

**SPECIAL REPORT**

of the

**ACADEMIC MATTERS, PROGRAM AND BUDGET AND  
UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION COUNCILS**

concerning

**COMMONWEALTH HONORS COLLEGE  
CURRICULUM RESTRUCTURING**

Presented at the  
695<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate  
May 13, 2010

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ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL**Background**

The Commonwealth Honors College Curriculum Committee is proposing a restructuring of the Honors curriculum. In the current system, students must complete both Tier I (Honors versions of foundation/Gen Ed courses) and Tier II (departmental honors courses and capstone experience) requirements in order to receive Commonwealth College Honors or Departmental Honors. The proposed restructuring involves the following changes:

1. A new honors designation of “General Education Scholar” will be awarded and recorded on the transcripts of students who complete the Tier I requirements, receive a grade of B+ or better in the General Education integrative experience, and maintain a 3.4 or higher overall GPA.
2. All students having a GPA of 3.4 or higher may apply for a space in Commonwealth Honors College Tier II, whether or not they have completed Tier I. Students who complete all Tier II requirements and maintain an overall GPA of 3.4 or higher will be awarded Departmental Honors or Multidisciplinary Honors, as appropriate. These will be listed on transcripts (or possibly on diplomas, if feasible).

As in the current system, students who complete both Tier I and Tier II requirements and have a sufficiently high overall GPA will also be awarded Commonwealth Honors College Honors (along with a level of distinction, as appropriate) to be listed on their diplomas.

**AMC Observations**

The proposal notes a number of potential advantages to the new system. The new General Education Scholar designation provides some recognition for students who enter the University in the Commonwealth Honors College and complete the Tier I requirements, but for whatever reason do not want to pursue Departmental or Multidisciplinary Honors. It also helps to elevate the importance of general education and the new integrative experience. The new plan for Tier II allows “late blooming” and transfer students to have access to the Commonwealth Honors College and its benefits. The Academic Matters Council agrees that these potential advantages are significant and worth pursuing with the proposed restructuring.

**AMC Recommendations**

The Academic Matters Council recommends that the Faculty Senate approve the proposed Commonwealth Honors College Curriculum Restructuring.

PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCIL

Dean Priscilla Clarkson responded to all of the Program and Budget Council’s questions about the impact of the changes on departmental honors advisors, and the advising support available to departments from Commonwealth Honors College. The Council agrees that the new system opens up options for students throughout the campus, while providing appropriate forms of support to departments in tracking and evaluating students who apply directly for departmental honors. The Program and Budget Council unanimously approved the Commonwealth Honors College Curriculum Restructuring.

UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION COUNCIL

The Undergraduate Education Council discussed the Commonwealth Honors College reorganization draft that had been circulated for the meeting. An amendment was proposed that the minimum grade requirement for the Integrative Experience component of the General Education Honors be lowered to B+ from the current A-.

The Council voted on this amended draft at its meeting on April 26, 2010. The vote was unanimous and in favor of accepting the amended draft.

**MOVED:** That the Faculty Senate approve the Commonwealth Honors College Curriculum Restructuring, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 10-050.  
52-10

**SUBMITTED BY**  
**COMMONWEALTH HONORS COLLEGE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE**  
**Subcommittee of Academic Matters Council**  
**REVISED 4/27/10**

**Priscilla M. Clarkson, Dean, Commonwealth Honors College**  
**Carol A. Barr, Isenberg School of Management**  
**Thomas F. Foley '12, Chemistry and History**  
**Daniel S. Gerber, School of Public Health and Health Sciences**  
**Cynthia S. Jacelon, School of Nursing**  
**Christina Kollisch '12, Biology**  
**Mark A. Lange, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences**  
**Don Levine, College of Humanities and Fine Arts**  
**Ervin Pejo '10, Biochemistry**  
**James R. Rinderle, College of Engineering**  
**Julian F. Tyson, College of Natural Sciences**  
**Leah Yoffe '11, Sport Management**

## PROPOSED CHANGES

1) There will be a new Honors Designation: **General Education Scholar**, which will be awarded to students who complete Tier I (see below) plus earn a B+ higher in the non-honors integrative experience and maintain a 3.400 or higher overall GPA. *This will recognize excellence in breadth of work beyond the confines of the major.*

2) All students *must apply* to Tier II (Departmental or Multidisciplinary\*), and students may apply for Tier II honors without having completed Tier I. *Completion of only Tier II will earn a student honors that recognizes excellence in depth of work, usually in the major.* Departments will develop an application process and make decisions on which students are accepted, given that students meet minimum standards set forth by Commonwealth Honors College (CHC); application process and standards must be approved by Commonwealth Honor College.

## CURRENT SYSTEM

Commonwealth Honors College currently has a 2-tier system—currently, students must complete Tier I and Tier II to earn Commonwealth College Honors or Departmental Honors. These are the requirements:

Tier I: Foundation Courses (Gen Ed)

Honors College Writing (Gen Ed)  
 Honors Seminar Series (Gen Ed)  
 Honors Gen Ed  
 Honors Gen Ed

Tier II: Departmental Honors\* Courses

Department honors course at any level  
 Department honors course at or above the 300 level  
 Department Capstone Experience (CE) part I, 3 credits  
 Department Capstone Experience (CE) part II, 3 credits

- Tier II above reflects current minimum departmental-honors curriculum standards as set by the Faculty Senate and overseen by Commonwealth Honors College -- some departments have chosen to exceed these minima.
- ***Departmental course content has always been decided upon by faculty through departmental curriculum development channels.***
- Honors designations for departmentally-proposed honors courses are reviewed by the Commonwealth Honors College Curriculum Committee (sub-committee of Academic Matters Council), which oversees University-wide honors standards.
- **An Honors Coordinator in each department helps students progress through Departmental Honors (Tier II).**

Tier II courses (except CE) range in type from 1-credit honors independent study (individual) or colloquium (group) enrichment models, to fully enriched honors courses, to graduate courses. They are designed to help prepare students for the high expectations of the honors thesis or project requirement of the CE by emphasizing critical thinking within the discipline and by exposing students to faculty research.

\*Currently there are 2 other tracks (Interdisciplinary and Commonwealth College, to be consolidated for simplicity sake into Multidisciplinary Honors), but students are encouraged to complete Departmental Honors (80% complete CEs in departments).

## PROPOSED RESTRUCTURING

Currently, completion of both Tier I and Tier II is the only means of earning *Departmental Honors*. **In the proposed model, students can complete ONLY *General Education Scholar*, ONLY Tier II (*Departmental Honors* or *Multidisciplinary Honors*), or BOTH Tier I and II and be awarded the aforementioned honors plus *Commonwealth Honors College Honors*.** The Infrastructure (e.g., courses and honors coordinators) is already in place; this system could be implemented for summer 2011 (class of 2015).

### CURRICULA ORGANIZATION

#### **General Education Scholar**

Open to first-year students recruited to Commonwealth Honors College and transfers who are admitted in time to take honors classes in the first semester of their sophomore year. Admission policies will be set by the Commonwealth Honors College Student Recruitment and Retention Committee (SR&R) in accordance with available resources.

**Tier I:** Honors College Writing (if exemption, an alternative Gen Ed course)  
 Honors Seminar Series (Gen Ed)  
 Honors Gen Ed  
 Honors Gen Ed

**PLUS:** Non-honors General Education integrative experience with a B+ or higher  
 And need to maintain a 3.400 overall GPA or higher

#### **Tier II: Departmental or Multidisciplinary Honors** (course requirements listed on Page 1)

ALL UMass Amherst students with GPAs at or above 3.400 may apply for a space in Commonwealth Honors College Tier II.

Each department would specify the number of honors students they are able to support through the Tier II curriculum. Commonwealth Honors College (CHC) would organize and coordinate a competitive application process for all GPA-qualified students (including those completing Tier I) to apply for entry into Tier II. Departmental Honors Coordinators, in consultation with their departmental faculty, will be invited to review Departmental Honors applications and accept students into Tier II Departmental Honors tracks in accordance with departmental standards and resources, or *if they prefer*, departments may set target numbers and appropriate standards (for example, a grade in or grades in a particular predictor course or courses), and leave the admission decisions to the CHC. Note: Similar processes would be used for students applying to Multidisciplinary Honors. The application process will be approved by CHC. There are no other changes to Departmental Honors; as always, Departments must meet the minimal curricular standards set forth by CHC and have approved by CHC any additions/changes to their Departmental Honors requirements.

**Honors Thesis or Project Option:** As always students at-large who gain the support of a faculty member may register for and complete an honors thesis or project (without being in the Honors College or intending to complete honors of any kind), provided that they do intend to follow the guidelines and expectations of an honors thesis or project course (499 numbers designate honors-level expectations).

## BENEFITS

### RECOGNITION FOR GENERAL EDUCATION SCHOLAR:

- Provides an opportunity for students who decide they are not interested in the advanced track to have their achievements in general education recognized.
- Helps to elevate the importance of general education, including the integrative experience
- Provides an opportunity to manage numbers relative to resources through the application process for Tier II
- Allows a greater number of highly qualified students to be recruited to UMass Amherst (Important because generally, students who start in Commonwealth Honors College are retained in the University)

### RECOGNITION FOR DEPARTMENTAL OR MULTIDISCIPLINARY HONORS:

- Allows “late blooming” students the ability to be recognized in their focused area of study
- Allows students to become members of Commonwealth Honors College, and thus receive all the benefits such as access to fellowships, scholarships, advising, and research grants awarded by Commonwealth Honors College
- Allows non-traditional students access to the Honors College
- Continues the successful venue of having the pre-capstone-experience honors courses of Tier II help to prepare students for the high standards of an honors thesis or project
- The application process into Tier II will give departments more voice in setting the capacity of their departmental honors tracks. Moreover, the application itself will push students to learn about the capstone experience and to consider whether they wish to continue in honors (because the application has a latent educational function)

## HONORS DISTINCTIONS

Students who complete Tier I, earn a grade of B+ or higher on their non-honors Integrative Experience, and maintain an overall graduation GPA of 3.400 or higher will earn

- *General Education Scholar* (listed on their transcript)\*

Students who complete Tier II (including all manuscript archiving requirements) and maintain an overall graduation GPA of 3.400 or higher will earn

- *Departmental Honors or Multidisciplinary Honors* (listed on their transcript or possibly on their diploma as well if the Registrar can arrange this)

Students who complete BOTH Tier I AND II will receive both of the honors listed above as well as

- *Commonwealth Honors College Honors on their diploma (along with a level of distinction, if appropriate)\**

\*Students in all 3 categories: 1) must meet or exceed the minimum Commonwealth Honors College graded residency requirement of 45 graded-residency credits, and 2) will be recognized at the Commonwealth Honors College graduation convocation (Celebration of Excellence).

## TYPES OF HONORS STUDENTS CAN EARN

	All University Students		Members of Commonwealth Honors College		
<b>Honors Designation</b>	<i>High Latin Honors</i>  THIS IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE	<i>Honors Thesis or Honors Project</i> (enrolled through Honors College in departmental 499 honors courses)  THIS IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE	<i>General Education Scholar</i>  <b>NEW</b>	<i>Departmental Honors (DH) or Multidisciplinary Honors (MH)</i> with a level of distinction, if earned*  THIS IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE	<i>Commonwealth Honors College Honors</i> with a level of distinction, if earned  THIS IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE
<b>Requirements</b>	Overall GPA by College/School (for a minimum of 54 graded UMass Amherst credits)	Complete 6-or more-credit <i>Honors Thesis or Honors Project</i> (it must be compliant with Honors College standards)	Complete Tier I (minimum of 4 <b>general education</b> honors courses plus a B+ or higher in the general education integrative experience and a 3.4 overall GPA at graduation)	Complete Tier II (minimum of 4 honors courses including a 6-credit Honors Thesis or Honors Project, and a minimum of 45 graded residency credits with appropriate GPA/s)	Complete Tier I and Tier II honors requirements, and a minimum of 45 graded residency credits with appropriate GPA/s)
<b>Designation Location</b>	On Diploma and Transcript	On transcript (with grade/s earned)	On transcript	On transcript [This is currently done without levels of distinction.] <b>OR, if Registrar can arrange, on diploma (NEW).</b>	On diploma [This is currently being done]
<b>Graduation</b>	Note: Final GPAs are not known in time for Commencement	N/A	Receive recognition at Celebration of Excellence	Receive recognition at Celebration of Excellence	Receive recognition at Celebration of Excellence

**\* NOTE: Students can apply to DH and MH without having taken Tier I (NEW)**