

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 22-59

BOARD DATE: June 21, 2022

RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM FOR HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Holyoke Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for seven years, effective June 21, 2022.

VOTED: Motion approved and advanced to the full BHE by the Executive Committee on 6/13/2022; and adopted by the BHE on 6/21/2022.

Authority: Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines as Revised by the Board of Higher Education in March 2022; G.L. c. 15A, § 9.

Contact: Winifred Hagan, Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategic Planning & Public Program Approval

Keith M. Connors, Program Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success

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June 2022

Holyoke Community College Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

BACKGROUND

This motion concerns the continuation of Holyoke Community College's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program in accordance with the Commonwealth Honors Program Guidelines. Once Commonwealth Honors Program approval has been obtained by an institution, the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee will review the program every seven years. The report of the Committee shall be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education for approval.

REVIEW PROCESS

Holyoke 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 April 16, 2021, the Commonwealth Honors Program Visiting Committee (Visiting Committee) conducted a day-long assessment, virtually via ZOOM, of Holyoke Community College's (HCC) 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 Visiting Committee; Mari Castaneda, Professor and Dean, Commonwealth Honors College at the University of Massachusetts Amherst; and Vanessa Diana, Professor of English/Chair of the Honors Program at Westfield State University. Prior to the visit, the Visiting Committee received and studied HCC's application for reaccreditation of CHP status. The virtual site visit was hosted and organized by the Coordinator of the HCC Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP), Vanessa Martinez; the day included meetings with the Academic Vice-President, Division Deans, Director

of Planning, Curriculum, and Assessment, faculty in the Integrative Learning Program, staff, students, and HCC President Christina Royal.

The Visiting Committee was impressed with the high level of commitment and enthusiasm expressed by everyone they met during the program review. Faculty, and especially students, spoke of the transformative experience of participating in the Commonwealth Honors Program with students adding that CHP enriched their education at HCC. The faculty, staff, students and college administration were also very supportive of CHP Coordinator, Vanessa Martinez, and of her promise of continued support of the CHP.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. Reestablish a part-time administrative assistant: This 18.5 hour a week position would be shared with the Coordinators of the Learning Communities and Service-Learning Programs.
2. Hold regular meetings between all Divisional Deans and the Honors Subcommittee: to improve communication and a sense of mutual understanding between faculty teaching in the Programs and their Deans.
3. Create student lounge space: Such space would contribute to cohort-building and retention among Honors Program students.
4. Provide coordinator summer stipend: commensurate with that of an academic chairperson.
5. Continue relationship between the Honors Program and the Pathways Coordinator: this valued relationship creates a productive context for the increased targeted recruitment of students and was also an effective strategy in sustaining and growing the program.
6. Improve communication of Honors Program offerings: Support efforts of the Honors Program in the Integrative Learning Programs consortium to strengthen collaboration with the Marketing Department on outreach to new and current students.
7. Develop alumni tracking: by collaborating with the Foundation Office.
8. Improve access to student data for analysis and recruiting purposes: Collaborate with Institutional Research, Admissions, and Registrar's Offices to grow the program with intentional focus on recruiting minoritized students into the Program.
9. Expand opportunities for more team-taught honors colloquia: students also indicated a desire for increased Honor offerings in STEM fields.
10. Explore options to maintain and grow resources: through internal budget allocations and external fundraising.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

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

1. Reestablish a part-time administrative assistant: Clerical support for the Honors, Learning Communities and Service-Learning Programs will continue to be provided in the foreseeable future.
2. Improve communication of Honors Program offerings: HCC recognizes, and the visiting team pointed out, that better communication of offerings will be necessary to grow the Program. HCC has scheduled a meeting with the public relations and marketing team with the goal of clearly outlining a plan for the dissemination and tracking of information regarding honors courses, with a particular emphasis on the recruitment of minoritized students. The College is currently in the process of implementing the EAB Navigate Student Success Platform, a tool that will allow programs to send targeted messages to students regarding unique offerings such as those of the Integrated Learning programs.
3. Continue relationship between the Honors Program and the Pathways Coordinator: HCC will continue to push out information through tried-and-true avenues including the Pathways Program and partners within the Integrated Learning Committee.
4. Expand opportunities for more team-taught honors colloquia: In order to further increase offerings in underserved academic divisions such as STEM and Health, the coordinator will meet regularly with the academic deans and program chairs with the goal of expanding the scope of the curriculum and improving messaging to faculty advisors.
5. Other recommendations: The impending arrival of HCC's new VPASA in July of this year¹ (2021) will provide a new opportunity to comprehensively address the Visiting Committee's recommendations to strengthen the HCC Commonwealth Honors Program.

On May 7, 2021, the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee voted to reapprove Holyoke Community College's Commonwealth Honors Program.

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 renewal of the membership of **Holyoke Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.

¹ This motion was intended to go before the BHE last year, but the pandemic impacted the timing.