



HONORS COLLEGE PROGRAM REVIEW

December 15, 2020

Introduction: Contribution to UW's Strategic Vision

Honors became a College in 2017 with the expectation of contributing significantly to UW's strategic vision. This report will show that Honors is delivering on UW's expectation in category after category. The Honors College expands UW's profile, providing students an intimate, small-college experience within the larger university. Further, Honors promotes every one of UW's major pillars: Honors is interdisciplinary, digital, entrepreneurial, and inclusive. Honors helps UW recruit excellent students, raise development dollars, promote study abroad, create experiential learning and service opportunities, and move beyond silos to true cross-college collaboration. Honors also graduates an increasing number and percentage of UW students. On average, Honors students graduate faster and with higher GPAs than non-Honors students. Honors alumni bring credit to UW through their pursuit of graduate degrees in all fields, their impact in the professional world, and their contribution to their communities. UW Honors is a thriving hub of excellence that merits UW's continued investment.

Contribution to the UW Pillars

The Honors College operates squarely in the wheelhouse of President Seidel's four pillars:

1. *Interdisciplinary*. We are interdisciplinary in our DNA. Our students come from every college at UW, representing majors across the academic spectrum ([See appendix 1](#)). In Honors seminars, students with different disciplinary expertise explore urgent issues that require multiple perspectives to solve. Our courses come from the Fine Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, and STEM

fields, as do our faculty ([See appendix 2](#)).

Honors gives students the breadth of perspectives and experiences necessary to excel in the complex, interconnected, and interdisciplinary 21st-century world.

2. *Entrepreneurial*. As a new college, Honors builds the structures to thrive in a changing environment. For example, we are building an outside-the-classroom curriculum through SOAR that will ensure every Honors student engages in experiential learning. Our Clay Faculty Fellowship, which will roll out in Fall 21, will attract top UW colleagues to teach in Honors. A projected online major, currently under development, would be one of the only online Honors majors in the country. Projected funded internships would allow Honors to support enterprises across campus while giving students valuable practical experience.

3. *Digital*. Honors has stepped up digital delivery to increase accessibility and flexibility in the teaching of our curriculum. The Honors minor is fully available online. We are exploring an online major that would expand our reach and make us stand out nationally. We invest in a faculty member who coordinates digital initiatives, running workshops on best practices in digital pedagogy and working one-on-one with faculty. In her "UW Digital Education Consultation Report," Mary Niemiec calls the Honors College an "example of exceptionalism and innovation" in digital education and says that "UW has an opportunity to be a national leader setting the gold standard for access and student success through the Honors College."

4. *Inclusive*. Honors is committed to inclusivity and inclusive structures. A new admissions policy reads applications holistically, rather than relying exclusively on GPAs and test scores, allowing us to recognize forms of excellence inclusively.

Internally, Honors is planning to institute a council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to advise on DEI priorities. The Honors commitment to inclusivity is visible in the disciplinary diversity of our student body and in our curriculum. Further, to expand students' capacity to understand diversity and operate in diverse environments, Honors requires that students take a non-western perspectives course. Honors is also committed to inclusivity through making our courses and entire major available online, which broadens our ability to include students at a distance across the state and the nation.

The unit's program reflects what land grant universities typically offer

Land grant universities typically offer Honors programs. Regionally, the following universities offer students an Honors experience: Arizona State, Colorado State, Idaho State, Kansas State, Montana State, New Mexico State, North Dakota State, South Dakota State, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Utah State. Honors colleges add intimacy and depth to the academic experience. UW is in keeping with our peers in offering students this opportunity.

Collaborations with other units

Honors actively participates with units across campus and beyond. We have a formal curricular partnership with CEAS to offer a major in Engineering. Our core Colloquium class incorporates the Archives, Art Museum, Libraries, Music, and Theatre and Dance. We have co-sponsored visiting lecturers with Accounting and Finance, English, Sociology, and the Wyoming Institute for Humanities Research. Our outside-the-classroom curriculum, offered through SOAR, incentivizes Honors students to attend events across UW; event sponsors this year have included Arts and Sciences, Business, Engineering, Law, and Nursing. Further, through SOAR, Honors students perform

required hours of community service and attend career-building events such as job fairs ([See appendix 3](#)). Off campus, we have an admissions agreement with Wyoming high schools that allows any graduate of the International Baccalaureate Program automatic admission into Honors. We also have an agreement with the Casper College Honors Program that allows their students to transfer automatically to UW Honors.

Faculty members stand out in national recognition

Honors faculty contribute prolifically to UW's overall excellence. Core Honors faculty have authored, co-authored, or edited 17 scholarly or creative volumes, and directed and acted in significant regional and national theatre productions. Regional and national recognition includes the Fulbright, the International PEN Open Book Award, the Pushcart Prize, two Kennedy Center Gold Medallions of Excellence, multiple awards from the Rocky Mountain Theatre Association, the North Carolina Board of Governors Teaching Excellence Award, selection as a Radcliffe Fellow, and awards from the US Forest Service's Birds Across America Program, the High Country Conservation Advocates, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Honors faculty have won UW awards including four Ellbogen Teaching Awards, numerous College of A&S Outstanding Teaching and Top Prof Awards, several Mortar Board Top Prof and Promoting Intellectual Engagement Awards, advising awards, and awards of recognition for research excellence. They have also received: Seibold and Flittie Awards, the Tobin Award, the UW Outstanding Graduate Women in STEM Award, and the UW Distinguished Alumna Award.

Beyond the core faculty, Honors brings together a growing community of faculty with distinguished careers in multiple colleges. Their service and recognition include publishing impactful creative and scholarly studies, offering leadership in national and regional academic associations, directing UW's Saturday University, appearing as

scholarly experts on PBS's *American Masters* series, winning a \$25,000 NEA Literature Fellowship, being a finalist for the National Book Award, receiving second doctorates (i.e. a recent doctorate in Chinese Medicine), and winning several Ellbogen and college-based teaching awards.

Credit hours per FTE faculty

Student credit hours in Honors have grown consistently, despite a small dip to 4,334 during the 2020 pandemic. Upper division hours represent from 51%-59% of our SCH ([See appendix 4](#)).

Although Honors is credited with just 6 FTE faculty, our high number of SCH shows our ability to leverage faculty resources from around UW to offer an extensive and desirable interdisciplinary curriculum. Honors partners with departments and colleges across campus to grow our faculty ranks, and we spend discretionary dollars to increase our teaching capacity further. Consequently, we have far greater faculty power than the 6 FTE number would suggest.

From Summer 20 through Spring 21 alone, 38 separate faculty members have been assigned to teach Honors classes and independent studies. Our professors' diverse fields include American Studies, Animal Sciences, Anthropology, Art History, Chemistry, Creative Writing, Ecology, Engineering, Family and Consumer Sciences, Geography, History, Languages, Law, Literature, Marketing, Molecular Biology, Philosophy, Physiology, Political Science, Religious Studies, Teacher Education, Veterinary Sciences, and Zoology. When we additionally consider the 86 faculty from 40 departments who mentored Honors capstone projects in 18-19 and the 111 faculty from 48 departments who mentored projects in 19-20, it is clear that Honors represents an outstanding confluence of faculty power from across the university ([See appendix 2](#)).

Does the number of faculty sustain program at current level? Would it do so if reduced?

Core Honors faculty deliver the bulk of our current program. If the number were reduced, we would have to ask other colleges to increase their contributions to Honors. Given the current squeeze felt by UW deans and department heads, it is hard to imagine other colleges being able to increase teaching and service assignments to Honors. Reducing our faculty number would therefore mean scaling down the Honors enterprise, which we do not want to do.

Involvement in outreach and state service, and impact on the state's cultural resources

Honors is involved in many initiatives that connect to state and national communities. We showcase UW to prospective students and families through Impact Days. High School Institute brings Wyoming students to campus every summer for learning, social connectivity, and their first exposure to a university. The Bridge Program, which Honors participates in, helps new UW students find their academic footing through summer study. Honors requires students to complete badges in the SOAR program, which includes community engagement. Through SOAR, Honors students do hundreds of hours of community service, making UW's presence felt in our Laramie neighborhoods ([See appendix 3](#)). The Brainy Bunch, run by Honors faculty member Karagh Brummond, takes science instruction to schools across Wyoming. Honors also collaborates with the Laramie theatre company Relative Theatrics to give students first-hand experience in the creative and business aspects of an arts organization.

Contribution to Education Abroad

Honors actively promotes education abroad. We think nothing broadens students' horizons like education abroad. Our vision is for students who want a study abroad experience to have one as affordably as possible. Honors supports education abroad with significant scholarship resources. Honors has also raised the number of courses we teach abroad to accommodate student demand, which has been robust: between Summer 17 and Fall 20, a total of 315 Honors students had some form of study abroad experience. Between Spring 18 and Spring 20, Honors stood up 17 education abroad courses ([See appendix 5](#)).

Contribution to fundraising

With our focus on student excellence, student opportunity, and student impact in the world, Honors has a powerful story to tell prospective donors. We have been telling that story, and donors have responded with significant gifts. In the past six months, Honors received a \$1.1 million gift from a living donor, and a \$1.2 million estate gift. In 2018, a \$2.5 million gift created an endowed position in the Libraries with special commitment to Honors. An excellence fund in honor of two former Honors directors has raised over \$160,000 in two years. An alumna this year created a \$100,000 scholarship fund to support incoming Honors students. Additionally, in the Foundation's Annual Giving campaign, the number of Honors donors grew from eight in 2017-18 to 111 in 2018-19, and the gift amount rose from \$1,155 to \$97,251.

Number of inquiries and number of applications for undergraduate programs

Admissions reports a growing number of inquiries about the Honors College, with numbers increasing after we became a

College and jumping dramatically in 2020. In 2016, we had 135 total inquiries and in 2020, we had 1,289. Over the past five years, numbers of applications have also grown dramatically, from 407 in 2017 to 1,309 in 2019. Further, Honors has sponsored cross-college Impact Days to recruit high achieving students to UW (these have gone virtual in 2020), and the yield from these visits has been exceptional ([See appendix 6](#)).

Number of declared Honors minors and percentage who finish degree at UW

Numbers of Honors minors have risen significantly since our first year as a College, 2017-18, and remain robust in 2020-21 despite the pandemic. OIA data put the 4, 5, and 6-year graduation rates for Honors students at significantly higher than the overall UW rate ([See appendix 7](#)).

Percentage of student body and number graduating with Honors

For four straight years, the percentage of UW students graduating with the Honors minor has increased. In 2016-17, before we were a college, the rate was 3.63%. Every year since then, the number has inched upward. In 2019-20, the number took a leap, moving from 4.07% to 5.29%. The total number of Honors graduates has increased as well: in the last year before becoming a College, we graduated 104 students; in 2019-20, we graduated 122 ([See appendix 8](#)).

Level of demand for unit's courses

The Honors College serves more than just Honors students. Each term, Honors serves anywhere from several dozens to hundreds of non-Honors students from colleges across UW. Once the priority registration period passes, we open our courses to non-Honors students with GPAs of at least 3.25 so that a wide UW population can benefit from Honors offerings ([See appendix 9](#)).

Number of undergraduates involved in research /scholarly/creative work

Every Honors student is required to complete a capstone project representing independent scholarly or creative work. In 2019, Honors students completed 112 capstone projects; in 2020, they completed 127. The chance to do independent work draws students to Honors and makes the College stand out for opportunities available to undergraduates.

Years to degree and GPA

OIA's most recent data show a three-year period in which Honors students graduate around a semester faster than non-Honors students within the same ACT bands. The data also show Honors students graduating with higher GPAs, in many cases significantly higher, than non-Honors students within the same ACT bands ([See appendix 10](#)).

Student Accomplishments at UW

Honors students are top achievers at UW. In 2019-20, 13 of the A&S Top Twenty Graduates (65%) were in Honors, as were 11 of the 13 finalists for the Tobin-Spitaleri Award for the Outstanding UW Graduates. Since 2016, 9 of the 11 Tobin and Spitaleri recipients have been in Honors. In recent years, Honors students have received the Jason Thompson Commitment to Diversity Award and the Shepard Symposium on Social Justice Undergraduate and Exceptional Service Awards. They have been peer tutors at the Writing Center and Learning Assistants at LAMP. Many have been Wyoming Research Scholars. In 2020-21, eight Honors students sit on the ASUW Senate. Wherever there are opportunities to make a difference on campus through academics, leadership, and service, Honors students play a major role.

Student Success: Market demand for Honors graduates

Gray's Data, used to determine market demand, are not intended for interdisciplinary programs like Honors. Perhaps a

better way to indicate the market demand for Honors graduates is to give a small sample of the professional and academic positions our graduates have found: head of marketing analytics at Lyft, professional actor, bookstore manager, professors of Botany, English, and Mathematics, project coordinator for UW's Office of Multicultural Affairs, lead engineer at Hill AFB, professional filmmaker, engagement manager at McKinsey Global Management, Wyoming state senator, IT at Twitter and Underwriters Labs, head of insights and analysis at Robin Hood Financial Service, corporate lawyer, museum curator, marketing manager at 3M, chief information officer at Northwestern Mutual, sustainable Engineering project coordinator at United Launch Alliance, agent with New York Life, professional dancer, optometrist, labor and delivery nurse, cardiovascular care nurse, elementary, middle, and high school teacher, victims' advocate with the SAFE Project, PhD's in Anthropology, Economics, Neuroscience, Psychology; MA's in English and Museum Studies; MFA's in Creative Writing; MS's in Architectural Engineering; DNP's; DPT's; MD's; MD/PhD's; JD's.

The point here is not to offer an exhaustive list of positions. Rather, it is to spotlight the huge sweep of the innovative and entrepreneurial spaces in which Honors alumni find themselves. Their interdisciplinary Honors College education contributes to their success. Joseph Aoun says that we increasingly need graduates "who possess a heightened power for thinking creatively and flexibly." Neil Irwin advises graduates to "cultivate a sense of open-mindedness, in which you hunger to try new things." He says, "today's ultracomplex organizations demand people who understand how the different parts of the business fit together. The best way to become one of those people is to actively seek exposure to different specialties, across departmental boundaries." Honors offers precisely this kind of education, requiring students to grapple with multiple academic fields and ways of thinking, to work inside and outside the classroom, and to tackle fundamentally different kinds of problems using a range of tools and media.