Activity of the *University Committee on Honors Programs* (UCHP) for AY 2012-2013

The UCHP consists of college reps and is an advisory to the Honors College Dean, Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore. 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 program activities. Among the topics addressed:

   a. The HC currently consists of approximately 3000 Honors students. This represents about 8% of MSU undergrads. Honors courses are open to all HC students and also to non-HC students by invitation. Qualified students may enter the HC either prior to arrival on campus, or by invitation (based on GPA) after arrival on campus. While most pre-arrival students elect to join the HC, many post-arrival students do not. It is not clear why this is the case, or whether it should be regarded as a “problem”. The HC is moving forward with various means for providing more focused information to on-campus students so that they can make an informed decision.

   b. The main advantages of HC status include flexibility of schedule and ability to design more specialized programs of study; honors classes, honors sections, and ability to incorporate graduate courses into one’s program; and access to certain research and funding opportunities that are not available to non-HC students. There are also certain minor perks such as order of enrolling in classes. More generally, the main areas of activity for HC students are characterized as research, international engagement, and leadership. It is to be noted that graduation with “honors” or “high honors” is unrelated to HC status.

2. The PA program continues to be a focus of attention as it is one of the best ways for recruiting HC students. The PA program is also a major means for providing research support for HC students, but it is restricted to freshman and sophomore students. The issue of effectively placing students in PA positions was discussed, and a suggestion was made to consider the U. Michigan (Ann Arbor) model in which PA projects are formally identified and information on the projects is assembled into book form. Turning to outcomes, colleges differ widely with respect to whether PA’s continue with research after their PA concludes. Engineering and the College of Business do well in this regard since most faculty grants for undergrad support typically support junior and senior level students. However, Political Science and related disciplines often have little follow-up to the PA program. Some units have additional PA enrichment activities; James Madison has a PA based symposium. A continuing discussion point is the identification of strategies for aligning HC research opportunities with the University Research and Arts Forum (URAF) and with ReCUR (the undergraduate research journal). At this point the discussion was broadened so as to seek to address the issue of identifying underserved populations, and providing remedies. It was agreed by all that this continues to be a critical issue. However, specific and effective strategies for such identification and remediation remain elusive despite the sincerity of all parties concerned.

3. Like other aspects of the academic enterprise, Honors Colleges across the country are now grappling with issues related to on-line course delivery. The Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC - the Big Ten and a few additional institutions) is also considering this issue. It is a standard topic of discussion in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The broad consensus of the UCHP is that any such
course must have an effective means for ensuring that requirements and evaluations are consistent with that of the off-line equivalent course. Additionally, various modes of delivery were described and discussed.

4. The UCHP members traditionally serve on evaluation and screening committees within the Honors College. This includes judging the MLK day projects in the Residential College for the Humanities (and your CoE rep indeed served in this capacity), screening of Honors seminar course proposals, selection of awards for summer research projects, and determination of international travel fellowships.

5. A major activity of the UCHP concerned the upcoming review of current HC Dean Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore, who is nearing the end of a first five-year term. The provost has charged the UCHP with creating evaluation instruments for assessing the performance of the current Dean and has also requested that the UCHP provide specific recommendations as to who should be queried to provide evaluation. Ultimately, the Provost will have final approval of the evaluation instrument and the choice of people to approach for evaluations. However, the general feeling is that it is likely that the recommendations provided by the UCHP will be followed by and large. A subcommittee of the UCHP met with the Provost to receive an appropriate charge, and the overall UCHP met to act upon this charge (preceded by individual preparatory work). As of this writing the result of this work is being fine-tuned by the committee (via email to the Committee Chair) in preparation for delivery to the Provost. It is to be emphasized that this recommendation is simply for the means to evaluate, not an evaluation itself. It is anticipated that several members of the CoE will be asked by the Provost to participate in the evaluation.

Submitted by Tom Pence, ME department