

**UAH Honors College:
Expanding Our Horizons
Reaching Toward the Future**

Strategic Plan

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Accepted by Dr. Christine Curtis, Provost on 1-21-2015**

Mission: To provide an enriched and challenging academic program for high-achieving students in all fields of study that creates community, emphasizes critical and creative thinking, crosses disciplines, and fosters top-quality undergraduate research and creative activity.

Vision: The UAH Honors College will become a destination college for high-achieving students in all fields of study by combining the educational experience of a small, elite university with the opportunities and resources of a research- and career-oriented public university.

Goals:

1. Produce graduates that are highly sought by graduate programs and employers.
2. Combine a traditional humanities, arts, and sciences education with high quality professional training in business, education, engineering, and nursing.
3. Foster an environment of community service and encourage students to develop a global perspective.
4. Offer students a genuine community centered on a respect for diversity and a shared interest in bettering oneself academically and personally.

In support of these Goals, the UAH Honors Colleges establishes the following priorities over the next 3-5 years:

Priority #1:

Recruit, retain, and graduate a cadre of talented, high-achieving students who desire the Honors academic, research, and community opportunities.

Priority #2:

Develop an attractive, inspiring, and enriched curriculum. This curriculum should encourage interdisciplinary thought; promote global awareness; integrate technical, scientific, and humanistic forms of inquiry; and provide high quality professional training. (In short, the curriculum should realize the Honors College Learning Outcomes. See Appendix B.)

Priority #3:

Create an academically centered learning community.

Priority #4:

Become the center for undergraduate research at UAH and elevate UAH to a pre-eminent institution for undergraduate research.

Priority #5:

Secure extramural funding to support Honors College activities.

Priority #6:

Provide an administrative structure that is efficient and responsive to students' needs and that involves students in the life and administration of the college.

Note: The UAH Honors College would like to examine the possibility of a National Collegiate Honors Council Site Visit within 3-5 years.

Objective and tactics to meet these 6 priorities:

Priority #1

Recruit and retain a cadre of talented, high-achieving students who desire the Honors academic, research, and community opportunities.

Note: *This priority assumes that careful selection of Honors Students is the first step in retaining them through the Honors Diploma (See Brimeyer, Scheuths, and Smith).*

Objectives:

1. Raise enrollment to 10% of total undergraduate enrollment in three years.

Tactics:

- a. Establish a signature event for high-achieving prospective students.
 - b. Develop and disseminate a consistent message about the UAH Honors College across the region.
 - c. Target regional AP instructors (in all fields), High School clubs, and other venues with information about the Honors College and provide speakers bureau opportunities to build knowledge and respect for UAH programs.
 - d. Develop a compelling program for attracting transfer students.
 - e. Reach out to Community Colleges, establish articulation agreements for those with Honors programs and consider encouraging Honors at 2-year schools that lack Honors.
2. Increase 6-year completion rate of Honors Diploma to 35% in **five** years.

Note: *UAH 6-year completion rate for Honors Diploma is about 19%. National average for completion of Honors Diploma in Honors Colleges with thesis requirement is approximately 25%, although there is evidence that this rate can be improved through concerted effort (Goodstein and Szerak).*

Tactics:

- a. Develop curriculum and course offerings that keep students engaged in the Honors College throughout the entire course of their study.
- b. Develop special Honors Orientation, FYE, and other early support and intervention structures for incoming students.
- c. Develop recruiting materials that stress undergraduate research.
- d. Develop handbooks, workshops, and events that will raise awareness of the Honors Capstone.
- e. Develop support structures for students (math or writing centers / tutoring centers) that are specific to Honors.
- f. Establish a mid-program “check-in”: an award or a 1-credit hour class.
- g. Create either a thesis/research coordinator position or a thesis preparation course (or both) to establish paths for the research development of Honors Students. *Note: (e) and (f) should work together.*
- h. Develop incentives to keep students engage in Honors Community (see priority #3).

Priority #2

Develop an attractive, inspiring, and enriched curriculum that encourages interdisciplinary thought and integrates technical, scientific, and humanistic inquiry with professional training and global awareness. This curriculum should realize the Honors College Learning Outcomes (Appendix B).

Note: *Curricular standards given here are consistent with NCHC standards for Honors Education (NCHC Board of Directors 2013) and with Best Practices (see Appendix A).*

Objectives:

1. Establish a comprehensive Honors Curriculum.

Tactics:

- a. Establish a core curriculum course required of all incoming Honors Students.
 - b. Establish a full complement of stand-alone Honors Courses that would allow Honors Students to complete Charger Foundations almost entirely by means of Honors Sections of Foundations courses.
 - c. Increase number of Honors Credit hours required (national best practice is 20-25% of total hours required for degree). Require students to distribute hours across different fields in their studies.
 - d. Create sections of upper division courses that allow students to continue their Honors Education through their major.
 - e. Work with colleges with impacted majors to provide space for elective courses.
 - f. Develop assessment instruments to ensure that Honors Learning Outcomes are met.
2. Offer more interdisciplinary seminars, and increase enrollment in them. (Ideally 3 per academic year, at maximum enrollment of 20 per class.)

Tactics:

- a. Develop incentives for instructors to teach, and for students to take, interdisciplinary seminars.
 - b. Work with colleges with impacted majors to provide special, upper division Honors courses specific to majors.
 - c. Look into NSF and other sponsored grants for education.
3. Encourage global awareness among Honors Students.

Tactics:

- a. Develop a path for creating Honors-specific study abroad courses.
- b. Develop further incentives to encourage study abroad.
- c. Find funding sources to defray student costs of study abroad courses.
- d. Work with Office of International Engagement, International Student Task Force, and other institutional offices and initiatives to increase number of international students in the Honors College.

Priority #3

Create an academically centered learning community.

Objectives:

1. Increase number of students living more than one year in Honors Housing.

Tactics:

- a. Work with Housing Office to develop financial incentives to retain students in Honors Housing.
 - b. Create a second colony for upper-level Honors Students in another living space (North, Southeast, or Charger Village).
 - c. Plan for Honors instructional space within Residence Halls.
2. Link academics, inquiry, and living into a single experience.

Tactics:

- a. Create a committee of faculty and residence life/housing personnel to create programming that ties core course with Residence Hall Programming.
 - b. Develop incentives for participation in living/learning experiences (e.g., “citizenship” program or similar point-based model). Ensure that this applies both to residential and non-residential students.
 - c. Develop spaces within the Honors Residence Hall that promote communal learning and study.
 - d. Work with Office of Housing to refine Resident Assistant selection and training for Honors Housing Resident Assistants and staff.
3. Establish responsibility for Honors College operations and growth among Honors Students. *Note: this objective is closely tied to Priority #6 (Increase Administrative Efficiency).*

Tactics:

- a. Identify Honors internships for Honors specific needs.
- b. Encourage Honors Capstones and possibly Seminars that promote, enhance, or improve the Honors College itself.
- c. Create a governing council of Honors Students charged with the growth and improvement of the Honors College experience.

Priority #4

Place the Honors College at the center of undergraduate research at UAH and help elevate UAH to a pre-eminent institution for undergraduate research.

Note: *This priority is consistent with the NCHC Best Practices for an Honors College (NCHC Board of Directors 2014a, 2014b) and also NCHC Definition of Honors Education (NCHC Board of Directors, 2013).*

Objectives:

1. Raise 6-year completion of Honors Capstone to 35%. See Priority #1, Objective #2.
2. Establish standards for Undergraduate projects and theses that can be used by all undergraduate UAH students for their research.

Tactic:

- a. Use the Honors Council to establish and disseminate these standards.
3. Increase participation to parity with other institutions in UA System Honors Research Day.

Tactic:

- a. Create a linked series of events to encourage polished presentations of student research and to create a pipeline of student work ready to present (e.g., RCEU Day, Undergrad Research Day, Special Honors Events, etc.).
4. Increase number of Honors Students earning prestigious Graduate Fellowships: GRFP, Fulbright, Truman.

Tactics:

- a. Establish a faculty-mentor program for talented students.
- b. Create a repository of past winners to establish best practices for getting awards.

Priority #5

Secure extramural funding to support Honors College activities.

Objectives:

1. Raise average, annual donation amount to \$10,000 in 5 years.

Tactics:

- a. Identify needs and create targeted letter for annual fund drive.
 - b. Establish alumni event and alumni contact program (include distinguished alumni).
 - c. Create Distinguished Honors Alumni Award.
 - d. Create opportunities for potential donors to have contact with Honors College and Honors Students (e.g., lectures, student research days, etc.)
 - e. Develop signature fundraising event.
2. Create Opportunities for larger gifts.

Tactics:

- a. Create corporate advisory board (3 year goal).
- b. Work with Office of Advancement to identity list of donors; cultivate relationship with them that stresses value of Honors to the community.
- c. Create opportunities for potential donors to have contact with Honors College and Honors Students (e.g., lectures, student research days, etc.)

Priority #6

Provide an administrative structure that is efficient and responsive to students' needs and that involves students in the life and administration of the college.

Objectives:

1. Reorganize office staff to create sufficient time for advising and enrollment management in the College Coordinator Position.

Tactics:

- a. Create student social media and web position
 - b. Create student event coordinator position
 - c. Secure second part-time student receptionist position (paid student, work-study, possibly a GA).
 - d. Increase Honors Ambassador responsibilities to include development of recruiting ideas and materials.
2. Involve Honors Students in the Honors College

Tactics:

- a. Create a governing council of Honors Students charged with the growth and improvement of the Honors College experience.
- b. Create Honors Internships for development of IT infrastructure, management of living opportunities, etc.

Appendix A: National Collegiate Honors Council Best Practices

Best practices for an Honors Program (included because they provide the foundation for the Best practices for an Honors College, NCHC Board of Directors 2014a):

- 1 The honors program offers carefully designed educational experiences that meet the needs and abilities of the undergraduate students it serves. A clearly articulated set of admission criteria (e.g., GPA, SAT score, a written essay, satisfactory progress, etc.) identifies the targeted student population served by the honors program. The program clearly specifies the requirements needed for retention and satisfactory completion.
- 2 The program has a clear mandate from the institution's administration in the form of a mission statement or charter document that includes the objectives and responsibilities of honors and defines the place of honors in the administrative and academic structure of the institution. The statement ensures the permanence and stability of honors by guaranteeing that adequate infrastructure resources, including an appropriate budget as well as appropriate faculty, staff, and administrative support when necessary, are allocated to honors so that the program avoids dependence on the good will and energy of particular faculty members or administrators for survival. In other words, the program is fully institutionalized (like comparable units on campus) so that it can build a lasting tradition of excellence.
- 3 The honors director reports to the chief academic officer of the institution.
- 4 The honors curriculum, established in harmony with the mission statement, meets the needs of the students in the program and features special courses, seminars, colloquia, experiential learning opportunities, undergraduate research opportunities, or other independent-study options.
- 5 The program requirements constitute a substantial portion of the participants' undergraduate work, typically 20% to 25% of the total course work and certainly no less than 15%.
- 6 The curriculum of the program is designed so that honors requirements can, when appropriate, also satisfy general education requirements, major or disciplinary requirements, and preprofessional or professional training requirements.
- 7 The program provides a locus of visible and highly reputed standards and models of excellence for students and faculty across the campus.
- 8 The criteria for selection of honors faculty include exceptional teaching skills, the ability to provide intellectual leadership and mentoring for able students, and support for the mission of honors education.
- 9 The program is located in suitable, preferably prominent, quarters on campus that provide both access for the students and a focal point for honors activity. Those accommodations include space for honors administrative, faculty, and support staff functions as appropriate. They may include space for an honors lounge, library, reading rooms, and computer facilities. If the honors program has a significant residential component, the honors housing and residential life functions are designed to meet the academic and social needs of honors students.
- 10 The program has a standing committee or council of faculty members that works with the director or other administrative officer and is involved in honors curriculum, governance,

policy, development, and evaluation deliberations. The composition of that group represents the colleges and/or departments served by the program and also elicits support for the program from across the campus.

- 11 Honors students are assured a voice in the governance and direction of the honors program. This can be achieved through a student committee that conducts its business with as much autonomy as possible but works in collaboration with the administration and faculty to maintain excellence in the program. Honors students are included in governance, serving on the advisory/policy committee as well as constituting the group that governs the student association.
- 12 Honors students receive honors-related academic advising from qualified faculty and/or staff.
- 13 The program serves as a laboratory within which faculty feel welcome to experiment with new subjects, approaches, and pedagogies. When proven successful, such efforts in curriculum and pedagogical development can serve as prototypes for initiatives that can become institutionalized across the campus.
- 14 The program regularly assesses and evaluates program goals and learning outcomes as articulated in the National Collegiate Honors Council's definition of honors education and modes of honors learning, and as appropriate to the institution's culture and mission.
- 15 The program emphasizes active learning and participatory education by offering opportunities for students to participate in regional and national conferences, Honors Semesters, international programs, community service, internships, undergraduate research, and other types of experiential education.
- 16 When appropriate, two-year and four-year programs have articulation agreements by which honors graduates from two-year programs who meet previously agreed-upon requirements are accepted into four-year honors programs.
- 17 The program provides priority enrollment for active honors students in recognition of scheduling difficulties caused by the need to satisfy both honors and major program(s) requirements.

Best Practices for an Honors College (NCHC Board of Directors 2014b):

- 1 An honors college incorporates the relevant characteristics of a fully developed honors program.
- 2 The honors college exists as an equal collegiate unit within a multi-collegiate university structure.
- 3 The head of the honors college is a dean reporting directly to the chief academic officer of the institution and serving as a full member of the Council of Deans if one exists. The dean has a fulltime, 12-month appointment.
- 4 The operational and staff budgets of honors colleges provide resources at least comparable to those of other collegiate units of equivalent size.
- 5 The honors college exercises increased coordination and control of departmental honors where the college has emerged out of a decentralized system.
- 6 The honors college exercises considerable control over honors recruitment and admissions, including the appropriate size of the incoming class. Admission to the honors college may be by separate application.
- 7 The honors college exercises considerable control over its policies, curriculum, and selection of

faculty.

- 8 The curriculum of the honors college offers significant course opportunities across all four years of study.
- 9 The curriculum of the honors college constitutes at least 20% of a student's degree program. The honors college requires an honors thesis or honors capstone project.
- 10 Where the home university has a significant residential component, the honors college offers substantial honors residential opportunities.
- 11 The distinction achieved by the completion of the honors college requirements is publically announced and recorded, and methods may include announcement at commencement ceremonies, notations on the diploma and/or the student's final transcript, or other similar actions.
- 12 Like other colleges within the university, the honors college may be involved in alumni affairs and development and may have an external advisory board.
- 13 The college regularly assesses and evaluates program goals and learning outcomes as articulated in the National Collegiate Honors Council's [definition of honors education](#) and modes of honors learning, and as appropriate to the institution's culture and mission.

Appendix B: UAH Honors College Learning Outcomes

1. **Independence of thought and research.** Honors Students question what they learn, develop their own viewpoints, seek original solutions to problems where possible, and pose their own research questions, problems, or creative activities.
2. **Strong critical thinking abilities.** Honors Students understand the relationship between evidence and conclusions, can sort relevant from irrelevant information, and can decide the best methods for attaining goals.
3. **Good oral and written communication skills.** Honors Students can explain their views and the views of others in clear, well-argued terms.
4. **Masters of their own discipline.** Honors Students know the required content and possess the necessary skills to be fully competent in their discipline. Yet they go further and seek a “depth dimension.” For example, they may know the historical and contextual origin of some of their content knowledge and skills, or they may understand the theory behind a practice or a formula better than other students.
5. **Possess broad-based knowledge.** Honors Students should have a strong arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences background and strive to forge connections between disparate ideas and disciplines.

Works Cited

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