

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

HONORS PROGRAM

External Review Report

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PART I.

INTRODUCTION

A site visit for purposes of the review of the University of Wyoming Honors Program was conducted by two experienced Honors administrators, each certified by the National Collegiate Honors Council (hereafter NCHC) based in Lincoln, Nebraska. Dr. James McKusick is the Dean of the Davidson Honors College and Professor of English at the University of Montana.

Dr. Rosalie Otero, Director and Associate Dean of the Honors Program at the University of New Mexico, now Professor Emeritus, is a past president of NCHC and former chair of the NCHC Assessment and Evaluation Committee.

Prior to our campus visit we received and reviewed materials sent by Dr. Susan Aronstein, Honors Interim Director, including a self-study containing budget information, recruitment materials, policies and procedures as well as history and mission, and a catalog of the University.

The report is divided into four sections: (1) Introduction, (2) An Executive Summary, (3) specific commentary and recommendations on the structure and organization of the Honors Program, and (4) an analysis of the UW Honors Program in terms of the NCHC's Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program. Appended is the itinerary of our visit and a listing of the individuals with whom we met during our visit.

In an effort to avoid inadvertent errors on matters of fact, a confidential working draft of this report was provided to Interim Director Susan Aronstein with an invitation to call any factual errors to the attention of the visiting team by email before completion of the final version of the report.

With approximately 800 institutional members, the National Collegiate Honors Council is the largest national organization concerned with honors education, but it does not serve as a formal accrediting body for Honors Programs or Honors Colleges. The members of the visiting team are NCHC Recommended Site Visitors, and they bring a range of national honors experience. This

document, however, should not be construed to constitute a report from NCHC as an organization.

Part II.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The visit to the University of Wyoming (hereafter UW) was a most pleasant and rewarding experience. The two visitors were received graciously by all the constituents of the university with whom they visited, and they found in turn an Honors Program that was functional, effective for the role that it was expected to play on campus, and admirable in terms of its development and current status. This is perhaps most strikingly underscored by the longevity of the program and the expense to which the university has gone to provide functional, pleasant facilities. The Red House, with its historical associations and its visibility on campus, lent additional cachet to the Honors Program. Upper administration, the deans and the other administrators with whom we met evinced an attitude of acceptance, even pride and certainly cooperation that augurs well for the functioning of the program. Mention was made repeatedly of the value of the educational experience that the honor students were receiving and the effective management of the Honors Program. There was thus a sense that Honors is highly valued by the university and is seen as a major component of UW as this school moves toward its vision of even greater academic credibility than it has already achieved.

Indeed, this acceptance and valuing of Honors was so much the case that an emphasis by the university administration on including more students in this program is visibly creating inordinate challenges to the program as it sought to accommodate growth while being relatively static in terms of resources. This is a classic “good news/bad news” situation. That the Honors Program is so embraced by the general university community speaks very well for its mission and accomplishments but also presents a warning: The visitors perceived that the traditional higher education mandate to “do more with less” has reached a breaking point for Honors. The resort to increased numbers of courses, the scramble every semester to find teachers, and the growing numbers of students with which the two staff members (administrative assistant and director) were expected to cope and the relative paucity of Honors housing—admirable as we found the Honors House to be—were clear danger signals. Funding patterns are characteristically relatively low resource allocation and negatively correlated with increasing enrollment patterns

which potentially dilutes the program outcomes. It would, therefore, be the strongest sense of the visitation team that the achievements are great, and the future challenges are perhaps even greater at the Honors Program of the University of Wyoming.

Throughout our time at the University of Wyoming, we were impressed by the extremely high regard in which multiple campus constituencies hold the Honors Program. In addition to the high repute of the Honors Program throughout the University, UW has an effective recruiting of high quality students, support among faculty and administrators, and a strong and pervasive respect and affection with which its students view the Honors Program. Clearly, the Honors Program has been a major factor in raising the academic life and reputation of the University.

The Honors Program has the potential to become a stronger component in continuing the institution's reputation for teaching and student intellectual development. There are interested and capable faculty as well as qualified and motivated students. It is essential for the central administration to support the Honors Program. The visiting team is concerned that the annual budget and continued dependence on the College of Arts and Sciences is a detriment to the program. Given the fact that the Honors Program contributes so much to the wellbeing of the institution and that more and more of the Honors students come from diverse majors including STEM majors and engineering, it is our recommendation that the university consider contributing, for instance, to course "buy-out" funds so that more Honors classes might be supported and so that departments, especially those in A & S, are not so hard-pressed by the demands that the Honors Program places upon them. As we spoke to various constituencies on campus, this seemed to be a major issue, with only a few colleges contributing to the program.

With a mandate for continued growth, the Honors Program needs additional staff. This recommendation will be addressed in Part III.

Recommendation:

The balance between enrollment and quality and the challenge of setting shared, realistic size goals are at the core of the Honors Program's strategic planning efforts for the coming years.

Given the availability of the Wyoming Hathaway Scholarship (with 3.5 GPA and 25 ACT) and the relatively low cost of tuition at UW, enrollments in the Honors Program will continue to increase. The visiting team does not presume to answer this question for the University of Wyoming, but we do have a strong recommendation to make in this area: The major stakeholders—senior administration (including the President, Provost, and the Honors Director), Deans, Department Chairs and teaching faculty, the staff, Honors students, and major donors and/or development professionals in the UW Foundation—need to come together as a Task Force and work toward a shared, consensus understanding of this matter. A decision needs to be made, which will be widely understood, and which will be binding for several years. Possibly a half-day retreat, with an outside facilitator, would be an effective way to move this issue forward. The current unsettled situation regarding program enrollment seems to us a matter that lurks constantly in the background (and sometimes the foreground) of many discussions of Honors, and we encourage the institution to move toward a resolution.

We also recommend that a Faculty Advisory Council, perhaps from some of the members of this Task Force, be established to support the Director and assist with such tasks as curriculum development, policy augmentation, and other appropriate responsibilities. At the very least, Council members' duties might include helping recruit faculty instructors, briefing new professors on the nature and rewards of engagement in the Honors Program, helping with some of the more challenging decisions regarding student enrollment (e.g., looking at applications which fall between obvious accepts and obvious declines), helping to filter proposals for courses, and the like. Obviously, the council cannot and should not replace thoughtful internal management of the Honors Program, nor should it be overtaxed with complex duties.

PART III

REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MISSION

The program has a clear mission statement that includes the objectives and responsibilities of Honors. The Honors Program at UW was established in 1961-62 when the first honors cohort graduated. The longevity indicates a clear commitment by UW to the Honors Program. The program resided in the College of Arts and Sciences. In the late 70's, the program was moved under the administrative umbrella of the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The mission of the University of Wyoming aspires to be one of the nation's finest public land-grant research universities. To serve as a statewide resource for accessible and affordable higher education of the highest quality; rigorous scholarship; technology transfer; economic and community development; and responsible stewardship of our cultural, historical, and natural resources. It states in its mission statement:

“In the exercise of our primary mission to promote learning, we seek to provide academic and co-curricular opportunities that will:

- Expose students to the frontiers of scholarship and creative activity and the complexities of an interdependent world;
- Ensure individual interactions among students, faculty, and staff;
- Nurture an environment that values and manifests diversity, free expression, academic freedom, personal integrity, and mutual respect; and
- Promote opportunities for personal growth, physical health, athletic competition, and leadership development for all members of the university community.

As Wyoming's only university, we are committed to outreach and service that extend our human talent and technological capacity to serve the people in our communities, our state, the nation, and the world. The primary vehicles for identifying the specific actions and resource allocations needed to accomplish this complex mission are the university's strategic plans, revised periodically.”

The mission of the Honors Program is to foster success by building community supportive of

especially high aspirations and goals. Designed to welcome students with diverse talents, the program provides a challenging, interdisciplinary curriculum that fulfills University Studies Program (USP) requirements, ensuring that high-achieving students from all majors, even restrictive ones such as engineering and music, are able to participate in the program.

Through this curriculum, and by providing students the opportunity to conduct individual research, the program seeks to encourage intellectual curiosity and academic excellence. Its ultimate goal is to produce vital, informed, successful, and engaged citizens. Thus UW's Honors Program has a clear mission statement, which is pivotal in achieving the institution's mission.

FACILITIES

The Red House is certainly spacious compared to the facilities often found on other campuses. With three floors devoted to the program there is sufficient space for offices, a lounge and computer lab, a classroom and kitchen. The Honors House is also an impressive facility. With the dramatic growth in the number of Honors students, however, space that now seems more than adequate is destined to become crowded in short order.

Although students also have designated Honors floors in the residence halls, it would be advantageous to be able to house the entire Honors student community in one residence hall.

Recommendation:

Although all of the floors in the Red House seem easily accessible, it is important that the Director move to the first floor. We believe this makes a much more positive statement that students are to be welcomed into the Honors Program and the Director is much more accessible.

CURRICULUM

Although the Honors Program is to be commended for its interdisciplinary focus, the curriculum is heavily reliant on the humanities. Considering the number of majors represented among the Honors students, the curriculum needs to become more inclusive in its offerings to accommodate students from all majors. We found there is a large population of engineering and STEM majors

in the Program. The curriculum should be designed so that Honors requirements can, when appropriate, also satisfy general education requirements, major or disciplinary requirements, and pre-professional or professional training requirements. Currently, general education is appropriately integrated into the curriculum whereby some courses may count for A & S humanities requirements, Quantitative Reasoning requirements, and University Cultural Context requirements. By expanding the curriculum to include science, social science, business, engineering and other majors, students will be able to graduate in a timely manner, colleges and departments can participate in honors education more readily, and the curriculum will become more comprehensive. One of the prime purposes of an Honors program on a campus is to encourage curricular experimentation and course innovation. The structure of UW's Honors curriculum certainly provides opportunity to do this.

There was some minor caviling from some departments about the pressure that it puts on them to undertake such extraordinary cooperation—with English apparently bearing the brunt of the commitment.

The Freshman Colloquium is excellent giving freshmen a common Honors core. The Colloquium also meets several requirements including the writing requirement, the Information Literacy requirement, and oral communication requirement. However, these courses must be kept small. Due to increased enrollments, they have climbed to a class size of 22. We are all aware of the studies that have been conducted regarding class size. We are also aware that few resources bring about an increase in class size. We highly recommend that UW not resort to large enrollments but seek alternatives to manage class size.

Study Abroad programs, especially faculty-led programs, are valuable and often effect life-changing experiences. International programs may offer another alternative to the standard thesis.

We did not see independent-study options other than the thesis. It may be another way to fulfill honors requirements, especially for majors that may not be large enough to fill a course. Students

in other programs who are offered an independent honors credit course see it as an excellent opportunity to get to know their professors well and to participate in projects that enhance their education.

Senior Project

The Senior Project requirement is commendable. Research does prepare students for graduate and professional schools. It helps students to think independently, to ask original questions, and to work one-on-one with a faculty mentor. The Honors Program, however, needs more flexibility in this area. Business and engineering majors, for example, are required to complete internships or design projects that could be accepted for thesis credit with some modifications. Although such projects have sometimes been approved by the Honors Director on an *ad hoc* basis, the Honors Program should consider providing clear project approval guidelines to students who seek to complete their senior projects in such “applied” disciplines. Giving students broader options will also increase program completion rates.

For many students the Senior Project is often the highlight of their undergraduate experience. Many faculty members also report that it is their favorite Honors assignment. But for many other students, it is a fearsome prospect, and for too many faculty members (individually and as Department and College citizens) it is a daunting venture. A considerable number of students and professors are devoted to the traditional “thesis”: a research paper of originality and substance, growing from carefully supervised independent work. Others have undertaken projects not accurately described as a “thesis” in the traditional sense.

We recommend that the Senior Project initiative be revisited and consideration be given to adding a required course. At other institutions, the Senior Thesis/Project often consists of six credit hours.

Recommendation:

Establishing a Faculty Advisory Council can review the thesis experiences and reaffirm

expectations for performance outcomes across disciplines. There needs to be more flexibility in the Senior Capstone experience. In addition, these projects should be more widely disseminated.

STUDENTS

Students with whom we met were truly exceptional. Equally apparent from some student comments is the fact that they would not have attended UW if it were not for the Honors Program. Observationally, however, and based on faculty comments as well, there does seem to be a certain homogeneity in the students within the Honors Program. While this is a difficulty in many honors programs/colleges that we visit, it is a deficiency that needs vigorous attention. Such attention can take many forms. For instance, a more thorough portfolio approach for application to the Honors Program might be considered. While the application asks for expected information (test scores, etc.) there might be other metrics, such as questions about “first generation college attending status” or some insight into socio-economic status. If an essay was incorporated into the application process, questions about challenges that the students faced in either attending high school or that they have experienced in anticipating college may be useful.

We did notice (pictures on Rene Sanchez’s wall) that there is diversity among the students who participate in the Summer High School Institute. This program is, of course, an important recruiting opportunity for the Honors Program.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

The program has a clearly articulated set of admission criteria (GPA, ACT/SAT score) for entering Freshmen, Transfer and Continuing students, and students who do not meet the criteria may write to the director and explain their reasons for wanting to participate in the program.

The Honors Program maintains control over recruitment and admissions. It is essential that the Director of the Honors Program continue to maintain control for two major reasons:

1. The Director and the Honors Program staff and students particularly the members of the Wyoming Honors Organization (WHO) understand the requirements for the

College and can best inform and influence potential students.

2. From the very beginning of the recruiting process, the Honors Program staff have access to potential students whose success in the Honors Program and at UW will depend largely on the personal advisement and mentorship they receive early on. In addition, there may be instances when GPA or ACT/SAT scores may not meet the posted criteria but the students may have other indefinable characteristics that would allow their admission and only Honors personnel would be able to discern those qualities. Finally, since UW admits many rural and first-generation students, it is crucial to keep recruiting and admissions control within the program in order to provide necessary flexibility.

The program's enrollment has continued to climb, stretching level resources allocated to the program. How many should be admitted to the Honors Program? The issue raised by this questions is perhaps the most often-asked and important facing the program. The Honors administration, staff, faculty and students are insistent on a powerful commitment to maintaining and building the highest academic quality that is imperative for honors education. Enrollment has grown explosively in the past years, increasing to a total of approximately 910 students in 2013-2014. Some of the most important stakeholders, including the senior administration of the University, remain committed to the increasing enrollment. However, others are concerned that continued growth, especially at anything like the current rate, might pose serious threats to some quality aspects of the Program, especially interactions among students and between students and faculty. Staffing for Honors courses is already an issue, as some Departments find they have to provide instructors to the Honors Program on a voluntary basis, without receiving any direct funding to "buy out" those instructors' regular departmental teaching assignments. . Thesis supervision, which requires significant commitment of time, becomes problematic as more students complete the upper-division requirements. Finally, over-enrollment strained the renovated and planned functions of the physical facilities. Thus, there is some sentiment for capping the enrollment at a set figure – e.g., 600 students, or 150 entering students, as well as raising the eligibility criteria and admission process such as requiring an essay in addition to

GPA and ACT scores or using a portfolio application, or including other requirements such as previously exhibited leadership roles, volunteer activities, and preparatory courses. Ultimately, the Honors Program needs to develop special admissions criteria to ensure steady but manageable growth and encourage diversity.

ADVISING

Honors students receive honors-related academic advising from the Director and Office Associate. This is, in fact, a key component of the UW's Honors Program that is lacking. Contrary to the myth that honor students are independent and need less advising than other students, it is important to keep in mind as an esteemed Honors colleague, Sam Schuman, wrote in *Beginning in Honors*:

“Honors students can be expected to have at least as many, and as complicated problems as other students. It is sometimes tempting to envision all honors students as especially well rounded, balanced, thoughtful, mature, and self-possessed. This vision does not seem particularly accurate or helpful despite its attractiveness and allure. Honor students, just like their non-honors peers, are sometimes plagued with doubts about their academic careers and their futures; they are going to have problems with their love lives, scheduling conflicts, health problems or intrusive parents. In fact, because their academic expectations and goals are oftentimes higher than those of their non-honors peers, honors students will sometimes have more academic and personal counseling needs than other students.”

Recommendation:

Susan Aronstein, Interim Director, and Cassidy Tolman, Office Associate Senior, communicate effectively and appear cohesive and committed to student success. However, the workload of each office prohibits good quality advising, especially in view of steadily increasing student enrollment. Nonetheless, the staff repeatedly expressed a commitment to provide students excellent services through academic advisement and strong recruitment outcomes. In the future, strategic planning processes will need to establish objectives that will clarify staff priorities in daily workloads. Given the central role that advising serves in the mission of honors programs, it will be essential to employ advising staff consistent with best practices.

STUDENT GOVERNANCE

The Wyoming Honors Organization (WHO) is an active honors organization. An executive committee (president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, historian, and senior assistants) governs the organization which meets weekly in the Honors House. In addition to participating in numerous community service and fundraising projects, WHO sponsors several social events over the course of the year to benefit honors students. Several WHOvians represent the Honors Program at honors conferences and work with the honors administration to promote the program.

The members of WHO with whom we met were enthusiastic with genuinely interested in helping to establish a thriving Honors community. While the visitors are entirely comprehending of the argument that Honors students have so many outside demands on their time that Honors Program planned activities simply add to the burden, it is nevertheless the experience of a great many other programs that Honors sponsored projects, activities and social opportunities are a very effective way to build community and a sense of identification with the Honors Program. This in turn has been shown to be a critical component in retention and student achievement of an Honors program (and of university programs as well). For instance, a great many Honors students, having come from an academic but not necessarily a social milieu in high school, yearn to establish their own social worth through interactions with their intellectual peers. There can also be a unique congruence between academics and social activities through such things as program sponsored field trips of significant academic relevance, through a marriage of academic and sports/physically competitive activities, and through outdoor interaction chances. Honors can, staff time permitting, provide unlimited opportunities in this regard. Such activities may also have a bearing on retention rates. We are pleased to report that the WHO are a valuable component of the Honors Program.

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

The Honors Program in the administrative and academic structure of UW is appropriate to its mission and functions. It is a university-wide program and the Director reports

to the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

However, as stated earlier, the Honors Program has insufficient staffing for 900+ students and for the many, varied responsibilities required of that office including staff supervision, maintaining budgets, advocating for resources with deans and Academic Affairs, fundraising, advising, recruitment, curriculum development and recruiting and hiring faculty, maintaining data, senior projects and study abroad advising, research and teaching.

The Honors Program Director has a full-time, 12-month appointment but does not have oversight of Honors activity only. Given the well-developed leadership role of Honors at UW, it is essential that Honors administrative experience be an important criterion in the search for a Director.

Recommendation:

We recommend that the Director be released from all other duties including teaching and service on departmental committees. The Director may be able to teach an Honors course in a couple of years. In order for the Honors Program to succeed in its mission, it needs additional staff positions. We recommend an Associate Director and a full-time advisor initially.

It is our understanding that a Search process will begin next academic year for a Director to lead the Honors Program. It is our recommendation that continuity in high quality outcomes inherent in honors education is dependent on a leadership with Honors administrative experience. Given the Honors Program's assessed level of development, an experienced leader in Honors education is required for program stability and growth.

FACULTY

The Honors Program has considerable control over the selection of honors faculty, as it should. During our visit, we noticed that enthusiasm and shared pedagogical vision characterized the instructional staff. When we met with instructors from Honors courses, there appeared to be less of a professorial community. Some of the faculty did not know others, and there was less

concord about the mission and nature of the courses. The faculty who teach honors courses are enthusiastic and enjoy teaching these courses. At many other institutions, in order to teach honors courses, faculty must be tenured or on tenure-track appointments. More and more, however, honors programs are obligated to hire graduate students, non-tenure track instructors and part-time instructors. Criteria used for recruitment and selection (e.g. research agendas, good pedagogical skills) of faculty instructors was not entirely clear and may need clarification in a written form

Recommendation:

These faculty members are devoted to their Honors teaching and their Honors students, and they enjoy their Honors classes greatly. While they are, of course, already busy, we believe that a few carefully arranged and productive events that involved them in sharing their experiences and expectations for their courses would be beneficial. If such events included food, attendance would be good and enthusiasm high. Some of these events might even include students as participants for the purpose of generating conversations on teaching, curriculum, the meaning and value of honors, the ideal honors experience—topics that cut across the concerns of both faculty and students. At the heart of these discussions, faculty can continually shape the quality of honors education at UW. We highly recommend faculty development as a priority in strategic growth of the Honors Program. We also suggest that a Faculty Handbook be developed that would contain written guidelines about the nature of and pedagogy associated with honors courses and theses.

As resources become available, there should be a concerted effort to hire tenured and tenure-track faculty. Ideally, it would benefit the program to have two or three faculty lines devoted to the Honors Program.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Budget

The Honors Program is allocated an annual budget that does not support the mission of the

program. Accordingly, there need to be additional resources allocated to the program level with enrollment increases. The Provost should create an Honors budget line, perhaps out of funds currently residing in the College of Arts & Sciences, to the Honors Program's budget.

Given the enrollment increases, it is necessary to consider additional resources for instructors. At some institutions, those colleges and schools that enroll honors students are "taxed" to support honors faculty. The Honors Program serves the University because it attracts good students and elevates the overall quality of education at UW. Some colleges support honors by providing a significant number of honors courses, such as the College of Arts & Sciences and faculty such as Business, but there needs to be "buy-in" from all of the units on campus.

As stated elsewhere in this report, the program is understaffed. The Honors Program will require additional resources to encompass best practices in the teaching, advising, and other facets of honors education.

Alumni

The Honors Program is sporadically involved in alumni affairs. Current students express a strong affinity for the Honors Program. We would surmise that graduates have this same affinity.

Recommendation:

Alumni can be an important resource. Alumni can be involved in projects that support fundraising initiatives, curricular development, and institutional change and can significantly impact the Program's agenda. Therefore, ideally, a priority in the next five years would be to build and engage alumni in relationship to the Honors Program. External Advisory or Advancement boards can play a key role in advancing the program's goals and objectives. Events maintain communication with alumni, but formal development of Alumni Advisory Boards can be more effective. Graduates of the Honors Program need early engagement of alumni to cultivate them in their new alumni role. The Honors Director is the most likely leader to collaborate with staff to engage and to cultivate board members.

However, given that the Honors Program only has two staff members, it is an impossible task to add one more component to the already overloaded responsibilities of the Director and Office Assistant.

Dr. Duncan Harris, the long-time, well-respected former director of the Honors Program, would be an excellent resource to establish links with honors alumni. However, there would have to be additional funds allocated to this position.

RECRUITMENT

Evidence of the role that the Honors Program plays in the university's commitment to excellence is the pivotal role of Honors in the general recruitment process. The Admissions Office clearly understands the importance of Honors and tends to highlight it. The recruitment process includes the use of technology including Facebook, tweeting, and phone calls as well as on-campus visits. The Honors Program website is well organized and informative. This certainly contributes to the visibility of the program.

Recommendation:

Plans need to be laid now for expansion of Honors staff, if the university persists in its plans to greatly expand the Honors Program.

DEVELOPMENT

The Foundation Office could highlight Honors in its "selling" of the university to potential donors. We were pleased to learn that after our visit, a special gifts officer was assigned to the Honors Program. Establishing endowments for honors is certainly important but, unfortunately, unless the endowment is substantial, programs cannot operate on endowment dollars alone. Central administration must include budget lines for the Honors Program.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

There does not seem to be a continuous process of collecting and evaluating data for the Honors

Program and the classes for which it is responsible. Some data was made available to the visitors, but the information such as student evaluations, student averages, retention rates, demographics, and the like are not readily available.

Recommendation:

Assessment and evaluation is important for honors quality, such as student achievement statistics after graduation, if sufficient staff were available. The design, syllabi, practices, methods of evaluation, and activities of all of the Honors courses are not stated or measured with appropriate student learning outcomes. The Honors Program needs to align curriculum with strategic plan, program learning outcomes and student learning outcomes.

Questionnaires should be developed and given to students in honors courses each semester. Both quantitative items and narrative items regarding subject interest, course rating, professor rating, and learning outcomes should be included in the questionnaires.

An Annual Report is an important instrument not only to record data that would be readily available to administrators, donors, and the like, but would serve as historical record over the years.

The honors program does not appear on the institution's regular program review rotation. A review of the program has not occurred since the late 70's. The visitation team recommends a move toward regular program review for UW's Honors Program.

GRADUATION

The Honors Program recognizes all of its graduates, providing them certificates of completion and stoles to wear at graduation, at a Spring Banquet. Students who complete Honors are recognized in the graduation program and at college commencements. Their completion of the Honors Minor is noted on their UW transcript.

PART IV.

ANALYSIS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING HONORS PROGRAM IN TERMS OF NCHC'S BASIC CHARACTERISTICS FOR HONORS PROGRAMS

Although no single or definitive honors program model can or should be superimposed on all types of institutions, the National Collegiate Honors Council has identified a number of best practices that are common to successful and fully developed honors programs.

- 1. The honors program offers carefully designed educational experiences that meet the needs and abilities of the undergraduate students it serves. A clearly articulated set of admission criteria (e.g., GPA, SAT score, a written essay, satisfactory progress, etc.) identifies the targeted student population served by the honors program. The program clearly specifies the requirements needed for retention and satisfactory completion.*

The UW honors program offers educational experiences that meet the needs and abilities of the undergraduate students it serves. It includes freshman colloquia that provide Humanities, writing and oral communication university requirements. The 2000 level courses explore issues central to human experience from perspectives of non-western peoples. 3000 level courses introduce study of nature and grounds of knowledge, its limits and validity. Many of these courses meet university cultural context requirements. 4000 level courses ask students to confront a complex social issue. In addition, students are required to complete a senior thesis. The honors program also offers a limited number of 3000 and 4000 level online courses to accommodate distance students. The necessary criterion for admission is either (1) a composite ACT score of at least 28 or a combined reading and math SAT score of 1240 or (2) a cumulative high school GPA of 3.7 or better. Requirements needed for retention and satisfactory completion are a minimum 3.25 GPA and regular completion of honors courses. In addition, the Program also offers admission by petition for students who do not meet the stated criteria.

Given the availability of Hathaway scholarships for students with a 3.5 GPA and ACT of 25, enrollments in the Honors Program will continue to grow. This escalation must be addressed in light of the minimal resources of the Honors Program.

As stated in Section III, much of the honors curriculum is Humanities-based and should be expanded to include other fields.

- 2. The program has a clear mandate from the institution's administration in the form of a mission statement or charter document that includes the objectives and responsibilities of honors and defines the place of honors in the administrative and academic structure of the institution. The statement ensures the permanence and stability of honors by guaranteeing that adequate infrastructure resources, including an appropriate budget as well as appropriate faculty, staff, and administrative support when necessary, are allocated to honors so that the program avoids dependence on the good will and energy of particular faculty members or administrators for survival. In other words, the program is fully institutionalized (like comparable units on campus) so that it can build a lasting tradition of excellence.*

Although the documents provided by the Honors Program indicate clearly-thought-out approaches to a variety of matters within its jurisdiction including a mission statement, there does not appear to be a comprehensive policies and procedures document that has received the approval of the central administration.

As stated in the section under budget, the Honors Program's resources are quite inadequate for a major university. Unlike many honors programs that provide significant funding for faculty release to teach interdisciplinary honors courses, honors colloquia, and honors sections of departmental courses, the Honors Program at UW does not have the resources to do so in its current budget.

3. *The honors director reports to the chief academic officer of the institution.*

The honors director reports to the chief academic officer at UW.

4. *The honors curriculum, established in harmony with the mission statement, meets the needs of the students in the program and features special courses, seminars, colloquia, experiential learning opportunities, undergraduate research opportunities, or other independent-study options.*

The breadth of honors courses available to honors students at The University of Wyoming is very good, albeit with a strong Humanities concentration. The interdisciplinary focus corresponds with best practices criteria of honors education.

The Program requires a Senior Honors Project. These projects are tailored to the students' interests and expertise. They may enroll in HP 4975 and 4976 to receive credit for their projects. However, the external reviewers are concerned that honors students are not currently required to enroll in any academic credits for the senior research project. We encourage the Honors Program to consider adding a requirement for a certain minimum number of academic credits for the senior research project. As mentioned above, many honors programs require students to enroll in 6 thesis credits for their senior projects. Certainly a minimum expectation of 3 credits for the senior project would be reasonable for UW students. Requiring a certain minimum number of thesis credits would provide motivation for the students and would enable faculty mentors to hold them accountable for their work on these projects.

Another possible approach to adding scope and flexibility to the honors curriculum would be to recommend, or even require, require a certain number of independent study or experiential learning credits. However, given the tightly constrained resources of the honors program, this recommendation should probably considered more of a long-term goal.

- 5. *The program requirements constitute a substantial portion of the participants' undergraduate work, typically 20% to 25% of the total course work and certainly no less than 15%.***

The UW Honors Program requires 15 honors credit hours, plus a senior research project, for the University Honors degree. The senior research project is expected to be “equivalent to 3 hours of course work,” and if that is true, then an Honors Program graduate would complete the equivalent of 18 honors credit hours, which accounts for exactly 15% of a 120 credit-hour undergraduate degree.

However, as noted above (paragraph #4), it appears that many honors students are not enrolling in any academic credits for the senior research project. We encourage the Honors Program to add a requirement for a certain minimum number of academic credits for the senior research project.

As the UW honors program continues to develop the breadth and scope of its curriculum, it would be desirable to consider increasing the number of required honors course credits, since 18 credits (15%) may be regarded as a bare minimum. A more typical honors program requirement at many flagship public universities would be 21 to 24 honors credits.

- 6. *The curriculum of the program is designed so that honors requirements can, when appropriate, also satisfy general education requirements, major or disciplinary requirements, and preprofessional or professional training requirements.***

The curriculum of the Honors Program is designed to satisfy general education requirements. However, it will be important to the continued success of the program to expand this feature to include major or disciplinary requirements as well. We encourage consideration of ways to incorporate capstone experiences in academic majors in lieu of a more traditional honors thesis. We also believe that it is imperative to develop and offer more upper-division honors courses in areas outside of the Humanities as well as to develop better integration of the honors curriculum with all of the colleges, schools, and academic programs on campus.

7. The program provides a locus of visible and highly reputed standards and models of excellence for students and faculty across the campus.

The Honors Program is reported by almost all concerned to be a vibrant and vital part of The University of Wyoming. Students (many of whom indicate that they would not have come to the University without the presence of the Honors Program) were extremely positive about their academic experiences and their treatment by the faculty and staff and administration of the UW Honors Program. Faculty, deans, the provost, and the president likewise had nothing but praise for the students and staff of the Honors Program.

A concern, however, has arisen because of the rapidly increasing number of Honors Program students and the need for more faculty to teach honors classes at a time when general university enrollment has grown dramatically and resources have declined. The director and chairs reported that they were experiencing significant staffing pressures as a result of these changes.

To facilitate discussions about concerns of the department chairs (and some of their deans), it would be helpful if the Director of the Honors Program would schedule a meeting once a semester or once a year at a convenient time to allow for a face-to-face “open forum” discussion of issues that either she or the department chairs might wish to raise.

As previously noted in this report, the visiting team strongly recommends the formation of a Task Force, representing all of the program’s major stakeholders, to be convened by the President or Provost, and to be charged to work toward a shared consensus concerning the future of the Honors Program. Ideally, such a conversation will result in the outline of a strategic plan that maps out future initiatives in Honors education and envision future development of the UW Honors Program.

We also recommend that a Faculty Advisory Council, perhaps constituted from some of the members of this Task Force, be established to support the Director and assist with such tasks as curriculum development, policy augmentation, and other appropriate responsibilities. Council members’ duties might include helping recruit faculty instructors, briefing new professors on the

nature and rewards of engagement in the Honors Program, helping with some of the more challenging decisions regarding student enrollment, and helping to review proposals for new honors courses.

8. The criteria for selection of honors faculty include exceptional teaching skills, the ability to provide intellectual leadership and mentoring for able students, and support for the mission of honors education.

The director is the only permanent faculty appointment to the Honors Program. She teaches two courses a year. The Program pays part of the salary for a full-time extended term academic professional lecturer in A&S. This lecturer teaches two classes a semester for honors. However, the College of Arts and Sciences is currently reviewing this arrangement.

The program must negotiate with College Deans and Department Heads to release tenure-track faculty to teach in the program. Three retired faculty teach a course a year for the program and the remainder of the courses are taught by several part-time temporary appointments.

In order for the Honors Program to continue its status as a model of excellence, the concerns surrounding exceptional faculty to teach honors courses must be addressed promptly.

Students are extremely positive in their responses to their honors course experiences. Faculty members who teach in the program are equally positive in their comments about their courses and the students.

To further strengthen faculty identification with the goals and policies of the Honors Program, it would be helpful if the Director were to host a lunch meeting once a semester for honors faculty. At the very least, such a meeting would enable faculty to meet each other and share their experiences and concerns.

9. *The program is located in suitable, preferably prominent, quarters on campus that provide both access for the students and a focal point for honors activity. Those accommodations include space for honors administrative, faculty, and support staff functions as appropriate. They may include space for an honors lounge, library, reading rooms, and computer facilities. If the honors program has a significant residential component, the honors housing and residential life functions are designed to meet the academic and social needs of honors students.*

The newly remodeled Red House is a comfortable, spacious space for the Honors Program. It contains office space, a classroom, computer facilities, and a lounge.

10. *The program has a standing committee or council of faculty members that works with the director or other administrative officer and is involved in honors curriculum, governance, policy, development, and evaluation deliberations. The composition of that group represents the colleges and/or departments served by the program and also elicits support for the program from across the campus.*

As present, the Honors Program does not have an Honors Council. We recommend that a Council be established that includes at least two student members.

11. *Honors students are assured a voice in the governance and direction of the honors program. This can be achieved through a student committee that conducts its business with as much autonomy as possible but works in collaboration with the administration and faculty to maintain excellence in the program. Honors students are included in governance, serving on the advisory/policy committee as well as constituting the group that governs the student association.*

The University of Wyoming Honors Organization (WHO) is an active RSO advised by the Honors Director. The group provides an excellent opportunity for honors students to get involved

and to form positive social bonds with other like-minded individuals. In addition to participating in numerous community service and fundraising activities, WHO sponsors several social events. They are, however, not engaged in policy matters in the Program. We encourage the Director to consider enhancing and formalizing the advisory/policy role of this student group.

12. Honors students receive honors-related academic advising from qualified faculty and/or staff.

Although students expressed satisfaction with honors advising, this area may be becoming problematic in the Honors Program with the significant increase in the number of students. There simply is no way that the Director and the Office Associate can be expected to meet the legitimate honors advising expectations of the growing number of honors students while meeting their other responsibilities. As noted earlier in this report, we recommend the addition of at least one full-time honors advisor to the staff of the Honors Program.

The UW Honors Program curriculum currently fulfills many of a student's University Studies Program (USP) requirements. Adjustments of the current advising model in harmony with recent changes in the USP may provide unique opportunities for increased retention and program completion rates, particularly through more robust advising and mentoring in the senior honors project. If the Honors Program is successful in adding more cross-listed departmental honors courses, then communication with departmental advisors will need to be maintained in order to ensure students are taking appropriate honors courses that also fulfill major requirements.

13. The program serves as a laboratory within which faculty feel welcome to experiment with new subjects, approaches, and pedagogies. When proven successful, such efforts in curriculum and pedagogical development can serve as prototypes for initiatives that can become institutionalized across the campus.

The Honors Program has provided faculty with an opportunity to be creative in their teaching. They have designed and taught numerous innovative courses including, for example, Bali Life

and Art during which students participate in the process of learning and performing gamelan music and dance under the direction of Balinese teachers. Although we do not yet see evidence that other honors curricular initiatives have been emulated elsewhere on campus, it is worth noting that the faculty do employ teaching techniques they've developed in honors in their non-honors courses.

The University Studies Program recently introduced a required course called a **first-year seminar** for all freshmen at UW. Students each will choose one such three-credit course from more than 60 available in a wide range of disciplines. The courses will enroll no more than 24 students, and they will be taught by some of UW's top faculty members. We recommend that the Honors Program consider creating an honors version of this **first-year seminar**, as an optional way for honors students to fulfill this requirement in an enhanced academic environment that also creates peer-bonding experiences during the freshman year. Although the honors version of this seminar would not be required of all honors students, it would nonetheless create a value-added option for honors students. Such an **honors first-year seminar** would provide a laboratory in which faculty will be encouraged to develop innovative enrichment opportunities for freshman honors students.

14. The program regularly assesses and evaluates program goals and learning outcomes as articulated in the National Collegiate Honors Council's [definition of honors education](#) and modes of honors learning, and as appropriate to the institution's culture and mission.

The Honors Program has undertaken steps to evaluate honors courses. All honors courses are evaluated online using the A&S course evaluation form. We recommend a formal, systematic assessment plan that includes course evaluations specific to honors with appropriate learning outcomes. The Honors Program also needs to produce annual reports that outline its successes as well as its plans for the future. The fact that the external review team was invited to campus to assess the program is an indication of the seriousness with which the critical review process is taken.

We recommend that the Honors Program be placed on a regular (5-7 year) assessment rotation like other academic units on campus.

15. The program emphasizes active learning and participatory education by offering opportunities for students to participate in regional and national conferences, Honors Semesters, international programs, community service, internships, undergraduate research, and other types of experiential education.

The UW Honors Program meets this criterion admirably. Honors Program students have participated regularly in regional and national conferences, field research, study abroad, and other forms of experiential learning. The UW Honors Program served as the gracious host of the 2010 Western Regional Honors Conference (WRHC) in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. In future years, the program should also consider inviting its students to participate in the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) conference.

With the WHO community service activities and study abroad programs, the Honors Program has embraced the concept of participatory, experiential honors education. In addition, several honors courses incorporate hands-on, experiential elements.

16. When appropriate, two-year and four-year programs have articulation agreements by which honors graduates from two-year programs who meet previously agreed-upon requirements are accepted into four-year honors programs.

The Honors Program does not have formal articulation agreements with two-year colleges, but it does have an option based on students' having a 3.25 or higher grade point average, that is open to both transfer and continuing students.

We recommend that the Program establish formal articulation agreements with Wyoming's community colleges.

17. The program provides priority enrollment for active honors students in recognition of scheduling difficulties caused by the need to satisfy both honors and major program(s) requirements.

The UW Honors Program complies with this characteristic.

APPENDIX A.

MEETING SCHEDULE FOR THE SITE VISIT AND INDIVIDUALS WHO PARTICIPATED

November 3

8:30: Breakfast: Hoyt Hall, Mathison Library

With John Mittelstaedt, Interim Dean of Business, Leslie Rush, Associate Dean of Education, Steve Barrett, Associate Dean of Engineering, and Tami Benham Deal, Interim Associate Provost (formerly Associate Dean of Health Sciences)

9:30: Cass Tolman, Staff Associate Senior, Honors

10:00: Alyson Hagy, Interim Associate Provost, Old Main 312

11:00: Chris Rothfuss, Honors Adjunct and Alumnus, Wyoming Senate, Red House, 206

12:00: Lunch with Peter Shive, Honors and Physics (retired), Steve Bialostok, Honors and Education, Barbara Logan, Honors and History, Tyler Fall, Honors and Religious Studies (Meet in Red House 207)

1:15: Sara Axelson, Vice President for Student Affairs, Old Main 408

2:30 Shelley Dodd, Director of Admissions, Knight Hall

3:30: April Heaney, Director of LEARN, Meg Flanagan Skinner, Director of the Ellbogen Center for Teaching and Learning, Audrey Kleinsasser, Director Wyoming School/University Partnership, Susan Moldenhauer, Director of the UW Art Museum, and Mark Greene, Director of the American Heritage Center
American Heritage Center, Conference Room

5:30: Dinner: Jeffrey's Bistro

With the WHO Executive Board (Stan DeVore, Mackenzie Cory, Jenny Voltmer, Amanda Smith, Molly Bloodgood)

7:00: WHO meeting, Honors House

November 4

7:30: Breakfast with Paula Lutz, Dean of Arts and Sciences

10:00: Erin Abraham, Honors, Red House 205

10:30: Diane Panozzo, Honors, Red House 203

11:00: President Richard McGinity and David Jones, Provost, Old Main 206

12: Lunch: The Rendezvous, Ross Hall

With Karen Bartsch Estes, Chair of Psychology and Honors, Susanna Goodin,
Philosophy and Honors, Paul Bergstrasser, English and Honors, and Noah Miles, Modern
Languages and Honors

1:00: Tracy Richardson and John Stark, UW Foundation, Gateway Center

2:15: Rene Sanchez. Program Coordinator, High School Institute, Red House 113

6:30: Dinner: Mizu Sushi

With Peter Parolin, Chair of English and Nina McConigley, Honors