

**North Carolina A & T State University  
Honors Program External Assessment  
July 15, 2009**

**FROM PROGRAM TO COLLEGE  
Capabilities, Challenges, and  
Recommendations**

**Submitted by**

**Peter C. Sederberg, Ph.D.  
Dean Emeritus  
South Carolina Honors College**

## Introduction

This preliminary report focuses on two core questions: first, whether the Honors Program at North Carolina A & T State University (NCA&T) possesses sufficient foundation and institutional support to pursue the transformation of the program into an college; second, if a sufficient foundation exists, what enhancements should be contemplated to justify such a change in designation. Assuming the existence of both the essential foundation and institutional support, I will also make some specific recommendations for how the transformation might be implemented. Any implementation plan, of course, will necessarily be subject to the vagaries of fiscal climate and institutional will, but the ill effects of such may be minimized if, at the outset, a clear assessment of the prospects, processes, and requirements can be developed.<sup>1</sup>

Before proceeding with such an assessment, I first review what the transformation of program to college should, but often does not, entail.

### Promise and Perils of Building an Honors College

Universities with well-established honors programs evince increasing interest in raising the profile of their institution by transforming their programs into “colleges.” While some honors colleges have existed for decades, the phenomenon really took off in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Only in 2005, after the phenomenon had been accelerating for well over a decade, did the National Collegiate Honors Council formally endorse guidelines on exactly what this process of transformation should entail. (See Appendix 1.) I will return to the particulars of these guidelines in the context of evaluating the position of the Honors Program at NCA&T with respect to the pursuit of such a transformation.

The 2004 survey identified near uniformity of the lofty motives articulated by the various institutions:<sup>3</sup>

100%: Recruit stronger students

91.4%: Improve overall campus academic quality

88.6%: Improve the quality of honors educational opportunities

85.7%: Raise the profile of honors within the institution

Unfortunately, some universities have found these goals far easier to endorse than to pursue effectively. In fact, the first goal often displaces the others. The establishment of a

---

<sup>1</sup> While I have benefited from, and many of my observations have been informed by, the external review report submitted by Dr. Sandra Holt in November 2007, I have attempted to avoid simply repeating her many valuable recommendations. My focus is on the particular challenge of transformation to an Honors College.

<sup>2</sup> Peter C. Sederberg, “Characteristics of the Contemporary Honors College” in *The Honors College Phenomena*, Peter C. Sederberg, ed. NCHC Monograph Series, 2008, pp. 25-42. A survey of existing honors colleges undertaken in 2004. At that time, 60% of the responding colleges were founded since 1993.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

“college’ is announced with considerable fanfare, students are heavily recruited, and enrollments increase, but the underlying honors infrastructure receives little or no attention, and the quality of the honors experience actually deteriorates.

Before proceeding with any assessment of the possibilities for and the requirements of such a transformation, university administrators, honors program leaders, and, at least tacitly, the yet to be recruited students need to embrace a three-way bargain. The university must give increased support to the program/college, who must develop greater educational resources for the students, from whom more should be expected. The bottom line is improved quality all the way around the triangle: the quality of support, the quality of programs, and the quality of student performance. If these outcomes can be successfully generated, then improved reputation, enhanced campus academic quality, and the profile of both honors and the whole institution will be enhanced. The reverse also holds. Poor planning and underdeveloped opportunities coupled with inflated promises may succeed in attracting students but will result in overshoot, collapse, and frustration.

### **Assessing the Foundation for Transformation at NCA&T**

A number of factors, both quantitative and qualitative, inform our assessment of the capacity of the program to make the transition to college status. Weakness in any particular area need not imply that the aspiration must be delayed or denied; rather, remediable areas guide the priorities for the transition.<sup>4</sup>

#### Size:

A compendium of honors programs and colleges, such as the Peterson’s Guide, documents tremendous diversity among programs, some with a few dozen students at two year community colleges to programs and colleges with thousands of students. Narrowing the focus to “colleges” reduces diversity, and a dominant model can be identified:<sup>5</sup> Honors colleges predominantly exist within multi-collegiate universities with an undergraduate population of 10,000 or more students. Most honors colleges enroll over 500 or more students. Functionally, they tend to have a centralized structure overlaying most, if not all, the university’s undergraduate programs.

None of these descriptors represent functional requirements for building a successful college, but they are suggestive. Smaller institutions lack the resources and smaller colleges do not possess a sufficient base on which to build honors academic opportunities. Size, however, is a relative metric. Enrollment growth for its own sake can be self-defeating. An old joke has a small child asking a tall man why he is so tall. “So my feet will reach the ground,” the man replies. Similarly, an honors program/college should be large enough to be well grounded in the wider institution, but not much more. Unfortunately, no precise

---

<sup>4</sup> I note with approbation that the leadership of NCA&T, at both the institutional and Honors Program level, have already avoided the single worst mistake—“the ready, fire, aim” strategy of renaming a program, heavily advertising the new “college,” and then trying to figure out what to do. For further guidance on what *not* to do, see ‘ Donald Publius’, “How not to Create an Honors College: A Dystopian Fantasy” in *ibid.* pp. 111-120. Every major problem raised therein has actually occurred at one university or another. Fortunately, so far as I know, they have not all occurred at the same university.

<sup>5</sup> “Characteristics,” pp. 28-29.

metric exists, but a rough estimate might be 5 to 9 per cent of the undergraduate student body and under 10% of the incoming class. Of course, 9% + 1 does not necessarily lead to catastrophe; nor does 5%-1 spell institutional enfeeblement. Rather, any push to exceed 10% should be met with cautious skepticism as to whether the institution can sustain, much less expand, existing programmatic quality. A college much smaller than 5% of the undergraduate student body may begin to suffer from a lack of institutional weight and credibility.

The Honors Program appears to have already established, at least in terms of raw numbers, a credible enrollment base with an entering class of 152 and a total fall 2008 enrollment of 542. Moreover, the quality of the admitted class has also improved, a result largely attributed to the introduction of a merit scholarship program, The Dowdy Scholars. This combination, if it can be sustained, suggests the achievement of the necessary base.<sup>6</sup>

Appropriate size is a tricky variable, as it includes the rate of growth and, minimally, the maintenance of quality of the incoming class and the programs of the honors unit, as well as the appropriate size relative to the total size of the undergraduate population. Also, as an ideal, the distribution of students within the program/college should roughly approximate the distribution in the overall undergraduate student body. NCA&T may already be approaching the limits to growth. A total (active) student body of 600 to 800 students seems roughly appropriate. Even if we assume that 800 is a desirable goal, the pace of growth, if too rapid, can lead “overshoot and collapse.” Nor should sheer numbers of students be the primary consideration. What should drive the growth of the program should be a capacity to maintain the appropriate equilibrium among numbers, student quality, and academic programs.<sup>7</sup>

#### Quality of the Students:

The primary purpose driving the establishment of an honors college, as noted earlier, is to attract more strong students to the institution. This, interestingly, does not seem to be quite as important a driver of the creation of an honors program in the first place. Honors programs often were created more to challenge and fulfill the talented students who were already coming to the institution. Only later, did the logical step of recruiting more them come to the fore.

NCA&T appears to be moving in this direction with the inauguration of the Dowdy Scholars Program. And it appears to have an impact. The second step in this direction is when the recruitment process shifts from a focus on trying to generate a higher yield among the top applicants already *in* the existing pool of admitted students to attempting to recruit more quality applicants *to* the applicant pool in the first place. A mere increase in the number of students attending the program is not a sufficient measure of success, especially if the

---

<sup>6</sup> Total program enrollment has grown from 354 in May 2004 to 507 in May 2009.

<sup>7</sup> I speak from direct experience here. The South Carolina Honors College had been slowly growing for over a decade from about 450 to 650 students when the President indicated a desire for an incoming class of 200 and an ultimate size for the College of 800. The Admissions Office, attempting to increase the incoming class entering in 1993 by about 20%, relaxed standards with the predictable consequence that the quality of the freshman class was the worst in its 15-year history. My predecessor, fortunately, immediately took more direct control of the process, and reversed the trend by 1994. For an in depth analysis of this problem, see my article “Nothing Fails Like Success: Managing Growth in a Highly Developed Honors Program,” *JNCHC*, Fall/Winter 2007, pp. 17 – 26.

quality is declining. Although the recent data is encouraging, the key is whether this short-term trend can be sustained and enhanced over the next few years.

#### The Quantity of the Curriculum Offerings:

A credible honors college should deliver on its promise to offer enhanced academic opportunities. Unless an institution begins from scratch, one predictor for a successful launch is the strength of the curriculum of the predecessor program. An honors college can then build upon a reasonably strong curricular base inherited from the honors program. This inherited base should include:

- Sufficient honors versions of first and second year courses that students may use to fulfill the general education requirements of the institution.
- Honors offerings of upper division courses in the most popular majors, as well as broadly appealing honors electives.
- The emergence of honors core offerings in those programs/colleges that contribute significant numbers of students to the Honors program.

The weaker the initial base, the more difficult and expensive will the task of building a credible honors college curriculum (see below). The trend line at NCA&T is encouraging at this point, in that the number of courses offered in 2008-2009 increased over the previous academic year, and appears to be on track to increase again this academic year. However, even with this improvement, the program is unable to meet the demand for 100-level core honors courses for the current incoming class, much less accommodate further expansion in enrollment.

This challenge has to be addressed simply to maintain the credibility of the existing honors program at its current size. If the honors class of 2013 entering this fall merely matches the size of the class of 2012, then this shortfall will intensify. If the university cannot find the resources to address the basic curricular needs of the Honors Program, then this does not bode well for meeting the challenge of transformation to a college.

Moreover, becoming a college should entail a strong commitment to the development of a range of upper division offerings. The basic curriculum goal of a college should be to provide four years of honors course opportunities for its students. Currently, the Program is making some preliminary progress in developing these opportunities, but the key word here is "preliminary." The dominant avenue for addressing the problem is the "honors contract." Both the external review and the internal documents of the Program identify the shortcomings of this alternative. An honors college must use these only as a last resort for students in low honors enrollment majors who must find a way to earn additional, upper division honors credits while fulfilling major requirements. (In the "recommendations" section, I will offer some alternatives to the honors contract.)

Finally, a highly developed honors program will invest in the development of enriched co-curricular experiences. I use "co-curricular" in the sense of institution-based programs that complement learning in the classroom. Prominent among these are opportunities for independent research and scholarship, professional development internships, and a range of venues for cultural enrichment. The Honors Program currently tries to cultivate

opportunities across this full range, but both program leadership and honors students crave more. Several different constituencies, in particular, mention the lack of sufficient support for students to visit state, regional, and national conferences. A thriving honors program offers such opportunities; for a college, they become essential in large part due to the emphasis on honors participation across all four years.

#### Standards for Admission, Participation, and Honors Completion:

Somewhat paradoxically, perhaps, I find the Honors Program's current standards both too lax and too stringent a basis for the development of an honors college. I think the admissions standards, while possibly appropriate at this stage, represents a Trojan horse if the program were to make a well-publicized move to an honors college. In the category of "be careful what you wish for," such a campaign might lead to a sudden increase in enrollment that would stress the nascent honors college's resources.

Although as I noted above, the most commonly cited reason for pursuing an honors college is to increase the numbers of good students attending the university, this goal must be balanced with a second—to increase the quality of the students participating in the college. Already the college has experienced a foreshadowing of this challenge with the positive impact of the Dowdy Scholarship program. Now is the time to begin reviewing the standards and process of recruitment. The criteria and process for transferring into the program may also need review. Already the program appears to be experiencing the mixed blessing of success in its improving status on campus.

On the other hand, the expectations for completion of the highest tier of honors seem too stringent. Students appear to readily accomplish the achievement of general honors. However, the accomplishment of both major and general honors is achieved by only a small handful of students. Yet this is precisely the area of achievement that needs to be strengthened in becoming an honors college. The major reason for this shortfall does not appear to be the lack of ability, but the lack of opportunity. The problem is multidimensional and so will be the solution, and it lies embedded in the general challenge of curriculum development.

#### Program Leadership and Institutional Support:

The Honors Program seems blessed with a history of competent and committed leadership. Peter Meyers, whose commitment to the development of the Program appears universally held in high regard, laid the foundation that supports a program that can seriously consider the possibility of working to achieve a substantively meaningful college status. The current interim director, Dr. Ray Davis, shares this commitment, and in his short tenure has been able to improve on the foundation he inherited. I found him to be an articulate and thoughtful academic leader committed both to the vision of an enriched honors academic community at NCA&T and to the principle of careful planning and consistent effort to achieve this vision. I was also pleased to find a pair of experienced support persons in Sandra Williamson, the Assistant Director, and Sherri Kendall, the Administrative Associate. Experienced cadre, such as these, facilitates the transition to college. The two more recent hires, Darrell Hairston and Karen Favreau, bring additional capacity.

The Honors Program appears well staffed, at least in numbers, to manage cautious expansion of the enrollment. However, the transition to Honors College may place additional strains beyond what one might expect to arise from a simple numerical increase in students and, we hope, courses. The goal of expanding and qualitatively enhancing four years of curricular offerings creates demands for a more effective system of academic advising to complement the students' major advising experience. As program/college curriculum and expectations grow more complex, major advisors, even with a program of enriched communication from the central honors office, cannot be expected to remain current and focused on the needs of increasing numbers of honors students.

At this point Ms. Favreau and Mr. Hairston appear primarily engaged in maintaining important initiatives extending beyond the classroom. While I am impressed with these initiatives (see below) for both substantive and political reasons, the transition to college will place strains on academic core functions; for example, more students, taking more honors courses, across more majors, engaging in more research/scholarship, in a more complex distribution over all four years. At some point, I believe this will demand enhanced honors academic advising capability. Again, I will discuss some possible alternatives in my recommendations.

Finally, a strong, dedicated leadership of a low profile program can often maintain essential integrity on a minimal budget. Even slow growth of such a program will require more institutional support in terms of recurrent budgets, as well as longer-term investments. The transition to honors college status, if meaningful, will demand even greater investment if the promise of enhanced opportunity is more than rhetorical. Currently, central administrative support appears strong. The Provost, Dr. Alton Thompson, and the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Dr. Kenneth Murray both seem strongly committed to the goal of improving the intellectual culture on campus and see the Honors Program as a major instrument to leverage such improvement.

Such commitment is essential; however, it must be matched by material action. Moreover, the deans of the major college partners of the program must echo this commitment. The central administration has already demonstrated its support by funding a modest expansion in honors staff, inaugurating the Dowdy Scholarship Program, and enhancing facilities in housing and future office space. Though laudable, especially in times of fiscal constraint, the real test of commitment comes in providing sufficient support to enable the program to expand its recurrent activities in terms of both curricular and co-curricular opportunities.

#### Honors as University Citizen:

Over the decades, initiation of an honors program generates a common push back from members of the faculty and administration. The basic charge usually reflects anti-elitist sentiments: A public university, especially one at a historically black institution, should not be devoting special resources and privileges to a group of students who can succeed on their own. The opportunities it creates should be equally accessible to all students. The creation of merit scholarships, especially if need-based aid fails to meet the demand, reinforces this argument. Obviously, proposing an honors college that will compete even more for resources only reinforces this argument. Only now, other colleges, not simply individual members of the faculty, will enter the fray, as they see the improved status for

honors as creating another unit that will compete institutionally, another dean “sitting at the table.”

I will not rehearse here the general arguments that can be balanced against these objections. Rather, what most interests and impresses me is the way that the Honors Program has positioned itself as a powerful university citizen through two programs. Perhaps the more significant of the two is the tutoring program where honors students assist at risk student in the general population. The undeniable contribution that this program makes to the well being of the overall undergraduate population will only grow with the increase in size and quality of the honors population possible with the transition to college.<sup>8</sup> The second such contribution is the recently initiated leadership and professional development program. This program, too, since it opens its doors to the wider student population, makes a contribution to the wider community.

Of course, honor students make other, more academic, contributions to the well being of the overall institution. An increasing number of academically talented and motivated students enrich the overall academic atmosphere at the institution, even though a certain percentage of the course work takes place in honors classes and seminars. As a critical mass of students grows engaged with the campus, they assume leadership in a range of student organizations. Their eventual academic accomplishments increasingly raise the visibility of the institution. Ultimately a virtuous cycle can be generated, as improved reputation attracts more quality students, who further enhance the reputation.

#### Facilities:

The current honors program offices are inadequate, even for a program of its size. I understand the program will move into new, more suitable, and visible space in fall 2010. Since I have not yet had the opportunity to review this space, I cannot directly address whether it will be sufficient for a program expanding into a college in terms of visibility, size and function, but I will offer some general guidance in the section on “Recommendations.”

The recent acquisition of 200 spaces in a new residential hall is quite impressive for an honors program at this stage in its development. This resource has already proven popular among students, creating a competition for space. The decision to allocate the space equally among classes, while understandable and politically prudent, may not be best for the further development of the program much less the inauguration of a college. Freshman honors housing offers a major recruitment tool. Parents, in particular, are keen on it. On the other hand, more vertically integrated housing aids socialization into the honors academic community. Finally, “seeding” honors students in significant numbers across university housing also could make a positive contribution.

---

<sup>8</sup> This point may be extended into a more general defense of honors educational opportunities. A state university’s student population is not composed of a collection of identical widgets whose needs can be addressed in an undifferentiated way. The contemporary public university, like the society it serves, must reflect and serve the needs of a pluralistic student community. Just as a public institution would not ignore the special needs of less well-prepared students or those with special needs, nor should it deny that the very best members of its student body also require opportunities to enable them to realize their full potential. What NCA&T nicely demonstrates is the possibility of using the talents of these high achieving students, who would not be there in as great numbers absent the honors program, to assist the university in addressing the critical needs of another group.

These goals obviously compete, but perhaps not in a completely exclusive fashion. Some tradeoffs will be explored.<sup>9</sup>

#### “Grading” Program Readiness for the Transition to an Honors College:

The preceding section offers my qualitative assessment of the strengths of the Honors Program with an eye toward making the transition to college status. Another perspective might assess the current program according to the National Collegiate Honors Council’s guidelines, “The Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program.” The first prescription of the analogous guidelines for a “fully developed honors college” states: “*A fully developed honors college should incorporate the relevant characteristics of a fully developed honors program.*” This prescription, while not requiring a university to first develop an honors program, recognizes that most honors colleges arise from pre-existing programs. Some of these programs, however, were not especially strong. Though not absolute prerequisites for a successful college, a program will be better positioned to make the transition if it is already well established.<sup>10</sup>

Table 1, therefore, provides a kind of institutional score card that may assist not only the assessment of readiness, but also help identify priorities for initial investment. [See Attachment, Table 1] A review of this rather superficial assessment shows that the Honors Program has “met” or “partially met” 13 of the 16 criteria, with only two “unmet” and one where I was unable to ascertain the applicability. On the whole, I believe this table suggests that the program has established a credible base from which to build a college, but also it identifies clear areas for investment.

### **Recommendations**

The preceding analysis lays the foundation for my recommendations. By and large, most of these serve a dual purpose, both to strengthen the Honors Program as a foundation *for* the launch of the College and to serve as a guide for the development *of* the College. My perspective, of course, is that of an outside evaluator; I am not conversant with the institutional culture of NCA&T. The leadership of the University will have to view my recommendations in the context of their greater familiarity with this institutional culture. However, their greater familiarity should inform how, not whether, they move in each area if they wish to strengthen their Honors Program and build toward an effective Honors College.

---

<sup>9</sup> Truth in consulting requires me to confess that at the University of South Carolina honors housing was first restricted to continuing students only. As its attraction became clear, honors floors were established in several freshman residences. Only 20 years after the College’s establishment did an honors freshman residence open. It immediately filled, plus we still had to use honors floors. Only with the opening of a two-year residence hall fall 2009, will the college finally have sufficient space to meet the demand.

<sup>10</sup> The diversity of honors programs is far greater in terms of both numbers and range of variance. For this reason the language uses the adjective “relevant.” Moreover, we must recall that these guidelines are just that; they do not have the status of assessment criteria nor can they fully account for variation in institutional culture. They are, however, a place to start.

### Size:

**Recommendation 1: The Honors Program must get a handle on both its *optimal size target* and the appropriate *rate of growth*.** Neither of these can be fine tuned to precision, but the absence of planning will more likely produce unpleasantly surprising increases. You can have too much of a good thing, if the resources are not available to provide even the same level of opportunities, much less enhanced ones.

**Recommendation 2:** Use program resource levels to determine the appropriate size and growth rate, not the other way around. Increased numbers of students must be supported by increased curricular and co-curricular opportunities. These opportunities must grow proportionately as the Honors Program grows in size or the quality will decline. A decision to move to a “college” presumably requires a *disproportionate* increase in resources to support the same increase in size.

### Quality of the Students

**Recommendation 3: Raise admission standards.** This recommendation essentially follows from the first two recommendations. An increasingly visible and attractive Honors Program generates the necessity for tightening standards. This necessity actually represents an opportunity. The major goal of the Program has been to bring more good students to campus and thereby enrich the overall intellectual atmosphere. One motive for establishing a college is to reinforce this effort. In short, a successful college should increase the size and improve the quality of the honors student body.

**Recommendation 4: Consider a qualitative admissions process.** One way to raise standard is to simply enhance the minimum numerical criteria required (SAT; GPA; class rank, etc.). A somewhat more flexible approach is to develop a sliding metric that combines test scores, grades, and, perhaps, weighting of AP and IB grades, where strength in one quantitative area can offset relative weakness in another. A second enhancement, especially with respect to moving to College status, would be to create a separate application process that would generate qualitative information on verbal ability, engagement, leadership, accomplishments, etc. This step need not be excessively elaborate; simply something to measure student interest and promise beyond the numbers.

**Recommendation 5: Enhance recruitment efforts.** Note where this recommendation falls . . . *after* tightening the admissions processes. More than a few institutions publicized their new college’s enriched (presumably) opportunities without having a new admissions process in place. If the controls on the admissions process have been determined, then a push must be made to expand the applicant pool beyond that which currently exists for the Program.

### The Quantity of the Curriculum Offerings:

**Recommendation 6: Increase the number of honors sections of core requirements.** Right now the Program offers multiple sections of the UNST 100-level courses. As a program, these should be increased in number to provide sufficient honors sections to accommodate all interested incoming honors freshmen. As a rough estimate, as the incoming class approaches 200, the number of these sections may need to double.

**Recommendation 7: Develop honors sections of core requirements in the most popular majors.** This development is critical to the move to a true four-year, honors college. Right now, this need is largely handled through the tried, but not particularly true, method of the “honors contract.” This is better than nothing, but not much. An authentic honors experience is generated not simply by an intermittent interaction of a student with a professor but the interaction among the students in and outside of class. Two variations on the standard honors course might be more palatable to various departments. The first is to set aside a certain number of seats in relatively small major program class, perhaps one third, for non-honors students who receive the instructor’s permission. These students would be held to the same standards and would receive honors credit. A second option would be to create an embedded honors section in a large class. The honors students would complete all the expected work of the regular class, but, in addition, the instructor would agree to meet with the honors students regularly and create an enriched experience for them.

**Recommendation 8: Develop a curricular process through which interested faculty can offer experimental honors seminars.** This again is something that can help create four years of true honors curricular opportunities for students as the program moves to college status. Currently, UNST 216: Genocide in the Modern World demonstrates the potential of this option. Once this avenue is opened, the most creative faculty at the school will take advantage of it. Of course, this outcome will depend on the willingness of their departments to allow them to teach such an occasional seminar as part of their normal instructional obligation.

Standards for Participation and Honors Completion:

**Recommendation 9: Review the requirements for four-year participation and recognition.** Right now, NCA&T possess essentially a two-year program. If fewer than five students each year complete the requirements for both general and major honors, then the program does not have a realistic four-year track. As part of the move to college, the four-year track should become the dominant one, but this is unlikely to happen even if the programs that have the most honors students develop more numerous honors opportunities. Perhaps 42 honors credits is a reasonable expectation, but the way of achieving it must be made more flexible. One way is to allow more honors electives to count in addition to the encouragement of options in addition to the contract noted previously.

**Recommendation 10:** Develop a requirement for a thesis or project as part of the 4-year honor recognition. Honors Colleges typically require a senior thesis/project. This requirement can become an opportunity for an ambitious student in a sparsely populated or rigorously structured major to earn sufficient honors hours, especially if the thesis can count for more than three credits.

Program Leadership and Institutional Support:

**Recommendation 11: Appoint a director of the Honors Program.** The strengthening of the existing program, much less the establishment of a college, cannot be accomplished if the leader is “interim.”

**Recommendation 12: The head of an Honors College must be a dean.** Moreover, this dean must report directly to the Provost and be a member of the Council of Deans. The Dean

of the College should not be expected to teach a course, unless the same expectation is held for other deans. However, the dean may choose to teach and might be expected to advise.<sup>11</sup>

**Recommendation 13: Enhance the academic advising capability of the emerging college.** Here I cannot make a definitive recommendation. As I noted earlier, if the program/college grows in size and complexity, it will likely become more difficult to rely on an advisor corps disbursed among the general academic programs to handle the job effectively. One way of managing the challenge is to divide advisement in the college between honors advisement in the college and major advisement in the departmental program. This doubles the number of advisors that a student has to see, but this comes with its own advantages. Effective academic advisement is critical for every student, but especially honors students who need to plan carefully for the long-term objectives.

**Recommendation 14: Improve co-curricular opportunities and resources.** As I noted above, by co-curricular I refer to those activities outside of normal course work that enrich the students' educational experience. These include supporting independent research, scholarship, and creative performance, service learning, and participation in regional and national conferences.

**Recommendation 15: Enhance the overall material support of honors operations.** This recommendation follows directly from everything else. The move to a college as outlined will require significant investment. Departments will not willingly offer more honors courses for nothing; co-curricular opportunities also require resources; increased numbers of students and more complex operations require additional personnel. All of these resource requirements come in a game that is often seen as zero-sum. Other colleges and departments will tend to see direct investment in honors or pressure to offer more courses and other opportunities as resources denied them. The investment in honors will have to be both direct and indirect. Institutional leadership will have to make the case for the general institutional benefits received by creating an Honors College. They may have to mandate the colleges and programs make certain contributions to the overall effort. Or they need to find the resources to allocate directly to the Honors College to reallocate to those departments that are providing honors courses and other services.<sup>12</sup>

#### Honors as University Citizen:

**Recommendation 16: Avoid multiplying missions unnecessarily.** I am impressed with the both the tutoring and the leadership development programs. However, some schools have demonstrated a tendency, especially in moving to presumed college status, to add missions to the college that are valuable, but not central. In some cases, the "college" is more periphery than core. This tendency sometimes reflects a desire on the part of the central administration to load up the college with functions to justify the increased investment and the desire of the College leadership to be helpful. Sometimes the additional resources allocated to the college are simply to run the peripheral functions, while the academic core remains underfunded.

---

<sup>11</sup> On a personal note, I taught a course each year for my first three years as dean of the South Carolina Honors College. By my fourth year, the incoming class had grown to 220 students and the demands of the position grew disproportionately. I, however, continued to advise over 60 students a semester for both their honors and their major (political science) academic work.

<sup>12</sup> This issue is obviously complex, and I cannot do it justice in this preliminary report. Perhaps this could be an area for examination in a second visit.

## Facilities:

**Recommendation 17: The Honors College office should be centrally visible and adequate to provide space to support its expanding responsibilities.** The new facilities for the honors program may be adequate for its current size and functions, but the needs may need to be reviewed as the program moves to college. The location and the quality of the facilities immediately inform visiting parents and students of the place the college occupies in the wider institution. If a university claims that the Honors College is central to its academic mission, then its location should also be central.

**Recommendation 18: Honors housing, as the program moves to college, should be expanded and freshmen should be served first.** As I noted earlier, attractive honors housing is a major recruitment tool. Ideally, every freshman that wishes should be able to occupy honors housing. One possible option to meliorate hard feelings would be to combine sufficient freshman housing with sophomore honors housing. Assuming not all freshmen will want this housing, devoting 250 spaces, 150 for freshmen and 100 for sophomores might be explored. Honors housing for juniors and seniors could be on floors of other residences.

## **Next Steps**

The leadership and the staff of the Honors Program are committed to the goal of establishing an honors college. More importantly, they have pursued their vision in a responsible fashion. Critical members of the central administration of the university also appear supportive of Program's initiative; however, they also must weigh the costs and benefits in the context of the wider institutional culture and needs. Finally, the ultimate success of the venture must have an acceptable level of support from the leadership of the major academic partners of the Honors Program, as well as those whose support may become critical with the initiation of a college.

I think the ground has been sufficiently tilled. The next step is to plant the seeds. I recommend that any further study, whether by external consultants or internally by the program staff, needs to be done in the context of a University authorized strategic planning initiative to develop the specific structure and functions of the honors college, an analysis of the material and programmatic requirements of the college, and a strategy for implementation. In short, the University leadership needs to establish a task force or charge an existing committee to undertake the actual strategic planning for a college as well as lead the required institutional conversation required before any formal decision to establish a college is made.<sup>13</sup> If such a context is established, then an additional external review could prove valuable to the institution's own planning efforts.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> I am concerned that any such formal charge comes from established leadership to established leadership. Specifically, I would hope that neither the Provost giving the charge nor the Director of the Honors Program is an "interim" appointment.

<sup>14</sup> While I am willing to return under these circumstances and build on my existing experience, I need to point out that a different perspective might prove beneficial. An expensive, though probably optimal, approach would be to bring in a "team" of two or more established college leaders. I would be happy to serve on such a team, and I can recommend some potential members.

This report provides a “readiness review.” The next external review should drill more deeply into a number of critical areas:

- *Budget:* The current funding model needs to be investigated in the institutional context of how other colleges are funded. The budgetary requirements of a new college should be explored and solutions proposed.
- *The incentive structure:* Related to the budget, what is the current incentive structure for programs to offer honors courses. How might this structure be improved to provide for projected needs?
- *Academic partners:* The next visit needs to involve conversations with the key academic partners (programs and colleges), both those who are currently critical and those who will become critical for the success of the college.
- *Academic enrichment:* What plans/ideas exist for enriching the requirements for admission, achievement, and curricular development for the new college.
- *Staff reorganization and expansion:* Can the existing staff be used more effectively within a college structure? What additions are required?
- *Long-term facilities development:* How might a new college fit into and be served by the university’s facilities development plan.

I am sure other areas of investigation can be identified, but these will serve a basis for developing the agenda for further consultation.

8/7/2009