

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 22, 2016

To: Campus colleagues

From: Andrew C. Comrie, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs & Provost

Subject: Re-Envisioning Honors at the UA



It is time to re-envision our Honors experience at the University of Arizona. The importance and value of an education that inspires extraordinary students will never change. Yet, since the UA first offered an Honors program, not only have the times changed but so have the opportunities, the challenges, the University, and of course the students.

Most recently, our inaugural dean of the Honors College, Dr. Patricia MacCorquodale, announced that she will be stepping down (please see the attached email that I sent out to UA leadership last week). With the challenge of finding a successor we also have the opportunity to imagine how we will further grow and define our Honors experience for the 21st Century. We are well on our way to achieving the goals in our Honors strategic plan and it is now time to consider what's next. How will we build on our current success and quality to design an Honors education that transforms how we conceive of and offer the experience itself? To that end, I am pleased to initiate a re-envisioning process for Honors at the UA.

Part of the stimulus for this re-envisioning initiative comes from insightful discussions I've had with Dean MacCorquodale and others over the last year. There is considerable excitement to add to our strengths and engage a new generation of scholars and students in novel honors experiences. I anticipate that a creative re-envisioning initiative will produce one or more compelling models that will inform how the UA might offer an even more distinctive Honors experience in the future. Importantly, this exercise will also inform us of the kind of leader we will need for the re-envisioned College. The re-envisioning process is intended to be generative rather than exhaustive, with the goal of rapidly producing a 'brainstorming report' over the next few months.

The Honors re-envisioning initiative will be led by a small task force, made up of creative institutional thinkers with a focus on the undergraduate experience. The group will be purposely small to enable nimbleness, ease of scheduling, and a creative team spirit. The task force will be charged specifically to meet with key stakeholders including students, faculty, college and central administrators, and donors.

The task force will necessarily have to examine the current model, both the student experience (the Honors Edge, which incorporates small class experiences, interdisciplinary general education courses, college based engagement opportunities and research opportunities with top-flight faculty) and the administrative challenges of creating an integrated structure where partnerships with the colleges are key (including appropriate structures that support college involvement). Naturally, the task force will also examine models of structure, direction and content from other institutions, including their pros and cons.

The most important function of the task force will be to brainstorm and outline new ideas to enhance the distinctive UA Honors experience for the 21st Century. That experience should include opportunities for students whose passions and talents extend beyond the boundaries of conventional academic areas. Our current Honors experience has been in the vanguard of student engagement efforts, and it is quite possible that the future Honors experience might build even further on the newly-established Activities and Competencies within our 100% Engagement initiative.

I am happy to announce that the Honors re-envisioning task force members will be Drs. Vin del Casino (chair), Patrick Baliani, Paul Blowers, Lisa Elfring, Melissa Fitch, Faten Ghosn and Bill Neumann, as well as two students. They will deliver their report by April 15, 2016 after which it will be made available for campus comment and feedback. I look forward to receiving their exciting ideas.