Honors College Advisory Committee
Plan for Strengthened Honors College
(Action Plan for Fall 2024 for HC enrollment class Fall 2025)

June 2024

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Honors College Staff: Jesse Curran (English) and Barbara Hillery (Associate Provost).

The Honors College (HC) Advisory Committee has met eleven times since September of 2023, not including regular subgroup meetings, with the charge of revising the structure of the Honors College to ensure programmatic coherence and academic excellence. The committee reviewed aspects of Old Westbury's program, researched other HC programs relevant to our program, and identified critical areas for transformation in the program. This action plan shares recommendations for the Honors College, with a rationale for key changes. A separate report will describe the history of the program, and its more recent trajectory, as budget and staffing cuts have eroded the Honors College's capacity.

Curriculum: The most pressing concern for the Honors College was the sense that it had limited curricular coherence. Honors students typically entered mixed enrollment classes as Honors classes did not fill; often there were only a few HC students. What constituted an "Honors College" course had been based upon the faculty member's commitment to the program, with a general request by the program that the faculty push HC students to do more. Students often had limited interaction with the HC after their sophomore year. The requirement for experiential learning and capstone was challenging to administer, as not all students were in departments where capstones were required (for example, students in Math, or the School of Business,) or where the capstone required substantial research.

To enhance the HC academic experience the Advisory Committee suggests:

1) Curricula to reach across students' entire career, from entering HC students, through to graduation.

2) The curricula will be composed of six courses, four of which will be electives, all of which will be designated as Honors courses. Electives are three courses meeting the LEC requirements (B), and the experiential educational component (C).

   A) All students will take a dedicated HC-First Year seminar (e.g. *FY1000 Ethics of Engagement)* as part of a cohort, led by an HC faculty, 4 Credits;
   B) Students will take three additional HC courses, from the HC curricula, based on high-impact practices (HIPs, see AACU https://www.aacu.org/trending-topics/high-impact.) The curricula will support students in meeting their Liberal Education requirements. As the HC progresses, upper-level courses could be offered within the School of Education or the School of Business, or within specific departments, 12 Credits;
   C) Students will take an experiential educational component, either: 1) an internship with a community partner such as Northwell Health, Nassau County, a local high school, or Huntington Historical Society or in a career field upon agreement with the HC Director, 2 credits; 2) a study abroad program, varied credits; 3) guided research with a faculty member, varied credits. 0-2 credits;
   D) A capstone experiential learning course to be taken in conjunction with a department's capstone (or to supplement departments offerings when there is no capstone.). Capstone experience could include a thesis, a service project, an artistic project. 2 credits.

3) The curricula will be developed over the course of 2024-2026. Faculty will be invited to submit to an RFP for courses with high-impact practices; those chosen will be awarded $2,000 to develop a course that they commit to teaching. We will seek interdisciplinary courses, courses with collaborative assignments or projects, courses with service projects or experiential learning, courses involving undergraduate embedded research in lower-level Liberal Education courses, and/or writing-intensive courses. In 2024-2025 the HC would select five faculty to develop such courses, and another five the following year.

4) HC program funding will be made available to those teaching HC courses for field trips, external lectures, etc.

Structure of Program/Classes: To optimize the impact of the Honors College for enrolled students, and as a unit within the college we recommend the following.

1) HC students "choose" or opt into the HC. Developing a strong cohort of students who interact immediately through FY Seminar. (see **Enrollment**, below.)

2) HC classes be composed of HC students. Minimal exceptions allowed with faculty and HC faculty mentor/faculty director permission to maintain the cohort effect.

3) HC classes have lower enrollment of fifteen students to enhance cohort effect. With lower faculty/student ratio students will receive greater attention in a seminar-style setting, common in most programs we researched.

Enrollment: Revisions are designed to develop a more inclusive approach to identifying students who are passionate, curious, and highly motivated. Early engagement by student candidates can shape a more intentional student cohort. Strong student cohorts should aid in retention to the HC and Old Westbury. We seek students committed to the idea of the Honors College and our university's mission. Placing HC admissions in the hands of OW faculty and staff before formal campus entry enhances relationships between students and faculty and staff. Oversight of enrollment by HC faculty and staff can contribute to more disciplinary diversity.

1) First Year applicants with a 3.3 GPA or higher (or potential Standardized Test) will be eligible to apply to the Honors College. Changes in GPA (from 3.5 to 3.3) address inequities among different high schools, seeking to identify strong, motivated students who want to "own their future." While a lower GPA may seem counter to fostering academic excellence, departments across the college often have great divergence in GPAs and the suggested GPA allows room for students in Math and the School of Business.

2) Upon being flagged in their OW application, HC candidates will receive a message from Admissions communicating the benefits of the program and will be provided with a link to a form for the HC Application;

3) The Honors College Application form will provide students with short paragraph written response questions. Priority given to early applicants; students encourage to apply within three weeks of acceptance;

4) The Honors College Director/Advisory Board will review applications and make acceptance decisions. The leadership team will possibly follow up with an interview if needed;

5) HC Director/Board will be able to monitor eligible students and the HC Application Forms as they are submitted;

6) In dialogue with Admissions, a priority application date will be set to encourage early applicants;

7) A cohort of forty students enrolled each year would allow for greater curricular diversity; this matches the size of OW's HC from 2010-2020.

8) Develop a plan for enrolling rising sophomores and/or transfer students, in conjunction with a retention plan.

Co-Curricular Programming and Space: Critical to all strong Honors Colleges we reviewed was a dedicated space for students and faculty for programming, study, and unstructured time to build camaraderie. Our HC Lounge was previously a campus "home." To invigorate the space we recommend:

1) Exchanging some of the desks for more comfortable furnishings, such as a round table, and sofas. Providing refreshment station.

2) Providing adequate staffing to sustain Honors College club and leadership to access SGA resources.

3) Co-curricular and social activities sustain academic excellence. Previous off-campus activities include: travel to NYC and LI museums or theater, off-campus lectures, participation in Student Research Days and Student Undergraduate Research Conferences (SURC) at Old Westbury and across the state. Funding must be available to continue such activities.

4) On-campus co-curricular activities similarly nurture the HC students' sense of belonging and academic breadth. Previous activities include: faculty lectures, dinners with faculty, fitness and wellness programs, and maintenance of an on-campus beehive. Other low-resource activities might include ping-pong tournaments, low-key meet & greets with pizza and the opportunity to hear from and talk with a faculty member (or administrator such as the President); monthly fitness and wellness events (e.g. yoga, dance team); reinvigorate on-campus internships with programs like Horseability, Honors Gallery talks with the Wallace Gallery. Staffing required to develop and implement such programming.

Benefits of the Program: Honors College students will receive multiple concrete benefits from their engagement with the Honors College. We recommend:

1. Unrestricted scholarship of $1,000 annually to match local SUNY scholarships. Unrestricted offers students greater flexibility and limits administrative work for HC staff;

2. Free Printing, accessible throughout campus;

3. Memberships in regional and national Honors Councils (e.g. NERHC) to provide research/presentation opportunities to students;

4. priority registration;

5. access to honors advisement/mentoring for graduate programs, careers, etc.;

6. Honors College Lounge (including several desktop computers with programs to support research, study, such as Canva);

7. Work with a tech company/vendor or identify a grant for discounts for honors college students;

8. Special Honors cords/sashes etc. for graduation. Honors' acknowledgement on both transcript and diploma. An HC or HN designation on courses, scheduled by the honors college, highlights the significance of the honors college, and offers future employers and universities the opportunity to understand the role of the honors college in students' academic careers.

Staffing: The HC currently is being directed by one contingent lecturer (Jesse Curran) and one administrator, the former who has two course releases each semester, while teaching two courses, and the other, (Barbara Hillery,) who currently serves as the Associate Provost, who is responsible for numerous ongoing projects, and whose responsibilities are still being negotiated as she returns to a faculty position for Fall 2024.

There can be no renewal of the Honors College without a commitment of full-time staffing by administration. For 2024-2025, based on the recommendation of the Provost, we have initiated a P1 to replace the former full-time staff person. This instructional support position was held by a full-time UUP member through February of 2024.

Necessary staffing for Fall 2025, when the HC reopens, is still under consideration.