



Douglass Seaton

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Honors Program Policy Committee (HPPC) – Report to the Faculty Senate, April 2017

The Committee

Before anything else, it is important to recognize the members of the Honors Program Policy Committee, who this year have accepted an unprecedentedly demanding challenge and accomplished remarkable work. The HPPC members are Bridgett Birmingham, Ravindran Chella, Ed Hilinski, Jane Lo, Daniel Maier-Katkin, Paul Marty, Chad Marzen, Lynn Panton, Douglass Seaton (Chair), and Mark Kearley (Director of Honors, *ex officio*). The HPPC has met much more frequently than in past years, and the members have contributed with impressive energy, creativity, and critical reflection. They well deserve hearty gratitude from the Senate and the University faculty. In addition, Dean of Undergraduate Studies Karen Laughlin met frequently with the HPPC and offered critical support and advice.

Situation and problems

At the beginning of the 2016–2017 academic year the HPPC found itself confronted by an Honors Program that had struggled for a long time. The Committee’s challenge was to revitalize what everyone should hope would stand as a jewel in the crown of the University.

- A year and a half had passed since the Program had received a very negative consultant’s review.
- A new Director of the Honors Program had been appointed, Dr. Mark Kearley, from the FSU Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry.
- Each year Honors had to recruit faculty to teach courses on an ad hoc basis, usually with commitments limited to just one offering of one course. Some funds were available to “buy out” faculty time, but this did not meet the needs of departments who lent faculty to Honors, and it could only be distributed unevenly in a context of bargaining with individual department chairs. The result was a perennial struggle to generate what were often inadequate numbers of course offerings for the large population of Honors students.
- The attrition rate among Honors students, who enrolled in but never completed the program, was extremely high. Among the reasons for this were the following:
 - Honors students typically enter with so many of their Liberal Studies requirements already completed that they do not need the available Honors courses and therefore do not take enough Honors courses to complete the Honors program.
 - Students complained that it was often impossible to find sufficient Honors courses at all.
 - Students felt that there was no intellectual benefit from participation in Honors.

- Students found many Honors classes nearly identical in content and level to other courses.
- Students did not perceive noteworthy pedagogical differences between Honors courses and other courses.
- Honors augmented sections, which many students had to use as alternatives when courses were unavailable, merely added artificial busy work.

In this context the University's *Strategic Plan for 2017–2022* established the HPPD's challenge (Goal IV, 1.):

Redesign and support a distinctive honors program that emphasizes academic excellence, collegiality, and collaboration. Our goal is to create a powerful sense of community that will encourage students to raise their academic aspirations to the highest levels.

Furthermore, the HPPC adopted as guiding principles the following ideals for an "FSU Faculty of the Future" (*Strategic Plan*, Goal II. 1.):

- Interdisciplinarity
- Collaboration
- Professional development
- Innovation

An innovative Honors Program

Over the course of the 2016–2017 year the HPPC developed a plan for a new Honors curriculum that will accomplish those goals in the following manner:

- The Honors Program at FSU will, when the plan is fully implemented, recruit a selective class of 300 students per year—grouped into three cohorts of 100 students each—pursuing a shared, dedicated, structured, and interdisciplinary curriculum specifically designed to create a sense of identity and community among the Honors students.
- Students pursuing this new Honors curriculum will be required in their first two years to take three classes chosen from a set of five courses guided by a common "Essential Question" (EQ) for each 100-student cohort, which together will fulfill the particular Liberal Studies requirements that Honors students overwhelmingly do need:
 - Cross-Cultural Studies (X)
 - Diversity in Western Experience (Y)
 - Ethics
 - Scholarship in Practice
 - E-Series (IFS)
- In addition to the cohort courses based on the EQ, the Honors curriculum requires
 - 1 credit of Honors Colloquium (in the first fall semester)
 - 3 credits of ENC 2135
 - 1 additional Honors course
 - 6 credits in Honors in the Major
 - Garnet and Gold Honor Society
- An important consequence of having a specific curriculum, with participation required and the ability to complete the EQ component by the end of the second year, is that the Program will be able to monitor students' progress and counter the unacceptable attrition rates of the past.

- Honors faculty will work together across disciplines to develop the various EQs for each 100-student cohort and to create and teach the EQ courses. This will help to shape an interdisciplinary cadre of "faculty of the future" by encouraging greater involvement by faculty in interdisciplinary, collaborative, innovative engagement. The Honor Program will thus serve as a model for faculty development throughout the campus, as well as for the students in the Honors Program.
- The EQ model will generate topical courses and collaborations that are focused, timely, and innovative, giving FSU's Honors Program a distinctive and exciting character. In this it will be quite different from other major university honors curricula, in which courses typically fit into unchanging and more generic categories.
- If Honors Augmented courses are retained as an option, they should require in writing a clear and rigorous addition to the course syllabus, subject in each case to approval by the Honors Program Policy Committee.

Implementation

Program Director Mark Kearley and Committee Chair Douglass Seaton have met with Provost Sally McCrorie and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs Joe O'Shea to present the proposed Honors Curriculum and discuss its implementation. As of 18 April the Provost has given the go-ahead to run a pilot EQ cohort of 100 new Honors students in the 2017–2019 academic years, with courses to begin in the spring of 2018.

It is essential to emphasize that the Honors Program belongs to the University; it cannot and should not work independently of the rest of the institution. This will require buy-in from faculty, the colleges, and the departments to meet the *Strategic Plan* goal to "support a distinctive honors program that emphasizes academic excellence, collegiality, and collaboration."

- For the pilot program, Honors will need to attract a cadre of five faculty members, most likely with teaching assignments adjusted from appointments that include teaching existing departmental honors sections, to create and teach the first EQ offerings. The Director of the Honors Program will contact department chairs to discuss possibilities. (Since any successful curriculum depends first and foremost on qualified professors, in the course of its deliberations the HPPC assured itself that the University has a long list of highly recognized, outstanding teachers who could succeed extremely well with this project.)
- The selected faculty members would work together to develop the EQ and interact in designing their courses related to that issue. The planning must enable the pilot program courses to begin in the spring of 2018.

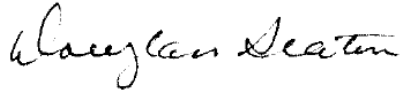
Assuming that all goes well in gearing up the pilot, it is hoped that full implementation of the new curriculum would start as soon as the fall of 2018. Three EQ cohorts of 100 students would then enter each year, so that there would be 300 first-year students in the new curriculum in the first full class under the new plan, 600 first- and second-year students each year from then on.

Beyond the EQ courses that students will take in their first two years, third- and fourth-year Honors students will require at least one additional departmental or interdisciplinary Honors course, as well as Honors in the Major. It is anticipated that the new curriculum, as it allows phasing out of some of the current general departmental honors sections, will generate from departments and faculty new, creative and innovative course offerings in their place.

Conclusion

The HPPC is proud to report on a remarkably productive year and a plan for a curriculum that we believe can move Florida State to national preeminence in this area and indeed should make our University enviable across the nation. As we now move forward, we covet the support of the Faculty Senate and the University faculty at large. Of course, as we begin the pilot run of the curriculum and work toward full implementation, we eagerly welcome comments and observations, criticisms and creative suggestions.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Douglass Seaton".

Douglass Seaton, HPPC Chair
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