TO: Honors Program Committee  
FROM: Stephan Flores, Director, University Honors Program  
SUBJ: Summary-Review, with UHP Profile & Compilation of Documents  

Please see listed below a series of PDF attachments*—files that comprise recent and historical records, reports, and data compiled to support the immediate transition in leadership of the University Honors Program (UHP) and to assist future leadership, program review and assessment, and longer term advancement of the program.

The program’s strengths over the course of its history and development have been affirmed on many occasions, including successive external program reviews. Also recognized and articulated are longstanding challenges and recent constraints to sustaining the program’s offerings and to realizing its potential full development.

With this view and accompanying record of the UHP’s strengths—particularly academic excellence in honors education achieved within and beyond the classroom—I want to call attention at this transition to several challenges/opportunities that may be most important for the university to address for the program’s “next steps.”

1. **Curriculum (& related funding)**. A series of past budget cuts reduced the program’s main budget for operating expenses by approximately 30%. In addition, the half-time position of the UHP associate director used to include the summer months: that summer portion was eliminated. The recent imposition of other expenses has drawn down much of the program’s accumulated budget savings. Because central administration also recently withdrew additional salary funding (that was formerly covered by central monies), the program faces an additional expense equivalent to approximately 28% of its main budget for operating expenses (not counting monies for fringe benefits).

For example, the UHP used to transfer $800 per honors course credit to departments in partial offset for costs of assigning a faculty member to teach an honors section of such general education courses as Anth 220, Psych 101, Hist 101, Engl 102, and so on. That amount was reduced some years ago to $500 per credit hour; with efforts to curtail other operating expenses (e.g., reductions in printing and mailings, shifts to online application and directing students to the UHP website for information), I increased that amount to $600.00 per credit hour. Looking forward, a primary question is how to sustain current course offerings if the budget remains reduced, or reduced even further.

If budgets must be cut, and if departments are willing and able to offer honors sections of general education courses without the UHP’s relatively modest contributions in offset funding (to buyout replacement faculty/lecturers, for example), then at least half of the honors curricular budget could be “saved” to cover the equivalent “28%” reduction to the budget. I and others (such as department chairs and several deans, including those who have served on the Honors Program Committee) have raised the question of support for honors course offerings to open a conversation and negotiation with the provost and deans and departments over how to sustain
and strengthen and ensure the breadth and continuity of the curriculum. To date, central administration has not reallocated funding to shore up the honors curriculum, or directed and required that departments release faculty to teach honors sections (regardless of whether offset funding is provided). Much of this situation is analogous to and coincident with the university’s challenge to staff and to fund the general studies curriculum; this challenge continues with the shift from two-semester Core Discovery courses to one-semester ISEM 101 courses, and future ISEM 301s. The aim to staff ISEM 101 sections with professorial (especially tenured and tenure-track) faculty complicates in turn who may be available to teach honors courses.

Many honors deans and directors across the country support the principle and practice that universities need to direct notable funds to departments and colleges in support of a strong honors curriculum. I have appended below two responses on this general question of funding honors courses, copied from an exchange on the listserv discussion of the National Collegiate Honors Council. Both responses are from honors directors and past presidents of NCHC: Dr. Greg Lanier and Dr. Bob Spurrier; both Lanier and Spurrier are among the 35 or so members of NCHC who have been designated/approved as Site Visitors to serve as external reviewers and consultants for honors programs and colleges. I find their perspectives to be well-informed, and regard Dr. Lanier’s argument particularly cogent and compelling.**

Of course there are many other issues regarding the curriculum—our inquiries into senior theses, points for research experiences, hybrid courses that mix honors with “nonhonors” students—but this question of funding and (or) ensuring a strong honors curriculum has been historically paramount to the program’s vitality and is widely-regarded as distinctive of honors programs and colleges—a touchstone of what constitutes honors education: small classes taught by strong teachers/scholars with attention to reading, writing, research, and discussion, and more . . . .

2. Staffing. To sidestep such reductions to the program’s main operating budget, and if no increases to the budget for staffing are in view, then another strategy is to try to achieve reductions by reconfiguring the faculty positions in the UHP. For example, the university could reduce the number of faculty serving in UHP administrative positions from two to one. Currently, the director is 60% in Honors in the academic year, and full-time in the summer; the associate director’s position is 50% in Honors in the academic year. If the program were staffed by a director and either an assistant director or program advisor, then either position could be staffed by someone with a Master’s degree, and perhaps even the percentage of time in the position could be increased. Presumably, the problem of budget and staffing may be addressed in the six-month or so short term by appointing an acting director without an associate director, and perhaps with the acting director’s percentage of time in Honors increased. But the question remains about how best to staff and to afford staffing for the program in the longer term; and as the attached documents show, we can recall the external program reviewers’ recommendation that a program of this scope needs a full-time director and associate director, and with someone (perhaps even another position) to coordinate advising and mentoring for major/national scholarships. Currently, the central position of the UHP Management Assistant is the sole full-time position for a program with 400 students, and substantial responsibilities across curriculum, co- and extracurricular efforts, scholarships, advising/mentoring, honors affiliated residence halls, and service (including the recent directives/shifts of
responsibilities and significant additional tasks to the program for overseeing/coordinate the honor societies of Phi Kappa Phi and Phi Beta Kappa, along with Phi Eta Sigma).

An additional strategy in response to the question of staffing is to continue to modify the labor/tasks distributed across the program’s current model of director, associate director, and management assistant (and also work-study student’s tasks). Revising, and to some extent, reducing and redirecting what UHP staff do—particularly the directors—can include reasoned trade-offs or compromises.

Not quite an example but more of an anecdote/history: The UHP used to require two essays as part of the application process, along with a minimum GPA or test score; then with research on our admission and retention data and peer-related comparisons, the correlation between GPA and test score index system was developed; later, the required essays were reduced to one essay; then, following research into recent writing assessment and placement practices, including following the lead of past-president of the National Council of Teachers of English, Dr. Kathleen Blake Yancey’s endorsement of foregoing essays in college wide admission practices in favor of short compositions that enable students to write from their best strengths, interests, and experiences, we shifted to the current requirement of four short compositions selected from six topics; Oregon State University was the first major university to use such an “Insight Resume” to elicit/capture a greater range of “noncognitive” measures, based on the work of William Sedlacek, at the University of Maryland.

3. UHP Scholarships. As director of the University Honors Program, I have made repeated requests to financial aid/central administration that honors scholarship awards (actual funds, not Western Undergraduate Exchange-rate awards) be counted in addition to the centrally-awarded, baseline GO Idaho program awards. Because our $1500 per year awards are for most students counted as just part of what makes up the GO Idaho Gold award of $2500 per year, the UHP has lost its former extra financial leverage to support and to encourage these high academic profile students to attend UI, and to participate in the UHP. Because the UHP assists in making financial aid awards to such a select group of students across the colleges/disciplines, this extra leverage may enable the university to be more successful in recruiting and retaining (especially in honors) a significant but modest number of entering first-year students, with selection based not only on HS GPAs and test scores but also with review of their written compositions, which provide a pretty good sense of their education, experiences (including leadership and service) and aspirations. Having our awards counted in addition to these students’ baseline funding also helps support the honors curriculum and program in general. See the attached program profile PDF/data for more specific information on this issue.

In sum, transitions/changes in the program’s admissions and retention policies, along with its curriculum and related policies/criteria, or less directly related yet significant topic of how best to staff and cover advising for major/national scholarships, are issues that the
Honors Program Committee and the program leadership may review, especially if levels of support—funding and staffing—shift.

* PDF attachments/files:
- UHP Director’s Summary-Review Memo to Honors Program Committee, 14 June 2013
- University Honors Program “Snapshot” Profile, June 2013
- Honors Program Committee Minutes, 2012-2008
- Honors Student Advisory Board Minutes, 2012-2013
- Honors Endeavors & Possibilities 2013
- UHP Senior Exit Surveys, 2011-2013
- Honors Program Committee Minutes, 2007 & 2001
- UHP Director’s Introduction and Summary Assessment for External Program Review
- UHP Annual Report 2008
- External Program Reviewer’s Report (Fall 2008)
- UHP External Reviewer’s Report: Condensed Version

Note: a selection of these documents figure in annual online assessment—log-in to university system is required for access.

Subset of documents also available on Honors Program Committee page, via Faculty Senate website:
http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/facultycouncil/CommitteeWebPages/Agenda_Minutes_Honors_Program.htm

Excerpts from NCHC listserve:
**Comment on funding honors courses, from National Collegiate Honors Council (http://nchchonors.org) listserve discussion. Posted by Professor Gregory Lanier, Associate Dean and Director of the Honors and Interdisciplinary Programs, University of West Florida; Immediate Past President of the National Collegiate Honors Council

[Dr. Lanier]: Hey everyone:

I'd like to offer a bit of a dissenting voice to both John [John Zubizarreta, Columbia College, S.C.] and Joan's positions [Joan Digby, Long Island University]. I have the utmost respect for both of them, a function primarily of the wonderful job both have done building exceptional programs, especially in the way they have managed to successfully integrate their Honors programs and course into the normal standard operating fabric of their institution's practices. Both of those programs are superb examples of what Basic Program Characteristic #2 tries to get at: "the program is fully institutionalized (like comparable units on campus) so that it can build a lasting tradition of excellence." If honors courses are just part of a faculty member's normal load, there is perhaps no better indicator of the program's full institutionalization.

But that situation is, in my perspective, very much the exception, and not the rule, especially for new or struggling Honors programs. The single common factor that I have encountered again and again as I have conducted many Honors program reviews and site visits across the nation is all too often a complete lack of funding, or sometimes only token funding, to support Honors teaching. And that is a huge problem for struggling programs and new directors, most of whom to put it bluntly simply don't have enough local clout to convince a department chair to free up
any faculty member, much less the one faculty member who really is that great Honors teacher to teach an Honors section. Honors Thesis direction? That's a total add-on, done only if a faculty member is willing to do it for free. And the changes in funding formula pressures that are designed to hold each and every faculty member accountable for teaching enough students to generate enough funds to pay his/her salary, such as were trumpeted in the Texas system not too long ago, pose a HUGE challenge now and will be, IMHO, a much greater challenge for Honors in the future. If it takes 30 or so students in each class to "pay the freight" as it were, then Honors classes, which are often held to half that size, are at extreme risk. In that scenario it is very, very easy for a bottom-line conscious Department Chair to simply pull out of Honors teaching completely, or to at best insist upon some mechanism to replace that lost SCH (Student Credit Hour) or FTE (Full Time Equivalency) productivity. And since I've also been a department chair for nearly 20 years now (and over 3 separate disciplines), I fully sympathize with that stance. A Chair's first loyalty must be the departmental curriculum; Honors is an add-on and can even be regarded as unneeded fluff by those hostile to Honors education. Compensation for Honors Theses, mentoring, etc.-- well, if a faculty member is willing to do that, and willing further to risk jeopardizing tenure or promotion for following those pursuits rather than crank out another article needed for promotion, they can, but as a Chair, I'm certainly not going to encourage that, much less reward it with real compensation. That's at least one reason why, my friends, I think we burn out so many young and new Honors directors and Honors faculty so quickly.

In sum: I believe very strongly that if an Honors program is going to deliver an Honors curriculum, the academic officer responsible for delivering that curriculum must have the means at hand to deliver that curriculum. A department chair normally has both a number of salaried faculty lines plus "cash" funding to hire adjunct faculty as needed. Why shouldn't Honors directors/deans have a comparable infrastructure and wherewithal?

At a minimum, I don't think an Honors program/college can be considered to be fully institutionalized unless the director/dean has--at a bare minimum--enough wherewithal to supply at the least one adjunct faculty salary back to the "home" for each and every Honors course offered, regardless of the department. Honors programs and colleges that have actual Honors faculty lines are of course doing much better than that.

And it's not a "provost's slush fund" (sorry John!). As many have said, "Follow the money trail, and you'll quickly recognize the organization's priorities." If the institution is willing to commit hard recurring budget dollars for teaching to a Honors program, that's THE most telling indicator of the institution's commitment to Honors. If a Provost funds Honors, that Provost VALUES Honors. At my institution, and I would confess instantly that I'm not a "fully institutionalized" program by this parameter, it would take the equivalent of two faculty lines to fully fund my program. Two lines out of nearly 300 institution-wide. I have the equivalent of one, and I'm working relentlessly to get the second. So I guess I'm either half-valued or half-worthless. But it's better than where it was when I started, 'cause at that time I had 0.

So that's my 2 cents for what it's worth. I do recognize that there are places like John's and Joan's and many of the larger Honors Colleges where the institution has committed to Honors by
folding Honors teaching into the normal faculty workload formulas. But those situations, I am
deathly afraid, are very much the small minority. The dominant paradigm is where Honors
directors have to scramble, hat in hand, for everything, and very, very few Honors activities,
especially Thesis direction, lead to adequate faculty compensation.

Greg

Comment from NCHC listserve discussion [same discussion thread as post from Lanier] on
funding honors courses, posted by Bob Spurrer, Director of the Honors College at Oklahoma
State University, and past president of NCHC:

Sean,

Here are a few thoughts about funding honors courses taken from an external honors review
report for which I was one of the NCHC Recommended Site Visitors recently:

A variety of models exist across the nation in terms of funding honors courses. A few
institutions have designated tenure-track faculty lines in the Honors Program or Honors College
leading to tenure in Honors rather than in a regular academic department, but with perhaps one
exception even at these institutions not all honors courses are taught by these faculty. A
variation on this approach is the appointment of Honors Program Faculty Fellows who are
released from their departmental responsibilities for a set period (two or three years) for a
budgeted full-time assignment in the Honors Program to develop and teach honors courses and
also sometimes to do some of the honors advising for Honors Program students.

The opposite end of the spectrum is the institution such as [the institution being reviewed] at
which the Honors Director must rely on the generosity of departmental administrators. Another,
less common, approach is for the central administration to recapture faculty lines across campus
when they become vacant and assign those lines to the Honors Program under a model in which
the Honors Director reassigns the lines to academic departments that show a willingness to
participate fully in the university's honors educational efforts while at the same time serving their
own majors and service courses.

Yet another model is one in which the Honors Program is responsible for funding special honors
courses and seminars (by providing released-time funding to the departments) but in which the
academic departments already offering honors courses fund the first honors section of regular
disciplinary courses (Calculus, American History, etc.) from their own budgets with the Honors
Program providing funding for additional honors sections of a disciplinary course if
needed. This cost-sharing model allows for a cooperative working relationship between the
Honors Program and academic departments rather than placing the entire "budget burden" on
either. Supplemental to this approach is sufficient budget to allow the Honors Program to
provide "seed money" in the form of course development grants or funding for an initial offering
of an honors course, followed by a cost-sharing arrangement in subsequent semesters.

Under this shared-responsibility model the funding provided for faculty released time should be
determined in such a way that there is a positive incentive for the department chairs and
deans. Ideally, it should give the department chair some budgetary flexibility by providing more dollars than the minimum needed to hire someone else to teach the course from which the honors course faculty member will be released. If a department cannot release a willing faculty member, another option can be to allow that faculty member to teach an overload course with department "banking" the Honors Program funds to provide the faculty member with salary support in the subsequent summer for research, instructional development activities, or professional travel.

Having salary dollar "carrots" can be extremely beneficial to the Honors Director in dealing with departments, but it probably is overly optimistic to believe that all departments will be willing to cooperate. For this reason, it may be necessary for the Executive Vice President to have a "stick" to employ if cooperation is not forthcoming—perhaps in the form of a budget reduction for departments that do not contribute to the institutional goal of having an outstanding Honors Program fully available to students across campus.

In terms of the honors thesis, I don't know that there is a pattern—but my first thought would be to inquire about the compensation (if any) offered for graduate theses and dissertations—or what sort of teaching load credit faculty receive for directing a graduate thesis or dissertation. I believe I recall one institution at which a faculty member could "bank" credit for directing honors thesis work and after a specified number of theses receive professional development funds or a one-course release from the normal teaching load in a subsequent semester.

Hope this helps, at least a bit.

Bob Spurrier

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http://www.uidaho.edu/honors/people/uhpcommittee

Faculty Staff Handbook 1640.53
HONORS PROGRAM COMMITTEE
A. FUNCTION
A-1. To recommend policies for the University Honors Program, including admissions requirements.
A-2. To act on changes in the program.
A-3. To act on petitions for exceptions to the requirements of the program. [The committee's actions on petitions may be appealed as stated in FSH Section 2500.]
B. STRUCTURE.
Six faculty members to represent a broad spectrum of the UI community, an academic dean from one of the six colleges representing the honors curriculum (college representation to rotate on an annual basis), chair [president] of the Honors Student Advisory Board or designee, and (without vote), director of the University Honors Program (UHP), associate director of the UHP, program
advisor of the UHP (staff). The latter serves as secretary. One of the six appointed faculty members serves as chair. [rev. 7/06]

http://www.uidaho.edu/honors/about
http://www.uidaho.edu/honors/about/programhighlights