

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION**

**NO.:** BHE 25-48

**BOARD DATE:** June 17, 2025

---

**RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM FOR MASSASOIT COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Massasoit Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for seven years, effective June 17, 2025.

**VOTED:** Motion adopted by the BHE on 6/17/2025.

**Authority:** Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines as Revised by the Board of Higher Education in March 2022; G.L. c. 15A, § 9.

**Contact:** Richard Riccardi, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success  
Keith M. Connors, Program Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success

# **BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**June 2025**

## **Massasoit Community College Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program**

### **BACKGROUND**

This motion concerns the continuation of Massasoit Community College's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program in accordance with the Commonwealth Honors Program Guidelines. Once Commonwealth Honors Program 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**

Massasoit Community College 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 February 7, 2025, the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) Visiting Committee (Visiting Committee) conducted a day-long, in-person assessment of the Massasoit Community College's (MCC) Honors Program. The Visiting Committee consisted of Kate Martin, Coordinator of the Honors Program at Cape Cod Community College, and Chair of the Visiting Committee; Dr. Emma Downs, Assistant Honors Coordinator at Fitchburg State University; and Jennifer Whitten-Woodring, Dean of the Honors College at UMass Lowell. Prior to the visit, the Visiting Committee received and studied MCC's application for reaccreditation of CHP status. The site visit was hosted and organized by the program's co-coordinators Professors David LaFontaine and Panteha Sanati. The visit featured meetings with interim President William Mitchell; Vice President of Academic Affairs Gail Gibson; Dean of Liberal Studies and the Arts, Rita Jones-Hyde;

members of the Honors Council and Honors Faculty; as well as current and graduated Commonwealth Honors Scholars.

The Visiting Committee, in their report, commended MCC's Honors Program in several areas. These commendations included MCC's clearly articulated mission that focuses on its purpose to "create enriched educational opportunities" including offering "small classes and independent research" to ensure learning is available to students who demonstrate academic talent, its financial and academic support to help meet the needs of their community's populations, and its enrichment opportunities among other commendations. The Visiting Committee, finding MCC CHP satisfied all criteria, recommends reapproval in spite of the limited course offerings (all courses are offered by the English Department) making it challenging for students from other majors or with different academic strengths to complete the program.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. Provide at least quarter-time designated administrative support for the program to help with budget and event planning,
2. Increase the number of Honors-designated courses beyond the four prescribed, to include other disciplines including STEM,
3. Aim for broader options in other disciplines to meet the Honors Seminar requirement to increase access to the Honors Program,
4. Lower the minimum grade for eligibility to Honors courses to a B, to align with the GPA requirement and allow for increased access, in keeping with the Massachusetts Department of Education's equity agenda,
5. Expand extracurricular activities to take advantage of area offerings, such as museums and libraries.

## **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE**

MCC offered the following responses to the recommendations made by the Visiting Committee:

1. Provide at least quarter-time designated administrative support for the program to help with budget and event planning: The CHP at Massasoit receives administrative support directly from the Academic Affairs Office. The program has support from several administrative assistants to help with day-to-day issues, paperwork, CHP emails, student outreach, and event planning.
2. Increase the number of Honors-designated courses beyond the four prescribed, to include other disciplines including STEM: The CHP at Massasoit is collaborating with the STEM division to pilot a science course that includes up to five honors seats for fall 2026.

MCC is also in the process of securing a stipend for professors interested in having honors seats in their courses. The stipend would compensate them for their additional mentoring and research time with the honors students. In spring 2026, MCC plans to open additional seats, possibly the Business division.

In conjunction with piloting the approach above as a way to offer additional courses across the academic divisions, the co-chairs and honors council will review their project process to incorporate additional ways students can submit their research. The revisions will allow a broader approach that is more appropriate to courses outside of Liberal Studies and the Arts.

3. Aim for broader options in other disciplines to meet the Honors Seminar requirement to increase access to the Honors Program: MCC is in agreement with this recommendation and is reviewing the process for creating additional seminar courses. As a way of example, MCC said it may be able to create a single course number with a rotating theme to offer students more variety. MCC is also considering making multiple courses in different divisions that also allow for rotating themes. MCC is considering these strategies towards its goal of offering a variety of options for the seminar course in order to incorporate other disciplines.
4. Lower the minimum grade for eligibility to Honors courses to a B, to align with the GPA requirement and allow for increased access. The program is weighing several options in this area to increase access to the program. These options include a) changing the minimum entrance grade through English Comp I to a B and b) creating an open admissions process for a student's first honors course. Once the decision is made, MCC will update its data pulls, marketing materials, and webpage to better reach possible honors student.
5. Expand extracurricular activities to take advantage of area offerings, such as museums and libraries: MCC's proposed budget for next year incorporates several options for extracurricular activities including a possible trip to the MFA, the Boston Public Library, and honors speakers. In addition, its current honors students will be travelling to UMass Lowell for an honors conference.

On April 11, 2025, the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee voted to reapprove Massasoit 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 **Massasoit Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.