

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 16-30

COMMITTEE DATE: June 7, 2016

BOARD DATE: June 14, 2016

**RENEWAL OF WESTFIELD 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 **Westfield State University** 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

Westfield State University Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

BACKGROUND

This motion concerns the continuation of Westfield 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

Westfield 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. 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 19, 2015, review team members Diane Sabato, Honors Program Coordinator at Springfield Technical Community College, Susan Edgerton, Honors Program Director at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and Meredith Lind, Executive Director of the Commonwealth Honors College at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, conducted a site visit of the Honors Program at Westfield State University (WSU). The Committee spent the day meeting with key constituencies, including the Honors Program Director, Dr. Glen Brewster, Honors Program Assistant Director, Vanessa Diana, faculty who teach honors courses, honors students, the Honors Advisory Committee, the Interim Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Dr. Diane Prusank, and the Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Marcia Marotta.

The committee highlighted the positive changes that have taken place over the past few years in the WSU Honors Program, in terms of increases in program enrollment, increases in the number of students completing honors projects, and increases in funding for programming. The visiting committee confirmed that the Westfield State Honors Program provides an enriched course of study for talented and motivated students at the college and that the Chair, faculty, students, and administration are committed to its growth and ongoing excellence. The visiting committee unanimously agreed that the Westfield State Honors Program meets the criteria for a Commonwealth Honors Program, and recommends that its Commonwealth Honors Program status be re-approved.

The visiting committee offers the following list of recommendations that will strengthen what is an already high-quality program:

1. Strengthen the honors program administration with full time clerical support.
2. Explore fundraising as an avenue to establish Honors Program scholarships.
3. Seek funding to replace the lost SGA funds for student conference travel.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

Westfield State University offered the following responses to the three recommendations made by the visiting team:

1. The institution is currently working to increase the administrative support for the Honors Program.
2. The Honors Program was notified that the Office of Advancement has identified the first scholarship devoted to students in the Honors Program, the Presidential Honors Scholarship, in the amount of \$4300 per year. The institution is pleased with the initial success of this fundraising and plans to continue these efforts.
3. Westfield State University has established a Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Work, and funding for student travel to present their research will now be allocated on a consistent basis through the Center.

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