ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH HONORS COLLEGE COUNCIL
FOR
ACADEMIC YEAR 2016-2017

Presented at the
772nd Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
November 16, 2017

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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Patrick Sullivan
Kimberly Tremblay, Chair
Julian Tyson
Susan Ware
Susan Krauss Whitbourne
Charge

The Commonwealth Honors College Council shall:

(a) Provide advice to the Dean of Commonwealth Honors College (CHC) on all matters relating to the administration of the Honors College, its curriculum and policies, including:
   (i) honors course approvals;
   (ii) standards governing the establishment, modification and termination of all Departmental Honors and Multidisciplinary Honors;
   (iii) standards governing CHC student admission and graduation;
   (iv) standards governing membership on the Honors Faculty and the direction of Honors theses/projects;
   (v) development of a system designed to resolve such differences as may arise between honors students and members of the faculty; and
(b) Send minutes of its meetings to principal administrative officers and to all academic deans as well as to those listed in Section 4-2-1 of the Faculty Senate Bylaws.

Summary of Commonwealth Honors College Council Business for the Year

The Honors Council held eight meetings during Academic Year 2016-2017. Two email votes were held upon prior agreement by the council. The first followed the March 20, 2017, council meeting and was conducted from April 3-5, 2017. The second followed the April 10, 2017, council meeting and was conducted from April 11-13, 2017. Both email votes were conducted to facilitate course approvals.

There was a mid-year change in Council Chair from James Rinderle to Kimberly Tremblay, to ensure smooth transition upon Dr. Rinderle’s promotion to Associate Dean of Engineering.

Early in fall semester, the CHC Council Chair invited the Chair of the General Education Council to meet with the full Honors Council and discuss the new ‘DIV’ designation and its impacts on ‘I’ designated courses, such as Honors 201H, as well as the Honors College Gen Ed curriculum. Further discussion took place at a following meeting, and a statement from the CHC Council on the new ‘DIV’ designation was drafted, approved by an email vote, and forwarded to the Faculty Senate.

The report of the Honors College Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee, the committee having worked during the full Academic Year 2015-2016, was forwarded to the Honors Council’s Policy Committee. During Fall 2016 the Policy Committee carefully considered the Ad Hoc Committee’s findings and its unanimous recommendations. The Policy Committee formulated its own unanimous recommendation which was submitted as a motion to the CHC Council at the December 12, 2016, meeting. The recommendation pertained to the graduation honors of General Studies Honors, in which students complete only the lower level honors curriculum without advanced work and without completing an honors thesis. The motion was to reinstate the requirement that CHC students complete a thesis to receive graduation honors from the Honors College. The motion was unanimously approved by the Honors Council and forwarded for consideration by the Faculty Senate and other appropriate councils.

The Honors College Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee also recommended development of a 300-level honors course to provide the basis for a common experience for honors students in their junior year. The Honors Council’s Course and Program Committee held a special meeting early in September to consider the course proposal. The Course Committee unanimously recommended one-year approval to the Honors Council, which approved the motion at its September 19, 2016, meeting. The Course Committee asked that evaluation materials be submitted next fall for consideration of extending approval.

Other items discussed by the Honors Council included the “thesis package” of expanded support being offered for students undertaking thesis, including a series of workshops aimed at juniors, arrangements with recently retired faculty to develop additional thesis seminars, the addition of a thesis writing coach, and upcoming appointment of a second Murray Professor to explore new ways of thinking.
about the thesis experience in STEM fields. To address the time constraints transfer students experience in completing honors requirements upon entering the University and Honors College in their junior year, two professors emeriti each developed six-credit, one-semester thesis seminars for Spring 2017.

Data on students entering the Honors College and graduation rates were considered and discussed by the Honors Council, as well as anticipated increase in the number of transfer students through the Commonwealth Commitment program. The Honors College Dean presented information on CHC priorities and requests for strategic investment, and impacts of planned budget cut for the next fiscal year.

The CHC Council received presentations on CHC yield scholarships by the CHC Director of External Relations and Development and on CHC branding concepts by the CHC Director of Communications.

Following review and report of the Course and Program Committee, the Honors Council approved eight new honors courses:

- Honors 390EH, *Junior Year Common Experience: How the 1960s Changed America*, a 4-credit honors course also approved by the General Education Council for SBU designation – one-year approval.

- Natural Sciences 490SH, *Integrative Science Senior Exposition Seminar*, 1 credit, enhances individual thesis for students in the iCons program – approved for three years.

- Biology 161H, *Quantitative Biology of the Cell*, a 4-credit honors course also approved by the General Education Council for BS designation – three-year approval.

- Biology 162H, *Quantitative Systems Biology*, a 4-credit honors course – three-year approval.

- An international honors experience associated with History 112H, *Introduction to the World's Religions*, 2-credit independent study involving travel to India – one-year approval.


- Economics 397GCH (final number assigned by Registrar: Economics 350H), *Global Origins of Capitalism and Modernity*, a 4-credit honors course also approved by the General Education Council for IG designation – three-year approval for offering at Oxford Summer Seminar.

- Political Science 390EH & Legal Studies 392EH (final number assigned by Registrar: Legal Studies 390EH), *Election Law in the U.S.*, 4 credits – one-year approval.

Two new year-long Research Methodology honors thesis courses were approved:

- Kinesiology 499E/F, Research Methodology: Biomechanics of Overuse Running Injuries, 8 credits (4+4) – three-year approval.


On behalf of the Council, the Dean’s office reviewed 21 new honors versions of departmental courses, 9 new honors colloquia proposals from departments, 16 re-approvals of honors courses, and 20 re-approvals of honors colloquia, between July 1, 2016, and June 30, 2017.
Between July 1, 2016, and June 30, 2017, the Academic Standards Committee of the Honors Council met as a group three times: once during the Add/Drop Period in September 2016, another time during preregistration in December 2016, and again during Add/Drop in January 2017. The committee used these meetings to orient new members and coordinate the overall approach to be used in proposal reviews. After that time, committee members conferred via PATHS or email, and proposal reviews were conducted in PATHS, the online CHC portal (www.honors.umass.edu/paths). The committee reviewed and approved 466 Honors Independent Study proposals, 395 individually contracted 499Y Research proposals, 311 individually contracted 499T Thesis proposals, and 65 individually contracted 499P Project proposals. The implementation of new, earlier deadlines for students to submit their independent study and 499 proposals on PATHS significantly improved the proportion of proposals that were reviewed and approved by the Academic Standards Committee before the end of Add/Drop, greatly reducing the number of late adds.

Honors Council members assisted in review and evaluation of applications for Research Assistant Fellowships and Honors Research Grants resulting in awards of $139,894 to 214 CHC students. The fellowships support students assisting faculty on research projects, while the grants support students’ own research under the guidance of a faculty member. Students applying for research grants must submit a research proposal, endorsed by their faculty sponsor, for competitive review.