

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 16-29

COMMITTEE DATE: June 7, 2016

BOARD DATE: June 14, 2016

RENEWAL OF UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL 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 **University of Massachusetts Lowell** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for six years, effective June 14, 2016.

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

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June 2016

University of Massachusetts Lowell Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

BACKGROUND

This motion concerns the continuation of University of Massachusetts Lowell'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

University of Massachusetts Lowell 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. Approval procedures for new courses
9. Student enrollment for past three years
10. Approval procedures for new courses

REVIEW TEAM FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On March 1, 2016, review team members Rajini Srikanth, committee chair from University of Massachusetts Boston, Joanna Gonsalves from Salem State University, and David Kalival from Middlesex Community College. The Committee met with key constituencies, including Chancellor Jacqueline Moloney, Provost Don Pierson, Honors College Dean James Canning, Honors College staff, Honors faculty, Honors College students, members of the Honors Curriculum Committee and the Honors Thesis Committee, and internal partners representing the Library, Admissions, Residence Life, and the Registrar's Office.

The visiting committee highlighted the breathtaking growth of the program, the strong leadership of the Dean of the Honors College, and the unequivocal support of both the Chancellor and the Provost as characteristics of the Honors Program at the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

While the committee made some suggestions for improvement, the report stresses that these recommendations are in the spirit of enhancing a very high-functioning Honors College. The review team enthusiastically recommends that the University of Massachusetts Lowell continue to be granted Commonwealth Honors Program status and recommends the re-approval of the University of Massachusetts Lowell Honors Program.

Recommendations from the visiting committee included the following:

1. Increase the number of advising staff to meet the rapid growth of the program.
2. Hire a Senior Thesis or Senior Project Coordinator to ensure that more students complete the Honors senior thesis or project.
3. Increase staffing so that the Dean of the Honors College can turn his attention to strategic activities such as fundraising and establishing corporate and other kinds of relationships for internship and research opportunities for students.
4. Provide more support for transfer students to help them to integrate into the Honors curriculum and find a senior thesis mentor.
5. Expand space for the program in the form of a seminar room and expanded student areas for socializing and quiet study.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

The University of Massachusetts Lowell has already responded to several of the visiting committee's recommendations. In response to the need for additional staffing to meet the rapid growth of the program and with an eye to the ambitious objectives set forth in the self-study, the institution has posted to hire one additional staff member and has upgraded two part-time instructors to full-time status. Demonstrating a commitment to provide additional space to accommodate the program's growth, the University's Space and Planning Committee has been charged with the priority of allocating additional space to the Commonwealth Honors Program. While the visiting committee emphasized the five recommendations listed above, the institution also pledges to keep other recommendations included in the report in mind as it moves forward with the Strategic Plan.

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 **University of Massachusetts Lowell** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.