

## **Recommendations**

The Task Force reviewed numerous documents from various archives dating from the early 1980s to present. Faculty, student, and alumni were both surveyed electronically and/or invited to make in-depth (focus groups) comments about the current honors program at Radford University. An external and nationally recognized consultant (i.e., Dr. Robert L. Spurrier, Jr.) was invited to campus for a two-day, comprehensive review of the Honors Academy. Discussions within the Task Force meetings evolved around these issues and how the Honors Academy fulfills its mission of providing scholarly opportunities to the University's finest students.

### Executive Summary

During the Task Force meeting on February 28, 2012 it was unanimously recommended to include an executive summary of the five most critical areas for enhancement. They are listed (unranked) as follows.

- Resources - The program has insufficient staff (especially academic advisers and support personnel), funding, and facilities to manage its current student enrollment. It is recommended that the available resources be increased to match the needs, or that enrollment be decreased consonant with available funding in efforts to significantly improve quality (Specific Recommendations 1-18).
- Communication - The program has inconsistent patterns of communication with other academic departments and schools, campus offices, and within the honors program itself. It is recommended that a comprehensive and strategic communications plan be developed in conjunction with qualified campus individuals (e.g., School of Communication and Office of University Relations) or external consultants to best convey information about the honors programs (Specific Recommendations 19-34).
- Operational Policies and Procedures - The Honors Academy is not operationally well defined in terms of faculty and student expectations, qualifications, and training. It is recommended that student and faculty requirements for honors classes, grading, capstone projects, course contract proposals, research, and financial aid be clearly defined through sequential orientations (e.g., New Faculty Orientation) and on-going classes designed to best inform all parties (Specific Recommendations 35-45).
- Organizational Structure - The Honors Academy has a reported history of autonomous organization. It is recommended that the Honors Academy develop and implement a detailed business plan for transitioning to an

Honors Program, and later to an Honors College, in accordance with the National Collegiate Honors Council. Dr. Spurrier (external consultant) is highly recommended to assist in developing a new organizational plan (Specific Recommendations 46-49).

- Curriculum - The curriculum for honors students is not well coordinated across academic disciplines or within some core courses. While some students have had truly exceptional experiences, a significant number of faculty and students have reported a lack of rigor and depth concurrent with advanced study. It is recommended that as an initial phase for improving the overall quality that all academic experiences, especially contracted classes and academic advising, be reviewed in terms of achieving the rigor, depth of knowledge, and skills expected for our best and brightest students (Specific Recommendations 50-64).

### Specific Recommendations

Each member of the Task Force was asked to keep an on-going list of recommendations. The following (unranked) are presented in the spirit of enhancing the program's reputation.

Specifically, it is recommended that (n=64):

1. Recommendations for enhancing the program are implemented as previous reviews have yielded little according to senior faculty members.
2. The program raises its student admission criteria to include only the upper 10% of each entering freshman class (i.e., increased selectivity).
3. An early admission program is developed for outstanding students (i.e., "high flyers") to attend summer classes prior to admission that facilitates recruitment and early faculty mentoring.
4. The program and offices for Enrollment Management work in greater concert relative to recruitment of outstanding students.
5. A greater initiative is implemented to retain students in the program, especially at the beginning of their sophomore year.
6. The program improves its profile of student diversity (e.g., racial, cultural, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, etc.).
7. The number of academic scholarships allocated to students enrolled in the program increase significantly and that continuation for student funding is more explicitly defined.
8. Students receiving academic scholarships for achievements equal to and greater than regular admission automatically be invited to the honors program.
9. The Director and Associate Director both have full-time, 12-month Administrative-Professional faculty appointments.

10. A comprehensive staffing plan is developed to meet what faculty members believed to be an "understaffed operation."
11. A full-time staff member is appointed to the program.
12. A full-time, professional, academic adviser be hired to supervise student advisement and in a manner similar to those provided in the colleges.
13. The non-personnel operating budget (NPS) is increased.
14. The program be housed in a more attractive and better-organized facility for purposes of student recruitment (e.g., Honors House) and collaborations.
15. Seminar classrooms are constructed for primary use by the program, and with distinctive signage and decor that enhances advanced instruction (e.g., Nationality Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh; <http://www.pitt.edu/~natrooms/pages/allnr1.html>).
16. Full-time, tenured faculty members from every academic program are assigned with appropriate release times to facilitate curricular issues, recruitment, and scholarly research.
17. New and current faculty members be considered for dual appointments in the honors program and their academic unit.
18. The Director and Associate Director develop a strategic donor or gifting plan in collaboration with the new Vice President for University Advancement (Dr. Deborah J. Robinson).
19. The program is assigned a regular representative from the Office of University Relations.
20. Funds are allocated for major public relations (Office of Advancement and Public Relations) initiatives that include new printed/public media.
21. The honors program improves its campus reputation via more frequent communications, public relations, and general promotion.
22. More and regular campus-wide functions be scheduled to increase interests and participation in the honors programs.
23. The program participates actively in the Highlander Days activities for both recruitment and scholarly purposes (e.g., student exemplars).
24. The program standardize its coding of student information systems to conform with those used by the Office of Institutional Research and other campus offices.
25. A plan is developed for more timely and consistent methods for notifying students of their acceptance into the program and their housing opportunities.
26. All communications are systematized within the program, which some students reported as "disorganized" throughout their experience.
27. A web designer is assigned to assist with providing more content regarding integration of student advisement, admissions, financial aid, etc.
28. Major efforts be implemented to create a greater "sense of community" among the honors students.
29. Entering freshmen are paired with more senior honors students to facilitate the first year experience.

30. The Office of Housing and Residential Life work more diligently to keep students not enrolled in the honors program out of the designated facilities in Floyd and Peery Halls.
31. Special orientation series are developed to further recognize incoming students.
32. Academic Affairs sponsor and host an Annual Fall Faculty Reception to stimulate and maintain appropriate campus interests in the program.
33. Program director(s) meet regularly with academic units to clarify policies and to address issues of concern.
34. Communication with participating faculty members is improved.
35. A comprehensive and up-to-date policy and procedures manual is developed to systematize internal operations.
36. An informative and comprehensive Student Handbook is developed (i.e., policies and procedures manual) and maintained.
37. A personal interview becomes part of the admission process.
38. Entering freshmen are required to live in one of the honors residence facilities for the first year.
39. Clear policies and procedures for admitting upper classmen and transfer students to the honors program be established.
40. Student's participation in the program is more clearly documented and especially with regard to "active" versus "inactive" status.
41. Honors students to register for classes early.
42. All financial assistance (e.g., need-based and scholarships) for students in the honors program be managed by the Director and allocated to a budget within the program.
43. A more clear delineation of duties relative to the Graduate/Undergraduate Student Engagement Forum is developed between the Honors Academy and the College of Graduate and Extended Education.
44. The roles and duties of the Advisory Board be better defined.
45. A session/presentation on the honors program is included in the New Faculty Orientation held each summer prior to the start of fall classes.
46. Consideration is given to changing the name (i.e., Honors Academy) to one more widely recognized and consonant with national honors programs and colleges.
47. The program develop a long-term plan for transformation into an Honors Program and later an Honors College within Academic Affairs.
48. The program maintains its reporting line to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.
49. A long-range strategic plan is developed that includes measurable action items for achieving mission and goals.
50. The program increases its scholarship expectations/requirements as required in the capstone projects.
51. Students' capstone projects begin sooner in their programs of study and encompass the junior and senior years. Project requirements should also be better defined for both faculty and students.

52. Contracted courses be revised to increase what students considered to be "too easy" and faculty members thought were "poorly structured."
53. The process of contracting courses is reconsidered relative to a more standardized process that ensures academic rigor.
54. The program remove limitations within contracted courses that equate work efforts with other students enrolled in the classes.
55. Each student in the honors program enroll in a one-credit hour honors seminar each fall semester to facilitate on-going scholarly projects and active participation.
56. Students who fail to maintain required grade point averages or to continuously enroll in honors courses be promptly counseled or dismissed from the program.
57. Core 201 and 202 in the Core A portion of the undergraduate curriculum be revised for students in the program (e.g., Honors Core Classes), and especially with regard for ensuring academic rigor in terms of subject-based critical reasoning and problem solving skills.
58. Honors student register online for courses in ways like students in other programs.
59. The program receives budgetary support for compensating faculty members to teach honors courses and/or direct capstone projects.
60. The Directors have access (for review purposes) to faculty teaching evaluations with regard to courses offered to students in the honors program.
61. Faculty teaching honors classes and/or directing capstone projects be nominated and elected in accordance with criteria that recognize their scholarly and instructional achievements.
62. Faculty members receive more formalized training before being assigned a honors course and/or research project.
63. Plans are initiated to develop a student honors society that greatly emphasizes excellence in scholarship, public service, and leadership (see: [http://www.achsnatl.org/standards\\_alert.asp](http://www.achsnatl.org/standards_alert.asp)).
64. The program work intentionally to de-emphasize perceptions among some students and faculty members that membership is more facilitative of socializing than scholarly endeavors.