

**Proposal to Transition Salisbury University's  
Existing Honors Program to an Honors College  
July 1, 2015**

Salisbury University's Honors Program began in 1980 with 20 freshmen students who met in the back of the University gymnasium and took a series of history, English, and philosophy courses. In 1996 the Honors Program was renamed for University president Thomas E. Bellavance. In 2011, the provost convened a task force comprised of faculty, students, and administrators to conduct a year-long assessment of the honors program; among the primary recommendations of the Honors Task Force Report was to transition the program into a College.

With more than a decade of growth at the University, and a similar growth in the Thomas E. Bellavance Honors Program, Salisbury University is well positioned to create an Honors College. Many prospective students and parents already refer to the Bellavance Program as the Honors College, as our closest academic competitors within the University System of Maryland have Honors Colleges. Renaming of the Bellavance Honors Program as an Honors College would help Salisbury University remain competitive and relevant within this environment, but it is not the only reason that forming an Honors College is important at this time.

With more than 330 students representing four schools and thirty-six majors on the SU campus, a single honors program cannot meet the needs of such a diverse University population. An Honors College, however, with multiple Honors Programs that include flexible curricula, will address those needs. Furthermore, the creation of an Honors College with multiple Honors Programs would empower individual schools to aid in the recruitment of honors students, to create program-specific curricula, and to participate as honors faculty members. The administrative restructuring of the Honors Program to an Honors College also would enable the College's Dean to be more involved in University-wide discussions about curricular, budgetary, and resource issues, as the current Honors Director does not hold a voting position on any University committees or decision-making bodies.

The current Honors Program staff includes a full-time, twelve-month administrative director, a full-time Assistant Director who oversees the living learning communities and freshman student activities; a full-time Program Management Specialist; and two part-time undergraduate student workers.

### **FULFILLING THE UNIVERSITY MISSION AS AN HONORS COLLEGE**

The growth of the Honors Program and transition to an Honors College aids Salisbury University in its mission of cultivating and sustaining a "superior learning community where students, faculty, and staff are viewed as learners, teachers/scholars, and facilitators, and where a commitment to excellence and openness to a broad array of ideas and perspectives are central to all aspects of University life." (University Mission Statement)

The University strategic plan specifically outlines the role of Honors at the University:

*"The Bellavance Honors Program is an integral part of SU's effort to recruit and retain high-achieving students. Students participating in the Honors Program are retained at higher rates*

*than their peers, have a shorter time-to-degree completion, and are engaged in undergraduate research across campus. Honors students have won nationally competitive scholarships and regularly present their work at regional and national conferences. Despite the clear successes and importance in attracting excellent students, the Honors Program remains undersized relative to our peers. The National Collegiate Honors Council recommends an Honors Program comprise approximately 6-8% of the undergraduate student body. To do so, SU's program needs to recruit an incoming class that equals 10% of the incoming freshman class. The profile of the Honors Program should reflect the larger student body in overall numbers, diversity, and majors within schools. To reach these goals, the Honors Program must examine its academic programming to ensure that students in every major can participate in Honors and must have sufficient staffing to grow its ranks." (University Strategic Plan: 2014-2018, page 4).*

The recent growth of the Honors Program reflects increased recruiting efforts, which have led to larger freshman classes that represent 10% of the total incoming freshman class. Within the next two years, the Program will also reach the 6-8% of undergraduate enrollment goal outlined in the University's strategic plan and the University's enrollment master plan (Enrollment Master Plan: 2014-2018, 1.4).

The Faculty Senate Honors Program Committee is proposing changes to the curriculum that would create curricular tracks (or programs) for honors in the sciences and business that will fulfill the charge in the University's strategic plan to "ensure that students in every major can participate in Honors."

This past semester, the Honors Program staff and the Faculty Senate Honors Program Committee unanimously agreed that transitioning to an Honors College with multiple Honors Programs will best serve these purposes.

### **STAFFING NEEDS AND CHANGES**

The Honors College proposal includes transitioning the current Honors Director to Dean of the Honors College and naming the current Assistant Director as Faculty Director for the Bellavance Honors Program in the Liberal Arts. These changes would align the University with similar Honors Colleges around the country. To aid in the advisement and teaching of students in the Honors Programs for the Sciences and Business, the proposal calls for Faculty Directors in these areas. These could temporarily be filled by current faculty who would receive course downloads in exchange for these duties (much as the Honors Director did in the initial years of the Honors Program).

Ultimately, the Dean of the Honors College would work with the Office of Advancement to seek donors interested in endowing these faculty positions and the three Honors Programs in order to help offset any added costs associated with downloads or extra duties. Because the current Honors Program and its staff already serve nearly 300 students, the transition would not require additional staffing needs. Rather, it will require shifting the burden for teaching in Honors from the Humanities to the Science and Business Schools where we are witnessing the fastest growing student populations.

## ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

