Activity of the University Committee on Honors Programs for AY 2009 - 2010

The UCHP consists of college reps and is advisory to the Honors College Dean, Cynthia Jackson Elmore. It met on 3 occasions this academic year (once in fall, twice in spring). Its major activities were:

1. Providing feedback to reports by the HC Dean on the current status of various HC programs. To this end, it is here reported that:
   
a. More than 1,800 incoming MSU students have been invited to join the HC. These numbers, along with the acceptance rate at the time of reporting, were on par with the past. Thus the HC is anticipated to maintain approximately the same size as per usual. About 17% of invitees are from out of state, which is down from historical norms of 20% - 25%.

b. About 1300 incoming MSU students have been invited to join the Academic Scholars Program (a less rigorous version of the normal HC program). This is also consistent with targets.

c. There is a new process for on-campus applications to the Honors College from students already enrolled at MSU. Under the new process the top 10% of students by College will be invited, along with the top 10% of students with sustained involvement in one of MSU’s enriched programs.

d. The research seminar program continues on pace. UCHP members helped to review various research seminar proposals from university faculty. Faculty from the College of Engineering have provided proposals for such seminar courses and, as a personal comment, I have been very impressed with those COE proposals that I have reviewed.

2. As per usual, UCHP members assisted the HC in evaluating various scholarship applications from HC students.

3. There has been extensive discussion on the issue of civic engagement. As background, to fulfill the regular HC program a student must complete at least nine required 'Honors Experiences'. These are almost exclusively H-classes or H-options. At issue is whether one such Honors Experience (at most) could be a civic engagement experience, meaning that it could involve civic or community engagement that is not directly tied to an in class experience. This notion has been endorsed by various HC students, academic specialists, advisers and the HC Dean. A position paper on its possible implementation was presented to the UCHP. This paper clarifies that this would be an optional substitutational component, and not a required component, of a student's HC program. The determination of such experiences would require coordination between the HC student and their faculty adviser for putting in place the plan for any such experience (so as to ensure consistency with HC standards). The UCHP endorsed going forward with the option.
4. Various college reps reported on particular issues with respect to courses in their colleges. It did not seem to me that any of these had direct bearing on COE programs or students. Please see me (Tom Pence) if you wish more details on these particulars.

5. The issue arises as to whether our undergraduates need more formal instruction in the use of library resources. I reported to the UCHP that, in my estimation, the COE students already have good knowledge and good means of learning about library resources (if you feel differently, please let me know as I am the COE rep to the UCHP for next year).

6. One of the more interesting issues concerns whether H-experience course substitutions could be granted for HC caliber courses that students may have taken before joining the HC. This is not currently permitted with one exception: students who enter the HC after the freshman year may include as an Honors experience any specifically indicated MSU Honors courses (those with an H in the MSU schedule of courses) that they may have completed before they formally joined the HC. What is not permitted is retroactive substitution for alternative courses that were not specifically H courses in the MSU curriculum. In the ensuing discussion, some concern was raised that this may not be fair to students who join the HC after their freshman year. Further discussion raised alternative concerns to any proposal that allows retroactive substitution. Specifically, it was remarked that a key aspect of the educational benefit of an H-experience course substitution derives from the consultation between the student and adviser that arrives at the educational rationale for making the course substitution prior to actually taking the course. No action was taken on this matter.

Submitted by Tom Pence, ME department