

Salisbury University
Honors Task Force Report

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Charge from the Provost:

After reviewing information about SU's Honors program and those of our peer institutions, outline what we would need to do at SU to develop our program into an Honors College. The critical questions listed below may help to guide your thinking and planning:

1. What would an Honors College look like at Salisbury University? How would it be organized?
2. What resources would be needed: financial, human, facilities?
3. How would you expand the curriculum to broaden the appeal of honors across the four schools?
4. How do we get more faculty involved? How should they be rewarded (stipends, titles, travel, etc)?
5. How do we strategically recruit more students? What should be the proportion of freshmen to transfers each year?
6. How do we better integrate Honors into our institutional goals, i.e., closing the achievement gap, recruitment, retention/graduation, internationalization, civic engagement OR acknowledge contributions and participation?

Introduction: The Honors Task Force convened in August 2010 and began working on the Provost's charge. The task force included members from each school, an academic dean, the director of the honors program, and a representative from the provost's office. Our first task was to examine the current status of the Honors program at SU. Next, we reviewed literature on best practices for honors programs and colleges and began looking at our peer institutions. Based on this information, the task force agreed on a series of basic principles that would guide our work. The recommendations that follow are the result of our research and many discussions with colleagues at Salisbury and at other universities. We expect that this report is the beginning of a conversation that should take place across campus, not an end.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. The current Bellavance Honors Program should be transformed into an Honors College
2. The honors curriculum should be revised to meet NCHC standards
3. Manokin Hall should be identified as the Honors College Residence Hall
4. A new Faculty Senate committee, the Nationally Competitive Scholarships Committee, should be formed
5. A Coordinator of Nationally Competitive Scholarships should be identified
6. Academic scholarships and travel stipends should be established
7. Honors Fellows should be created

Current State of Honors Program at Salisbury University:

Current Mission Statement: The mission of SU's Bellavance Honors program is to create a community of outstanding scholars and to provide them with exceptional liberal arts and science and research learning opportunities. We aim to respond to the needs of SU's strongest and most motivated students by providing small, innovative seminars, extra-curricular colloquia and activities, and structured support for undergraduate research and other exceptional achievements beyond the classroom.

History: Salisbury University's honors program began in 1980 with 20 freshman students. Since then, the program has grown so that approximately 250-300 students participate in honors each year. Last year more than 50 students graduated with Honors, and a similar number presented research at national, regional and on-campus conferences.

Dr. Tony Whall (English) was the director of the Honors program from 1980-2006, and was instrumental in improving its curriculum, building its community and securing its current home, the Bellavance Honors Center at the corner of Loblolly and Camden. In 1996 the Honors program was renamed for its great supporter, the late Thomas E. Bellavance, president of Salisbury State University, who left a bequest to help fund program needs.

The original curriculum was a team-taught great books series of courses: as the program grew, it became harder to staff this kind of class, and the curriculum evolved to offer unique courses, often offering general education credit, taught by professors from across the university. Over the last four years professors from all four schools have designed and taught Honors

courses. Honors also promotes student research by requiring either a one-credit junior research project or a full thesis for all students graduating with Honors.

The Honors director was, at first, the sole faculty member attached to the Honors program. Dr. Whall taught in English and Honors, with a two-course download to administer the program. Since then, the Honors program has also gained an Assistant Director (1994) whose duties focused on student activities and mentoring. In 2006 the program gained a 10-hour share in an administrative assistant. In 2010, a graduate student assistant was added to the ranks.

Affiliations: The Honors Program maintains memberships in the National Collegiate Honors Council, the Northeast Regional Honors Council, and the Maryland Honors Council.

Current Curriculum: Honors courses are purpose built, unique classes, many of which carry general education credit. In keeping with the enhancement of the curriculum adopted by many departments of the university, Honors offers 4-credit seminars, in addition to 1-credit research or research preparation classes. The courses are:

- HONR111 – Critical Thinking and Writing (General education I-A)
- HONR112 – Issues in Social Sciences (General education III-B or C)
- HONR211 – Issues in Humanities (General education III-A or C)
- HONR212 – Issues in Natural Sciences (General education III-B)
- HONR311 – Honors Interdisciplinary Seminar (General education if crosslisted with a gen ed bearing course, such as literature)

These courses (with the exception of HONR111) are essentially topics-style classes, with faculty creating classes in areas of their interest that satisfy the general education designation for a particular class. The classes are capped at 20 and are intended to be writing-intensive and discussion-driven. Students take an active part in their learning.

In addition there are several Honors research classes.

- HONR312 Junior Research/ Creative project (1 credit)
- HONR490 Honors Thesis Preparation (1 credit)
- HONR495 Honors Thesis (3-4 credits depending on discipline)

Students who complete research in other departmental courses can often replace Honors research courses with their departmental work. The student must present or publish the results.

In order to serve both four-year and two-year (transfer) students, in 2006 the Honors program introduced a two-year curriculum to complement its traditional four-year offering. Students entering as freshmen are expected to take 20-21 credits of honors classes, while transfer students (or continuing students) with at least 47 credits are required to take 13 credits of honors work, including a thesis.

University Honors (20-21 credits):

HONR111 or HONR211

HONR112

HONR212

HONR311

AND EITHER HONR311

HONR312 (1 cr)

OR HONR490 (1 cr)

HONR495 (Honors Thesis)

General Honors (13-14 credits) (for two year or upper-class students)

HONR311

Any other 4-credit HONR course (HONR111, 112, 211, 212, 311)

HONR312 (1 cr research project)

HONR490 (1 cr thesis prep class)

HONR495 Honors Thesis (3-4 cr)

Students in both Honors tracks must graduate with a cumulative GPA of 3.5 and complete an Honors outcomes portfolio (a series of essays reviewed by the associate director).

Current Honors Administration/Staffing:

Administration: The Honors program is run by a director and associate director. They are members of the faculty on 10-month contracts. The director has a 12-credit download, and teaches 12 credits for Honors each year. This is in part because the current director occupies the only PIN line dedicated to the Honors program. The associate director has a 12-credit download, and teaches 8 credits for English and 4-credits for Honors each year.

Administrative Support: The Honors program has a 10-hour per week share in a Program Management specialist. It has also recently acquired a graduate student assistant. In addition, an undergraduate student assistant is also employed several hours a week to help with correspondence and other communications.

Honors Program Committee: The HPC is a standing committee of the Faculty Senate, made up of four at-large faculty members, a designated faculty senator, two Honors student leaders, and the director of the program as an *ex officio* non-voting member. The Senate recently proposed a by-laws change that may alter the composition of this committee in the near future, however.

Current Responsibilities of the Director/Associate Director:

Advising: All Honors students have advisors in their major. They also come to the Honors director and associate director for advising help as needed. In addition, Honors runs a separate process to enroll students in their Honors classes before regular course registration begins. This is done through a combination of on-campus group advising meetings, and an online

database tool that helps students select their honors course for the upcoming semester. As Honors numbers have approached 300 students, this has taken up an increasing amount of time. In addition, the directors review Honors graduation audits, and advise seniors approaching graduation of unmet Honors program needs.

Extra-curricular Activities: The Bellavance Honors program runs a very full slate of extra-curricular opportunities, both directly through program offerings, and through Honors Student Association events. These include planning and running at least four trips per semester: camping, going to theatre or sporting events, or service projects. In addition there are a similar number of extra-curricular events on campus: a listing of recent activities is online <http://www.salisbury.edu/honors/activities/activities.html>. These are in addition to activities limited to the students participating in one of the two Honors Living-learning communities. The Honors director and associate director also regularly accompany students to off-campus research conferences (the National Honors Conference, the Northeast Regional Honors Conference, and often the Maryland Honors conference).

Recruiting Students: Honors runs three separate recruiting processes for students each year, as well as recruiting faculty to teach its courses every semester. The directors correspond with 500+ prospective freshmen, review 200+ applications (including essays), and admit a class of between 80 and 100 new students. Honors also recruits transfer students (meeting and working with Honors directors at community colleges, corresponding with prospects identified with admissions etc.), as well as current Salisbury students interested in joining the Honors program after their first semester.

Recruiting Professors: The Honors program director plans, schedules and recruits professors for Honors courses every semester. This involves identifying faculty who are both likely to be good at teaching small, discussion based classes and willing to undertake the extra work involved in preparing them.

Communications: Honors creates and manages a wide variety of communications. These include the mailing of some 500+ invitations sent to prospective students; posters for student events; individual correspondence with prospective students, current students and their parents; weekly e-mails to the student body; a newsletter; admissions brochure copy; catalogue copy; participation in admissions events, particularly scholar's visitation day; programmatic surveys; Facebook pages for Honors and for an Honors alumni group, and of course, the SU Honors website.

Research Mentoring: While technically part of the teaching of the Honors program, the HONR312 and HONR490 classes are inevitably taught on an overload. Students have research mentors in their chosen discipline, but the Honors director and associate director facilitate the articulation of research expectations, review and monitor student progress, and advise students on research presentation options.

Assessment and Strategic Planning: The Honors program runs programmatic assessment through a variety of mechanisms. Because Honors is not well-represented in tracking data gathered by UARA, the directors have created their own databases in order to track student

progress towards Honors program completion and to gather data useful to planning future course offerings and making programmatic improvements. Recently, the director has been invited to Provost's Council meetings to help make Honors more visible and central to all aspects of university administration.

Current Budget: Despite significant growth in the number of students participating in honors, the Honors program's budget has remained essentially stagnant since 1994. In addition to the university financial support, the Honors program relies on the Thomas E. Bellavance Honors Scholarship Endowment which provides funds ranging from \$4000-\$9,600 depending on the endowment's performance. \$4000 of this is spent on student scholarships: the remainder pays for course development costs, and student and faculty conference travel.

Successes of the Current Program:

SU's honors program has grown significantly in the last four years, almost doubling in the number of active honors students. Honors students are leaders in undergraduate research, accounting for a significant percentage of presentations at the Salisbury University Student Research Conference and the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. In addition, SU students regularly make presentations at honors conferences.

Table A: Honors Enrollment

	2006-7 AY	2009-10 AY
Active Honors Students (fall)	145	288
Honors Graduates	14	49
Research class enrollment	28	87
HONR312, 490 research classes taught as overload	100%	100%
Honors conf. presenters (National, Regional and State)	12	12
SUSRC presenters	13	39
NCUR presenters	0	8
# of Living Learning Communities	1	2
# of Annual assessment surveys	1	5

Though increased retention is not a specific goal of honors programs, it is clear that students who participate in honors have a higher college GPA and are retained at higher rates than other first year students with similar academic credentials who do not participate. At SU, the retention rate for honors students was 5% higher than that of their high achieving (HSGPA ≥ 3.5 & SAT ≥ 1100) academic peers in the 2006 and 2007 cohorts.¹ Additionally, Honors students had higher cumulative GPAs than did their high achieving peers (Table B).

¹ Honors students were retained at an 89.5% and 90.5% rate in 2006 and 2007, respectively, while SU students with a HSGPA ≥ 3.5 & SAT ≥ 1100 were retained at 84.8% and 84.3%. The 2008 cohort was slightly different, as retention among high achieving non-honors students increased to 86.6%, while Honors students dropped to 87.0%.

Table B: First Year Cumulative GPA

Cohort Comparison	2006	2007	2008
Regular admit, GPA \geq 3.5; SAT \geq 1100	3.1	3.2	3.2
Regular admit, GPA \leq 3.5; SAT \leq 1100	2.6	2.7	2.8
Overall	2.8	2.9	3.1
Honors	3.4	3.5	3.3

A growing honors program can be an important part of the university's overall retention plan, but it must be given sufficient resources to succeed. As the number of students enrolled in honors has increased, the budget and staffing has remained relatively stagnant.

Challenges

The SU Strategic Plan notes that, "The Honors Program is integral in helping the University to increase its academic excellence, continue to attract and retain excellent students, build a more engaged student body, and attract additional resources."² Yet honors education at Salisbury has been under-funded, understaffed, and largely dependent on the generosity and goodwill of individual departments and faculty members for its course offerings.

The honors program operating budget has not increased since 1994, when it was set at \$23,000 for operating costs and \$5,000 for special events funding. One cannot build a lasting tradition with an impulse buy. An Honors College may be a means to excellence, but the act of creation alone is not sufficient. Honors College success is a process that requires both will and wallet, as has been seen at other institutions. At one of our peer institutions, Honors gave three faculty lines to deans of other school in exchange for the promise of teaching. As we learned in our campus visit, that "guarantee" has since been "forgotten" by some.

Recruiting faculty to teach honors courses has been particularly difficult during the recent budget crisis. The Honors director is currently the only PIN line associated with the honors program, and other faculty must be recruited each semester to teach the bulk of the honors courses. Understandably, home departments stretched thin due to increased enrollment and the recent hiring freeze are less likely to be able to release their professors to teach an honors course.

The inability to offer special scholarships to honors students puts SU at a significant disadvantage in recruiting the best students. Towson University, for example, offers all first-year honors students an Honors College Scholarship of \$1,000-\$3,000 a year above any other

² SU Strategic Plan, 2009-13, p. 12.

scholarship money they may have received. While we realize SU cannot match that level of funding under our current budgetary constraints, establishing a modest number of scholarships is important if we wish to remain competitive.

During the past two years at Salisbury University, the fall-to-fall retention rate of transfer students with a GPA of 3.60 and above has fallen from 93 percent to 87 percent. Establishment of an Honors college could be one way to maintain our cohort of top students—the group most likely to bring the university distinction.

One of the difficulties facing many honors programs is finding a way to encourage more participation from students outside the liberal arts, though SU actually does reasonably well in this area. The figures are as follows (Honors % vs. University as a whole %):

Fulton: 38% vs. 32 %;
Henson: 35% vs. 24%;
Perdue: 14% vs. 22%;
Seidel: 13% vs. 22%.

Students in the Seidel and Perdue Schools are presented with unique challenges that often make it more difficult for them when attempting to attain this goal, largely due to the demands of accreditation.

Why an Honors College?

The task force recommends that the honors program be transformed into an Honors College for several reasons. The change to a college is not just nominal; it will acknowledge the significant growth that has taken place in the last five years, and will better characterize the changes in curriculum, staffing, and facilities recommended in this report. An institutional commitment to an Honors College will affirm the achievements of the Honors program to date and increase its ability to foster innovation and excellence across the university.

Under this plan, the director of the Honors College will have a seat at the table when the academic deans meet with the provost, helping integrate honors into the larger academic community. In addition, we believe the interdisciplinary scope of the courses and faculty makes this bigger than a traditional university program. Finally, this change will place SU in a better position to recruit the best students to our campus. As our peer institutions have switched to honors colleges, students (and parents) expect to find a similar opportunity at Salisbury.

Honors Program vs. Honors College:

The guiding organization for honors programs and colleges in the United States is the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). While the NCHC is not an accrediting agency, it is widely recognized as the pre-eminent professional association of undergraduate Honors programs and colleges. The NCHC has identified best practices for honors programs and colleges (see Appendix). Programs and colleges share many characteristics, but typically differ in the number of credit hours of honors courses students take, the administrative structure, and funding. We recognize that the term we use -- program, college, school for that matter -- may not affect the academic quality of an individual student's experience, but we do see an opportunity here to raise the profile of Honors both on campus and as a recruiting tool, provided

that the name change is accompanied by substantial commitment to enhancement and improvement of the program, supported across the university.

Peer and Aspirational Programs:

The Honors Task Force researched many peer and aspirational honors programs and colleges during the fall 2010 semester. This investigation included discussions with honors college administrators, research into best practices, and a significant literature review. After initial research, the committee chose to examine a number of colleges and programs in greater depth, including:

University of Maine
Appalachian State
University of Maryland, College Park
Duquesne
University of Vermont
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
UNC-Greensboro
The College of Charleston

In addition, members of the task force made site visits to Towson University and Drexel University to view their facilities and meet with some of their administrative staff.

In researching these programs and colleges, it became clear that Salisbury University was falling behind in several crucial areas, including student scholarships, facilities, honors staffing, and faculty recruitment.

Proposed Mission Statement:

The mission of the Honors College is to create challenging academic and cultural opportunities that attract the brightest applicants and most academically talented and motivated students to Salisbury University. The Honors College provides a home for students and faculty from all four of the University's Schools who seek to engage in a shared intellectual enterprise based on critical thinking, interdisciplinary analysis, and co-curricular opportunities. Honors students will have the opportunity to participate in a living-learning environment where they can connect what they learn with how they live. The Honors College promotes excellence in undergraduate research in each student's discipline through close faculty mentoring and a final capstone project. Through the Nationally Competitive Scholarships Program, the Honors College will identify and cultivate students across campus who would be strong candidates for prestigious national fellowships and scholarships. As a center for academic excellence, the Honors College will serve as a resource for students who are considering graduate or professional school as the next step in their careers.

Relationship to University Strategic Plan and Strategic Enrollment Plan:

University Strategic Plan: Salisbury University's Strategic Plan for 2009-2013 identifies several goals that a well-supported Honors College can play a substantial role in achieving. Goal 1 is to "Provide exceptional contemporary liberal arts education and academic and professional programs that are aligned with an increasingly competitive, global, and knowledge-based economy." The Honors College curriculum and the entire honors experience is designed to offer an exceptional education to SU students, combining an intensive, challenging liberal arts education with co-curricular activities designed to foster lifelong learning. Honors College students are required to engage in undergraduate research and will work closely with faculty on projects that can lead to presentations and publications in many different disciplines.

As part of Goal 1, the strategic plan calls for the university to "Continue to build upon the strengths of the Bellavance Honors Program to attract and retain well-qualified students."³ Moving from an honors program to an Honors College model will help the university achieve this goal by providing the resources and facilities necessary to compete for the best students in the country.

Strategic Enrollment Plan: In March, 2009, Salisbury University's Enrollment Strategic Planning team issued its Strategic Enrollment Plan (SEP). The report noted that SU must "increase its first-to-second year retention rate, its five-year graduation rate, and its six-year graduation rate. Efforts to increase high ability, out-of-state, international, and minority students will be important as SU seeks to expand markets from which to attract additional students."⁴ As demonstrated above, the Honors Program already retains and graduates students at a rate significantly higher than the rest of the university. Simply increasing the number of honors students without providing sufficient resources risks weakening the program and losing the very qualities that have led to this success.

In particular, our recommendations align with the SEP Strategy 6, "Create innovative academic, co-curricular, and support programs to enhance the recruitment of high ability students."⁵ We believe that an Honors College can be an important part of the university's effort to achieve these goals, especially in recruiting and retaining high ability students and in creating innovative academic programs. Under this proposal, more SU students will have the opportunity to participate in programs with a demonstrated record of retention.

Envisioning the SU Honors College

Enrollment Goals: The target enrollment for the Honors College is roughly 8-9% of the incoming class. The university expects its enrollment to stay relatively steady for the next 10 years; if approximately 1,250 students enroll each fall semester, our target is 100-120 new students each year. Currently, approximately 40% of honors students who begin as freshmen complete the program. We anticipate that the percentage of students completing the full honors

³ SU Strategic Plan, 2009-2013, p. 8, 15.

⁴ SU Strategic Enrollment Plan, 2008-09, p. 3.

⁵ SU Strategic Enrollment Plan, 2008-09, p. 10.

curriculum will increase slightly if this plan is implemented due to the incentives (scholarships, housing, and travel support) built into our recommendations. At the same time, adding a required capstone project and an additional course to the curriculum may present a challenge for some of our students.

Recruiting Students: To be competitive with our peers, the Honors College must aggressively recruit high achieving students. Attractive facilities, available scholarships, and an engaged faculty are all crucial aspects of the Honors College recruiting strategy. We propose the funding of 16 Honors College Academic Scholarships (\$3,000 each) each year: 4 freshmen, 4 sophomores, 4 juniors, and four seniors (\$48,000 total). In addition, we propose that 10 (\$1,000 each) scholarships to support honors students' international education be funded each year (\$10,000 total).

As SU expects to have a growing transfer population, capturing a larger number of transfer students will be an important part of the Honors College mission. One significant difficulty for many transfer students is building their sense of engagement with the university, which is also a key to retention and academic success. Participating in the Honors College can help build a sense of community that is often missing for transfer students. To that end, we propose that the university pursue more articulation agreements with honors programs at community colleges that transfer a significant number of students to SU. We currently have a successful articulation with Wor-Wic Community College that we could build upon, given administrative support.

Recruiting Faculty: One of the major difficulties facing any interdisciplinary program is recruiting faculty to teach the courses. By providing a regular rotation of faculty, this plan will provide predictability for students and the honors director, who will have a course schedule mapped out 2-3 years in advance. In recognition of the work involved in creating and teaching honors courses, we recommend that the university create the title of Honors Fellows. The title will carry with it a stipend of \$3,000 a year. Faculty with the title will be expected to teach one honors course each semester for one year as part of their regular teaching load, and will participate in co-curricular events throughout the academic year. We believe that 4 Honors Fellows would be sufficient as the Honors College begins, with the numbers to increase as the student population grows. The task force recommends that the home departments of the faculty be compensated for the cost of any replacement faculty in a manner appropriate for that department and in cooperation with the relevant Academic Dean. Serving as an Honors Fellow should be considered a significant accomplishment for a faculty member and evidence of excellence in teaching.

Nationally Competitive Scholarships Program (NCSP): As part of the new Honors College, we recommend SU begin a concerted effort to assist our best students in winning nationally competitive awards such as Fulbright, Truman, and Marshall scholarships. Many colleges and universities have offices devoted to fostering student interest and guiding prospective candidates through the demanding application process. We recommend that the Coordinator of the NCSP be a faculty member with a half time reassignment, and that a new faculty committee be formed to develop, hone and oversee the process of identifying, mentoring, and preparing students to apply for these awards. Although the NCSP would be housed in the

Honors College, all SU students would be eligible to participate in its activities. The Honors College Graduate Assistant would help in publicizing all NCSP events to help attract student participation.

Facilities

Currently, the Honors program resides in a university-owned house on Camden Avenue. The house includes offices for the Director and Associate Director, a seminar room, a small kitchen, and limited room for honors students to study and socialize. While this space is adequate for a small honors program, it is already stretched thin; adding more students and staff will soon exceed the limits of the building. In order to be competitive with other honors colleges, Salisbury University must commit to identifying and securing comparable facilities, including administrative, educational, and residential life.

Administrative Space: The Honors College should occupy a visible space centrally located on the campus, with sufficient office space to accommodate the director, assistant director, coordinator of the Nationally Competitive Scholarships Program, and an administrative assistant.

Educational Space: Ideally, honors courses are small seminars of roughly 20 students. Large lecture halls are not required for these classes, and indeed can be counterproductive. What is needed are seminar rooms with proper teaching technology. Fortunately, such spaces have recently been created in a number of our residence halls.

Honors Housing: Most honors colleges offer special on-campus housing for their students by setting aside entire residence halls or, in smaller programs, honors floors. Honors housing is featured prominently in the recruiting materials for all of our peer and aspirational programs. With Sea Gull Square opening in fall 2011, the timing is right to create a dedicated Honors residence hall. We propose that Manokin Hall be transformed into an Honors College residence hall. While we recognize that on-campus housing is quite limited, we believe that transitioning Manokin would have little impact on the overall campus while having a significant impact on our ability to recruit high achieving students. Manokin Hall houses 77 students and 4 Resident Assistants and has a classroom already in use. The honors program currently offers two Honors Living-Learning Communities in Manokin, accommodating 39 students, making any student displacement minimal. The residence hall would give first priority to incoming freshmen honors students (who must be enrolled in at least one honors course); if there are available rooms upper class honors students enrolled in at least one honors course will have second priority. The Resident Assistants would be members of the Honors College who have gone through the same training as all other RA's and who would be employed and supervised by the current Residential Life staff. The RA positions would be an important recruitment/retention tool given the limited financial resources of the university.

Incorporating All Four Schools

Establishing an Honors College at Salisbury University that is “professional-school friendly” would be difficult, but the challenge is not insurmountable. To the extent that students can work towards fulfillment of Honors through our general education program, these proposed reforms affirm our commitment to excellence in liberal education for all students and the development of graduate school- or workforce-ready skills in information literacy, critical thinking and communication. The four schools at Salisbury University have distinctive ways in which students can achieve honors, and we should embrace the differences rather than view them as obstacles. Offering a more flexible path to honors will benefit our students and the university as a whole. We recommend broadening the path to honors by including departmental honors, contractual honors courses, honors versions of popular General Education courses, and pursuing articulation agreements with honors programs at community colleges (detailed below).

Proposed Curriculum

The NCHC guidelines for best practices suggest that an honors college curriculum include 24 hours of honors credit and a capstone project. We recommend that the SU Honors College adhere to those recommendations for students who choose to enroll in the full honors curriculum.

Guidelines for Honors Classes: As proposed, the new Honors curriculum will include both specially designed Honors classes and Honors sections of regular classes. Although the topics and disciplines will vary significantly, there are several common characteristics that will characterize these courses throughout the curriculum.

Since Honors offers faculty the chance to teach ambitious students in small classes, discussion and active learning in a seminar-style environment will be the norm. Honors students begin by focusing on critical thinking and writing skills as they prepare to become independent researchers. These skills should remain a focus in all Honors classes. In short, Honors classes will challenge students to reach beyond their current level of achievement and to enjoy doing so!

Honors classes: Students in the Honors College will take the core honors courses HONR111 (or HONR211), HONR112, HONR212, HONR311. These courses are designed to introduce students to the skills and dispositions expected of an honors student, including intensive critical thinking, reading, writing, and discussion.

Honors sections: The honors version classes will meet the learning outcomes associated with the non-honors section of the same class, but will go further to engage students with some of the major issues in the field that they are studying. In lab sections of Honors science classes, for example, the incorporation of new labs, the deeper discussion of concepts, or an innovative approach to connecting lab material to other themes in the discipline might be expected. In Honors history classes, students might work more regularly with primary sources, or address additional layers of historiographical interpretation. In an Honors math class, students could consider historical or practical applications of the concepts under study, or learn different methods to attain the same kind of proof or result.

Another major component of many Honors classes is experiential learning. Students in Honors classes have

- published a study of local environmental history
- travelled to Civil War battlefields
- explored evolution at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History
- designed, dug, and planted a garden (in a course on garden history)
- staged and acted in a Shakespeare play
- cooked dinners which they have then had to explain in chemical terms (kitchen as lab!)

While not all Honors classes have this kind of experiential component, this is the kind of extra quality which we expect of all Honors classes. We encourage Honors students to strive to exceed requirements. Teachers of Honors classes should strive to give them a learning experience that is unique, fun, and challenging.

Contractual Honors Courses: In an effort to be more responsive to students whose majors have few electives, we propose that Honors College students be allowed to take up to one “contractual” course as part of their required curriculum. In a contractual course, students will work with the Honors College Director and a faculty member to develop a separate honors contract for an existing course. This contract would stipulate extra work outside of the normal course requirements that would satisfy an honors element. Both the faculty member and Honors College director would have to sign off on the contract. Students wishing to take more than one contractual course would need approval from the Honors College Director.

Honors Capstone: Undergraduate research is central to the identity of Salisbury University, and the Honors College will make that a signature feature of its curriculum. Honors College students will be required to engage in a capstone project in their final year (currently, this is an option for honors students). This capstone will vary depending on the individual student’s major, but could include a written thesis, a performance, a business plan, a community project or any other significant academic work. In each case, there must be a presentation element to the capstone so that the greater SU community may benefit from the student’s work. The presentation element could come in many forms: a conference presentation, art exhibition, video on SUTV, or a performance, just to name a few. The Director of the Honors College will work directly with faculty in each of the schools to develop ideas for projects and presentations that acknowledge the variety of academic activities that take place in various disciplines. Since these capstones may involve costs for materials, travel, or other expenses directly related to the project, we recommend that the university develop a fund to help defray any financial burden.

Departmental Honors: As part of the effort to expand honors while maintaining high standards, we recommend that all departments be strongly encouraged to develop departmental honors. Each department would retain the right to determine the specific requirements for departmental honors, but we recommend that the university should establish basic minimum requirements that would apply across campus. The task force suggests that to earn departmental honors, students must take at least two honors courses towards the major (these could be honors sections of regular classes or contractual honors courses), meet a minimum cumulative SU GPA

of 3.5, have no grade lower than a C, and complete a capstone project in the senior year resulting from exceptional work in the student's field.

Like the honors capstone, the departmental honors project can be based on different experiences. Although experimental or theoretical research and field work could be a capstone project in the non-clinical departments in the Henson School, perhaps internship and practica are more appropriate for the clinical departments. Art exhibition, musical performance, primary source research, and literary analysis may qualify in Fulton. Internship and practicum may be a good fit for Seidel. Research, practica, and internship could appeal to Perdue. However, a blending of these categories or novel experiential learning may be suitable, all decided by the representative department.

For departments with accreditation, it is important that departmental honors be aligned with the intent of the relevant accrediting agency in mind. For instance, at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Honors in Nursing helps prepare its students for research and graduate school, areas to which their accrediting agency pays keen attention. In each case, the department of the student's major should delineate the specific criteria for successful completion of the capstone project.

Here are just a few ideas about how the capstone project might be evaluated:

- Experimental and theoretical research, field work, primary source research, and literary analysis could culminate in an honors thesis and oral defense.
- Art exhibition and music performance could be based on a body of selected work in public display or performance
- Internship or practicum could be assessed based on professional evaluation metrics unique to each department

In order for capstone projects to be successful within departments, there must be financial support for these projects given to each school by the SU administration. Faculty willing to serve as mentors for capstone projects should be compensated for their time and provided with necessary supplies. A commitment to increased funding to these schools designated for capstone projects is important to success.

International Education: The university's strategic plan acknowledges the importance of international education for our students. While we recognize that requiring an international experience would prohibit many students from participating in honors, all Honors College students will have an opportunity to include international travel courses as part of their curriculum. The Honors College will offer at least one course with an international education component every four semesters. Since a domestic field study can also be a valuable part of experiential learning, the Honors College should also support those opportunities for our students. We recommend that the university establish 10 \$1,000 international travel/field experience scholarships each year (to be distributed by the Honors College director)

Staffing

In order to provide the best experience for our students, the Honors College must have sufficient staffing, both in faculty and administrative support. The NCHC recommends that Honors Colleges be headed by a dean with a full time, twelve month appointment and a status equal to that of other academic deans. While mindful of the NCHC's recommendations, the task force also recognizes the economic difficulties facing this university as well as other universities across the nation. When resources are scarce, we recommend that the bulk of any available resources be channeled in ways that most immediately benefit students. The Director of the Honors College should be given a 12 month contract, however, in recognition of the increased workload and year-round nature of the position. The task force recommends that as the Honors College develops, the university should reconsider whether the director should become a dean, as the NCHC suggests. We also recommend that the Assistant/Associate Director position be converted to a full-time PIN in honors within the next few years to reflect the increased teaching and administrative load required in the Honors College.

Ideally, the Honors College should have its own faculty lines. A stable, dedicated faculty would allow greater consistency in the program. The task force believes, however, that there must be a strong university foundation from which to build and sustain the Honors College. Therefore, we recommend that the university must fully meet existing needs for replacement faculty lines before creating new PIN lines specifically for the Honors College. Once the university achieves that goal, the task force recommends that we hire two PIN lines to teach the HONR 111/211 courses.

Proposed staffing:

Director of the Honors College: full time, 12 month contract
Assistant/Associate Director of the Honors College: full time, 10 month contract
Coordinator, Nationally Competitive Scholarships Program: ½ time
Program Management Specialist: full time
Graduate Assistant for Programming
Honors Fellows (4-8)

The Director's responsibilities include:

1. Recruiting students
2. Advocating for the College
3. Overseeing the Honors College curriculum
4. Coordinating Departmental Honors (FTEs will continue to go to individual departments)
5. Assisting in fundraising for the Honors College
6. Processing undergraduate honors theses/projects
7. Supporting the Nationally Competitive Scholarships Program
8. Conducting regular assessment of the Honors College
9. Teach one honors course per semester

The duties of the Assistant/Associate Director include:

1. Assisting the director in all operations of the Honors College

2. Teach 2 honors courses each semester
3. Supervise the Graduate Assistant

The Coordinator of the Nationally Competitive Scholarships Program will:

1. Identify and recruit students for specific scholarships
2. Conduct workshops for student applicants
3. Assist students in the application process
4. Chair the NCSP committee

The Graduate Assistant will:

1. Coordinate all co-curricular programming for the Honors College
2. Assist in publicizing all Honors College events

The Honors Fellows will:

1. Teach one honors course each semester for one year
2. Participate in associated co-curricular activities

Benefits to the University as a Whole

Salisbury University's core values are excellence, student-centeredness, learning, community, civic engagement, and diversity.⁶ These values are also central to the Honors College and will be reflected in its students, faculty, and staff. The establishment of an Honors College represents an opportunity for the university to embody excellence in a way that will garner greater distinction. The entire university could benefit from what the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) calls "a locus of visible and highly reputed standards and models of excellence for students and across campus."

Attracting more high achieving students to Salisbury University will benefit the entire university. Since Honors College students all have majors in university departments, all faculty will benefit by having more high achieving students in their courses. Honors College students will be leaders in undergraduate research, a point of distinction for SU. The honors capstone experience is an ideal incubator for projects that can be presented at local, regional, and national conferences.

While such benefits can—and do—accrue to institutions with Honors programs, the Honors college with a seat on the Deans Council (and access to more resources) "avoids dependence on the good will and energy of particular faculty members and administrators for survival." Institutionalizing Honors "can build a lasting tradition of excellence"—where Salisbury University's actions need to match its words.

The Honors College also offers faculty an opportunity to engage in innovative teaching and develop new courses which can be brought back to their home departments. Faculty teaching honors courses will have the ability to test new ideas, subjects, approaches to curriculum and pedagogy in an interdisciplinary environment. As the NCHC notes, such

⁶ Salisbury University Strategic Plan, 2009-2013, i.

experiments “can serve as prototypes for initiatives that can become institutionalized across the campus.”⁷

The creation of the Nationally Competitive Scholarships Program will directly benefit those students who win the awards, but will also serve to raise the academic profile of the entire university. Many of our peer institutions make their success at winning these scholarships a prominent part of their overall promotional strategy, and SU should be in a position to do the same. All students who apply for nationally competitive scholarships will benefit even if they do not ultimately win; simply preparing for these prestigious awards helps students by broadening their scholarly horizons. Honors College students will be a natural group from which to recruit students, but the program will not be limited to students in honors.

Proposed Budget

The 2008-09 Strategic Enrollment Plan includes Strategy 19 – “Develop additional funding sources as a means to attract and retain high ability, diverse student populations.” The recommendations under this strategy suggest that the university “Create campaign priorities designed to further support scholarship opportunities for high ability students.”⁸ Fully funding an Honors College can be an important part of achieving that university goal. Our proposed budget is intentionally modest, but we must make fundraising for the Honors College a university priority in order to sustain and build upon its successes.

Scholarships:

16 Academic Scholarships (\$3,000 each):	\$48,000
10 International/Field Education Scholarships (\$1,000 each):	\$10,000

Staffing:

Director (existing PIN line, move to 12 month)	\$15,000
Assistant/Associate Director (convert to full-time Honors)	\$70,000
Program Management Specialist:	\$40,000
Graduate Assistant:	\$10,000
Coordinator, NCSP (replacement stipends):	\$10,000

Faculty:

4-8 Honors Fellows (\$3,000 stipend):	\$12-24,000
Replacement Costs:	\$24-36,000

****The task force recommends that the university create two additional Honors PIN lines once critical faculty staffing levels have been met across campus.**

⁷ See Appendix, NCHC, “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program”; NCHC, “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College.”

⁸ SU Strategic Enrollment Plan, 2008-2009, p. 14.

Assessment

Like any university initiative, the Honors College should be assessed regularly to determine whether it is meeting its goals and to identify any areas needing improvement. The director will conduct an Academic Program Review on the same seven-year schedule as academic departments, drawing upon evidence of student achievement collected on a regular basis and analyzed with an eye to improving program quality continuously. The APR will include measures of academic performance, retention, student engagement, and graduation and will be presented to the Provost and the Senate Honors Committee. We recommend that the Senate Honors Committee should conduct an annual review to consider whether to recommend the director position be converted into a dean.

Proposed Timeline

While some of the recommendations can be gradually incorporated, others should be implemented as quickly as possible to move the Honors College forward. We propose the following timeline be adopted as closely as possible:

1. Convert the Honors College Director to a 12 month position (July 1, 2011)
2. Hire a Program Management Specialist dedicated to Honors (July 1, 2011)
3. Submit new curriculum to UCC for approval (Fall, 2011)
4. Recruit NCSP Director (Spring, 2011)
5. Secure funds for scholarships (Spring, 2012)
6. Recruit 4 Honors Fellows (Spring, 2012)
7. Convert Manokin Hall into an Honors Residence (Summer, 2012)
8. Implement new Honors curriculum (Fall, 2012).
9. Convert Assistant/Associate Director PIN line (Fall, 2012)

Appendix

a. NCHC guidelines

NCHC: Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program

Although no single or definitive honors program model can or should be superimposed on all types of institutions, the National Collegiate Honors Council has identified a number of best practices that are common to successful and fully developed honors programs.

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 engages in continuous assessment and evaluation and is open to the need for change in order to maintain its distinctive position of offering exceptional and enhanced educational opportunities to honors students.
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.

Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College

The National Collegiate Honors Council has identified these best practices that are common to successful and fully developed honors colleges.

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.