Honors College History and Current Status

The success of the Honors College can be registered in student and alumni success. At a May 2023 event, "Old Westbury Women in Law," then law students or lawyers all credited their success with the mentoring they'd received from the Honors College. Old Westbury alumni had attended the law schools of George Washington University, Northwestern University, along with the more local Northeastern School of Law, St. John's School of Law, and CUNY School of Law. Our Honors College graduates have attended the Yale School of Public Health, Harvard University, Cornell University, Michigan State University, the Marxe School of Public and International Affairs at Baruch College, the Craig Newmark School of Journalism at CUNY's Graduate Center, and SUNY Albany's Graduate Program in History; Honors College students have become pharmacists, librarians, pediatricians, osteopaths, teachers, accountants, and psychologists. Because Old Westbury students are often first generation, their knowledge of needed skills and approaches to moving forward in careers can be limited. The former HC Director believed mentoring to be critical in moving forward students in their careers, and was highly successful in nurturing student ambitions.

The Honors College has long provided students with an opportunity to feel a deepened sense of belonging in a specialized academic space that supports excellence. Honors College students are proud of their membership identity and use it to promote the university to their communities. At open house and newly admitted student events, the HC table is one of the most trafficked, as new potential students seek to access the very best curricular and co-curricular opportunities OW can offer.

As a former Honors College Advisory Committee member noted, Honors College students raise the bar in all classes, and across the college. Here are just a few of the kinds of activities they've engaged in that have sustained academic excellence at Old Westbury in the past decade.

- In 2024 an Honors College student won the U.S. Department of State's prestigious Benjamin Gilman award for International Study; Honors College students account for 50% of the Gilman Scholarships awarded to Old Westbury
- Honors College students have received 100% of the Fulbright Fellowships awarded to Old Westbury students (1).
- Honors College students account for 71% of SUNY Chancellor's Awards for Student Excellence at Old Westbury.
- 30% of Presidents Medal for Scholarship Awards went to Honors College students.
- Honors College students have a graduation rate approaching 70%
- Honors College students in the BS/DO program frequently graduate in 3 years
- In 2018, a team led by Honors College students took first place in the national Peterson Foundation Up to Us economic summit, beating over 100 colleges including elite privates.
- The Honors College has promoted innovative and high impact practices, including:
    - Honors cohort Learning Community
    - Required experiential/applied learning experience
    - Implementation of the HHMI SEA-PHAGE curriculum into Introductory Biology.(In 2017-2018 a faculty member worked with an Honors class to isolate

ad characterize bacteriophages/phages (viruses that infect bacteria) from our local ecosystems. Students took soil samples and their work is part of a nationwide project, Science Education Alliance's Phage Hunters Advancing Genomics and Evolutionary Sciences (SEA-PHAGES,) that is jointly administered by the University of Pittsburgh and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science Education division. Their work has been published.)

  - Students in two honors classes of *AS3462 History of US Women* participated in a nation-wide crowd sourced project to identify key leaders in the fight for women's suffrage. Over twenty students published short biographical sketches of suffrage leaders from Maine, New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey for the Women and Social Movements database published by Alexander Street Press in 2018 and 2020.
  - Honors College students interning at Old Westbury's Women's Center researched Women in Governance on Long Island, examining women in elected representatives and executive positions from Long Island School Boards, to county executives, state senators and assembly people to the U.S. Senate. Students shared their research at SUNY's Student Undergraduate Research (2016).
  - In 2022, an Honors College student attended the Annual Public Policy Leadership Conference through the Harvard Kennedy School

- Honors College students work on campus at the Writing Center, the Tutoring Center, the OSSD office, the Communications office, CSTEP and STEP, Career Planning and Development, and as T.A.s and R.A.s. The directors of these centers regularly work with the HC to place Honors students in these peer leadership roles, which serve the campus community at large.
- Honors College students regularly work as Research Assistants, assisting professors across disciplines in their labs and with their scholarly projects.
- Honors College students have long provided the leadership for the campus Environmental Sustainability Club; some of the club's accomplishments include campus beehives and the installation of a food justice garden.

Staffing: We begin with this area, as it has changed the most dramatically over time, and will shape the contours of any future planning for the Honors College. The HC was initiated in 2007, with a part-time director (Ph.D.), and then a part-time student internship advisor (M.S.) who also aided in co-curricular planning, and a full-time instructional support person (UUP member) who supported administrative and logistical needs. In 2011 a full-time director was hired on a twelve-month contract (Ph.D. hired in non-academic role). That director:

- boosted enrollment into the 160-200 student range, bringing in 40-50 new Honors freshmen each fall;
- enhanced the cohort effect greatly by accessibility, and support to student-run programming;
- provided much one-on-one career and educational mentoring to students;
- organized ongoing co-curricular activities;
- identified faculty to teach HC courses;

- supported students with undergraduate research, including participation in local Student Research Day and SUNY's Undergraduate Research Conference;
- chaperoned a study abroad trip to China;
- and was active in leadership of the regional Northeast Regional Honors Council.

Since December of 2021 the Honors College has operated with substantial cuts to its staffing. When the part-time Master's level internship advisor left in 2018 she was replaced by a full-time advisor; that person did not remain long and was not replaced. In December of 2021, the full-time director retired. Providing no replacement for the Director, the Provost's Office supported a part-time contingent faculty member as the HC director of the program from January 2022-June 2023, under the support of an Associate Provost. Starting in Fall 23, new college administration made further budget cuts to the program, and instead provided one course release (fall 23) and then two course releases (spring 24) to the director (she has a 4-4 lecturer line) to run the program as a "Faculty Mentor." The Associate Provost continues to support the program. In February of 2024, the long-time instructional support assistant retired, and has not been replaced.

These dramatic staffing cuts have significantly curtailed the ability of the Honors College to support students. There has been no full-time presence of HC staff near the offices or lounge. Providing the intense mentoring that clearly paid off for first generation college students is nearly impossible. The faculty mentor and Associate Provost oversee the book scholarships, organize co-curricular activities, though fewer given time and budget constraints, organize ongoing Honors classes, advise current Honors College students, coordinate the HC Internship program, facilitate research opportunities with faculty, oversee independent HC course contracts, maintain Honors College Brightspace page, and write support letters for graduate programs and other academic opportunities.

Curriculum: As mentioned in the action plan, while the Honors College previously had strong student mentoring, it had limited curricular coherence. The former director offered many classes to meet working students' needs, but limited numbers of HC students in each class diluted the impact of the Honors cohort. (Some cohort affect was achieved by having a FY1000 and an EL2000 HC class.). Classes were chosen on an *ad hoc* basis, they were traditional Liberal Education courses. While the HC developed a much higher profile under the former director, he had to solicit classes each year for the HC, and departments were often unwilling, given their own constraints, to designate classes as Honors. There were no specific demands within courses designated as Honors, or for HC students within mixed enrollment classes. Additionally, many students often had limited interaction with the HC in the classroom after their sophomore year.

Though the previous curricula did ask for a capstone project, 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, and hence students received a much less rigorous capstone learning experience.

Structure of Program/Classes: Through 2023 Enrollment Services invited students into the HC based on high school GPA and/or test scores. Students did not apply to the HC. Classes were

mixed enrollment, often with only a few Honors students, and typically ran at traditional course number of 30 students.

Enrollment: As stated, HC played little role in enrolling HS students, though did play a role in bringing in Sophomores into the program. Resultingly, while mentoring and support of co-curricular activities brought students into the HC mission, not all students were connected to the program, and mixed-enrollment classes could also minimize connection. Increasingly students have been STEM students, with a loss of diversity in disciplines within the program. Approximately forty students were entered into the program each year, though that number went higher just before the pandemic. New Enrollment Management staff also increased scholarship benefits in 2022-2023, to attract strong students. In recent times, HC staff have struggled to access lists of incoming FY HC students from Enrollment Services, making curricular support to those students challenging.

In Fall 2023 a decision was made to cut enrollment into the HC for 2024-2025, without communicating this to the HC staff, the Associate Provost, or the HC Advisory Committee.

Co-Curricular Programming and Space: The HC Honors Lounge, though spare, was a vital space for HC students once the NAB was established in 2012. Diminished staffing and students' more limited connection to the college post-covid has constricted the space's conviviality. Diminished staffing has also meant that SGA funding for the student club has dropped. While the faculty mentor and Associate Provost have supported ongoing co-curricular events, such as a museum trip, or end of year luncheon for HC students, the level of programming has dropped considerably given the staffing cuts. Similarly, support for student research persists, but is deeply constricted.

Benefits of the Program: Honors College students have received multiple concrete benefits from their engagement with the Honors College, including:

1. A restricted $500 book scholarship. Assuring compliance with the limits of this scholarship has taken much administrative time;

2. Free Printing in the Honors Office—this has been less available as staffing has been cut and the office is not open;

3. Memberships in regional Honors Councils, though in recent years we have not always paid for memberships, nor participated in annual conferences. The previous director served as Vice President of the Northeast Regional Honors Council;

4. priority registration;

5. access to honors advisement/mentoring for graduate programs, careers, etc. This has continued, but by dint of shortages in staffing is less common;

6. Honors College Lounge (discussed above);

7. Special Honors cords/sashes etc. for graduation. While the registrar lists Honors' as a campus location on the transcript, the campus location is not permanent, hence there is no current acknowledgement of the honors college on transcript or diploma.