time would seem to be right for the Honors Program to move in this direction.

I. Priority Enrollment

One of the characteristics of most other honors programs is priority enrollment for honors students. This is important not only so that students may enroll in honors courses in a somewhat open-enrollment situation, but also because with a limited number of honors courses the students must be able to schedule their “regular” courses around those honors courses.

J. A Fully Integrated Honors Program

At present, “honors” at Weber State University is disjointed, to say the least. General Honors, University Honors, and Departmental Honors appear to exist largely independent of each other. There is a definite need to fully integrate the honors experience into a coherent whole so that an incoming freshman can see the route to graduation with an Honors Program Degree (or whatever designation Weber State University chooses to adopt to recognize and reward its students who satisfactorily complete the entire honors experience at the university). Dr. Elsley already is building bridges to Departmental Honors and making progress in this direction. It would be a reasonable goal to have Departmental Honors fully integrated into the Honors Program by the 2010 fall semester so that the Honors Program Office becomes responsible for tracking these students and notifying the Registrar of their completion of requirements (upon recommendation of the student’s major department).

K. Recruiting Efforts, Honors Program Admission, Student Retention

The Honors Program Director and professional staff have made significant steps in student recruitment in terms of visits to key high schools and establishing a presence at on-campus events targeted at high-talent students. They have quite correctly involved current honors students as part of the recruiting efforts, and in the future they may also wish to involve honors faculty as well. Still, there is a major flaw in the current recruiting strategy in that a prospective student may not be accepted into the Honors Program until after he or she has been admitted to Weber State University—a strategy that diminishes the ability of the university to use the Honors Program to increase applications to the institution itself.

L. Honors Program Web Page

The web page of the Honors Program is well designed and up to date. There is a link from the National Collegiate Honors Council's web page to the Honors Program web page, and it would be a good idea to include a link to the NCHC web page on the Honors Program web page at Weber State University.

M. Strategic Plan for the Honors Program

The Honors Program does not at present have a strategic plan, but we recommend that development of a strategic plan be undertaken by the Honors Director with the assistance of the Honors Steering Committee and the honors faculty.

N. Honors Alumni

The Honors Program has begun to compile a list of its alumni. This is an excellent starting point. However, the alumni with whom we spoke indicated they would be willing to serve in other capacities as well. Alumni can be asked to help with recruitment efforts. Alumni can also be invited to give presentations to the Honors community, and some alumni who live nearby may be asked to serve on an External Honors Board that meets at least once each semester to give the Director additional advice.

O. Assessment

Dr. Elsley has written a white paper on Honors Assessment. It is an excellent map for establishing assessment procedures and instruments for various aspects of the Program including course evaluations, writing assessment rubrics, and exit questionnaires/ interviews with seniors. The faculty with whom we spoke said they were willing to have honors course evaluations available to students as an advising tool. Annual reports are important not only to preserve Honors Program history, but also to gauge progress and change. It is also important that an annual review of the Honors Director by the Associate Provost take place.

Responses

- A. A Director's Council is now meeting.
- B. Dr. Elsley and Associate Provost Thomas are now coordinating student applications for major national scholarships.
- C. Provost Vaughan has made one-time funds available for program development. The provost also mitigated the budget cuts for this area to ensure the continuance of existing funds.
- D. Provost Vaughan, Associate Provost Thomas and Dr. Elsley have considered this suggestion and have concluded that the current model is a better fit for Weber State University.
- E. Dr. Elsley has experimented with keeping the facilities open in the evening, but the response has not warranted continuing with this practice.
- F. Expanding the Honors Program Steering Committee is under review.

- G. Providing participatory elections for Honors Program Student Advisory Board members is under consideration.
- H. The Honors program has added a 1 hour class this Fall. There are currently additional colloquia and classes under consideration.
- I. Priority enrollment has been discussed, but the feeling is that it would open the door for too many other groups.
- J. Dr. Elsley has fully coordinated the departmental honors with the Honors Program.
- K. Admitting students at an earlier stage is under review.
- L. The webpage link has been established.
- M. A strategic plan is currently being developed.
- N. Efforts to involve alumni are continuing.
- O. All Honors courses are evaluated. Dr. Elsley has an annual evaluation by Associate Provost Thomas.