

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 21-11

COMMITTEE DATE: June 15, 2021

BOARD DATE: June 22, 2021

REAPPROVAL OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM FOR BRISTOL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Bristol Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for six years, effective June 22, 2021.

VOTED: Motion adopted by AAC 6/15/2021; adopted by BHE 6/22/2021.

Authority: Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines as Revised by the Board of Higher Education in November 2006; G.L. c. 15A, § 9.

Contact: Patricia A. Marshall, Ph.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success
Keith M. Connors, Program Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success

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June 2021

Bristol Community College Reapproval of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

BACKGROUND

This motion concerns the continuation of Bristol Community College's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program. According to the Commonwealth Honors Program Guidelines, once Commonwealth Honors Program approval has been obtained by an institution, the Program will be reviewed every six years by the Commonwealth Honors Executive Committee. The report of the Committee shall be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education for approval.

REVIEW PROCESS

Bristol Community College prepared a self-study document presenting its Honors Program structure and operation in terms of the Commonwealth Honors Program requirements. The report provided evidence documenting the fulfillment of the following criteria:

1. Alignment of the mission and goals
2. Organization and administration
3. Admissions criteria
4. Transfer criteria
5. Program curriculum
6. Graduation criteria
7. Program resources
8. Curriculum Review Process

VISITING COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On October 28, 2020, the Commonwealth Honors Program Visiting Committee (Visiting Committee) conducted a day-long assessment, via ZOOM, of Bristol Community College's (BCC) Honors Program. The Visiting Committee consisted of Daniel Soucy, Chair of Liberal Arts and Sciences and a Professor of Philosophy at Mount Wachusett Community College, and Chair of the CHP Visiting Committee; Catherine Villanueva Gardner, Professor of Philosophy and Women Gender Studies/Director of the Honors College at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth; and Scott Nowka, Professor of English/Chair of the Honors Program at Salem State University. Prior to the visit, the Visiting Committee received and studied BCC's application for reaccreditation of CHP status.

The Committee spoke with the Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Suzanne Buglione, with faculty who have facilitated honors courses and team-taught honors seminars, with honors committee members, and with Honors Program students. The ZOOM meeting concluded with an exit interview with college President Dr. Laura Douglas and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Suzanne Buglione.

BCC's Honors Program has a strong and stable presence on the BCC campus. Denise DiMarzio submitted a detailed self-study to the Department of Higher Education for reapproval. The Visiting Committee was impressed with the support the college administration has for the Honors Program, the enthusiasm from both faculty and students involved in the program, and the willingness on the part of the President to consider ways to enhance and improve this program.

The Visiting Committee commended BCC for the extensive changes it made since the last visit, including the following:

- Fostering new collaborations among BCC's Honors Faculty.
- Improving the honors contract process.
- Creating a sense of community within the program.

The Visiting Committee was impressed by the Honors Program at BCC and recommends, without reservation, that BCC Honors Program be granted re-approval.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. Sustainability: A clear path for future sustainability if the program continues at its current pace of growth.
2. New Honors Courses: Adding new honors courses so students in different degree programs can more easily progress in the program. For example, adding an honors business class.
3. Increase the Number of Special Topics Courses: Maintaining (and increasing) the number of special topics courses, which are typically team-taught. Team-taught courses allow for exploration of contemporary content and best pedagogical practices; for example, discussion-based, student-directed learning, etc. SCI251 "Emerging Paradigms in Science: Humanities and Culture" is an excellent example of a current team-taught course.
4. Increase Secretarial Support. Per the CHP Guidelines, institutions should provide consistent and adequate secretarial and support staff.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

BCC offered the following responses to the recommendations made by the Visiting Committee:

1. Sustainability: As part of a recent policy change, the program will continue efforts to draw in new students at the 100-level to omit the later need for components (contracts), a cost-savings measure. The CHP at Bristol has instituted a change to the stipend paid to faculty who work with Honors students, whether in a component or culminating project, which is a newly established flat rate of \$250 per faculty member. In addition, components will be limited to those students in programs without which they could not participate in Honors and for courses for which there is no existing Honors section already. Under review with the Honors Advisory Board is a possible change of offering components to those students beyond 30 credits only.

The college maintains its commitment to offering the Honors Coordinator a generous four-course reassignment to provide the maximum support for the program. In addition, the college has committed to raise funds for student Honors stipends but also will work to find a feasible, sustainable number of students that the program can readily support. During the pandemic year with enrollments skewed, it is difficult to determine what that number of students is, though this institution will be addressing this concern as times return to normal.

2. New Honors Courses: While changes and additions must be weighed against enrollment overall and enrollment in Honors, since the fall accreditation visit, the Coordinator has met with several colleagues in various disciplines to discern possible changes so that students in programs with little room for existing Honors may more easily participate. For example, since Business Administrative Transfer majors all must take Accounting 101 and Business Law 251, these are the most likely courses in which to create Honors sections in that area. Two faculty are exploring the creation of these sections.

In addition, there has been a recent discussion for making the existing Honors seminar, Paradigms of Science 251, a new elective choice for engineering majors. Finally, discussion with Occupational Therapy staff has opened the possibility of creating a 200-level health-related Honors course that might be adopted by several majors going forward.

Two new 100-level Honors courses, English 101 and BIO 121, were created within the past two years to attract new students and to allow for a jump-start into the Honors Program, reducing the need for components.

3. Increase the Number of Special Topics Courses: BCC has made a commitment to holding two team-taught Honors courses in the fall and spring semesters at the current time.

4. Increase Secretarial Support: Behind-the-scenes expertise is crucial and maintaining the knowledge-base within a dedicated Administrative Assistant role is instrumental to the program's success. In the past, the Administrative Assistant support followed the academic area to which the Coordinator belonged. Going forward, an individual from Arts and Humanities, who has been newly classified as Administrative Assistant II, will remain the administrative support for the Honors Program regardless of the faculty member in the Honors Coordinator role. This will allow for continuity during any transition, including a change in Coordinator. While there is not a prescribed number of hours for the role, with the change to Administrative Assistant II came additional duties added on to the role, which will support the program's growth and require more dedicated time to Honors.

RECOMMENDATION

Department of Higher Education staff thoroughly reviewed all documentation received from the Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and recommends that the Board approve the reapproval of the membership of **Bristol Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.