

Report from Honors Program Task Force

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Report submitted to:
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The University of Florida (UF) has many outstanding resources that allow it to maintain a vibrant Honors Program. UF is a major comprehensive research university that encompasses the full range of academic disciplines, including graduate programs and professional schools. The Honors Program should utilize the University's research mission as a primary focus and actively include honors students within that mission. Honors students have an exceptional range of disciplines from which to choose, providing them with opportunity to work directly with faculty scholars, that are known nationally and internationally for their research and creative activities.

Although there is currently no comprehensive evaluation of US honors program, Peterson's Guide lists 600 honors programs in the US. In general, these programs have become very competitive for the 'best students'. Most undergraduate honors programs across the country are four-year programs with ties to the students major at the upper division. In fact, here at UF the honors program staff works with honors students beyond the 2nd year through advising and identification of opportunities for research experience. There is, therefore, significant appeal to extend the UF honors program from a two-year to a four-year program. However, the committee recommends that the University administration and faculty focus first on improving the organizational, structural and operational deficiencies of the existing two-year program, as described in this preliminary report. Subsequently, with these improvements implemented, the honors program will be in a better situation to consider how best to proceed with establishing a high quality four-year undergraduate honors experience.

The task force formed three subcommittees: Honors Admissions, Honors Program, and Honors Outcomes. This report presents recommendations pertaining to those areas as well as recommendations regarding Honors Program Operations.

Part One: Admissions

The overarching goal of Honors recruitment should be to attract the very brightest and diverse honors students to UF, yet the honors program should strive to identify students, not solely according to high school GPA and SAT scores, but according to their record and promise of commitment to intellectual initiative and interdisciplinary inquiry. Thus the honors program needs to work closely with the UF office of admissions to publicize the program to the UF applicant pool and to coordinate with general UF admissions to attract students that will both enhance the Honors program and be enriched by the honors experience. Applicants expressing interest in the UF Honors program should be asked to complete a separate web-based application, which will include an essay in response to a specific question or essay prompt. The essays question /prompts will be designed afford the applicant the opportunity to showcase their intellectual experiences and philosophies.

The program should attempt to identify students who exemplify:

- An inquiry-based approach to learning
- A broad multidiscipline approach to their studies
- Direct involvement in professional, government, or advocacy organizations
- A strong desire for formal and informal interactions with faculty and academic units

Relate the number of students admitted and enrolled in the program to the budget.

The staff of the honors office is insufficient for the current size of program. The number of students admitted to the present two-year program is large compared to the current staff of 5 members (750 freshmen each year). Currently there are 3 professional staff members with master’s degrees, along with vacant 4th and 5th positions. There also exists an office manager and a program assistant for support staff. If the program is increased in size or scope, either by admitting more students or by implementing a 4-year program, certainly the number of staff needs to be increased, at least proportionally. It must be noted that 2-year programs are a distinct minority nationally, and programs have a reasonable number of advisor staff with degrees in the discipline they advise or willing and interested faculty from various colleges. There should be some way to see if each college, with help from the Provost’s Office, support faculty time devoted to Honors student advising.

Base admission on holistic reading of the students’ applications with honors students involved in the process.

Presently students are offered admission to the UF Honors Program based strictly on a high school GPA/SAT requirement (4.0 and 1400 SAT), plus automatic admission for National Merit and National Achievement Scholars. Using those criteria for the past two years, UF’s Honors Program has enrolled approximately 750 freshmen each year. Currently, applicants are also required to write an Honors essay; however, this required essay is currently not read by the Honors staff (i.e., all students are admitted who are invited to apply).

We recommend the following procedure:

- 1) National Merit, National Hispanic, and National Achievement scholars are automatically admitted to Honors.
- 2) Other students with high GPAs and/or high SATs are invited to apply. The cut-offs here are probably lower than our current requirements in order to broaden our applicant pool. Increased emphasis is placed on high school GPA (UF calculated?) since that is a better predictor of success at UF than the SAT score.

GPA	SAT	Number of eligible students
4.0	1400	1,666
4.0	1390	1,870
4.0	1380	2,349
4.0	1350	2,790

- 3) The table shows from the students UF admitted for 2006 the number of students that would be eligible based on different requirements of UF-adjusted GPAs and SAT (or equivalent ACT

scores). The first line, a 4.0 GPA and SAT of 1,400 or higher are the current requirements. The other lines show the effect of lowering the SAT requirement.

- 4) Students invited to apply must write an Honors essay. Existing Honors students would be used to read and score the Honors essays. The students must be trained how to score the essays and more than one student reads each essay. A staff member (or members) also reads and scores the essays. The staff members make the final admission decision.
- 5) The GPA/SAT cutoffs can be adjusted to keep the reading task manageable. The final admissions decision can be made based on keeping the program at the appropriate size given its resources.

We believe that the recommended procedure will 1) more accurately assess candidates; 2) allow students who do not perform as well on standardized tests (but are still great candidates in their own right) an opportunity to be in the Honors Program; 3) will lead to a larger pool of applicants; 4) promote well-rounded candidates; 5) be easier to advertise because parents and students can be assured that the student will be invited if they meet the specific criteria; 6) promote the Program's reputation because there is an actual selection process; 7) give current Honors students an opportunity for additional input into the direction and composition of the program. The major drawback is the fact that the process requires more time and effort by the Honors Program, both on the part of the existing Honors students who participate by reading the essays and also the staff who read and then make the ultimate choices.

Honors program should track and monitor indicators of admitted students including:

- GPA
- SAT
- International and intercultural experience
- Diversity

The program should also track the candidate who chooses not to accept their offer to the UF honors program, as to where they decide to attend school (this data should be tracked separately from the general UF admissions data). Some additional items to track would include: selection of major (and eventual major at graduation since these often change); percent of Honors graduates who graduate in 4 – 5 – 6 years, etc.; success of Honors graduates in GRE, MAT, MCAT, LSAT, etc. – Students should be requested to provide their scores to the Honors program for statistical purposes and not specific recording in a student's HP file.

Part Two: Honors Program

A wide-ranging effort should be undertaken to enhance the comprehensive honors experience.

- Promote strategic increase in the number and quality of honors courses offered, particular attention should be given to the core STEM areas.
- Implement constant quality control of honors courses (to be carried out in cooperation with specific Departmental and College leadership).
- Strengthen quality and consistency of honors advising.
- Incorporate issues of ethical concern, leadership, service, and public scholarship into the UF honors experience. Leadership, ethics, etc, are vital and if the Honors Program students are the “best” among the “best,” then we need to help them along to show ways that they can become leaders, not just at UF but in their professions, in society, in life. The honors programs should explore the possibility of cooperation with the Graham Center to coordinate some type of leadership program to integrate within the Honors program.

The Honors program should foster greater engagement between students and faculty members both in the first two years and in the upper-division course work. The Honors program should better utilize the administrative, academic and residential settings to encourage and foster common interests and share curricular and co-curricular experiences. Curricular activities should include honors sections of required courses. Requirements of course work should be set, such as three required general honors courses completed within the first four semesters and three honors level courses in the topic-oriented courses (of major). There should be a strategic increase in the number of new honors courses offered, including new emphasis on upper-level (upper-division) honors courses to support the extension from a two-year to a four-year program. Discipline-specific honors courses should be targeted.

Co-curricular activities of Honors program may include:

- Dinners with Faculty [Perhaps at the Honors Dorm, at the faculty home; at a restaurant]
- Seminars
- Invited lectures
- Roundtables
- Community outreach projects

The program should work to identify meaningful honors experiences and opportunities:

- Explore honors leadership seminars
- Strengthen globalization of the honors curriculum
- Encourage more emphasis and rigor in honors study abroad programs
- Promote academic credentials related to leadership
- Seek innovative partnerships (university, schools, hospitals, community)
- Create opportunity for dialogue regarding ethics. Explore possibility of taking advantage of ethics courses currently in UF curriculum; UF has the Poe Ethics Center in CBA; there is an Ethics Center in CLAS; etc.

Honors Course: The evaluation of existing honors courses and approval of new courses is currently at the discretion of the director. Faculty members submit proposals for courses to the director. There is no formal process to solicit new courses from faculty nor is there a formal process for students to submit requests for new courses. There is no special evaluation of honors classes other than the standard CLAS student evaluation form [Engineering requires all courses to be evaluated by students]. Almost all Honors courses are offered by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, with Agricultural and Life Sciences offering 3-4 courses per semester and one course is offered by the College of Business and a few honors courses are offered in Engineering. While this is a historical artifact, the UF Honors program should be broadly expanded throughout the campus.

Curriculum Committee: Have a standing committee of faculty and students to review current courses, proposed courses, and the General Education/Gordon Rule certification for courses. This committee should consider the breadth and the depth of the entire curriculum and make adjustments based on course enrollments, interest by students, and other issues based on the adjusted profile. The committee should also consider the rigor of the courses in the Honors program, and potentially increase the rigor of the courses if needed. Honors courses should be more than simple General Education courses and the criteria for implementing honors courses should reflect which major/majors accept these courses, as most Honors students have met all the General Education requirements. They should include courses of interest for advanced students and even upper-division students, including seminars or writing courses.

- a. The Honors courses should pay instructors at least market rate for CLAS and likewise across other colleges. Explore the possibility to establish a full time faculty teaching Honors program courses; no doubt adjuncts do a good job but they are not always “engaged” in the life of UF –The entire issue of the incentives for the departments should be examined at the provost’s level; currently it is a disincentive for a department to offer a small course rather than a larger one which generates more student credit hours. More colleges beyond CLAS should offer Honors courses; specifically, Engineering and Business are both well represented by students majoring in those colleges in Honors but there are very few courses offered in Honors. The opportunity to teach an Honors course could be used as a recruitment tool for faculty. Indeed, some UF faculty find that teaching Honors courses is a rewarding experience. Honors courses should be systematically reviewed after a few years (3?). Perhaps have each Honors course be taught for three years, and then be considered for a renewal. This would help courses remain fresh and perhaps encourage more revamping of courses. Some courses should be sun-setted after a few years.
- b. Add evaluation questions to the current course evaluation forms under the “optional” section (currently, only the standard CLAS evaluation forms are used for honors classes). These questions should be specific to the Honors program and used for reviewing Honors courses. It might be better from an administrative point of view to consider doing a separate student-driven set of questions in an online evaluation.

Completion of the Honors program: Currently, “completing the Honors program” is nothing more than filling out a form, taking four honors courses, and getting a certificate. More emphasis should be on transitioning students to their upper-division Honors work. There should be an exit interview for each student at the end of their completion of the Honors program, providing advising for the student and an opportunity to collect data about the student’s future plans.

Honors Residence College at Hume Hall: Hume Hall is a tremendous resource for the Honors program that is not currently being utilized to its full potential. More programming should take place in Hume Hall by the Honors staff and faculty, in addition to more advising presence by Honors staff and faculty, as well as teaching of honors courses. Currently the programming is organized and led by Honors students (Student Honors Organization and Honors Ambassadors). This may require hiring a staff person to manage this for Honors. If the admissions committee recommends admitting fewer students, then there could be more emphasis on programming to a true residential college model (because more can live there for more than one year). Faculty who teach Honors Courses should be required to attend one program per semester. It should also be mandatory that RCA’s living in Hume also be in the Honors program. The honors students in Hume often have aspirations of attending professional schools such as medical school, law school, or some other. Having students who have successfully completed several years at UF or have even already been admitted to the professional schools would serve as a valuable resource and possible mentors for the incoming honors students.

International Experiences and Study Abroad: Students should be encouraged to spend at least one summer abroad, if not one regular semester or perhaps an entire year, if the student's major field will accommodate such study. The Honors program should work in conjunction with the UF International Center to provide first rate advising and information about study abroad and to ensure that students stay "on track" while also experiencing the academic and cultural advantages of study abroad.

Assess Honors overseas studies opportunities: Currently, the “Honors” overseas studies programs (Honors in Paris, University of Lancaster) are not exclusive to Honors students and do not necessarily have an Honors curriculum. Explore the creation of, or modification of, overseas studies programs for Honors students that have a distinctive learning opportunity. Overseas study should be encouraged.

Faculty participation: There should be more presence of faculty in the Honors program and its activities. Faculty who teach in the Honors program should be required to attend one program per semester offered for students and encouraged to develop such programs. It will be imperative that these activities be broadly communicated to faculty in a timely manner to ensure faculty participation.

Scholarship Programming: There should be structured, intentional programming provided for the special scholarship programs managed by the Honors program (Lombardi Scholars Program, United World College Scholars). Peer programs at other

institutions have much more programming and support for those students, including a dedicated staff member for these scholarship programs.

Leadership, Community Service and Civic Engagement: Honors students should be expected to be able to apply their knowledge in practical ways in the real world. All students should participate in a project that allows them to share their expertise and skills with society, either through direct service or through research focusing on specific problems or issues or concern to society, or creative activity benefiting the community. Recommended activities include public affairs, public health, etc.

Part Three: Outcomes of Honors program

Our sub-committee has defined Outcomes as “Value Added’ to the undergraduate educational experience at the University of Florida. The Sub-committee has defined the following elements that are Value-Added outcomes for students in the Honors program, which should be tracked and measured.

Mentored Research or Creative Work: The academic program for Honors students should culminate with a scholarly project in the senior year. These projects range from a research or scholarly paper, to a composition, recital, work of art or some other demonstration of their creativity and achievement in their chosen area of specialty. Honors students should graduate with some level of Honors recognition that might be include honors through their department (magna or summa cum laude), or recognition that shortens the time to an advanced degree such as qualification for PhD candidacy. Students should also strive to have the results or outcomes of their research or creative work disseminated at a national level such as coauthoring peer-reviewed publications. Existing programs that foster this goal include the UF University Scholars Program, the Beckman Scholars Program and the new Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) Science for Life Program.

Interdisciplinary Academic Choice: The Honors program should foster dual Majors across colleges, along with strong co-curricular Honors programming. Interdisciplinary majors (IDS) are an option for more independent multi-subject curricular studies. Internships should be a vital part of the program and should be fostered with government, industry and private non-profit organizations as well as recognized centers of excellence at other universities. The Director of the Honors program should collaborate with the Academic Deans and Associate Deans of Colleges to facilitate this process and to propose seamless ways of helping students accomplish dual majors, especially across colleges.

Admission to Graduate and Professional Schools: The Honors program should partner with graduate and professional schools to foster recruitment and admission. The Honors program should partner with existing priority admission programs to help advertise and recruit students for these programs. There will be a need to document and track how

many honors program students gain such admission, where they track within UF and how they progress graduate schools etc.

Faculty Advising for Prestigious Awards and National Scholarship Programs: The Honors program should have a full-time adviser with responsibility for national scholarships (Rhodes, Marshall, Mitchell, Fulbright, Goldwater, Truman, etc.). This adviser will engage in expanded outreach to students, more systematic identification and tracking of potential applicants, the development of greater awareness and involvement on the part of faculty in identifying and preparing potential applicants, and increased time working individually with student applicants.

Prestigious scholarships and fellowships

	RHODES			GOLDWATER			TRUMAN			MARSHALL			UDALL		
	08	07	06	08	07	06	08	07	06	08	07	06	08	07	07
University of Pittsburgh	0	1	1	2	2	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Emory	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
UNC, Chapel Hill	0	1	0	0	3	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
FSU	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
University of Georgia	2	0	0	1	2	4	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
University of Richmond	0	0	1	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Ohio State	1	0	0	4	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
UF	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0

The table above shows how UF compares to some peers and regional competitors in five highly competitive scholarships for the past three years. UF students won more Goldwater scholarships over these three years than the other seven schools in the table but over the same three years UF students won no Rhodes or Marshall scholarships and only one Udall scholarship. Given the small numbers of scholarships awarded and the small number of years examined, drawing conclusions is tricky. However it seems a fair assessment that, at best, UF falls in the mid-range of these schools. Of the publics, it seems clear that UGA and UNC both had more success than UF. Given the resources that were available to the Honors program over this time period, being even in the mid-range is an accomplishment. In particular, the University of Georgia, the University of Pittsburgh, and FSU have a staff person with the task of grooming and preparing students. UNC, Chapel Hill has an “Office of Distinguished Scholarships,” staffed with two people, which is devoted to preparing students. For UF to compete, a similar position is necessary. This adviser will engage in expanded outreach to students, more systematic identification and tracking of potential applicants, the development of greater awareness and involvement on the part of faculty in identifying and preparing potential applicants, and increased time working individually with student applicants. For UF to not create this position is to harm our students.

Survey: There is an overwhelming need to acquire outcome information from current and graduated students. A carefully focused list of outcomes should be delineated so that UF can track its performance over the last few years and compare this data to other institutions nationally. Outcome survey information is needed ASAP. Currently enrolled Honors students and alumni should be surveyed in such a way that results populate a searchable database. There is no email list of Honors alumni. The UF Alumni Association has some contact information and this needs to be expanded ASAP. The UF Foundation has a dataset of honors alumni and they sent a fundraising letter this summer. It was suggested that a version of the survey could go to alumni by advertising the link on Facebook and the Florida GNN, which is the UF alumni online network. A hard copy mailing with the survey could be done, but this method for an assessment project for university scholars produced a low response a few years ago. Incentive-driven web-based instruments using, for example, \$5 certificates for Amazon.com have worked well at the national level to enhance compliance.

Careful consideration should be given to the development of useful survey questions.

Dissemination of Results: The UF Honors program represents one of the larger programs, within one of the largest universities in the US. The Honors program itself has a responsibility to be an active participant and a leader in the national community of Honors programs. The Honors program director and staff should be encouraged to present at national meetings and establish collaborations with complementary programs as possible.

A newsletter for former UF honors students: A newsletter would be informative and an excellent tool for outcomes measures and alumni bonding. An excellent model is that published by the University of Georgia (see appendix A). The electronic format reduces costs and articulates well with database-driven program tracking. Such an effort will be an excellent "bridge" between Alumni and the Program, and other interested UF units such as Colleges, UFF, and the UF Alumni Association.

Part Four: General Operations of Honors program

The Honors program should be led by a senior faculty member (Honors program Director), who will report to the Associate Provost (or Academic VP?). The Director will; set the overall intellectual leadership of the program, recruit UF faculty to participate in the program course instruction, interact with potential students, donors, and funding agencies. The Associate Director and other honors staff must be sufficiently numerous and well-trained regarding day-to-day operations that the director can effectively assume these crucial leadership tasks.

Duties of Honors program administration: Relocate duties of Honors program, which are not directly related to students in the Honors program, to other areas on campus. The

responsibilities of the Honors Office should be redirected to serve more exclusively the Honors program. This would remove some of the following responsibilities:

- Dual enrollment (high school) advising
- Approving and monitoring internship credits for all students
- Managing the Washington Center Internship Program
- Undergraduate research programs (move to another unit and coordinate Honors interaction through a full-time staff person)

Expand the following duties into a full-time staff role, rather than hiring faculty or staff piecemeal and having this be part of their duties (with other responsibilities). These individuals could be part of Honors or separate offices.

- Prestigious Scholarships Advising and Recruiting (including managing special scholars programs, such as Lombardi Scholars and United World College Scholars)
- Recruiting, Advising for Graduate and Professional Programs; this person should explore the expansion of early admission or fast-track into such programs at UF
- Undergraduate Research Programs (introduce lower-division students to research opportunities, really support upper-division students to do research). This person needs to monitor and update the undergraduate research database on a regular basis.
- Hume Hall full-time programming person and/or graduate student hired by Honors to have a presence in Hume. The graduate student could be from one of the areas of interest of many Honors students (e.g., medicine, law, engineering).

Office space for Honors program: The office space for the Honors program should have enough space for advising offices (private offices for each staff member/advisor), a conference room, waiting space for students and visiting families, and potentially programming space. The location should be central on campus for easy access to students and visitors. The location should also be appealing due to the frequent interactions with parents and visitors and the strong interaction between Honors and undergraduate recruiting.

Honors program administration should promote the data collection and performance assays pertaining to:

- Academic program and courses
- Co-curricular activities
- International program(s)
- Diversity
- Leadership opportunities
- Service and civic engagement
- Internships
- Scholarships

The Honors program administration should develop/improve:

- A searchable website
- Honors course evaluations each semester
- Senior survey of graduation outcomes

- Survey internship each year
- Survey alumni for career events and outcomes
- Enhanced communication:
 - Press releases
 - Alumni publication
 - Leadership letter
 - Annual report
 - Email students/faculty/alumni via list serve
 - Establish 'outstanding honors student award'
 - Establish 'outstanding mentor award'
 - Donor events
 - Honors alumni reunion
- Engagement of parents of Honors students:
 - Honors parents open house
 - Parent Information sessions
 - Parent-hosted events
 - Parent fund-raising events