

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Assessment and Accountability **NO.:** AAC 09-30
COMMITTEE DATE: May 29, 2009
BOARD DATE: June 4, 2009

**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 4, 2009.

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

Contact: Francesca B. Purcell, Ph.D., Associate Commissioner for Academic
and P-16 Policy

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June 2009

University of Massachusetts Lowell

Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

Background

This motion concerns the continuation of the University of Massachusetts Lowell membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP). 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. This is the first renewal cycle for the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Review Process

The University of Massachusetts Lowell prepared a self-study document presenting its Honors Program 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 University of Massachusetts Lowell
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 November 8, 2008, a review team (Rajini Srikanth, Director, Honors Program, University of Massachusetts Boston; Ginger Hurajt, Director, Honors Program, Northern Essex Community College; Lisa Krissoff Boehm, Director, Honors Program, Worcester State College) appointed by the Commonwealth Honors Council conducted the six-year review. Prior to the on-campus visit, the team reviewed the self-evaluation prepared by the College. The site visit was hosted and organized by Professor Doreen Arcus. The team also met with Honors Committee members, faculty and students.

On the basis of the campus visit, the review of the self-evaluation, and the materials received during the on-campus visit, the team concluded that the University of Massachusetts Lowell

Honors Program substantially satisfies the CHP criteria. The review team recommended to the Commonwealth Honors Executive Committee that it renew the membership of University of Massachusetts Lowell in the Commonwealth Honors Program.

Institutional Response

The University of Massachusetts Lowell (UML) responded to the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: *Move gradually toward centralizing the honors curriculum and exercising greater oversight of honors course content and pedagogy.*

UML is in the process of moving toward a more centralized curriculum, which has become feasible due to the growth in the program over the last four years (from 140 to 300 students). Courses offered specifically by the honors program are now listed under an *Intercollegiate Arts and Science Courses* designation along with a variety of other interdisciplinary courses. This is the first step toward greater oversight of honors course content and pedagogy as proposals for seminar topics will be approved by the honors council. This represents additional funds for the honors program, (in supporting additional faculty release time), a strategic investment to which UML is committed.

Recommendation 2: *Articulate what it means to be in Honors through holding a special convocation for Honors students.*

The Honors Program began their annual HOP (Honors Orientation Program) in 2007. UML will build on this event to incorporate an address from the Chancellor's office beginning Fall, 2009.

Recommendation 3: *Increase funding for undergraduate research.*

While increased funding is a challenge, the University is committed to continuing the Annual Student Research Symposium which is sponsored by the Honors Program, and providing adequate funding for the event as it grows to offer better inclusion of the humanities and fine arts. As UML is re-examining the role of University Councils, including the Council on Research, the Honors Director will be involved with the reconfigured entity to represent undergraduate research needs across the curriculum.

Recommendation 4: *Reinstate and fund the position of Associate Director to help the Director with strategic planning and program development*

Although fiscal constraints do not allow for this change at this time, UML is committed to supporting the continued growth of the Honors Program and will continue to revisit this recommendation until such time as the budget will allow it. In the meantime, UML has added a graduate assistant (18 hours/week) to the Honors Office and plans to add another technical graduate assistant dedicated to the Annual Research Symposium beginning in FY10.

Recommendation 5: *Continue outreach to diverse students through the National Science Foundation's Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation (LSAMP) scholarships to Honors minority students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields.*

The Honors Director and the Program Coordinator have been actively engaged in LSAMP planning and have worked closely with admissions to ensure that all students who are willing to challenge themselves academically feel welcomed by the Honors Program. They are also participating in pipeline activities, including Research Symposium invitations to students at Middlesex Community College (via LSAMP) and to Lowell and Lawrence High Schools (via admissions).

Recommendation 6: *Explain clearly the value of the honors workshop to science and engineering and creative arts students.*

The Honors Director has conducted Q&A sessions at the honors workshop classes to clarify the common honors threads across disciplines. In addition, an FAQ section is being prepared for the Honors Website to address questions that students had at these sessions. The program also holds a meeting for all rising seniors in spring of their junior year to provide an overview of the upcoming thesis and relate it to the content of the Honors Workshop. Finally, the Honors Director has been awarded a small grant from the Council on Teaching and Learning to develop faculty resources for teaching in the Honors Program, some of which will be relevant to the Honors Workshop.

Recommendation 7: *Evaluate the requirement to attend three extracurricular enrichment events per semester; assess the ease or difficulty of enforcing the requirement at the end of AY 2009-10*

In consultation with the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, this requirement was modified to one extracurricular enrichment event. Student feedback will become part of the assessment in AY 2009-10.

Recommendation 8: *Build on the success of the newly reinstated Honors Fellows Fundraising gala to cultivate large donors.*

At the recommendation of the vice-chancellor for advancement, the honors fellows fundraising gala has been designated a bi-annual event. The importance of the honors program to the strategic growth of the University clearly requires continued collaboration with Advancement, for example, in procuring sponsorship for events such as the Annual Student Research Symposium and an Annual Honors Distinguished Lecture Series, and adding to the Honors Fellows Scholarship endowment. Historically, the office for advancement has operated primarily on a college basis—i.e., gifts officers dedicated to individual colleges—which put intercollegiate programs such as honors at risk of slipping through the cracks. Reinstating the honors fellows fundraising gala was one way of bringing the needs of the honors program back into focus in advancement, and UML is committed to continuing and strengthening that support.

Recommendation 9: *Provide a specially designated study area for Honors students on both the North and South campus to facilitate the development of learning communities and intellectual camaraderie.*

Space is a critical need everywhere on campus, and the state Division of Capital Asset Management (DCAM) is currently conducting a thorough review of facilities. The DCAM team met for several hours with the Honors Director and Coordinator to understand the need for such space on both North and South campus in light of the constraints of the current Honors office on

North. Based on their recommendations, the University will enhance Honors Office space and create dedicated Honors Student space on both campuses with all deliberate speed.

Recommendation 10: *Increase resources for web management.*

The Provost Office will provide support for web management this spring to update the Honors website. UML intends to add a technical graduate assistant to the honors office who will have responsibility for the Annual Student Research Symposium as well as ongoing web support. Additional faculty resources will be developed with the Teaching and Learning grant.

Recommendation 11: *Fund the position of major fellowships coordinator to enhance UML's national visibility.*

Although the current budget does not support instituting such a position, UML is cognizant of the advantages it would offer and of its natural fit with the Honors Program. UML will continue to revisit this recommendation until such time as the budget will allow for this strategic investment.

Recommendation 12: *Evaluate the structure of the Advisory Committee to increase efficiency and participation. Add a member from the Development office to the Advisory Committee, so that Honors Program priorities are in the forefront of the institution's fundraising efforts.*

Beginning this year, the honors director meets regularly with the vice provost for undergraduate education and attends weekly academic council meetings with members of the provost's office, the deans, and representatives from admissions, student affairs, the registrar's office, and the office for institutional research. Current members of the honors program—one from each department—will be replaced with a faculty member from each college/division as appointed by the dean. A member of the advancement office will be included as will student representation. This more efficient Honors Council will begin in Fall 2009.

University of Massachusetts Lowell will provide a status report on its response at the spring 2010 Commonwealth Honors Council meeting.

Recommendation

Board of Higher Education staff thoroughly reviewed all documentation received from the CHP Executive Committee and recommends that the Board approve the renewal of the membership of the University of Massachusetts Lowell in the Commonwealth Honors Program.