

MEMORANDUM

Date: 6/13/08
To: Aghop Der Karabetian
Cc: Gerard Lavatori
From: Andrea Labinger
RE: 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.