

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION**

**NO.:** BHE 25-49

**BOARD DATE:** June 17, 2025

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

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee and renews the membership of **North Shore 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  
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# **BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**June 2025**

## **North Shore Community College Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program**

### **BACKGROUND**

This motion concerns the continuation of North Shore 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**

North Shore 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 December 2, 2024, the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) Visiting Committee (Visiting Committee) conducted a day-long, in-person assessment of the North Shore Community College's (NSCC) Honors Program. The Visiting Committee consisted of Jean Kennedy, Coordinator of the Honors Program at Quinsigamond Community College, and Chair of the Visiting Committee; Leonard Von Morze, Interim Dean of the Honors College at UMass Boston; and Kimberly Poitevin, Chair of the Honors College at Salem State University. Prior to the visit, the Visiting Committee received and studied NSCC's application for reaccreditation of CHP status. The site visit was held at the Danvers campus and hosted Dr. Tiffany Magnolia, Interim Dean of Liberal Studies and outgoing Honors Program Coordinator. The visit featured meetings with incoming Honors Program Coordinator, William (Billy) Jackson, Jennifer Harris, Professor of

Behavioral Science and Faculty Fellow for the Honors Program, an Honors student, three faculty who teach in the Honors Program and the NSCC President and Interim Provost.

The Visiting Committee, in their report, commended NSCC's Honors Program in several areas. These commendations included strong program leadership with a solid succession plan for change in leadership, the addition of a faculty fellow for enhancing program recruitment and advising, the planned creation of an Honors Center in the Learning Commons, the intrusive student advising model, the open admission policy leading to significant increases in student enrollments, redevelopment of the Honors Contract Form that includes faculty mentor instructions, new team-taught Honors Seminars allowing students the opportunity to develop rich critical thinking skills, and faculty commitment and enthusiasm for teaching Honors Seminar.

The Visiting Committee was impressed by the Honors Program at NSCC and recommends, without reservation, that NSCC's Honors Program be granted re-approval.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. *Increasing student enrollment* - the site visit team suggests that a clear vision for the increase includes program goals, incremental course offerings and other programming offerings (activities). The coordinator should work with the Admissions Office to allow more students to begin their time at North Shore as Honors students. (Students who join the program later may have a more difficult time completing the course requirements for Honors Scholar). A significant obstacle to increased enrollment is the fact that the Office of Admissions does not generate information about the prior GPAs of entering students. The ability for Honors to identify high-achieving high school students would allow the program to offer automatic admission to students who are likely to benefit from Honors and thus allow more new students to begin their studies at NSCC as Honors students
2. *Increasing the budget in alignment with increased enrollments while also assessing fundraising challenges* - With the goal of increasing enrollment to 100 students, budgetary needs will likely shift, particularly if the program begins to offer more extracurricular activities for students. The site visiting team suggests that the new leadership anticipate budgetary needs as enrollment increases. In addition to budgetary needs the program may wish to assess the challenges in fundraising that is primarily used for scholarship support for students.
3. *Creation of the program's own mission statement* - It may be in the interest of the program to create its own mission statement that focuses on the program goals and inspirations for the students joining the program, including a vision (3–5-year program development plan) as the leadership in the program transitions and sets the stage for the next seven years of development (prior to the next re-approval).
4. *Elevation of program branding* - The site visit team understands the limitations on marketing imposed by college-wide branding, but some visual distinctiveness for Honors

Program might provide helpful publicity, e.g., a specific Honor program video on the program linked on the college's website may prove helpful or another form of media within the college.

5. *Creating dedicated space* - During the Library and Learning Commons tour the site visiting team was shown the open space that is projected to serve as an Honors Center. This dedicated space will build visibility for the Honors program, allow Honors Students to build community, and enhance students' identity as Honors students
6. *Evaluate communication platforms* – where the Discord platform is used by students it would be beneficial to learn how it might impact student retention and investment in the program. The self-study suggested that a survey be conducted to determine students' availability and interest in engaging in social activities through the Honors Program.
7. *Diversify research options* -e.g., engineering program vs humanities. The program has established clear guidelines and a strong mechanism for allowing students to pursue Honors Projects in non-honors courses, but faculty (especially adjunct faculty) need to buy into the process. It was reported during the site visit that they are reluctant to take on this work even though they are compensated.
8. *Develop new Honors Seminars* – New Honors Seminars need development moving forward as several of them have been offered for 10+ years. Offering new topics as well as inviting new faculty to participate in the Honors will only expand honors visibility on campus.

## **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE**

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

1. Increasing student enrollment: NSCC commits to developing a clear vision for increasing enrollment, which includes collaborating with the Admissions Office to identify high-achieving students earlier. It will explore how to obtain and utilize data on applicant GPAs to facilitate this process along with strategies to retain current students in the program.
2. Increasing the budget in alignment with increased enrollments: As NSCC aims to increase enrollment to 100 students, it will proactively assess its budgetary needs. It will seek additional funding sources to support scholarships and extracurricular activities for its students. College administration supports the goal of enrollment expansion and the resources necessary to achieve it.
3. Creation of the program's own mission statement: NSCC recognizes the suggestion to create a dedicated mission statement for the CHP. It plans to develop this in conjunction with a comprehensive 3-5 year program development plan, ensuring it aligns with both

NSCC's mission and the aspirations of our Honors students. This plan will contain a vision for how to realize our aspiring growth.

4. Elevation of program branding: NSCC plans to develop a dedicated video for the Honors Program page on the college website. This video will showcase student experiences, faculty insights, and program highlights, enhancing visibility and attracting prospective students.
5. Create dedicated space: NSCC is excited about the projected Honors Center in the Learning Commons. It recognizes the space being pivotal in enhancing community among Honors students and increasing visibility for the program
6. Evaluate communication platforms: NSCC will conduct a survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the Discord platform for student engagement and retention. This feedback will help it refine its approach to fostering community within the program.
7. Diversity research options: To address faculty reluctance regarding Honors Projects, NSCC will enhance communication about the benefits of these projects for both students and faculty, especially adjunct faculty. It will also explore ways to support faculty in taking on these additional responsibilities.
8. Curriculum Development: NSCC will prioritize the development of new Honors Seminars to keep its curriculum fresh and engaging. It will also invite new faculty to contribute, broadening the scope of topics offered

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