

Honors Program Action Update Fall 2009

MEMORANDUM

Date: 09/25/2009
To: Felicia Beardsley, Associate Dean, Arts and Sciences
Cc: Jonathan Reed, Dean Arts and Sciences
From: Gerard Lavatori, Honors Program
RE: **Fall, 2009**, Response to External Evaluators' Action
Recommendations for Honors Program

On October 13-15, 2003, a team of external evaluators visited the ULV Honors Program and prepared a written report of their findings. As part of that report, the evaluators, Dr. Rosalie C. Otero of the University of New Mexico and Dr. Melvin H. Shoemaker of Azusa Pacific University, made a number of recommendations. The following is an update on the status of these recommendations. Please note that some of the external visitors' suggestions have been condensed to avoid redundancy. A full version of the report is available from the Honors Director.

1. *"It is recommended that some consideration be given to raising the criteria for admission of incoming freshmen from the current minimum SAT 1150 or ACT 25 score and also to increasing the minimum cumulative high school GPA to a higher norm of selectivity."*

Response: The Honors Committee discussed raising admission standards and concluded that our numbers would drop significantly if the minimum scores were raised. Even under our current system, we admit fewer than 25 new students each year to the Honors Program, an unusually low percentage of our total university enrollment. Until the university's general admission criteria are raised, we do not anticipate being able to comply with this recommendation.

UPDATE 2008-09: Because the number of Program applicants is dramatically down this year compared to years past, perhaps reflecting a University-wide decline in enrollment, we do not think it a wise idea to raise admission standards at this time. However, it is heartening to note that the newly- admitted freshmen have combined SAT scores that are significantly higher (averaging in the 1200 range) than in previous years.

UPDATE Fall 09: The number of applicants was up this year with 17 new students admitted in Fall, 2009, compared with 13 for the 2008/2009 academic year, including one transfer. The average combined SAT scores for students admitted in the 2008/2009 academic year was 1161. The average combined SAT scores for students admitted in the fall of 2009 was 1218. GPA's among Honors students inducted into the Program consistently average above 4.0. The Honors Program currently includes 56 students out

of a total undergraduate population of approximately 1,500 students or less the 4% of the total student population. Although increasing selectivity may seem a desirable goal in the ideal, the Program could accommodate more students in some of the seminars, so it would not be prudent to reduce the number of students eligible to enter Honors at this time.

2. *"It is recommended that the Honors Director position become a half-time appointment, thus reducing the teaching and other administrative responsibilities currently engaging the Director. It is recommended that consideration be given to hiring a full or part-time administrative assistant to free the Director for the administrative enrichment of the program."*

Response: In cooperation with Dean Yaffe and former Provost McDowell, the Honors Director position was redefined as indicated in Recommendation 2. At present, the Honors Director holds a 50% teaching/50% administrative position. Although Dean Yaffe is aware of the need for a part-time administrative assistant for the Honors Program, funding has not become available for such a position. Currently the Honors Center staff is comprised of College Work-Study students. These assistants represent a helpful, although impermanent, ancillary component of the program. New students are recruited and hired every year, requiring frequent re-training.

UPDATE 2008-09: Dr. Lavatori's position will remain the same as his predecessor's; i.e., 50% teaching/50% administrative. It seems very unlikely, given the degree of retrenchment that has been imposed on all of us, that an administrative assistant position will be filled this year.

UPDATE Fall 09: There is no change reported for the 2009/2010 academic year. However, the Honors Program move from the Honors House to the more centrally located Miller Hall Center will afford the Program more administrative assistance due to the proximity of the Humanities Administrative Assistant and her staff. Ideally a full or part-time administrative assistant for Honors would allow for greater flexibility in staffing the Honors Student Computer Lab which relies on work-study students and the Director for maintaining its operating hours.

3. *"It is recommended that the Honors Program be given a salary line to provide for Honors instruction by full-time faculty which could be disbursed to the respective school and department of the Honors instructor, thus providing for a standard adjunct replacement. This would lessen the departmental reluctance to have a full-time faculty member teach an Honors course."*

Response: This recommendation has not been implemented. The Honors Program still relies on the good will and flexibility of individual departments to free its faculty to teach Honors courses. Some full-time instructors prefer to teach Honors seminars on-load, with compensatory salaries provided to their replacements, while other faculty elect to teach Honors courses as overload.

UPDATE 2008-09: To a certain extent, the outside evaluators' suggestion is carried out – at least in spirit. The Honors Program has a dedicated faculty salary line. The choice still remains with individual faculty members whether or not to teach Honors courses on-line or as overload.

UPDATE Fall 09: The budget for funding Honors faculty was cut by \$6,000 for the current academic year. Currently Honors has an adjunct faculty salary budget of \$11,200 and a budget of \$2,800 for overload or a total of \$14,000 for professors' salaries. However, if Honors offers three, team-taught interdisciplinary seminars each semester at \$2,600 per salary for each professor with the Ph.D., the total for six courses for the year would be \$31,200. Also the Honors Colloquium class, if taught as an overload would require \$1,400 for a total of \$32,600 for Honors salaries. This kind of funding would afford flexibility in Honors course scheduling and a greater diversity of course offerings across the departments since faculty are more likely to offer Honors classes if they can be paid an overload salary rather than having to request that their department chair approve of their teaching an Honors course as part of their departmental teaching load. However, the Honors Program relies heavily on the good will of La Verne faculty members to teach Honors courses as part of their on load assignments. Some seminars, such as HONORS 499, Interdisciplinary Senior Seminar, are taught or anchored by one professor which helps reduce the strain on the Honors budget. A budget allowing for at least three overload or adjunct salaries per semester or \$15,600 per year would be a more realistic and minimally adequate sum required for continuing with the current course offerings. A budget of \$18,200 would afford needed flexibility. The current budget of \$11,200 would prove to be inadequate for maintaining the status quo and severely limit course offerings if the Dean's office did not approve of supplemental funds.

4. *"It is recommended that the Honors Committee and the University review the present governance structure and consider the merits of having the Honors Director report to the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. This would give importance to the program and provide for greater inclusion of the schools of Business and Education."*

Response: The fact that the ULV Honors Director reports to the Dean of Arts and Sciences is somewhat anomalous within the context of university honors programs in general. This arrangement, however, has a historical explanation and also responds to the volatility of the Provost's position until now. The Committee will revisit this suggestion at one of its 2007-2008 monthly meetings.

UPDATE 2008-09: The Committee did not discuss this suggestion during the 2007-2008 academic year. It remains to be seen whether a transition in governance structure will be implemented next year.

UPDATE Fall 09: The governance structure as it relates to the Honors Program, its Committee and Director changed twice over the past year. In the Spring of 2009, the Honors Program Director reported to the Provost's Office indirectly through the office of the Vice President of Undergraduate Programs. Since the University has a new Dean and Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences and a new Provost, the Honors Program Director

reports to the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences. Because many of the Honors courses fulfill General Education requirements in areas contained within the College of Arts and Sciences and most of the Honors faculty are members of that College, the move seems logical. However, many students in Honors are majors in Business or Education and surveys of Honors students show that Honors students would like to see more Honors courses offered by faculty in their majors. The Honors Committee currently officially enjoys representation from both the College of Business and the College of Education, although more actual participation from faculty from those colleges would be desirable. Although the location of the Honors Program within the College of Arts and Sciences seems a logical and comfortable fit, it is hoped that the change in governance will not impede participation in Honors from faculty outside of the College of Arts and Sciences.

5. *“It is recommended that some discipline-based Honors seminars be considered in addition to the current two interdisciplinary, integrative, team – taught seminars available each semester. This would satisfy the frequently heard comments of the Honors students, and, if the courses were upper division, they would satisfy the Honors requirements desired by transferring Honors students. It would be imperative that the Honors Director and the Honors Program Committee approve all interdisciplinary and disciplinary honors courses and the instructor(s), maintain the characteristic Honors distinctiveness, and administer the budgetary compensation of the instructor in order to ensure the academic quality of the program.*

“It is recommended that junior and senior non-Honors majors who have a minimum cumulative 3.50 GPA or higher be permitted the opportunity to enroll in discipline-based Honors seminars to receive the academic enrichment and to provide a sufficient enrollment to warrant the instructional cost.”

Response: The Honors Committee agrees in principle that the introduction of discipline-based seminars would be beneficial to the Program. Some movement in this direction has already begun, with one or two students having been given permission to enroll in upper-division major classes (non- Honors) and to develop a special capstone project or thesis in conjunction with another disciplinary area as a substitute for an Honors interdisciplinary seminar. However, the Committee thought it best to wait until the new General Education requirements are implemented before making such a policy change in the Honors curriculum.

UPDATE 2008-09: Dr. Lavatori and I have discussed the desirability of introducing disciplinary-based Honors classes as we begin our transition to a new directorship. Although budgetary problems persist, with no immediate sign of abatement, we think it would be wise to offer students the option of taking one disciplinary-based class as part of the Honors requirement for graduation. The impact of this decision on enrollment in Honors seminars should be thoroughly investigated first, however.

UPDATE Fall 09: The Honors Committee has discussed the possibility of offering discipline-based courses on several occasions. There is a concern that this model has not worked in the past where Honors students enrolled in non-Honors courses and proposed

to do supplemental work for Honors credit; there was no incentive for the faculty in those courses to work more closely with the Honors students on the supplemental work, and there was little opportunity for oversight by the Honors Program faculty of the Honors work done in those courses. In essence the courses were Honors courses in name only. However, the Honors students have indicated that they would like Honors courses more related to their majors. The Committee has considered allowing certain specially-designated accelerated courses in the majors to be designated as Honors options. The matter has not yet been decided.

6. *“It is recommended that with additional discipline-based courses and the foregoing options becoming available to the Honors students that consideration be given to raising the minimum requirement for the ‘Honors Program Graduate’ to 24-26 semester hours and the minimum qualification for recognition as an ‘Honors Program Participant’ to 12 semester hours of Honors work.”*

Response: The Honors Committee has not yet addressed this recommendation. In the light of reduced semester hour requirements for majors and for General Education, as well as a university-wide commitment to helping students graduate in four years, this would seem like a less than optimal time to increase unit requirements for Honors. However, the Committee will consider the feasibility of this recommendation.

UPDATE 2008-09: The Honors Committee agrees that increasing the requirement for Participants to 12 semester hours is a sound idea. This item will be brought to the table during the upcoming academic year.

UPDATE Fall 09: The discussion about raising the requirement for Participants to twelve units is currently being discussed in the Honors Committee. Currently students can graduate as Participants having only completed two seminars and two colloquium classes. Raising the minimal level of participation to twelve units would have the effect of requiring that students complete three seminars or two seminars and four colloquium classes, which seems a more significant level of participation to recognize but which may make it less attractive or feasible for juniors or double majors to be a part of Honors. The matter was brought to the Honors students for consideration as well without any resolution as of yet.

7. *“It is recommended that the Honors Director and Honors Committee establish an enrollment goal which is an appropriate percentage of the institutional undergraduate enrollment, and which can be supported by the available facilities, budget, curriculum, and quality instruction.”*

Response: At the time of the external team’s visit, the current enrollment in the Honors Program comprised approximately 5% of the undergraduate student body. This figure has not changed substantially. The Committee seeks ways in which to comply with the evaluators’ suggestions that admissions standards be

raised (Recommendation 1) while at the same time increasing enrollment. The Committee has not yet determined how to accomplish these two goals unless the university in general adopts more rigorous admissions standards and achieves a better retention rate.

UPDATE 2008-09: The University of La Verne is experiencing an enrollment and budgetary crisis at present. Attempting to increase enrollment in the Honors Program while at the same time raising academic standards for admission seems inconsistent with the declining enrollments we are currently experiencing. Further, the dilution of academic standards reflected in the new General Education curriculum seems to run counter to the external team's sensible recommendation.

UPDATE Fall 09: While it may not be possible to increase participation in Honors and increase admission standards, retaining students admitted to the Honors Program would be another means of increasing the level of enrollment in Honors. Greater flexibility in scheduling afforded by additional Honors courses could help. Also, discipline-based courses in majors under-represented in the current Honors course offerings could help students in those fields participate in Honors while making progress in their majors. Of course, having Honors courses that fulfill General Education requirements seems a necessity in the retention of Honors students. The process of approving Honors courses for General Education requirements is ongoing.

8. *"It is recommended that a central campus location and a more commodious facility be foremost in the thinking and planning of the administration for future campus development. A prominent, central campus location would make an institutional statement in support of undergraduate scholarship and academic excellence.*

"It is recommended that consideration be given to the designation of a floor or wing of an existing residence hall as an optional residence for Honors students..."

Response: Much attention has been given to the first half of this recommendation. Discussions were held with the Space Committee about the desirability of relocating the Honors Center to a more prominent, spacious, and desirable campus location, and it was determined that the Honors Program and the International Student and Study Abroad Center (ISAC) would share the to-be-remodeled Hanawalt House following the fire that partially destroyed that structure. The Honors Director and ISAC Director, Philip Hofer, visited the Hanawalt House site together with then- director of Facilities and Maintenance, Brian Worley, and plans were made for allocation and occupation of this space. To date, however, no further progress has been made. Since approximately 50% of the students enrolled in the Honors Program are commuters, there has been little or no serious discussion about the desirability of inaugurating an Honors wing in one of the student residences.

UPDATE 2008-09: We are dismayed to report, that as of this date, we have been given notice to vacate the Honors House. No new venue has been established, although Gerard

Lavatori has been contacted by Assistant Provost Mark Nelson to investigate possibilities for our new location.

UPDATE Fall 09: In August, 2009, the Honors Program moved from its location at the Honors House to the Honors Program Center in the north wing of the basement of Miller Hall. The more central location with proximity to the new Student Center and classes in Miller Hall has proved to be advantageous. Already there is an increase in Honors student use of the Honors Program facilities. Honors students are being polled about the desirability of an Honors Program wing in a residence hall. Commuter students appreciate the Honors Center as a space to relax, read, use the computers or have a meal. A recent meeting of Honors students requested the hooking up of our remaining three computers in the Honors Student Computer Lab as a priority with additional, discipline-specific software such as Derive as desirable. Students also requested a water purifier, large-screen digital television with vcr, more comfortable lounging furniture and coffee tables for the new Honors Student Lounge. The Honors Committee is still hopeful that a larger smart Honors Seminar Room, accommodating at least 15 students and two instructors and a permanent secured computer and projector will be provided. This could be accomplished by enlarging the current seminar room and expanding it into the present Honors Office while still preserving the lounge with its kitchen access.

9. *“It is recommended that the composition of the Honors Committee be more diverse and the membership consist of two faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences, one faculty each from the colleges of Education and Business, two faculty who are teaching Honors seminars, and at least one student representative elected by the Honors students. The Director and the Dean (and/or the Provost) should also serve as ex-officio members.*”

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

10. *“It is recommended that the Honors Program be granted sufficient budget to cover the annual membership dues and the registration, travel, lodging, and expenses for the Director and at least one student or faculty colleague to attend the national and regional conferences.*”

Response: Time constraints, as well as budgetary limitations, have prevented ULV’s Honors Program from participating as fully in the national and regional Honors conferences as we would like. When the Honors Program was first being developed – and for about a decade thereafter – the Director attended all national conferences as well as selected regional meetings. While the start-up guidance and mentorship provided by participation in these meetings was invaluable to our development as a program, it is no longer as vital to our daily operations as it once was. However, it would be very desirable to reinstate the practice of regular conference attendance, as new ideas are extremely important in maintaining the dynamism of the Program.

UPDATE 2008-09: With a new director on board, this would appear to be an ideal opportunity to encourage attendance at both national and regional conferences, so that Dr.

Lavatori might become familiar with the NCHC and WRHC organizations and begin to participate actively in the workings of both councils. This would help give ULV's Honors Program greater visibility and open up additional opportunities for our students to become involved in Honors activities extramurally.

UPDATE Fall 09: Participation in NCHC and WRHC is desirable. Current memberships are being maintained providing opportunities for staying up to date with developments in Honors programs nationally and for student publication in national or regional revues. Although no significant source of funding exists in the Honors budget for travel to national or regional Honors conferences, the professional development committee may provide a resource for visiting one of the several Honors conferences offered annually.