

MISSION AND GOALS

The mission of The Honors College (HC) is to provide for its students exceptional educational opportunities, available in the context of a dynamic community of learners – faculty and students alike – exemplifying a shared commitment to academic excellence and personal intellectual growth. The College provides traditional coursework, laboratories, studio and field experiences, and intensive seminars and research opportunities, in a curricular array appropriate for students from their first day of university classes through graduation. The Honors College and its programs serve as exemplars of rigor, creativity, faculty-student engagement, dedication to academic integrity, and community inclusiveness.

The goals of the Honors College are to:

1. Provide the finest educational opportunities possible for university students of high academic aspirations.
2. Bring together the most accomplished faculty scholars and most receptive and talented students in a synergy of advanced learning.
3. Support the realization of holistic and global education, in which traditional academic and creative accomplishments are coupled with personal growth and a devotion to life-long learning on a world-wide palette.
4. Foster the development and confirmation of talents, skills and experiences that will promote opportunities for successful post-graduate education and/or the fulfillment of professional careers, and,
5. Grow the proportion of UNLV undergraduate students engaged in Honors education to the benefit of the students, the faculty, the institution and, ultimately, the larger community and nation.

DESCRIPTION

The Honors College plays a special role in UNLV's educational mission. It is a selective undergraduate college that offers an educational experience focusing on a solid liberal arts foundation, but in the context of a growing research university with extensive academic and cultural opportunities. The Honors College is an educational partner with the "discipline" colleges of the University where Honors students specialize in their academic majors. This combination, of a central intellectual core in Honors combined with advanced learning in a major field, helps develop graduates who are fully prepared for graduate education, professional schools, and rewarding life careers. With a diverse student body, a strong curriculum taught in collaboration with UNLV's outstanding faculty, special advising, research, service and leadership opportunities, scholarships and special residential arrangements, the Honors College offers an exceptional value in higher education in Southwestern USA.

The advisory and governing body of the college is the Honors Executive Council (HEC). It is composed of faculty members from various undergraduate colleges/schools and two Honors College students in good standing. It serves as the curriculum committee, reviews policy regarding student recruitment and development, and establishes policies for the governance of the college.

Although there is no national or regional accrediting body for honors colleges or programs, the UNLV Honors College is a member of the National Collegiate Honors Council and the Western Regional Honors Council. These organizations are professional associations of undergraduate Honors structures, Honors administrators and Honors faculty, staff, and students. Both provide support for institutions sustaining Honors education, with guidance in curriculum development, program assessment, teaching innovation, national and international study opportunities, internships, service and leadership development, and mentored research.

Stakeholders

The principal stakeholders in the College's programs are its students. Second to the students are their parents and siblings as the level of investment and engagement of families in the success of their students is manifested from the first day of freshman orientation until graduation.

University faculty who teach the Honors curricula and who serve as research mentors are also important stakeholders. Honors courses provide the opportunity for many faculty members to teach multi-

disciplinary material not normally found as part of the majors curricula of their home departments. Honors classes are composed of students from throughout the University, creating classroom environments which are quite unlike the norm; the diversity of student backgrounds and skill sets provides a richness of conversation that, coupled with the intrinsic curiosity and articulation of Honors students, fosters lively inquiry and thoughtful discussion.

The University itself is a stakeholder in the Honors College and its programs. In 1984, when the Honors Program was conceived, two distinct but related goals were established: to create a curriculum that would challenge the top undergraduate students who enrolled at UNLV and to recruit more top students to UNLV. The program started with 38 first-year students; today's College supports over 600 undergraduates and matriculates over 125 new students per year. Well over half of recent HC graduates report that the opportunity to enroll in the Honors College was a critical factor in their decisions to attend UNLV.

Community stakeholders are served by the Summer Advanced and Gifted Education (SAGE) Academy. This program, which is sponsored by the Honors College, serves talented and high-achieving high school students. The SAGE Academy, in collaboration with the Division of Educational Outreach and the Clark County School District, offers credit-bearing coursework in a wide array of subjects. These courses range from foreign languages and drama through engineering and mathematics. SAGE has served hundreds of Clark County students, bringing the quality of the Honors experience to a wide cross-section of the community. Past participants in SAGE report great satisfaction with their academic experiences.

ANALYSIS AND APPRAISAL

Planning

The Honors College approaches long-term planning through both its Faculty Senate Program Review and its NWCCU accreditation report. From the recommendations in those reports, the Dean and academic staff determine a set of goals. The next level of planning takes place annually in anticipation of the next academic year, i.e., consideration of the courses and availability. Finally, Honors students are tenacious advocates in shaping their own academic destinies and they are creative in finding ways to express their academic needs. Concerns brought forward by students are addressed by meetings among the academic staff of the College, first to respond to the immediate issue at hand followed by, as necessary, revision of standing practices or establishment of new academic rules. In cases where these changes would constitute modification of the curricular structure of Honors programs, the planned changes are submitted to the Honors Executive Council for deliberation.

Educational programs

Students in university honors are required to complete a minimum of 31 credits of HON-prefixed courses. Students entering university honors directly from high school can satisfy most of the requirements in the UNLV core curriculum with honors courses. Students who enroll after entering UNLV or who transfer to UNLV may apply some of their regular courses toward the honors core but must still meet the 31-credit HON requirement and the requirements in the core. Students transferring from other honors programs or colleges can petition to have up to six credits of honors courses earned at the previous institution applied towards the 31-credit requirement. Although advanced placement credits earned can be used to replace certain honors courses, those credits do not count toward the 31-credit HON minimum. Department honors scholars have to complete a special research project within their major study disciplines in addition to taking several interdisciplinary seminars taught by outstanding UNLV scholars/teachers.

The most telling indicators of the quality of the Honors College's programs are the views of graduating students, who have assessed and integrated their HC academic experiences over their years at UNLV. In a recent examination of the HC senior exit survey, it was found that over 90% of graduating students would join the College again (strongly agree + agree on a 5-stage Likert scale) were they to start their university educations over.

Assessment

Student learning outcomes, assessment plans, and semester reports can be found at:

http://provost.unlv.edu/Assessment/reports_honors.html. The results show that the program continuously goes through a process of adjustment to meet their educational outcomes.

Closing the Loop

Assessment results inform each of the planning elements. For instance, Honors students generally have high regard for coursework designed to lead to improved written expression, but the observed skills are more mixed. This has resulted in:

- The rededication of the long-term goal of the College to provide formal opportunities for mentoring in written expression,
- Assignment of the most effective writing instructors to courses with high writing components, and,
- Providing continuous editorial feedback on writing exercises associated with Honors curricula.

Students

Honors College students major in all discipline colleges of UNLV, with a distinct emphasis on majors in the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Sciences, which together consistently represent approximately half of all Honors students. The College of Business represents the third rank in majors, with 15-20% of Honors College students, depending upon year, followed closely by those majoring in various fields of Engineering. Substantial numbers of HC students major in Hotel Administration, Fine Arts and Urban Affairs.

Honors College students start strong, sustain their high performance and graduate in numbers above institutional norms. The most recent incoming class (Fall 2008) profile was impressive with 268 total applications; 142 admitted, resulting in 52.9% admitted; 113 total registered with four National Merit Finalists.

Considering the last ten year period as a snapshot, completed applications have increased by 64%, but the total registered is roughly the same. This is because the 1998 percent admitted was 96% of completed applications compared to this year's approximately 53%; thus, the Honors College is far more selective today than a decade ago. Approximately one-third of matriculating students brought perfect high school GPA's to the College in fall 2008. The average proportional class rank for matriculating Honors College students for the past 5 years is 0.90 (or the top 10% of high school graduates).

The College currently has an annualized FTE of 66.7 based on an enrollment of 410 HON-prefixed class enrollments for Fall 2008.

Annual Year	Annualized FTE
2003-04	28
2004-05	44
2005-06	44
2006-07	47
2007-08	53

This College is seeing the same trend as many others with students who do not always self-identify their ethnicities. Most identified minorities in the College are of Asian backgrounds. The HC has a substantial cohort of Hispanic students, but few African American students. The college has plans to collaborate with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to improve this record.

Advising the students in the Honors College is the responsibility of two full-time academic advisors, with approximately 300 students per advisor. Additionally, the HC advising professionals are central to the

recruitment process, to admissions, to new-student orientation, to annual academic advising (all students) and to the confirmation of applications for graduation. Advisors help students with class selection, help all HC members understand and navigate their majors and Honors curricular requirements, including consultation with other advising centers, and provide essential assistance relating to financial aid, registration, and housing on campus.

For the Fall 2002 incoming cohort in the Honors College, the first graduations occurred in Fall of 2005. Graduation rates jumped after four years, reaching a six-year graduation rate of approximately 62%. After six years, slightly under one-third of the original cohort was in the “not enrolled and not graduated” category. Analysis of the 2003 and 2004 cohorts shows a progressive decrease in the slope of the still enrolled curve, indicating improvement in Honors student persistence for more recent cohorts.

Over the last several years, HC students applied for nationally-competitive awards from the Fulbright Scholar Program, The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation, the Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholarship Program and the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Program and UNLV has had 3 winners of these awards in the last 2 years. In addition, three Honors students were selected as 2008 McNair scholars and three were been awarded the HSBC Scholarship for the 2008-2009 academic year. Two first-year Honors College students were selected as “Most Caring Americans” by Senator Robert J. Dole, Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Val J. Halamandaris, Founder and Director of the Caring Institute.

Faculty and Staff

The Dean is the only permanent faculty member in the HC. The College draws its faculty from academic departments across the campus. In the most recent six semesters, an average of 288 students have enrolled in approximately 30 class sections/semester taught by an average of 25 instructors resulting in an effective student-to-faculty ratio of 11.5. Such a low ratio is necessary for the careful mentoring of Honors students in skill development, scholarship, and the stringent evaluation of both.

In the choice of Honors instructors the HC emphasizes: 1) scholarly accomplishment, 2) instructional skill, and, 3) active faculty-student engagement. Several of the College’s regular faculty instructors are UNLV Distinguished Professors and Barrick Scholars. Others have records of exceptional success in the classroom, having been recognized by students, faculty committees, or administrative evaluators. Each Honors instructor is evaluated by students following each course. The gender mix of faculty in the College’s curriculum changes each semester, but the gender ratio is usually slightly weighted toward females.

Less than half of the instruction is via part-time instructors. This provides a reasonable mix of demand on the discipline colleges coupled with the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with select part-time instructors. Most part-time instructors hold terminal degrees in their fields. These instructors have proven themselves as capable mentors who fully engage the students in their classes.

The College has two professional academic advisor/recruiters. Both have been exceptionally active within the campus Advising Council and are participants in both the National Academic Advising Association and the regional Western Regional Honors Council. The student to advisor ratio is satisfactory at 290 : 1, which is low by UNLV standards and reflects the extra time that is required for the unusual amount of advising that is typical of an Honors environment. Honors College advisors are also central to recruitment and admissions which is handled by Enrollment Management for other academic units. In addition, advisors are essential in the evaluation of students who are applying for the HC scholarships.

The College also has two support persons: one Executive Assistant and one Administrative Assistant. Educational and student support demands would best be served with the allocation of an additional professional staff line and/or a part time Graduate Assistant. As funds become available, the College hires up to three part-time student workers. These employees are drawn from the roster of HC students and have responsibilities in office functions and at special events such as the Honors Poster Sessions and the College’s Medallion Ceremonies.

Research

As an undergraduate unit with no assigned faculty, the research and creative activity in the Honors College resides largely in the exceptional efforts of students enrolled in Department Honors. These students apply to the Department Honors program ideally as juniors, spending up to two full years in mentored research. This research potentially takes place in every discipline on campus. The Department Honors process includes three required elements: completion of four HON 400 Seminars; HON 498 culminating in a Poster Presentation and HON 499 culminating in a defense of thesis. Recent research and creative projects have included:

- **Juan C. Plata**, Mechanical Engineering - Upper Airway Opening and Hyoid Bone Displacement: Data Collection for a Potential Obstructive Sleep Apnea Treatment
- **Audrey E. Garcia-Martinez**, Psychology - Emotional Biases in Facial Affect Recognition
- **Tyler D. Parry**, History - The Paradox of Progress: Hildegard of Bingen in the Age of Transition
- **David G. Cotter**, Biological Sciences - The Cost of Acclimation: A link between Stress Protein Production and Motility the Rotifer *Brachionus plicatilis*
- **Varun Piplani**, Philosophy/Political Science - Structural Immiserization: Assessing the Impact of Conditional Lending Policies on the Promotion of Sustainable Development in Developing Countries
- **Diane S. Samuelson**, Honors Multidisciplinary Studies - The Generalists Are Coming! The Generalists Are Coming!: Intellectualism in SF as a Reason for the Genre's Marginalization in the Academy
- **Jeffrey P. Pees**, Political Science - Translation Project Concerning the Preamble and the Environmental Policy contained within the 2005 German Grand Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU, & SPD
- **Teri N. Vela**, History - "Don't Ask Don't Tell": Outing an Outdated Policy
- **Nicholas F. Baker**, Mathematics - Five Leadership Theories Illustrated by the Harry Potter Novels
- **Vishal Y. Patel**, Biochemistry - One-dimensional Molecular self-assembly of a Novel Electron-deficient Asymmetrically Substituted Bisphenazine
- **Sascha Zoe M. Horowitz**, Biological Sciences - Study of Seasonal Variation of Juvenile Hormone Levels in Desert Honey Bees
- **Rycel L. Uy**, Chemistry - New Electron-deficient Conjugated Polymers with Phenazine Pendants

DISTINCT CHARACTERISTICS

The Honors College is an academic partner with every other academic college on the UNLV campus. The Honors curriculum complements the requirements and electives of individual majors, providing a substantial fraction of the fundamental skills acquisition, academic maturation, and critical thinking development that fosters success in major professional fields.

The faculty and staff of the College provide an unusual degree of individual attention to students. Honors College academic and advising professionals provide advocacy for academic success, help in navigating the institution, guidance in selection of coherent and sustaining curricula, counsel for combined personal and academic growth, and encouragement in the development of progressive individual empowerment.

The Honors College is unusually responsive to student demands for curricular innovation. HC students are not hesitant to request seminars on important academic subjects and contemporary issues of interest, and the College works hard to satisfy these requests. Most recently (for the Spring 2009 semester) the College offered an HON 400 Seminar on Jane Austen in response to a surge in interest in this author and her works.

CHALLENGES

The College will continue to actively assess the attributes and needs of students, adjusting and improving course offerings, as well as advising and student support plan in response to generational changes in its principal stakeholders.

The college plans to have more active interaction with the Office of International Programs. The intent is to increase the proportion of Honors students who study abroad for a semester or academic year.

International Programs has a host of opportunities through the National Student Exchange and the University Studies Abroad Consortium. The goal is to prepare students for the global environment in the work world and put to use the College's foreign language requirement.

FTE growth for the College has steadily grown over the last five years. This pattern suggests a continuation of this trend, especially when combined with the marked increase in the number of applications for the next academic year (Fall 2009). The challenge will be to introduce an increasing number of appropriate courses with the right instructors for students. This effort will require greater resources, either directly in dollars allocated to the College's instructional budget or indirectly via attracting capable teachers from departments throughout campus.

The College's research activity is largely limited to the mentored scholarship of students enrolled in the Department Honors Scholars program. The first challenge is to identify a sufficient number of faculty researchers to mentor these students. Each student has a major professor and a committee of two other faculty members in the same or a closely allied field. This adds up to some hundreds of discipline department members contributing to the senior work of Honors students. The College will have to strive to recognize them for this effort. The second challenge is to advise new transfer students to the Department Honors process. When these students arrive on campus, they often have not met a single faculty member. While there is a good picture of their core academic skills, their aptitude for research is unknown. The College administration and advisory staffs are currently working with members of the Honors Executive Council to devise a new structure to permit a more systematic approach to assessing the students' likelihoods of success in scholarly work.