

Academic Policies Committee

April 28, 2014

The APC received the following charge from the Faculty Senate on 12th March, 2014:

A number of years ago, the Faculty Senate recommended that Honors students be granted priority registration. Since then, priority registration has been expanded to other groups of students, such as Supplemental Instruction leaders. Please review our current priority registration practices and, if the committee believes the system should be changed, offer a revised priority registration policy to the Senate for consideration. Please plan to report to the Senate by early November, 2014.

The committee met and discussed the charge. It was quickly clear that there is no line of decision making regarding which groups should and should not get priority registration since there is no extant policy or procedure regarding such matters.

The registrar informed the committee of the four groups currently receiving priority registration and the APC Chair then solicited explanations from the people responsible for those four groups (Honors, dual-degree Biology students, Supplemental Instruction leaders, and students with disabilities). The committee met and reviewed these explanations (attached as appendix one) and found the arguments made for these particular student groups compelling.

The committee has concluded that there is no need for a policy regarding priority registration, since it is needed on a case by case basis. A clear procedure would help any groups with a need to be able to make their case for such a priority registration slot.

The APC thus recommends that each of the extant groups, each of which is identified every semester on a semester by semester basis, should be awarded the second or third registration slot (the Registrar explained that gullnet registration appointments need to be distributed as evenly as possible in order to maximize the system's function). The faculty or staff member leading each group will identify such students on a semester by semester basis to the registrar's office at least one month before program planning sign-up commences for the following semester (thus the student's registration slot will be visible to an adviser who might otherwise not expect to meet with a sophomore in the first week of program planning). The first slot for registration should remain for our students with the most credits who might nonetheless need a particular course for graduation and thus must maintain their priority. The APC finds the second or third slot is indeed necessary for students in the programs already identified in order to enable them to maximize their academic potential and achieve timely degree completion.

Any group of students in need of priority registration in order to meet their academic needs should present a written justification to the APC, who will review it and then make a recommendation to the Office of Academic Affairs regarding the application.

Emails from Heather Holmes, CSA Director:

4/11/2014:

SI leaders qualification are 3.0 gpa, faculty recommendation and an "A" in the class they are supporting. We hire second semester freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors so you can see that a freshman or sophomore candidate has the latest registration date. They do not register for the SI supported class since they already received credit for that class but in order to follow the SI model, they must sit in the lecture of the SI supported course.

4/9/2014:

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a learning enhancement program designed to organize and improve ways in which students prepare for class outside of class. The SI program targets traditionally difficult academic subjects, those that have a high rate of D or F grades or withdrawals. SI provides regularly scheduled, out of class, peer facilitated sessions led by SI leaders. SI leaders are model students, nominated by faculty, who have demonstrated an appropriate model of thinking, organization and mastery of the discipline. SI leaders attend all class sessions; take notes, read all assigned material and facilitate a total of 3 hours of SI sessions each week. SI sessions integrate how-to-learn with what-to-learn. National research indicates that SI students earn higher subject grades and withdraw less often than non-SI participants (UMKC, 2006).

In order to follow the SI model, SI leaders must be able to fit the SI course into their planned student schedule. Priority registration allows faculty nominated SI leaders to work their schedules around the SI course they are supporting. Prior to priority registration, the Center for Student Achievement and faculty would lose some of the best candidates for SI positions because they couldn't fit the course into their schedule. Additionally, we had to make accommodations for staff that negatively affected the classroom environment (for example, SI leaders would leave early or attend late). Given the time spent in training and relationship building with faculty, it is in everyone's best interest to retain SI leaders. For fall 2014, 56 SI leaders will support 71 courses.

Email from Dr. Judith Stribling, Coordinator Dual Degree in Biology/Environmental Science, 4/2/2014

Students in the Biology/Environmental Science Dual Degree Co-operative program with UMES have received priority since the program began in 1991 because the time conflicts with UMES and SU courses cannot be managed with one system. Enrollment in courses at UMES is done through our registrar, using paper inter-institutional enrollment forms, and the registration there is not actually entered in PeopleSoft at all, except for a placeholder showing number of credits, until the credits are transferred in. There are huge scheduling issues with this program as it is very packed and we are trying to graduate students in 4 years, so their staying on track with courses that are difficult to get, such as Organic Chemistry, is of utmost importance.

This arrangement is not a privilege, it is a necessity, for the reasons given above.

Salisbury University

To: Dr. Lucy Morrison
Chair of Academic Policies Committee

From: Dr. James Buss

Date: April 9, 2014

Re: Priority Registration

Memo

Background/History:

Students in the Thomas E. Bellavance Honors Program are granted priority registration two days earlier than other students in their cohort (determined by the number of completed credit hours).

Priority registration for Honors students was introduced at the Faculty Senate meeting of February 14, 2006, when Professor Lucy Morrison “reviewed a request from the committee for the Senate to review and recommend that freshman and sophomore Honors Program students be given priority registration for their classes.”¹ The topic was discussed and tabled until the March 7, 2006 Faculty Senate meeting, when Dr. Richard England (then Director of the Bellavance Honors Program) addressed the Faculty Senate to answer questions about the need for priority registration. He responded in the following manner:

1. Priority registration is linked to the Honors students inability to schedule classes around a limited number of required Honors classes
2. Honors priority registration is a common model with peer and benchmark universities, including (at that time) Eastern Illinois University, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Rowan University, and the University of Wisconsin at Eau-Claire, as well as local competitors, such as Towson, St. Marys College of Maryland, and James Madison.
3. Outside consultants associated with the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) advised that universities offer priority registration for Honors students. Dr. England read a note from Dr. Robert Spurrier, who then led the Assessment and Evaluations Committee of the NCHC. “When I do external reviews of honors programs . . . one of the things I praise (if they have it) or complain about (if they don’t have it) is priority enrollment—and point out that it is a common feature of the most developed honors operations across the country.”
4. Honors students struggle more than most because of a set of demands above and beyond the others.

A motion was made to support the proposal for a trial period of 4 years “during which time research can be collected to study the impact of priority registration on program retention.” The motion carried with

¹ “Draft: SU Faculty Senate Meeting,” 14 February 2006 (accessed on April 9, 2014 from the posted Faculty Senate meeting minutes on the SU webpage).

13 senators in favor and 3 opposed.² At the time, Honors students were granted priority registration equivalent to one class rank above their current level (this has since changed to the current model).

Current Need:

As the director of two Honors Programs in my career, I am well aware of the need for Honors priority registration and the arguments against it. At my previous institution (Oklahoma City University), Honors students were granted "level one" priority registration, meaning that they registered prior to ALL other students at the university. While I am not advocating for this level of priority at Salisbury University, I would stress that Honors priority registration is the norm at universities and colleges across the nation.

Furthermore, I believe that Salisbury University should continue granting priority registration to Honors students for the following reasons.

1. **Priority registration is one of the few tangible recruitment tools available for the Honors Program to recruit high caliber students.** At the current moment, the Honors Program has limited scholarship opportunities to offer talented students who would like to attend SU and view Honors Programs or Colleges as integral to the university experience. Moreover, since both the new Enrollment Master Plan and University Strategic Plan (draft) emphasize growth in the number of Honors students on campus, removing this incentive would hinder these efforts, especially since our competitors (both regionally and nationally) offer Honors priority enrollment. (Please see statements by current Honors students that are attached at the end of this memo as evidence.)
2. **The Honors Program offers a relatively limited number of class offerings** (typically 9-10 sections of lower level courses and 3 sections of required upper-level classes per semester for an active Honors student body that numbers 245 students). Honors students must try to work their major and minor requirements around this limited offering and many of our Honors students do so as they work to complete double or triple majors. In fact, of the 245 active Honors students at the moment, 88 are double-majors and an additional 19 are triple majors. Priority registration enables our students to graduate on time and with Honors.
3. **An onsite review from NCHC evaluators would include an assessment of Honors priority registration as part of their evaluation.** As a relatively recent outsider to SU myself, I might be viewed as someone who could offer a professional opinion on this matter. I can attest that the national organization (NCHC) views priority registration as a key component to fully developed Honors Programs. In fact, I serve on the same Assessment and Evaluations Committee of the NCHC that Dr. Robert Spurrier once chaired. The current issue on the table for the national Assessment and Evaluations Committee involves the certification of Honors Colleges—priority registration in on the long list of items on the evaluation rubric.
4. **Removing priority registration at this time would prove disastrous for the growth and development of the Bellavance Honors Program.** The Honors Program has undergone some turmoil over the past four years (as it has had four different directors during that time). I am currently in the process of an internal programmatic-wide assessment and evaluation which will provide recommendations for reaching the larger goals of the Enrollment Master Plan and University Strategic Plan. Part of this internal study will include a thorough evaluation of current practices, including priority registration. As such, we will be implementing the type of study suggested by the Faculty Senate in 2006.

² "Draft: SU Faculty Senate Meeting," 7 March 2006 (accessed on April 9, 2014 from the posted Faculty Senate meeting minutes on the SU webpage).

Proposal:

I ask that the Faculty Senate permit the Bellavance Honors Program to continue offering students priority registration until it can conduct a full and thorough evaluation of its current policies and procedures (a five year study would be ideal). During that time, the current full-time director will collect data and report its annual findings to the Faculty Senate Honors Committee. In recent months, the Honors Committee has been active in drafting a 17-page document of policies and procedures that will be used to guide the Honors Program as it moves forward. Removing priority registration for Honors students at this time would hinder recruitment strategies already in place to increase the number of high caliber students at Salisbury University—we have seen the new recruitment strategy yield high numbers of Honors applications (nearly 300 at this point) and an impressive pool of accepted Honors students (the Honors Program has accepted 190 students for the fall semester with an average weighted GPA over 4.0 and an SAT score near 1900). These prospective students are from nearly every major across campus. In addition, a change in policy would hurt current students who are attempting to navigate a limited Honors course offering and their majors. While changes in the Honors curriculum might aid in relieving some of these tensions, those changes are several years from becoming reality, as they need to be considered and then taken before the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee.

Quotes from Current Students:

“Priority registration was a contributing factor in coming to Salisbury University and has proved to be invaluable in signing up for classes such that I can complete the Honors curriculum along with my major classes and general university requirements.” David Eberius, President of Honors Student Association (Senior, Computer Science)

“Priority registration of classes is extremely important to students in the honors program. We need to choose honors classes early and unless students are certain of a class schedule it is difficult to schedule honors classes. Most honors students are also taking heavy class loads and try to schedule larger blocks of study time which requires an early chance to register.” Daniel Norris (Senior, English Major)

“Honors deserves priority registration. Many of us have very tight schedules that will not fit any other time slots. We take rigorous courses, many of which are only offered once or twice a year. I cannot imagine the stress and negative impact upon a students’ future here at Salisbury if they cannot get into the classes they need and when they need them. I know personally, I would not be able to finish my major with honors without priority registration. The offer of priority registration was a key factor in joining the honors program here at SU, a program which was (by far) the largest influence in my choosing to come to Salisbury.” Sarah Dobry (Sophomore, Math and Secondary Education)

“Priority registration is key to the honors program, as it allows our students to get into higher level classes that would usually fill up. Giving us this extra time to register makes it so honors students can plan their schedule and continue to be top students at the university.” Veronica Thompson (Junior, English, Secondary Education)

“When I signed up for the honors program I knew that I was going to encounter a rigorous course load, but as a reward for the rigor we were promised priority enrollment. That aspect is one of the largest selling points for the program and is only fair.” Alaina Gostomski (Freshman, Early Childhood Education)

“Priority registration is one of the main reasons I applied to the honors program and decided to come to Salisbury University.” Frances Sherlock (Freshman, Business Management, Conflict Resolution)

“Priority registration was a big reason I joined the honors program. Having some level of security in class availability means a lot.” Abby DeCrenza (Freshman, undecided)