

**Honors  
Program Review Site Visit  
Dean's Response  
Academic Year: 2019-2020  
(Site visit extended to Fall 2021 due to COVID)**

Submitted by:  
Associate Provost, Brenda Marsteller Kowalewski  
January 15, 2021

**Introduction**

The Honors program was previously reviewed in academic year 2014-15 under a previous director and administration in the Provost Office. The current director of the Honors program, Dr. Dan Bedford, took the helm in April 2016. In the academic year 2019-2020, the Honors Director and staff prepared a thoughtful self-study and planned a Program Review Evaluation Team site visit for spring semester 2020. Given the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the site visit was rescheduled for the Fall 2020 semester and was facilitated virtually in October. The Honors team facilitated this challenging and disrupted process expertly which resulted in a meaningful site visit and a realistic response to the Evaluation Team site visit report with suggestions for taking the Honors program in a new direction that is more inclusive of all students served at Weber State University. The self-study was guided by five key focus areas identified by the Honors team, including: a) Honors completion rates; b) curriculum structure; c) assessment; d) the Aletheia club; and e) staffing levels. These key areas of concern for the Honors program guided both the Honors team in writing the self-study and the site visit team in their questioning and their discussion of their findings.

The Program Review Evaluation Team, consisting of five members (2 WSU faculty, 1 WSU Dean, 2 external Honors Center Directors), was exceptional and chaired by a national leader in Honors programs (former president of the National Collegiate Honors Council). The Evaluation Team's careful review of the Honors program was informed by feedback from the Weber State University community of faculty, staff, students, and administrators, as well as evidence-based practice in collegiate Honors programs and the expertise and experiences of the review team members themselves. The commendations recognize the strong leadership and talent of the current Honors team. At the heart of the recommendations are suggestions for re-envisioning an exceptional Honors program that better aligns with the open enrollment mission of Weber State University and employs a diversity, equity and inclusion lens. Both commendations and recommendations made by the site review team and the Honors program's response to them are addressed below.

**Site Visit Team Commendations**

The Site Visit Review Team's commendations for the Honors program are consistent with my own observations of Honors. Dan Bedford's leadership has been the source of the program's success since 2016. He has hired talented staff members and recruited equally outstanding faculty members to bring the Honors curriculum to life. The Honors program is a place of connectivity and innovation once more at WSU. Dan's visionary and collaborative leadership makes reimagining the Honors program through a lens of diversity, equity and inclusion a realistic and achievable goal. These commendations are well deserved.

## **Site Visit Team Recommendations and Program Response**

The recommendations from the Site Visit team were extensive, well-informed and very helpful for moving the Honors program forward. The team made eighteen recommendations in five broad categories:

- Honors staffing, resources and budget
- Recruitment, admissions and scholarships
- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Communication and misconception around “Honors”
- Curriculum

My remarks are organized by broad category rather than by specific recommendation.

### Recommendation Category #1: Honors Staffing, Resources and Budget.

The Site Visit Team recommends that an additional staff member be added to the team along with dedicated Honors faculty members. The Honors Director’s response to the site visit review team report puts a finer point on the particulars of this recommended additional staff position and dedicated Honors faculty. The Honors Director suggests an additional staff position that would have responsibility for and expertise in diversity, equity and inclusion. Additionally, he recommends bringing stability and consistency to the Honors program faculty by developing an Honors Teaching Fellows program. I think both of these suggestions by the Honors program director have merit and I am committed to working toward achieving both of these additional resources for the program. Additionally, the site review team recommended folding the instructional costs into the overall Honors budget rather than asking the Provost to backfill the budget to cover additional instructional costs. This is an area we can and will explore. It is obvious that having a clear understanding of the resources in the budget makes for better planning and implementation.

### Recommendation Category #2: Recruitment, Admissions and Scholarships

Most of the recommendations from the site visit team in this category pertain to better defining and managing the relationship between the ever-growing Presidential Scholarship recipients required to take an Honors course and participate in the Aletheia Club. As was mentioned in the Honors Director’s response, the relationship between Honors and Presidential Scholarship recipients and the Aletheia Club is already being renegotiated. The expectation is that the Aletheia Club will no longer exist by the 2022-23 academic year and the Honors course requirement for scholarship recipients has just recently been reduced to 3 Honors credit hours which can be achieved in a variety of new ways – taking three separate one-credit hour book discussion classes or one typical 3-credit hour Honors course. These changes are already underway and are part of a larger effort to reimagine the Honors program and what it means to be an Honors student. The administration and the Honors team have collaborated to make these changes and will continue to do so in order to create the space in Honors for all types of WSU students who may or may not be Presidential Scholarship recipients.

### Recommendation Category #3: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The Site Visit Team recommendations in this section generally suggest necessary actions in the process of reimagining the Honors program through an equity, diversity and inclusion lens. The Provost’s Office fully supports this reimagining endeavor and has already provided the resources needed to reassign time for both the Honors director and assistant director during the spring 2021 semester to focus on re-envisioning the Honors program in this way. As mentioned above, the issue of securing an additional staff position focused on diversity, equity and inclusion in the Honors program, is something I am committed to working toward. I concur with both the site review team and the Honors director that engaging campus partners in this process will be critical. I also concur

with the Honors Director that the suggested diversity climate survey is something to consider with respect to the most appropriate timing and tailoring it to the Honors program specifically.

#### Recommendation Category #4: Communication and Misconception around “Honors”

The Site Visit Team recommendations in this category again give some suggestions on things to do to help the Honors program redefine itself and then effectively communicate that to the broader campus community which should in turn effectively recruit new kinds of students to the program. Both scholarships and admissions to the Honors program are actively being considered and will be fleshed out in the “reimagining Honors” conversations occurring spring 2021. This is a welcomed and exciting change for the Honors program. The Provost’s Office is committed to helping bring this new vision and definition of Honors to fruition.

#### Recommendation Category #5: Curriculum

The Site Visit Team recommendations in this category focus on three underlying curricular issues: 1) a very high number of general education courses that does not lend itself to offering a common pedagogy and/or curricular approach in Honors AND require a lot of people power to manage tracking and assessment; 2) the absence of an Honors First-Year Seminar experience to build community and retain students; and 3) the lack of consistency and definition of what it means to achieve departmental Honors. I concur with the Honors director that each of these are important underlying curricular issues that need to be addressed; however, the suggested solutions from the program review site visit team may not end up being the most appropriate next steps. I think the lack of consistency and definition of departmental Honors has been a pressing issue for the Honors program for many years now and would love to see it prioritized as a top curricular concern. I encourage the Honors director and assistant director to keep all of these curricular issues at the forefront of their minds as they work during the spring 2021 semester to reimagine the Honors program and to continue to explore possible solutions beyond those offered by the review team.

#### **Conclusion**

The Site Visit Review Team’s recognition of the need to step back, reflect and reimagine Honors at Weber State University is completely appropriate. The commendations and recommendations made by the Site Visit Team are solid and the program’s response to these is thoughtful and recognizes that much of their future action will be determined this spring 2021 semester which will be spent reimagining the Honors program and the steps necessary to bring it to fruition. I encourage the Honors program to collaborate with other stakeholder groups across campus in their efforts to evaluate and adjust the mission, vision, Honors identity, scholarships, admissions, and communication plan. I have been impressed with the results of the preliminary changes agreed upon by the Honors team and the administration thus far and I look forward to seeing many of the recommendations from the program review brought to fruition as we engage in the process of reimagining Honors at Weber State University.