

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 19-29

COMMITTEE DATE: June 11, 2019

BOARD DATE: June 18, 2019

**RENEWAL OF WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY 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 **Worcester State University** 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.

Contact: Patricia A. Marshall, Ph.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success
Ignacio J. Chaparro, MPA, Project Specialist for Academic Affairs and Student Success

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

June 2019

Worcester State University Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

BACKGROUND

This motion concerns the continuation of Worcester State University'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

Worcester State University 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 26, 2019, the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) Visiting Committee conducted a day-long assessment of the Honors Program at Worcester State University (WSU). The Committee consisted of Vanessa Martinez, Professor of Anthropology/Honors Program Coordinator at Holyoke Community College; Scott Nowka, Professor of English/Honors Program Area Chair at Salem State University; and James Canning, Honors College Dean at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. The visit included meetings with Professor Meghna Dilip, faculty director of the Honors Program, the assistant faculty director, Professor Hugh Cleve Wiese, the deans of the university, Honors Program faculty and students, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Lois Wims, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs Henry Theriault, and University President Barry M. Maloney.

The Visiting Committee recommends the re-approval of the CHP status for WSU's Honors Program, calling it an "active, well-funded, and thriving" program. The Committee was impressed with the commitment of the students and faculty, as well as the full support of the administration.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. Continued Support: The Committee commended Professor Dilip and recommended that Professors Meghna Dilip and Hugh Cleve Wiese continue to be supported in their very effective leadership of the Honors Program.
2. Relocated Facilities: The Committee recommended that the Honors Program be moved to a larger and more prominent location on campus that is more suitable to the program's needs.
3. Expand Staff Capacity: The Committee noted the need for a full-time administrative assistant that is dedicated to supporting the Honors Program. The committee also noted that the appointment of the director and the assistant director should be expanded beyond a single year, as this short period of time hinders planning and could lead to disruptions in the program in the future.
4. Review Staff Responsibilities: The Committee recommended that the position description for the assistant director be reviewed to ensure it accurately reflects the full extent of the current responsibilities of the position. The committee also recommended an increase in the course reduction for the assistant director from one 3-credit course release per academic year to one 3-credit course release per semester. The additional course reduction is necessary to ensure that the assistant director is able to fulfill their responsibilities to the Honors Program.
5. Honors Course Offerings: The Committee recommended that WSU explore the possibility of offering more honors-designated courses and decreasing the reliance on honors embedded courses.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

Worcester State University offered the following responses to the recommendations made by the Visiting Committee:

1. Continued Support: The institution is carefully considering the recommendations as they strategically program with funds received from the estate of late alumnus and benefactor, Lt. Col. Sheehan – which were directed to the Honors Program and its students.
2. Relocated Facilities: The institution will review the recommendations and use them to inform the campus's interactions with architectural firm ARC, which is designing the May Street Building renovation.
3. Expand Staff Capacity: The institution did not directly respond regarding a full time administrative assistant and long-term appointments (beyond a year) of its director and assistant director.

4. Review Staff Responsibilities: The institution appreciates the Committee's input regarding compensation for the assistant director position, and reviews the awarding of alternative professional responsibility credit across similar titles and responsibilities, as well as adherence to provisions of the MSCA contract.
5. Honors Course Offerings: The institution's Director of CHP has developed a proposal for a sophomore-level seminar and will be working with department chairs to develop additional honors sections/courses.

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 **Worcester State University** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.