

Wichita State University
Honors Steering Committee Final Report
Shaping the Future of Honors Education
Fall 2008

Submitted by

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Shaping the Future of Honors Education

Charge & Background:

Our charge as set forth in May of 2008 by Provost Miller and Associate Provost Pickus was to sketch a new vision for the WSU Honors Program as a “model of excellence” on campus. Specifically, we were charged with identifying ways to align the Honor’s program more closely with WSU’s urban serving, research mission, generate principles, traits, and topics that could shape the honors program at an urban serving research institution, and draft a compelling job description for recruiting a new director to the honors program to help insure a successful national search.

In early summer our group reviewed the 2007 Honors Program Review Committee’s findings and began with a reading list of new developments in honors education. In early fall, we surveyed program data of honors programs, examined closely the honors programs at our 27 member CUSU (Coalition of Urban-Serving Universities) schools, interviewed local education and business leaders about honors students and community engagement and other education/workforce trends, and, of course, shared our own ideas as students, teachers and alumni of honors programs here and at other universities. We also drafted a position description for an Honors Director. The chair of the Steering Committee accompanied the associate provost to the NCHC (National Collegiate Honors Council) in San Antonio in late October to visit with prospective honors directors and learn about developments in honors programs around the country.

In mid-November, as we moved toward finalizing our two primary documents: Principles and Traits of a Model of Excellence Honors Program, we welcomed input from several reviewing groups, including: the Honors Affiliate Group (Ted Adler, Rai Atul, Elizabeth Behrman, Cindy Craig, Darren DeFrain, Charlie Fox, Anthony Gythiel, Mel Kahn, Ron Matson, Paul Rillema, Jackie Williams and Bill Woods—whose initial insights on transforming honors education at WSU were also instrumental to the Steering

Committee's work); Honors Students (Amber Lowen, Garret Harmon, Andrew Stanton, Ragini Venkatasubban, Sheersty Rhodes, Nathan Whitman, Veronica Hill, Jena Slater), the Planning & Budget committee of Faculty Senate, and Admissions staff, among others. Insights from these meetings and e-mail correspondence (especially in regard to clarifying four points on Benefits, Research, Community Engagement, and Networking) are reflected in the final report.

We enjoyed our work together and moved with due diligence to complete a focused task (four month time-line) by meeting every two weeks for 1 ½ hours and sharing a BlackBoard on-line "course" for idea exchange. We appreciate the refreshments provided by the Provost's office and the special arrangements in the Morrison Hall Boardroom by Jackie Boyles.

All Honors Steering Committee members are committed to taking honors education at WSU "to the next level." We hope our recommendations will be useful in shaping the future of honors education as a model of excellence at WSU. Many members are eager to assist the Provost's Office in the search for the next director of the Honor's Program beginning in 2009.

Principles of a Model of Excellence Honors Program
Honors Steering Committee Recommendations
Wichita State University
Fall 2008

The Honors program at Wichita State University seeks to be a model of excellence and innovation—in teaching and learning, in individual and collaborative research, and in public service. The Honors program aims to fulfill the mission of WSU as an *urban-serving research university* by recruiting exceptional students to the program and then equipping and motivating those students to (a) learn about complex local, national and international problems by studying in various settings on campus, in the community and in the world; (b) contribute to creative and practical solutions of those problems through individual and collaborative research; and (c) act as articulate citizens in an academic climate that fosters rigor, respect, and responsibility.

The Honors program emphasizes active learning, close contact between students and faculty members in both formal and informal settings, teamwork and group problem solving, community service, global and cultural awareness, and the cultivation of skills related to lifelong learning and success in the workplace.

The Honors Program is flexible, rigorous, interdisciplinary, and not connected to specific majors or programs; it emphasizes high standards of intellectual rigor and intellectual integrity and therefore cultivates high-level research, writing, and oral communication skills; it requires direct participation in both local and global issues and thereby cultivates good citizenship.

While selective, admission to the Honors program is not based on academics alone. Work and life experience, volunteer service and other activities, interests, and other factors may be considered in the selection process. As part of the application process students make

their own case for why they ought to be admitted—both in terms of the benefits to themselves and the benefits to the program. The program is open to “late arrivers” of various kinds, including transfer students. This means that a student need not be admitted into the Honors program as a freshman in order to enjoy its benefits and rewards.

The key learning outcomes of participation in the Honors program include:

- Development of deep knowledge about local and global issues of major importance
- Development of advanced skills in research, writing, and oral communication
- Development of advanced skills in teamwork and leadership
- Development of advanced skills in independent and collaborative learning
- Development of advanced skills in creative and innovative problem solving
- Development of keen awareness of how to be an engaged citizen

The rewards and benefits of being an Honors student include close contact with faculty, a strong sense of community with other Honors students, scholarships and other resources not available to the majority of the campus, opportunities to serve the community, opportunities to travel, deep intellectual engagement with important questions, opportunities for independent and collaborative original research, and the development of skills that will lead to success in future endeavors (whether in the world of work or graduate studies).

Top 10 Traits of a Model of Excellence Honors Program
Honors Steering Committee Recommendations
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The Honors Program must transform its mission to support the mission of Wichita State University as an urban-serving research university. To that end, it must grow its value on campus, in the community and the world for greater...

1. Visibility.

- Where the program is housed is important. A model of excellence should be easy to locate on campus (for example, Morrison Hall or the Marcus Welcome Center). This is also true of the program's website presence, including its navigational clarity, interactivity, and relevance in terms of interface with the university website.
- Honors dorms or houses, lounges, research centers, lecture and program sponsorships, and other honors activities should be prominent, centrally promoted, and vibrant year round.
- An honors director needs to be an active, articulate out-in- front leader on campus and in the community for recruitment, retention and growth of honors programs, faculty and students.

2. Networking.

- The honors program needs better social and intellectual networking on campus in the form of an honors dorm, faculty-student collaboration outside the classroom, and regular special programming in order to retain students and enrich learning opportunities.

- A cohort-based system is preferable—where students work together in classes, on service projects, and applied research teams, etc., throughout the program.
- More intentional networking between honors, admissions, high school and community college counselors, and college advisors is necessary to alleviate as many of the “hassles” of entering and navigating honors at WSU as possible.

3. Community Engagement.

- Honors students need intentional credit-based connections to the Wichita community in service learning projects, work-based research collaborations, leadership training, diversity initiatives, sustainability campaigns, etc., in order to become engaged citizens.
- The honors program must hone a synergy between the academy and the community in the form of high-end “apprenticeships” or “research fellows” to foster personal growth, develop a keener awareness of local and global issues, and, ultimately, reflect the mission of WSU as an urban-serving university.
- Similar to Co-op Education and Work based Learning at WSU, already cited as a model of excellence by the Higher Learning Commission in 2007, the Honors Program at WSU must leverage its high academic standards and high student performance in creative ways to help alleviate the “brain drain” phenomena in south-central Kansas as cited by Visioneering Wichita, 2006.

4. Interdisciplinary Learning.

- Honors students need connections to the wider world by studying in an interdisciplinary way on a singular big topic (for example, Global Science

Challenges, Poverty, Climate Change, AIDS, Urban Renewal, Digital Communications, etc.).

- The honors program needs to intersect with the globalization initiatives proposed by the Globalization Task Force to make sure the two programs, which have been targeted to become “models of excellence” on campus, work in tandem to promote interdisciplinary learning at WSU.
- Interdisciplinary learning among honors students and faculty can be accomplished best with non-traditional educational models especially at the junior and senior level: distance education, travel, exchange programs, inventive forums for the exchanges of life experiences and directed studies/practicums. These nontraditional forms of learning will need to substitute for some of the traditional general education course requirements.

5. Research Experience

- Honors students should conduct, present, and respond to critique on a major original research paper, project, or performance that distinguishes and connects their various academic interests and areas of emergent expertise. The research component should be tied in some way to the Wichita area, on a special practical and focused topic that requires sustained inquiry.
- In addition, students should have the opportunity to learn how to work in research teams as a central component to the honors experience. Multiple students working on the same research area would require faculty supervision with clearly defined roles, goals and outcomes, including formal presentations at conferences, symposia, or community meetings.

6. Leadership Development.

- Honors students need to learn and demonstrate how to set goals, take initiative, be astute communicators, handle challenges and setbacks, and work in groups and other fundamental leadership skill sets.
- Leadership skills are vital to high-achieving students who must learn to thrive in an interconnected, diverse, challenging and complex workplace, and to become articulate and caring citizens in their community and in the world.
- Leadership can be learned and evaluated in formal honors classes, practiced in collaborative work/research projects, and symposia/workshops. Leadership can also be modeled by guest lectures and special interactions with faculty, community resource persons, and other mentors.

7. Flexibility and Participation.

- A workable honors program at WSU must not just accommodate but encourage transfer students to join honors and join permeable cohort groups.
- The program may want to consider a two-tier honors system so that there are multiple entry points easy for transfer students and four year students who “catch fire” after their first two years here and now have the record to perform at an honors level.
- The honors program must make it easy for adult learners to feel welcome, valued, and needed for its success.

8. Benefits and Rewards.

- A vibrant honors program has measurable achievements and benefits to students and faculty alike. Like several of the honors programs we

examined from the 27 Coalition of Urban-Serving Universities (CUSU group), benefits of being named a WSU honors student or WSU honors faculty member or WSU honors community partner should be clearly spelled out. This goes beyond assessment reporting.

- Benefits should include such things as awards, scholarships, cultural event vouchers, apprenticeship opportunities, travel opportunities, sustained interaction with and mentorship by faculty, specialized graduate school application preparation, and other tangible accomplishments from being a part of WSU honors.
- Benefits to faculty should also be spelled out including such things as release time for mentorships, travel opportunities, teaching in the honors program, grants for professional development in honors, stipends, and recognition for service to honors.

9. Rigor and Selectivity.

- A strong honors program must maintain selectivity, emphasizing high academic standards, leadership acumen, and other superior educational and life accomplishments. Is 260 students (our current number of honors students) too many? About right?
Demand should exceed slots available. (It's not discriminating enough just to have a 3.5 GPA or a 26 on the ACT and you're automatically in.)
This will require a screening procedure and interviews from DSI and other scholarship competitions. Creative recruiting is key.
- It must be of manageable size to keep interchangeable cohort structures going for 2 or 4 years, and to study in an interdisciplinary and independent manner.
- Selectivity should also extend to faculty who want to affiliate with the program, such as submission of an application and teaching portfolio.

10. Sustainability.

- Honors programs that thrive and prosper and sustain the “model of excellence” label often have their own funding streams (an endowed program, chair, fellowships, scholarships, etc., or renewable grants, or other partnerships) to complement state general use funds.
- The 10 traits identified here will demand steep start-up costs in addition to budget incentives to maintain excellence year in and year out. An Honors Director will need to function as a Director of Development and Grant Procurement Officer for the honors program in its early formation.
- Modeling a strong honors program after an established program of distinction at WSU (for example, cooperative education) or aligning it with emerging programs of high credibility on campus (CRTE; Globalization Model of Excellence) or affiliating with established academic centers (Center for Community Support and Research; National Institute for Aviation Research; Center for Entrepreneurship, etc.) may be additional ways to establish a firm foundation and a sustained drive to excellence.