The Honors College proposal

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Units affected by the proposed reorganization:
General Education Honors courses
Honors Academic Advisor, joint in The Honors College and University College
Honors Academic Advisor, Senior
The Honors College is a university-wide program that recruits high ability students to the university, provides personal attention and advising to help them craft a challenging Honors education, instills an ethic of engagement and discovery, and coordinates the opportunities and quality of experiences across colleges and departments. The Honors College fosters a culture that supports academic excellence, interdisciplinary interests, and career success.

Honors academic experiences are the heart of an Honors education. Experiences where students are actively and intellectually engaged include Honors courses, research opportunities, study abroad, service learning, and independent study. An Honors education expects more from students in terms of the depth of their learning and their commitment to the education process.

The most serious impediment to an Honors education is the limited availability of Honors courses. The Honors College faces a continuing challenge insofar as courses are scheduled in departments. The Honors College does not have authority or funding to provide Honors courses across the university. 24% of Honors students in fall 2007 felt that there were not enough Honors course offerings in General Education; 47% felt there were not enough Honors courses in their major.

Students need 1.5 Honors credits in General Education to make progress toward graduation with Honors. If only first year students enrolled in the Honors General Education courses, the deficits of spaces in Honors sections for spring 2009 are 43 in Tier 1 Humanities, 57 in Tier 2 Natural Sciences, 92 in Tier 2 Individuals and Society and 65 in Tier 2 Humanities, for a total of 257. The result would be that one in three Honors students will not be able to find enough Honors courses assuming that they are neutral about the specific content of the courses involved. For this reason, Honors general education is crucial to providing an initial Honors experience for our most talented students, and keeping them at the UA.

Honors general education should be sharply differentiated from the non-Honors track. Course availability is important -- we have seen that without incentives or pressure from central administration, colleges and departments are unable or unwilling to deliver Honors courses on their own. But course availability is at best a partial answer. There should be academic oversight and coordination of the Honors experience. The mere addition of an Honors section to a large Tier One course is not sufficient. The Honors College should coordinate general education for Honors students, administering the Honors "track" recently devised by the UWGEC. We support the centralizing of general education under the VPI and believe that The Honors College should work with that office to coordinate not just the availability, but the content of courses for Honors students. The funds provided by the VPI to The Honors College should be used to support the development of new, interdisciplinary Honors general education courses.

In any given semester, fewer than 15 TOTAL independent Honors courses are offered in the majors and minors. That is, exclusive of general education and basic foundational courses such as English, Math, Chemistry and Biology, Honors education is largely delivered to students using co-convened courses. This means that high ability students may receive, in the major coursework, some differentiated assignments, but little in the way of differentiated delivery of instruction. They are also unable to benefit from the peer interaction that we know is so vital to these students.

With the exception of a very few highly populated majors (Psychology, Chemistry), few departments have any developed curriculum for Honors students. Funding should be provided to allow coordination of Honors education, and the development of curriculum, at the departmental
level. The Honors College should be provided funds to supply $7,000 per year to a faculty member in every department with more than 30 Honors students, currently 23 majors and 8 minors. Curricula should be coordinated through The Honors College to provide consistency across campus.

This problem of course availability is likely to be exacerbated by changes proposed to make courses larger and more efficient. Budget cuts and curricular reforms in the past have eliminated Honors courses. For example, the elimination of the humanities program in 2003 resulted in the loss of 11 independent Honors General Education courses and two interdisciplinary Honors seminars were eliminated. Twice during budget reductions, the Department of Chemistry has been pressured to eliminate courses in the Honors chemistry sequence.

A second issue is the lack of sufficient advising resources to provide adequate advising for all students on their Honors educational plan. Honors students have unique advising needs because their educational plan is highly value based, combines interdisciplinary interests, and focuses on post-baccalaureate plans. Honors students’ multiple interests are reflected in double majors (15%) and multiple degrees (5%). The Honors academic advisor is responsible for work that cannot be done elsewhere on campus, and is not being done by any current professional advisor. Honors advising addresses the unique needs of high ability students based on multiple intelligence theory and gifted education.

Honors advising is not a matter of determining the completion of units. At the core of Honors experience is flexibility, the key to taking advantage of the possibilities a world class University offers. Honors students do not complete a set of defined courses; they are guided to add a minor, study abroad, identify areas where interdisciplinarity is possible -- in other words, the Honors student must be supported in using all that the UA can supply.

The Honors advisor determines the number of Honors units needed by each student, depending upon when they enter the College, and this must be done centrally. The Honors advisor provides crucial oversight to students as they progress through the milestones of The Honors College, First Level Honors and Graduation with Honors. The steps to graduation from The Honors College are different from the progress-to-degree requirements for other students, and proactive advising is critical to student success.

The Honors degree is just that -- a degree -- which is why we sign the degree checks. We certify that the student has completed an Honors degree that is consistent across campus.

The Honors College has two advisors to fulfill the needs of 3800 students. The Honors Academic Advisor, Senior provides the degree check for students graduating with Honors, meets one-on-one with incoming transfer students, and advises all other students on progress in their Honors education. The other academic advisor, funded by University College and housed in Honors, advises undecided Honors students, oversees the Paladins student success course, and coordinates programs and activities for first-year Honors students. An additional advisor is needed insofar as the Academic Advisor, Senior, is responsible for approximately 3800 students. This advising load greatly exceeds the standards recommended by the Advising Taskforce.
**Proposed solutions.**

1. Hold deans and colleges accountable for General Education compacts. Use this mechanism to schedule sufficient seats in Tier 1 and Tier 2 courses for students to be able to take 1.5 Honors units per year.

2. Redirect the $150,000 that Honors receives in General Education funds to support interdisciplinary Honors courses. These funds would provide 21 Honors courses @ $7,000 each.

3. The Honors College currently has an advisor whose line is supported through University College. We recommend that this position be transferred to the Honors College. This structure would be more efficient. The current dual reporting takes additional effort for coordination and conflicting expectations for the position occur.

4. As advising responsibilities are reviewed across colleges, reallocate additional resources to The Honors College to provide another Honors advisor.

**Consultation process:**

1. The Dean of the Honors College has participated in the Transformation committees on areas studies and liberal arts to represent Honors interests and coordinate efforts with other colleges.

2. The Dean of the Honors College met with Dean Andrew Comrie and Vice-President and Dean Juan Garcia to review areas of possible duplication of efforts, consolidation, or merger. No duplication of efforts or sensible consolidations was determined. University College is a strong collaborative partner, but has very different kinds of programs and students. Honors would lose its distinctive character if it was subsumed under University College and the university-wide dimension would be lost. The Graduate College has undergraduate programs to encourage students in to continue for graduate study in STEM, particularly minority students. These programs include Honors students but extend beyond this group. Honors and Graduate Colleges have successful but limited collaborations encouraging post-baccalaureate education.

3. The Honors College management team (6 of 12 employees) met several times to discuss reorganization and examine peer institutions. The two alternatives to the current structure (abolishing The Honors College or merging Honors into another college) would end the university wide appeal of Honors and would have several significant consequences:

   a. negative impact on recruiting of high ability students and National scholars
   
   b. uneven programs and opportunities for students with interdisciplinary interesslack of coordination and quality control across colleges
   
   c. loss of major fundraising opportunities including a naming gift for the college
   
   d. loss of national reputation

   The national trend is toward university-wide efforts and college status. Several of our peer institutions recently have created a university-wide Honors college as part of their strategic
effort to increase the quality and reputation of their undergraduate program (e.g. University of Minnesota and Purdue University). There are 30 named Honors colleges and programs to date.

**Projected Savings**

The projected benefits are to increase the number of Honors spaces in General Education and to give Honors greater ability to fund interdisciplinary courses. A second objective is to create a better and more integrated advising team within The Honors College.

The projected savings would be:

60-100 hours of the Associate Dean’s time that could be reallocated to other projects

144 hours of the Honors Academic Advisors time that could be spent advising students rather than attending staff meetings in a second college