

## **Associate Provost Ryan Thomas' Response to Honors Program Five Year Program Review**

I would like to join Dr. Judy Elsley in thanking Drs. Richard Badenhausen, Dan Bedford and Brad Carroll for their thoughtful and thorough review of the Honors Program.

I would also like to thank Dr. Elsley for her strong and forward looking leadership of the Honors Program.

My response to the recommendations follow the recommendation and are in italics.

### **Theme: Honors Director, Staff, Faculty, and Facilities**

#### Recommendation:

The Honors Director and staff should pursue ways of institutionalizing Marilyn's high-impact practices so they may continue to benefit the Honors Program in the years to come.

*We all recognize the importance of Marilyn Diamond's advising in the success of our Honors students. While no one can replace Marilyn, I agree that we need to plan for an extensive search and a period of overlap training when Marilyn chooses to retire.*

#### Opportunity:

Working with the Honors Student Advisory Board, the Director and staff should investigate the possibility of extending the Honors Center's hours by, for example, giving Honors students their own code for the Center's door, or by hiring a work/study student to be present during the late afternoon and evening hours. While security will inevitably be a concern when allowing student access to the Honors Center after hours, individual access codes allow comings and goings to be tracked precisely, thus somewhat allaying such concerns.

*I support Judy's response to this suggestion and think that having Chris Fink supervise the center during extended hours would be an excellent approach to assessing the need for additional hours.*

### **Theme: Departmental and University Honors**

#### Recommendation:

The Review Team believes the two options of Departmental and University Honors are complementary, with Departmental Honors serving to lift the students and engage them so they may then enroll in University Honors. The two options of Departmental Honors work in concert, and both should be maintained.

*I agree that the two programs complement each other and I support Judy's decision to maintain the two programs.*

#### Recommendation:

The Honors Program should continue working to expand the participation in Departmental Honors to more departments, and to encourage all departments to include in its Department Honors contract a requirement that students take at least some of their general education courses within the Honors Program. The College of Business and Economics, which currently has no departments offering Departmental Honors, is especially ripe for cultivation, as two recent hires in the College (one faculty, one administrative staff) are alumni of the WSU Honors Program.

*I join with Judy in feeling that Christy Call's current efforts to extend the departmental honors program will prove to be successful in establishing broader participation in the program*

**Theme: Aletheia Club Students**

Recommendation:

The Honors Director and staff should monitor the path to completion of students from different cohorts who are Aletheia Club members, and use this data to advocate fine-tuning, if necessary, to the Aletheia Club conditions and criteria. One possible solution would be to establish separate tiers of GPA requirements: a lower one for first-year students and then rising requirements after that.

*I have spoken with the administrators involved in the Aletheia Club and they are very open to working with the Honors Program to "fine tune" the program with respect to this group of Honors Program participants.*

Recommendation:

As part of its usual conversations with Honors faculty and students, the Honors Director and staff should identify the impact of Aletheia Club students, and through advising of both students and faculty act to minimize any adverse impacts.

*I support a more deliberate approach in assessing the impacts of the Aletheia students on the Honors Program*

**Theme: Communication, Internal and External**

Recommendation:

The Review Team believes that more effective use of technology and social media should be made to bring the Honors Program to the attention of its external audience. The Honors Program should establish its own Facebook page, administered jointly by the Office Manager and by one or two students on the Student Advisory Board. The administrators can view the Facebook pages of other departments and student groups for ideas on how best to proceed. Privacy settings can be managed to ensure the quality of the Honors Facebook page.

*I appreciate that the Honors Program has updated its web presence and I support additional efforts to use social media to increase communication.*

Recommendation:

The Honors Program should include its Departmental Honors advisors on the list of departmental advisors that is made available to students.

*This recommendation had been implemented.*

Opportunity:

The Honors Program should investigate the possibility of establishing a permanent presence in a high-traffic area. For example, a dedicated TV monitor in the Union building could continuously show videos that advertise the Honors Program's upcoming activities and events.

*I support efforts to find new forums to advertise Honors Program events and activities.*

Opportunity:

The Honors Program should regularly communicate with and cultivate a relationship with the Ogden Standard-Examiner's education editor (currently Becky Wright).

*I support cultivating a relationship with local media reporters.*

Opportunity:

The Honors Student Advisory Council should look into collaborating with other student groups across campus.

*I support efforts to respond to this opportunity.*

Opportunity:

A suggestion was made to start a "The Prof Picks the Flick" activity. A professor picks a movie that is available on DVD, and Honors students are invited to watch the movie and stay afterward for a 30-minute discussion period.

*I support experimenting to find if there is an appetite for such activities.*

**Theme: Resources**

Recommendation:

The Honors Director should work with the Provost and others to provide the Honors Program with adequate funding through regular increases to its budget, rather than relying on the largesse of university administrators, especially in light of the significant growth of the program in recent years (over 200% increase in number of students over a four-year period).

*Mike Vaughan and I will review resource needs with Judy and see what additional resources might be available.*

Recommendation:

Kyle should be included in Honors planning and other activities to become better acquainted with the program. An Honors student could possibly be identified to work in his office and assist in fundraising efforts. This might help the Development staff get a better feel for Honors and have specific individual Honors stories to tell when meeting with donors.

*I now meet with Kyle twice a month to discuss development efforts in academic areas, including the Honors Program. I am delighted to explore other efforts to support development in this area.*

Recommendation:

The Honors Director and staff should create a prioritized list for donors, listing a range of dollar amounts and a number of itemized uses for those funds. One example of a “big-ticket item” might be a several-million-dollar donation to support and pay for a Study Abroad trip every year for select Honors students.

*I support the list that Judy has made in response to this recommendation.*

Opportunity:

All donors to the Honors Program should be invited to the Nye Banquet and be recognized for their generosity at the event.

*We will continue to invite all donors to the Honors banquets.*

Opportunity:

Given the reality of tight resources, the Honors Program is to be commended for its creative approach to staffing, in particular its shared position with the Physics Dept. Although these sorts of arrangements are tricky to establish, the institution should be supportive of Honors if it decides in the future that such hybrid positions serve the dual interests of Honors and a disciplinary department. At the recent NCHC conference in Denver, there was a well-attended session devoted to this very form of staffing, suggesting that programs across the country are pursuing this strategy.

*I will visit with Michael Vaughan to determine whether there would be resources to provide the finances for such a program.*

**Theme: Assessment**

Recommendation:

The Honors Program should continue refining its assessment tools and strategies better to suit its needs and those of its faculty and students.

I support the Honors Programs ongoing assessment activities.

Opportunity:

Because the program has not yet “closed the loop” with its assessment feedback, it might be worth gathering the Honors faculty together once a year to discuss a targeted issue like “How to Use Student Feedback to Improve Honors Classes.” The faculty with which we spoke seemed amenable to the idea of meeting on occasion to discuss Honors-related matters.

*I support this suggestion.*

As a result of this Five Year Program Evaluation, we have developed the following goals:

- To continue working on gathering effective assessment materials and then applying the information we gather to continually improve the Honors Program and the classes that we offer.
- To put in place a process of negotiating an annual budget with the Provost’s Office.
- To work towards establishing working and up-to-date contracts for all campus departments that would like to participate in Departmental Honors.
- To collect more data on Aletheia students so we can better serve their needs.
- To continue to work with Kyle Braithwaite to seek out donor opportunities.

*I support the Honors Program’s additional goals.*