

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 22-60

BOARD DATE: June 21, 2022

RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM FOR MOUNT WACHUSETT COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Mount Wachusett 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

Mount Wachusett Community College Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

BACKGROUND

This motion concerns the continuation of Mount Wachusett Community College's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program in accordance with the Commonwealth Honors Program Guidelines. Once the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) 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

Mount Wachusett Community College prepared a self-study document presenting its Honors Program structure and operation in terms of the CHP 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 November 5, 2020, the CHP Visiting Committee (Visiting Committee) conducted a day-long review of the Mount Wachusett Community College (hereafter MWCC) Honors Program, via Zoom, having previously received and studied MWCC's application for reapproval of CHP status. The Visiting Committee consisted of John Diffley, Honors Coordinator at Springfield Technical Community College; Meredith Feltus, Director of Development & External Relations Commonwealth Honors College; and Catherine Buell, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Mathematics, and Coordinator of the Honors Program at Fitchburg State University. Prior to the visit, the Visiting Committee received and studied MWCC's application for reaccreditation of CHP status.

The virtual site visit was hosted and organized by Honors Program Coordinator Daniel Soucy. The site visit team met with the Honors Faculty members, the Honors Committee, and Honors Students. One Honors faculty member provided a letter in support of the program prior to the Review Team's visit due to teaching commitments. Additionally, the Site Visit Review team met with the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Dr. Paul Hernandez. The visit concluded with an exit interview with MWCC President, Dr. James Vander Hooven.

The Visiting Committee was impressed with dedication and commitment by the CHP Coordinator, who goes above and beyond for the benefit of students, with the strong group of engaged and dedicated faculty, and with the institutional commitment to retention and completion for Honors students through a final-semester tuition waiver. The Visiting Committee also identified the following commendations for the MWCC Honors Program:

- The program's four required honors courses exceed the Commonwealth Honors Program's minimum three required honors courses for community college Honors Programs.
- Strong program recruitment and advocacy efforts by the CHP Coordinator were cited by several students as the reasons they joined the program. The coordinator also proactively built relationships with the Pathways Early College and Gateway programs on campus and identified those students as likely candidates for the Honors Program.
- Clear student-centered approach on the part of the Coordinator and faculty.
- Broad range of student disciplines and projects.
- Student enthusiasm about component courses and faculty receptiveness to student requests to add an honors component to an existing class.
- Program innovation, in particular the pilot of new Honors English 102. The MWCC Honors Program is also in the early stages of exploring a potential pilot honors course in a STEM field.

The Visiting Committee was impressed by the MWCC Honors Program and recommends, without reservation, that the Mount Wachusett Commonwealth Honors Program be granted re-approval.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. Clarify the Honors Curriculum: The Honors Program website listing and the self-study's description of the curriculum are unclear regarding requirements and the number of requirements. Simplify the requirement language and include statements about flexibility and substitutions on the website and in marketing materials to aid in the recruitment and retention of students. Consider adding the Honors Program as a "Concentration" or "Certification" or "Minor" in the Degree Works program or Advisor Link to provide clarity to students and advisors alike.

2. Increase Administrative Support: The Honors Coordinator who, as the strength to the program, is heavily involved in recruiting, retention, advising, and organizing Honors courses and contracts, needs additional administrative support.
3. Connect the Honors Program Effectively to Admissions, Marketing and Academic Affairs: Increased communication is needed between the Honors Coordinator and Admissions about the Honors Program. The Honors Coordinator should be invited to academic affairs meetings regarding marketing, admissions, and curriculum to overcome the obstacles of the unique organizational structure of these various divisions. Streamlined interactions between the Honors Coordinator, Advising, and Admissions are needed to:
 - a. Clarify the pathways into Honors through the Admissions process via improved applications and communication with the Honors Coordinator.
 - b. Increase education and communication regarding the Honors Program with Professional Advisors to include the Honors Coordinator.
 - c. Improve the current recruitment process which is mostly done through student-to-student communication or through a select group of faculty recommendations. Through better marketing and communication to faculty and advisors, students could be recruited through more avenues including introductory mathematics and writing courses.
4. Growing and Maintaining the Honors Program: Now that the Honors Program appears to be returning to a healthy and sustainable level of students after a drop-off in enrollment, the primary focus should be on retention. The site visit team does not directly recommend the program grow substantially; however, if it does, then the team highly recommends MWCC continue to offer the tuition waiver for the final semester, support courses running with smaller numbers (or with pilot programs), increase the budget, and increase the support and aid to the Honors Coordinator.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

MWCC responded saying it developed a detailed action plan to address each of the recommendations for program improvement. The president expressed his commitment to giving the Honors Coordinator and his team full support as they work to satisfy all of the recommendations outlined above.

On May 5, 2022, the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee voted to reapprove Mount Wachusett 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 **Mount Wachusett Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.