

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION**

**NO.:** BHE 26-59

**BOARD DATE:** May 19, 2026

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

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education accepts the report and recommendation of the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Berkshire Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for seven years, effective July 1, 2026.

**VOTED:** Motion adopted by the BHE on 5/19/2026.

**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**

**May 2026**

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

### **BACKGROUND**

This motion concerns the continuation of Berkshire 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 and recommendation of the Committee shall be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education for approval.

### **REVIEW PROCESS**

Berkshire 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 October 3, 2025, the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) Visiting Committee (Visiting Committee) conducted a day-long, in-person assessment of the Berkshire Community College (BCC) Honors Program. The Visiting Committee was comprised of Dr. Binnur Ercem, Director of the Honors Program at Middlesex Community College, and Chair of the Visiting Committee; Dr. Jenny Shanahan, Assistant Provost and Coordinator of the Commonwealth Honors College at Bridgewater State University; and Dominick Usher, Senior Assistant Dean of the Commonwealth Honors College at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Prior to the visit the Visiting Committee reviewed the report prepared by BCC Honors Program Coordinator, Professor Christopher Laney, as part of the Commonwealth Honors application. The Visiting Committee found the self-study to be thorough in addressing all CHC criteria for Honors Program approval and commend the BCC Honors Program for the report's clarity and

detail. The campus visit provided the Visiting Committee with the opportunity to further examine the information presented in the self-study; to engage in extended discussions with Professor Laney; to tour the program and campus facilities; to meet with Honors Program students, faculty, and advisory board members; and to speak with Vice President for Academic Affairs, Laurie Gordy, and President Ellen Kennedy about the role of the Honors Program at BCC.

The Visiting Committee identified the following commendations for BCC's Honors Program:

1. Strong Leadership: the Coordinator, Professor Christopher Laney, has made significant progress in expanding the program, with particular emphasis on promoting equity and accessibility. He has developed strong connections with students, many of whom attested to his dedicated leadership in their success within the program. Serving as the sole director, he has effectively guided the program and contributed to a measurable increase in student participation in honors courses.
2. Dedicated Faculty: the Honors faculty contribute to the program's strength by offering innovative and intellectually rigorous courses, as well as creative approaches to instruction. They demonstrate enthusiasm for developing new honors courses and mentoring students through honors projects.
3. Strong Institutional Support: the Honors Program benefits from strong institutional support, as emphasized by both Vice President Gordy and President Kennedy. In her endorsement, President Kennedy remarked, "Berkshire Community College Honors Scholars Program is a cornerstone of academic excellence at BCC. It not only prepares students for successful transfer to four-year institutions, but also toward making meaningful contributions to their communities and professions."
4. Accessible Entry Points: the inclusion of gateway courses has created accessible entry points into the Honors Program, making it easier for students to participate and engage with honors opportunities early in their academic pathways.
5. Ready List of Courses: the development of an honors component-ready list of courses is an innovative strategy that helps motivate students to enroll in honors coursework and encourages greater participation in the program.
6. Diverse Student Body: the Honors students exemplify the program's success: a diverse, dynamic, and intellectually curious community who deeply appreciate how the Honors experience has enhanced their learning. Their excitement for independent research opportunities and for the dedicated faculty who challenge, inspire, and support them highlights the program's meaningful impact.

The success of the BCC Honors Program is evident. The Visiting Committee unanimously recommended its re-approval as a Commonwealth Honors Program institution.

The Visiting Committee offered the following recommendations to continue strengthening BCC's Honors Program:

1. Data Collection: the program would benefit from robust data collection practices and the use of student success and demographics information to guide informed decisions about program growth, course offerings, and continuous improvement initiatives.

2. Coordinator Compensation: it is recommended that the stipend increase awarded to the coordinator this year be maintained. The coordinator's responsibilities, particularly projects that require additional time—such as marketing and communications, website development, collaboration with advisors, development of co-curricular opportunities, student leadership and employment initiatives, and outreach and recruitment—warrant continued recognition and support. Since the Coordinator's reassigned time is less than the one-half teaching load recommended by the CHC, an annual stipend of \$5,500 for winter intersession and summer work, would be commensurate with another course release.
3. Program Alignment: it is recommended that the program consider aligning its admission and graduation GPA requirements with the Commonwealth Honors College statewide standard of 3.2, ensuring consistency and comparability across honors programs.
4. Terminology Changes: the Visiting Committee supported the idea of changing the name of the "Colloquium" courses to "Seminars," reflecting current academic terminology and more accurately conveying the nature of the course.
5. Honors Contract: it is recommended that the program consider replacing the 1-credit honors component, taken concurrently with a 3-credit course, with an honors contract, similar to the practice used by other Commonwealth Honors Programs.
6. Honors Scholarships: while acknowledging the program's efforts to increase honors scholarships, it is recommended that additional support is provided for students presenting at MassURC, such as assistance with poster printing and transportation to and from UMass Amherst.
7. Mission Alignment: it is recommended that the Honors Program consider aligning its mission statement more closely with the college's overall mission, particularly to highlight and reflect ongoing efforts in diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

## **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE**

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

1. Data Collection: The Honors Coordinator, VPAA, Registrar, and Office of Institutional Effectiveness are meeting this semester to identify ways to improve the collection and use of data. A new process will be in place by Spring 2026.
2. Coordinator Compensation: Given the growth of the program, and the commensurate increases in time spent by the coordinator in Summer and Intersession, the College supports the stipend to recognize the year-round nature of the position, and to make it feasible to work on long-term projects during these off-contract times.
3. Program Alignment: This is on the agenda for the next meeting of the Honors Advisory Board, for discussion and a vote on making this change. If this change is approved, it could be implemented starting with the Fall 2026 semester.
4. Terminology Changes: The Honors Advisory Board has approved this change. The Honors Coordinator will work to effect the necessary revisions in the catalog, course

syllabi and descriptions, student communications, and marketing materials, with anticipated completion by Fall 2026.

5. Honors Contract: Conversations with the Registrar are underway, and the Honors Coordinator is seeking more information from the Registrars at other institutions.
6. Honors Scholarships: Funding for assisting students with these costs has been added to the program budget, and Honors students have this support for the conferences, including the BCC Scholars Day Conference and MassURC.
7. Mission Alignment: While the mission of the Honors Program is closely aligned with the mission and values of the College, the Honors Program written mission statement needs to be revised to reflect this more clearly. The Honors Advisory Board will form a subcommittee in Spring 2026, tasked with drafting a revised mission statement. It is anticipated that the new mission statement will be ready by the Spring 2027 semester.

On April 10, 2026, the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee voted to recommend reapproval of Berkshire 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 **Berkshire Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.