

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Assessment and Accountability **NO.:** AAC 07-37

COMMITTEE DATE: June 6, 2007

BOARD DATE: June 14, 2007

MOVED: **RENEWAL OF UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON
MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM**
The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the
Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and renews
University of Massachusetts Boston's membership in the
Commonwealth Honors Program for six years effective June 14, 2007.

Authority: Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines as
Revised by the Board of Higher Education in November, 2006.

Contact: Francesca B. Purcell, Ph.D., Director for Academic Policy

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

June 2007

University of Massachusetts Boston

Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

Background

This motion concerns the continuation of University of Massachusetts Boston'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 Executive Committee. The report of the Committee shall be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education for approval. This is the first renewal cycle for the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

The University Honors Program at UMass Boston is a University-wide program, and students from all majors in every college are eligible to join. The program currently enrolls over 200 students and offers unique honors courses as well as a variety of educational, service, social, and advising opportunities.

Review Process

University of Massachusetts Boston prepared a self-study document presenting the Honors Program's structure and operations in terms of the Commonwealth Honors Program requirements. The report provided evidence documenting fulfillment of the following criteria:

1. Alignment of the mission and goals of the Honors Program with those of the University of Massachusetts Boston
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 April 20, 2007, a review team (Doreen Arcus, Director, Honors Program, University of Massachusetts Lowell; Stacy Evans, Coordinator, Honors Program, Berkshire Community College; and Sandra Nearing, Director, Honors Program, Bridgewater State College), appointed by the Commonwealth Honors Council, conducted the review. Prior to the on-campus visit, the team reviewed the self-evaluation prepared by the University.

On the basis of the campus visit, the review of the self-evaluation, and the materials provided received during the on-campus visit, the team noted the University Honors Program is an excellent Honors Program and a credit to the CHP. Special mention was made of UMass Boston's focus on diversity and interdisciplinarity. The review team recommended to the Commonwealth Honors Executive Committee that it renew University of Massachusetts Boston's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program.

The reviewers made suggestions in the areas of student involvement, additional resources, and curriculum modifications. In regard to student involvement, the review team suggested continued outreach to diverse students and urban high schools, formulation, enhanced accommodations to non-traditional students (e.g., extended hours for honors center; flexibility of funding), and increased student representation on the advisory board. The team called for an increase in funding for undergraduate research; for faculty serving as a major grants coordinator during the summer; and for outside speakers. In regard to the curriculum, the review team suggested that UMass Boston review the core competencies for the junior seminar and consider the use of a common text, develop a long-range plan for the international field experience, and clarify departmental honors versus honors program graduation requirements. The team also suggested that UMass Boston clarify the strategies for gaining new faculty involvement in the Honors Program.

Response

University of Massachusetts Boston acknowledged the team's concerns and responded that the campus is developing a plan for increasing the availability of services for evening students, including better access to the Honors Center and other services. In addition, the Honors staff will work with the Financial Aid office and Student Employment to identify ways to provide students with aid that can be used for the summer courses. UMass Boston stated that the Honors Program will work with the colleges to identify, catalog and publicize departmental and other funding sources for undergraduate research. In addition, as part of the FY2008 budget process, the University will give serious consideration to the Honors Program's request for increased funding.

The Director and Associate Director will continue to refine the methodologies and objectives for the Junior Colloquium and will discuss the use of a common text with faculty who are scheduled to teach the Junior Colloquium for the next four semesters. They will also clarify the difference between departmental honors and honors program graduation requirements. The University agrees that a more systematic process for identifying teaching faculty is wise. In addition to following up on faculty suggestions, the Director will make regular and formal presentations at chairs' meetings of the various colleges to widen the network of available faculty.

University of Massachusetts Boston will provide a status report on its response at the spring 2008 Commonwealth Honors Council meeting.

Recommendation

Board 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 University of Massachusetts Boston's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program.