

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION**

**COMMITTEE:** Academic Affairs

**NO.:** AAC 19-27

**COMMITTEE DATE:** June 11, 2019

**BOARD DATE:** June 18, 2019

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**RENEWAL OF BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY COLLEGE MEMBERSHIP IN THE  
COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM**

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Berkshire Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for six years, effective June 18, 2019.

**VOTED:** Motion approved by AAC 06/11/2019; Motion adopted by the BHE 06/18/2019

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

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## **BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**June 2019**

### **Berkshire Community College Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program**

#### **BACKGROUND**

This motion concerns the continuation of Berkshire 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**

Berkshire 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 March 11, 2019, the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) Review Committee conducted a day-long assessment of the Honors Program at Berkshire Community College (BCC). The Committee consisted of Ginger Hurajt, Honors Coordinator at Northern Essex Community College; Meredith Lind, Senior Assistant Dean at Commonwealth Honors College from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; and Hillary Sackett-Taylor, Honors Program Assistant Director at Westfield State University. Prior to the visit, the Committee reviewed the report prepared by BCC Honors Program Coordinator, Stacy Evans for the CHP application. The Committee applauds the BCC Honors Program for the report's clarity and detail. The campus visit allowed the Committee to further explore information furnished in the self-study; to speak at length with the Honors Program Coordinator, Professor Stacy Evans; to tour Program and campus facilities; to meet with Honors Program students, faculty and advisory committee members; and to discuss the role of the Honors Program with BCC's Vice President for Academic Affairs Jennifer Berne and President Ellen Kennedy.

The Visiting Committee unanimously offers a recommendation of re-approval of the CHP status for BCC's Honors Program, noting that students enrolled in the Program were "an energetic, diverse, creative and intellectually engaged group who take advantage of opportunities for independent inquiry guided by faculty who challenge them and share in their excitement." The Committee was impressed by the integration of CHP into the College's mission and the endorsement by President Kennedy of the Program's success.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. Publicity and Visibility: The Committee noted that the publicity and visibility of the Program could be improved on campus. The college website could feature Honors students' work/events/stories
2. CHP Transfer Benefits: The Committee recommended that the benefits of Commonwealth Honors Program transfer to four-year CHP institutions be made clearer to students.
3. Recruitment/Dedicated 1<sup>st</sup> Semester Course Offering: The Committee noted that current recruitment practices have moved to get students into the Honors Program in their 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. The Visiting Committee recommended that students be able to matriculate into the Program upon admission, and suggested reinstating a first-semester Honors course (e.g. a history course).
4. Faculty Course Release: The Committee recommends that the Honors Coordinator receive a 3/2 course reassignment as current 2/2 reassignment may be a constraint on the Program's ability to grow.
5. Student Aid: The Committee recommended an increase to student scholarship funding (e.g. tuition waiver or a bookstore gift card).
6. Student Engagement/Interdisciplinarity: The Committee recommended investing in team-taught colloquia to provide a true interdisciplinary experience for Honors students. The Committee also recommended inviting Honors course-related speakers to present at BCC's FORUM Program.

## **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE**

Berkshire Community College offered the following responses to the recommendations made by the Visiting Committee:

1. Publicity and Visibility: The institution has begun advertising their Honors Colloquium for Fall 19, Graphic Novel as Cultural Barometer, via newly installed screens in classroom buildings. This has already created more interest in the Program based on visits to the Honors Coordinator by prospective students. The institution also plans to work with marketing to make sure that the Program is regularly featured via website and social media platforms.

2. CHP Transfer Benefits: The institution includes CHP transfer information in all recruitment material and every advising appointment. The institution will also integrate this information into other communications (e.g., Honors lunches, post-admission emails) and continue to consider new venues to advertise and encourage intersystem transfer.
3. Recruitment: The institution does not currently have a sufficiently large first semester population to offer a dedicated course for new students. However, the institution is currently redesigning their online application to the College to integrate the Honors Program application into the process. Furthermore, the College plans to collect high school GPA electronically for all applicants to the college to do targeted recruiting of new students, which was unattainable in the past. This will allow for targeted recruiting of new students.
4. Faculty Course Release: The institution will consider the recommendation of course reassignment. Should current efforts to increase enrollment in the Program succeed, the 3/2 course reassignment will be revisited.
5. Student Aid: The institution's Honors Coordinator is working with the BCC Foundation to raise money for scholarships to be given to students who are entering the Program.
6. Student Engagement/Interdisciplinarity: Faculty who teach Honors courses are chosen with their discipline in consideration in order to provide a cross disciplinary approach. The faculty are also encouraged to use internal and external speakers in their courses. Additionally, the institution has the Honors Coordinator working with the Forum Coordinator to arrange for FORUMs that are aligned with Honors classes.

## 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 **Berkshire Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.