ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

COMMONWEALTH HONORS COLLEGE COUNCIL

ACADEMIC YEAR 2014-2015

Presented at the
750th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
September 10, 2015

COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Neal Abraham    John Lenzi
Doris Bargen    Don Levine
Carol Barr      Luis Marentes
Rajesh Bhatt    Ernest May
Richard Bogartz LeeAnn Monteverde
Marcy Clark     Howard Peelle
J. Kevin Crocker James Rinderle
Alexandrina Deschamps Elizabeth Seibert
Gloria DiFulvio Pamela Trafford
Emma Dundon     Kimberly Tremblay
Joanne Evans    Julian Tyson, Chair
Diane Flaherty  Susan Ware
Dan Gordon      Susan Krauss Whitbourne
Sarah Hutton

Submitted by
Julian Tyson, Chair
Commonwealth Honors College Council
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 seven meetings during Academic Year 2014-2015. An eighth meeting, scheduled for March 13, 2015, was cancelled.

Provost Katherine Newman attended the Honors Council meeting on December 5, 2014 and discussed a variety of new initiatives. The Council formed a working group and compiled input for the Provost from the Council as a whole. The Council feels that the following must be carefully managed as the numbers of students increase: the need to provide (a) a breadth of small honors classes, (b) meaningful culminating experiences, especially in those disciplines where this typically consists of an authentic research experience in a faculty research laboratory, and (c) effective and timely advising.

At its meeting on September 19, 2015, the Honors Council Chair announced that the honors course approval process was being integrated with the campus online Course and Curriculum Management System (cps.provost.umass.edu/umacps/). Academic Year 2014-2015 was planned as a transition year during which departments could submit course proposals through the online CCMS or the traditional paper/email method while any issues in the online process were resolved.

The Honors Council held several discussions regarding the financial impact to students of the Honors College Fee, and the Interim Dean reported on steps being taken to raise funds and establish scholarships to provide financial assistance for UMass students who transfer into the Honors College and therefore do not receive scholarship support to offset the fee as do freshmen entering the Honors College.

At its February 13, 2015, meeting the CHC Council unanimously approved a proposed amendment to the CHC Council bylaws to include representation by one-full time lecturer from Commonwealth Honors College on the Council’s membership.

The Council also discussed possible effects of a new course numbering system for add-on honors colloquia and independent studies. In order to implement honors requirements within the SPIRE Academic Requirements Report, thus allowing students to track their progress toward completion of honors requirements on SPIRE, the Registrar’s office developed a plan to modify the way such honors add-ons are listed within SPIRE. The CHC Council approved moving forward with the proposed plan and requested that a message regarding ramifications be sent to departments.
Other items discussed by the Honors Council included the Interim Dean’s CHC self-assessment and action plan submitted to the Provost, growth in honors freshmen admissions and faculty involvement in application review, additional honors housing options for students, the CHC budget and campus implementation of “responsibility center” management, updates on the joint honors-departmental tenure-track faculty, the involvement of the Council in personnel actions for the joint hires and participation in the interviewing of prospective candidates for such positions, and reports from CHC Council representatives to other Faculty Senate councils on matters affecting CHC.

The Course and Program committees were combined into one committee. Following review and report of the Course and Program Committee, the Honors Council approved a new honors course developed by the joint Honors faculty member in Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, M&IE 290H, “HIV, TB, and Malaria: Simulation modeling to address public health problems.” This 4-credit honors course is also being submitted to the General Education Council for SB designation.

Three new year-long Honors Thesis Seminar courses were approved:

- Biology 499C/D, Honors Thesis Seminar: Bio-based Innovation, 6 cr. (3+3) – one-year approval
- Political Science 499C/D, Honors Thesis Seminar: Energy and Global Politics, 8 cr. (4+4) – three-year approval

On behalf of the Council, the Dean’s office reviewed 22 new honors course proposals from departments, 6 new honors colloquia proposals from departments, 42 reapprovals of honors courses, and 14 reapprovals of honors colloquia, between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015.

Upon considering the request of an academic department and following input from the Registrar and the General Education Council, the CHC Council recommended that the International Scholars Program senior seminar, Honors 451, “Cross-Cultural Re-Entry Seminar,” be proposed to the General Education Council for Integrative Experience (IE) status.

Between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015, the Academic Standards Committee of the Honors Council met 11 times and reviewed 372 Honors Independent Study proposals, 349 individually contracted 499Y Research proposals, 273 individually contracted 499T thesis proposals, and 59 individually contracted 499P project proposals.

Honors Council members assisted in review and evaluation of applications for Research Assistant Fellowships and Honors Research Grants resulting in award of $133,635 to 174 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.