

Response to the Program Review Evaluation of Weber State University's Honors Program

First, I'd like to thank the committee, Drs. Richard Badenhausen, Dan Bedford and Brad Carroll for their excellent work. Their thoughtful and helpful comments help the Honors Program to move forward in a productive way. It was a pleasure to work with this committee.

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.

I agree with the committee's commendation of Marilyn's effective advising. I hope there will be overlap time when Marilyn chooses to retire so she can train the next person. We overlapped Leanna Riddle and Aubrey Lord when Leanna retired, and that worked well in terms of giving Leanna time to train Aubrey.

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.

This is a good idea, and having talked with Joan Hubbard, the Stewart Library Director, we have decided to keep the Honors Center open longer two days a week. Chris Fink, our hourly employee, has agreed to supervise the center from 4:00 pm (when we normally close) to 6:00 pm on Tuesday and Thursday. He will keep a log of who comes in those later hours so we have a way to assess the usefulness of these later 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.

As the numbers of Departmental Honors students has increased, we've seen a parallel decrease in the number of University Honors students. I agree with the committee that

University Honors still provides a useful course for some students, and we have no intention of closing that option.

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.

Christy Call is proactively working to extend the opportunity for Honors to every department across campus, and particularly to the John B. Goddard School of Business and Economics. Dean Jeff Steagall is supportive of our efforts. We do, in fact, have contracts with Economics, the School of Accountancy, and Computer Science. One of Christy's goals for 2015 is to develop contracts with the remaining departments in this college.

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 agree that we should monitor the progress of Aletheia students so we have better data for working with that group, and we will do that. The criteria, however, for Aletheia involvement is handled through another office.

We are fairly flexible about GPA requirements when students come in to the Honors Program, as we realize that past records do not always reflect future potential. However, we do insist on the same final GPA – 3.5 – in order to maintain a high academic standard.

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.

This is a good suggestion, and like the recommendation above, we'll more consciously collect data on Aletheia students.

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.

We agree with this recommendation, and put an Honors Facebook page into place in October 2014. Aubrey Lord, Corbin Standley (the HSAB president) and Chris Fink have access to add or delete material. We use it to notify students of information and events, post photos of events, put up articles that pertain to Honors students, and invite students to events. Aubrey says, “We’re reaching a small but growing population.”

Recommendation:

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

The list of departmental Honors Advisors is available to students on the Honors website, under “Departmental Honors.” The list also includes advisors contact information.

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.

We agree with this suggestion, and we’re looking into promoting Honors on a TV monitor in the Union building. Aubrey has taken charge of exploring our options and will report back to us this month on our options.

Opportunity:

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

This is a good idea. I have worked with Becky Wright on other projects, and we will reach out to her for our major events, such as banquets or speakers.

Opportunity:

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

We very much encourage HSAB to collaborate with other student groups on campus. For example, they work closely with Boomer Kelly, this year’s BIS/Honors senator. They also co-ordinate with CCEL when planning service projects. In December 2014, HSAB worked with Upward Bound to provide “shoeboxes for veterans.” We all see ourselves as integral members of the Weber community, faculty, staff and students alike.

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 like this idea, but I'm not sure how well it would work on Weber's commuter campus. I will discuss this with Honors faculty to get a wider perspective. We are posting "Faculty are Loving . . ." on the webpage, which allows students to read of different professors' favorite films, music, and books.

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).

The Honors Program has been fortunate in the support we have received from Provost Mike Vaughan and Associate Provost Ryan Thomas. They have paid for the classes we've added as the program has expanded. We could not have grown to our current size without the financial support of the Provost's office.

However, the Honors Program should not rely on the goodwill of another office. Like any other department, the Honors Program should negotiate an annual budget with the Provost's office which the Honors director will then manage. I will therefore begin conversations with Mike and Ryan about this issue.

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.

We met with Kyle after we received this report, and showed him the committee's comments. We agreed that we should work more closely, and that Kyle should attend some Honors events so he has a clearer sense of the program.

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.

This is a good idea, and we have started to make a list of donor requests, including:

- Money to pay for an Honors sponsored GRE class for Weber students. The cost of such a class is often prohibitive for students, and Honors seems like a good place to make such an opportunity available.
- We have lost our Financial Aid funds that gave tuition relief to HSAB members, and we'd like to find a donor who could support our HSAB students.
- I'd love to see an annual "Study Abroad" trip for Honors students.

We meet regularly with Kyle, and I will send him a copy of this response.

Opportunity:

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

We do invite the Nye family to the Fall and Spring banquets, and 6 or 8 members of the family usually attend. We recognize and thank them at those events, and send them a CD of photos after the event.

I have tried to meet with Lisa Eccles, but she's made it clear that she doesn't want face to face contact with us. She deals directly with Kyle's office. However, it would be a good idea to send her an invitation to our banquets, and we will do that.

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 would love to see more partnering of the kind we have with the Physics department. I think I would need support and a financial incentive from the Provost to make this happen. Most departments need their faculty to teach in the department, so it would take some sort of administrative prompting for Honors to be included in a hire. I will talk with Ryan about this.

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.

Yes, assessment is an ongoing and continual process of refinement. Like the San Francisco Bridge, as soon as we reach one end, we start again at the other. We anticipate working on assessment as long as the program exists.

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.

This is a good idea. I will talk with the staff and Ryan about arranging a meeting each semester or once a year to talk about assessment with faculty. Besides the suggestion of including faculty, the Honors Program is in conversation with Gail Niklason, Heather Chapman, and RC Callahan to not only further develop assessment approaches that are in practice now but to branch into new areas that have not yet been assessed. For example, we are talking with Heather about surveying students concerning their experience with Honors through a broad, university survey that is administered after graduation. We have also

recently updated an exit survey for students graduating with Departmental Honors that will be captured and retained in our office. Additionally, we have scheduled a meeting for spring semester 2015 with RC and Gail to discuss strategies for 'reading' assessment data through Canvas.

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.