

Development Plan for Honors
Submitted October 10, 2005
Peggy W. Watson, Director
Honors Program

I believe that the Honors Program is currently fulfilling its maximum potential under the existing system. We support over 600 of TCU's finest students through Honors classes, advising, administration of the Fogelson Forum, the creation of Honors Week including Convocation, the recruiting of top students, and ongoing cocurricular activities.

In the past two years, we have attempted to make enhancements to the Program as currently designed, focusing on improvements that did not necessitate additional budget expenditures. Since the fall of '03, we have doubled the availability of Honors housing in Moncrief Hall and have added Honors wings in Sherley Hall and Clark Hall; even with this additional availability, we had over 175 Honors students on a waiting list for Honors Housing for fall '05. In the fall of '04, we added early registration, a benefit long desired by students.

In May 2006 we will graduate the largest number of students with Departmental Honors or University Honors in the history of TCU. Our retention rates in Honors from the freshmen '04 class to sophomores is over 75%, which is unprecedentedly high, and our retention rate of these same Honors students at TCU is 93%. As part of the current Retention Study taking place on campus, it has been noted that TCU traditionally loses 12% of freshman students with a 3.6 GPA or above; preliminary reports on the '04 freshman class indicate that among students supported and challenged by Honors, that percentage is less than 3%. We have recently assisted two Honors students in their selection as Fulbright Scholars and anticipate another national scholarship winner this coming year. We offered an exceptional study abroad program to the British Isles exclusively for Honors students in the summer of 2005 (with Professors Steele, Blackwell, and Sohmer) and will offer another program in 2006 (with Professors Blackwell and Hestir).

While we are proud of these successes and their direct and positive effect on students, there are still major concerns, particularly in the area of availability of faculty. These include:

- Although the three-course sequence of Honors Intellectual Traditions is arguably the finest example of interdisciplinary inquiry for undergraduates on the TCU campus, we have been unable to reduce the class size of 45 students.
- The lack of availability of full-time faculty to teach the four interdisciplinary Colloquia classes required for University Honors, despite great faculty interest.
- Continued reliance strictly on the good will of faculty to support many Honors Program classes, and inadequate support and recognition for their efforts.

- Lack of a coordinated program to recruit our nation's best students, including National Merit, National Achievement, National Hispanic, and our local Community Scholars.
- Despite improvement, inadequate housing (i.e., some type of a Living/Learning Center) to support and therefore retain our top students.

If TCU is to continue to attract, challenge, and support high-achieving students, consideration must be given to improving the Honors Program, with the goal of creating an enhanced Honors Program or Honors College by fall of 2008. While many details will need to be worked out, I believe that in a final plan, students will still graduate from an existing college according to their major, with participation in the Honors College/Program as a means of furthering and acknowledging academic excellence.

I propose that the Honors College/Program is an ideal vehicle through which to address the following issues, all of which are currently being discussed campus-wide as priorities.

- Retention of students, particularly high-achievers.
- Expansion of the Chancellor's Scholars Program. In his Fall Convocation Address, the Chancellor proposed to increase the number of Chancellor's Scholars from the current 49 to 160. Recruiting and supporting these students (the average SAT of the fall '04 Chancellor's Scholars was 1500) will be difficult, if not impossible, without Honors. All fall '05 Chancellor's Scholars accepted an invitation to the Honors Program, and several were actively recruited by Honors.
- Expansion of the Community Scholars Program. Under the model we will propose, this Program will be administered by Honors.

With this understanding, an Honors College could serve as an umbrella unit to administer and foster at least the following:

- Honors Program
- Chancellor's Scholars Program
- Community Scholars Program
- An expanded lectureship series, based on the model of the Fogelson Forum. Despite the success of the Fogelson and other lecture series, TCU falls behind other major universities in the quantity and quality of invited lecturers.
- An Endowed Chair for a Professor of Honors.

- A program for establishing three-year appointments for faculty members as “Honors Professors.” Awarded competitively, these appointments would recognize, promote and reward faculty contributions.

Proposed Chronology

The academic year 2005-2006 will be a year of study, analysis, and planning. Activities include:

- A benchmark study of Honors Program and Colleges (already underway)
- Forums to seek input from various groups: Honors Council, Honors Students, Honors Faculty, alumni and community, etc.
- The creation of a Board of Visitors for Honors (already underway)
- The creation of an electronic newsletter (already underway) to strengthen contact with the community and former Honors students.
- Appointment (or reappointment) of a Director of Honors as a full-time position for a three-year period beginning in fall 2006. The position will involve all current responsibilities for running the Program, as well as devising and putting in place a strategic plan.
- Creation, by May 2006, of a strategic plan, including all budgetary considerations.

2006-2007

- A year of fund-raising based upon the needs outlined in the May 2006 plan. The concept of an Honors College would offer multiple naming opportunities, and could tap former Honors students, a relatively underutilized source of TCU support. We will of course seek funding from various agencies.

2007-2008

- Begin the administrative steps necessary to set up an Honors College. During this year an Endowed Professorship be will attached to Honors and TCU faculty be encouraged to apply for a three-year appointment as an “Honors Professor.”

2008-2009

- Inaugurate an Honors College as part of TCU’s commitment to academic excellence.

Current requests:

For the present, we seek approval from the Provost of the following initiatives for 2005-2006.

- Support for the establishment of a committee of interested faculty, including faculty traditionally dedicated to the Honors Program and some faculty currently serving on the Honors Council, to begin work on a more detailed plan.
- Support in soliciting ideas about enhancing the Honors Program, including the possible establishment of an Honors College, with various university constituencies.
- Support in setting up an Honors Board of Visitors, thus encouraging more community and alumni involvement.
- Assistance from the Provost and the Chancellor in aligning the May report with TCU's overall vision and goals.
- Permission to work with Advancement and other university offices to quietly look at funding opportunities and sources of support.
- Financial support for the Director to travel to study other high-ranking Honors Programs and Colleges, particularly those that embrace the importance of ethical leadership and living/learning centers.