

March 17, 2017

To : Scott Shaw, Chair, Faculty Senate

From: Fred Sterbenz, Chair, Faculty Senate Budget Planning Committee

Budget Planning committee --- Discussion of proposed change of Honors program to an Honors College.

The budget planning committee met with Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Education Anne Alexander on February 24th to discuss the issue of making the honors program a college. This includes adding a Dean to administer the program. There was discussion of the honors program and the way it worked. Some of the discussion ranged beyond just the budget.

The program is described in the Honors Steering Committee Final Report of December 2016. The report describes the structure of the honors curriculum including the components. The components of the curriculum include a Senior Research Project. It also includes a budget for the new college. The proposed change of the honors program to an honors college will cost the University nearly a million dollars a year of new costs when Employee Paid Benefits are included. This is not a one-time cost but occurs every year.

It was somewhat unclear why the honors program needed a Dean. The committee noticed that there are not that many honors faculty where a tenure decision would be made by the honors college. They did however note that the burden on the director may be excessive and that it would be difficult to run the proposed program without more staff. They felt that at current funding levels it is a challenge to administer the program. Some also noted that this is a time when many other departments have less staff. It was noted that some of the costs of the honors program are imposed on other departments when the honors program needs small classes to be taught and also supervision by faculty of senior research projects. These costs might be hidden and it is difficult to predict what they will be in the long run. Since many details will evolve over time it is hard to tell how much they will cost. (This might also suggest the need for more funding.) Some members of the committee wondered if the Honors program could be combined with the graduate school.

The committee was concerned about the recent loss of nearly 100 new potential honors students that occurred because of the loss of some scholarships that might have changed their decisions. However some of the committee wondered if there were other ways to improve the recruiting of honors students, besides adding a large administrative structure at this time. Is having colleges directly fund students an alternative.

The proposal to make it a college includes an increase in administration by adding a more elaborate administrative structure including a Dean, an Associate Dean, and staff. This is occurring at a time when other departments have lost staff during a financial crisis. Consequently there was some concern about adding a college at this time. The increase in expenditures came at a time when other departments were reducing expenditures.

Some specific items related to the proposal. First the Chair of the faculty senate asked about it appearing that there were 720,000 of costs and new costs were listed at 620,000. There is an item of other in the old budget at 100,000 which appears to be reset to zero. I would note that a recommendation of an endowment of 15 to 20 million is in the report. I would suggest that an endowment 20 to 25 million might be better, since the cost is nearly a million and four percent of 20 million is 800,000. As to the specific request of the chair of the faculty senate we have not tracked the funding for the scholarships. Although I would note that the structure ties the honors program to study abroad.

The committee did think the honors program was valuable and it would be important to increase our recruiting of honors students. However the timing for such an expansion did not seem that good. To put it simply there was not a lot of enthusiasm for adding nearly a million dollars of ongoing annual cost to an honors program and increasing administration at a time when many other programs are still coping with the financial cuts. The main concern was the substantial cost of the program.