

SINCLAIR HONORS PROGRAM
ANNUAL REPORT
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Sinclair Honors Program Annual Report May 2005

The Sinclair Honors Program adheres to the core values statement of the National Collegiate Honors Council, of which we are a longtime member: our program “values an atmosphere that promotes academic opportunity and challenge for Honors students and faculty. Within this intellectual environment, members of Honors communities demonstrate integrity, respect, and excellence. Through the Honors experience, participants realize enhanced personal, social, and intellectual development. The NCHC recognizes the importance of life-long learning and social responsibility in preparing individuals for an increasingly complex world. These beliefs and values are reinforced among member institutions through the collegiality and shared purpose of the NCHC.”

Sinclair's program, like the community college student, is highly diversified. It:

- serves both non-traditional and traditional students, both part and full-time students
- allows students to participate in a two-tiered program by
 - enrolling in individual honors courses, or
 - applying to be an Honors Scholar
- offers five types of honors courses--
 - core courses
 - honors contracts within non-honors courses
 - course plus honors seminar
 - special topics courses
 - interdisciplinary courses
- develops critical thinking skills and analysis through research and presentation
- provides close interaction between students and faculty
- provides special honors recognition, as well as designation on transcript
- promotes faculty growth by providing a forum for developing innovative courses
- encourages professional and collegial interaction through special incentives for designing and teaching interdisciplinary courses
- provides scholarships for students in the Honors Scholars Program
- requires a Service Learning experience for students enrolled as Honors Scholars

History

The Honors Program at Sinclair was established in 1986 at the initiative of Dean Clifford Barr at a time when many community colleges were just beginning to develop Honors curricula. Dr Mary Navarro was appointed to convene a committee and undertake to develop an academic Honors Program within the Division of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The committee drew up plans to offer a variety of course offerings, both core and special topics. The Board of Trustees approved the program and an operating budget. The Honors Committee was formally established to assist the Director, oversee the program, develop criteria for Honors course proposals, and to recruit students and faculty for the program. Dr Navarro was also advisor to Phi Theta Kappa, Sinclair's Nu Pi chapter, the international honor society for two-year colleges.

We offered our first two courses (English 112 and Math 116) as pilots during winter quarter 1987. The program soon expanded to include courses in psychology, history, biology, humanities, and physics. During the 1990s we branched out into other divisions and departments, including fine arts, business, and communications. Interdisciplinary courses were first developed under a Sinclair Foundation grant for faculty planning. Interdisciplinary courses are an essential feature of any Honors program and are a key part of articulation agreements with four-year institutions. We define "interdisciplinary" as any HUM course and/or any cross-listed course.

The Sinclair Honors Program is an institutional member of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) and the Mid-East Honors Association (MEHA). We have an articulation agreement with Wright State University, and students who complete our program are eligible for special scholarships there.

Thomas Martin became Honors Director in 1998, at which time Phi Theta Kappa became a separate organization and the Honors Committee became the Honors Council.



Our websites

The Honors website (first set up in 1996) is one of the most complete, and most frequently updated, at Sinclair. It includes course listings and syllabi, a handbook for faculty, various forms, full descriptions of the program's activities, and links to related programs such as Phi Theta Kappa and Ohio Fellows. We have recently added a "testimonials" page with comments and news from former Honors Scholars who have moved on to graduate school or the working world.

When the my.sinclair website went online, the Honors Program also established a presence there. Honors Scholars, students in honors courses and others who scored high on the Accuplacer test are members of the Honors “organization” and receive updates and news via e-mail and announcements on the student homepage. This has proved to be a valuable recruiting tool for Honors courses.

Recruiting

As with most Honors programs – particularly at nonresidential schools – our greatest challenge is informing students about the availability of Honors courses and persuading them to register. Our best recruiting tool is the Admissions office: prospective students who score high on the Accuplacer test receive a message with their scores encouraging them to investigate Honors, and many also receive one of our brochures from the Admissions counselors. Just as useful are the faculty in departments which offer Honors options: simply announcing the availability of a course in the classroom often brings us new students. We also include a list of Honors courses in each quarterly bulletin and on our website, and e-mail that list to all the students in our my.sinclair groups.

Participation

Students may elect to participate in Honors two ways:

1. Honors Scholars Program

Students may apply to become Honors Scholars. Upon acceptance, scholars undertake to complete five honors experiences while maintaining an overall 3.25 GPA. Three of the five honors courses must be in different disciplines and one course must be Interdisciplinary Honors. In addition to other financial aid and scholarships, Honors Scholars may apply for up to six Honors Program Scholarships on a per-quarter basis during their time in the program. Honors Scholars are required to fulfill a Service Learning requirement before completing the program. Students will perform unpaid community service as part of a selected Honors course or through an Experience-Based Education (EBE) course.

2. Individual Honors Courses

Qualified students may enroll in individual Honors courses whether or not they plan to become Honors Scholars. To receive Honors credit, a student must earn a minimum of "B" in the course.

Each quarter we offer a public Honors Symposium at which a student or group of students presents a project from an Honors course.

As of spring 2005, we have 34 active Honors Scholars, “active” meaning “currently enrolled, all requirements not yet completed.” The term “active” is relative, however –

some of these students attend full time and are conscientious about staying in touch with the Program; others are part-time and/or not enrolled every quarter; some we rarely hear from. In addition, there are about 20 students who were accepted into the program but have not completed the requirements and have not been heard from in several quarters: we consider them “inactive.” Since 1998, about 35 Scholars have completed all requirements and moved on to four-year institutions.

The Director and the Honors Council

The Director’s responsibilities include:

- maintaining and supervising the Honors Program Office, room 10-339
- recruiting Honors faculty
- recruiting students for courses and for Honors Scholars Program
- coordinating Honors courses
- maintaining student records
- handling applications for Honors Scholars and Honors Scholarships
- developing in-service programs for Honors Faculty
- supervising student workers in partnership with Phi Theta Kappa advisor
- planning the quarterly Honors Symposium



The Honors Council member is expected to:

- oversee the development of new Honors courses
- help recruit faculty to teach honors courses
- help identify students as potential Honors Scholars
- interview students applying for admission to the Program
- support and assist the Honors Director and Phi Theta Kappa advisor
- review applications for Honors Scholarships
- help identify new Service Learning opportunities
- serve on a subcommittee

The members of the Honors Council are:

- Director of the Honors Program
- Advisor to Phi Theta Kappa
- a representative of the Admissions Office
- an academic counselor
- faculty members who teach, or may teach, Honors courses
- a student member of Phi Theta Kappa
- an Honors Scholar student



The Program Aide

Our office manager and secretary, Linda Schock, is shared with Phi Theta Kappa and Ohio Fellows. Besides answering student questions and handling drop-in visitors to the Honors Program office, Linda maintains the website, tracks statistics, and takes care of routine office tasks like filing, typing and copying. One major responsibility is creating a my.sinclair mailing list for all new students who score high on the Accuplacer test, so that we can send them news about the program. This happens about once a month throughout the year.

CRITERIA FOR ALL HONORS COURSES

Regardless of the type of Honors course, it must meet the following minimum criteria:

1. At least 50% of the grade must be based on research, writing and presentation. Some form of presentation should be required in every Honors course.
2. Students will be expected to interact and participate fully. Percentage of grade to be based on participation is at the instructor's discretion (unless there is a departmental rule).
3. Examinations and assignments that require students to demonstrate a command of the vocabulary and concepts of the subject; critical analysis and synthesis skills; problem solving; and mastery of the English language.
4. A class presentation by the student. This may take any number of forms. If special equipment is required, the instructor will make the arrangements.
5. For interdisciplinary courses, integration of two or more disciplines

Financial Aid

A few years ago we began offering Honors Scholarships to Honors Scholars (up to \$500 per quarter for six quarters, not need-based). With the reorganization of the scholarship structure a few years ago, these became Academic Excellence scholarships, now \$400 maximum, and also available to non-Honors students with the necessary 3.5 GPA, as long as they have completed 36 credit hours or more. This arrangement has worked well for us; we are almost always able to award some money to Honors Scholars who request it.



Service Learning



Beginning in January 1998, each student admitted to the Honors Scholars Program must complete a Service Learning project before "graduating" from the program. The Honors Council believes that Honors students, as leaders of tomorrow, should make a commitment to community service. You might volunteer at a local homeless shelter, work with the Lincoln School mentoring program, participate in a service project at your church, volunteer at a museum or outdoor education center, at the Park District, join a Habitat for Humanity project, serve on the board of a nonprofit organization -- the possibilities are endless.

In the Honors Program, "Service learning" is defined as a not-for-pay activity that benefits the public good. The Honors Committee has the sole right to determine whether a given activity fits this definition. This activity may be an internship such as that required by Ohio Fellows, but still must be not-for pay and for the public good.

Appendices

In spring 2005, Institutional Planning & research conducted a study for us which revealed several interesting facts. Here are the highlights:

1. Students in Honors courses have a higher overall success rate than students who do not take an Honors course. In 2003-2004, 86% completed their Honors course(s) successfully, and 84.3% finished all courses successfully. This compares to a success rate of 73% collegewide.
2. About 52% of all students in Honors courses maintained their GPA or raised it. However, 48% showed a slight decline in GPA (averaging 0.06 points). In many cases this might be simply because the student earned his or her first B (IPR tells us that many students taking Honors courses have a 4.0 GPA). But it could also be that unqualified students self-selected themselves into some courses. This tells us that we must do a better job advising potential honors students (not to take too heavy a load, or to take 'easier' classes while they are taking an Honors course, etc), and perhaps exercise more control over whom we give permission-to-register to.
3. There is a strong correlation between high GPA and success in Honors courses: that is, students who do better generally (in all coursework) also do better in Honors classes.
4. Students taking both Honors and non-Honors courses at the same time tend to do better in the Honors course (perhaps because they work harder at that course, and receive more individualized attention from the instructors). The average numeric grade in the Honors courses was 3.16, and in 'regular' courses 2.63.

Honors Course enrollment

Enrollment in Honors sections varies considerably from quarter to quarter, but there are some consistent patterns: ENG 111 and 112 always do very well; PSY 121 and 122 and ENG 113 usually have good numbers; HIS 111-112-113 sometimes have enough students for a stand-alone section, sometimes not; others like HIS 101-102-103 and BIO 171-172-173 always have a few students, but never enough for a stand-alone. The chart below shows a small but steady gain over the past few years in total numbers.

