Activity of the *University Committee on Honors Programs* for AY 2011 - 2012

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. As in past years, the UCHP provided feedback to reports by the HC Dean on the current status of various HC programs and initiatives. Recruiting is of particular importance. For the next academic year, about 450 new students were accepted into the HC. About 1300 offers were extended to new students for the Academic Scholars program. In addition, about 900 current MSU students were extended an invitation to join the HC (an Open House was initiated this year for such students).

2. With respect to ongoing HC programmatic issues:
   
   a. Diversifying the topic areas for the Honors Research Seminars is a goal of the HC (faculty receive $3000 to develop and fund such a seminar for freshmen and sophomores). Currently, certain colleges are not well represented (e.g., social science, business). To date the CoE has had relatively good participation.

   b. ReCUR, the recently launched Undergraduate Research Journal, may go from two to one issues per year so as to remain in keeping with the submission rate.

   c. The Honors College Forum is projected to continue on a one event per semester basis. The HC would like to establish an advisory committee that plans, develops, and recruits for these.

   d. The HC is seeking to fill the position of coordinator for National and International Fellowships/Scholarships. Eventually, the HC seeks to have the equivalent of 1.5 people devoted to that effort.

3. Coordination of the PA program was a particular focus of attention for the UCHP. HC Assistant Dean Melissa Baumann is heavily involved in this aspect of HC operations. As regards the PA program the targeted group continues to be the top 1% of high school graduates with an ACT score of 33 or more. Pluses and minuses of having a formal class associated with the PA program were debated. The timing of the PA experience was also discussed in the sense that better research outcomes would logically be possible with upper division students. The current guiding principle is that the purpose of the PA program is not solely to advance the university research mission in the most efficient manner, but rather it is to provide a research experience early in the student career. Points of emphasis included the importance of early research in preparing students for later research, and the fact that many other schools do not have anything similar to offer. The consensus view was that current guiding principles remain in place.

4. Logistical issues with respect to the early determination of PA placements received a great deal of attention. The issue is that the early semester deadline (mid-to-late August) is necessary for payroll reasons, and also is useful for PAs to hit the ground running. However this timing often makes it difficult to engage with possible faculty mentors. Placement challenges are especially likely to arise for students contemplating study in more than one discipline. The possibility of having PAs-to-be meet with potential mentors during summer orientation was discussed, as was the possibility of using technologies such as Skype to aid with placement.
5. Guidelines for course H-options were reviewed. It is to be noted that all H-option requests are reviewed by HC staff. In addition, some, but not all, colleges place additional grade requirements on H-options (e.g., ≥ 3.5). While certain sentiment had been expressed toward the possibility of formalizing guidelines at the HC level, the alternative opinion - that strict requirements may be inimical to creative possibilities – emerged as the consensus view.

Submitted by Tom Pence, ME department