

University Honors College

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost
From: John Mouracade, Dean, University Honors College
Date: February 24, 2020
Re: UAA Administrative Review Questionnaire – Spring 2020

While the Honors College has been placed under administrative review instead of academic review, I would like to point out that the Honors College is an academic unit. We deliver curricular and co-curricular programming that supports the functions of teaching and research. Students graduate from the Honors College and this is reflected on their transcript.

1) What are the core functions of your unit that are funded in Fund 1 (i.e. Fund 104110)? (Bullet point list is preferred. No more than one-page, please.)

The core functions of the Honors College can be broken into two types, primary and secondary. The secondary functions are dependent on the primary ones. For instance, Honors is often featured in recruitment efforts. Recruitment is a secondary function. Without the primary functions of delivering the honors curriculum and funding undergraduate research, there would be no basis for recruiting students.

The primary functions of the Honors College are:

- Delivery of the honors program curriculum (seminars, community engagement course, senior project)
- Supporting university wide undergraduate research endeavors through the Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarship (OURS)
- Promoting and supporting Major Scholarship applications (Fulbright, Rhodes, Marshall, etc...)

The secondary functions of the Honors College are:

- Recruitment (especially of high achieving students)
- Retention
- Advising
- Fund raising
- Public relations
- Supporting grants (EXITO, ADAC, REU's, etc...)
- Faculty development (e.g., mentoring workshops)
- Alumni relations
- Recognizing faculty and student achievement (e.g., Student Showcase, Undergraduate Research and Discovery Symposium)
- Serving as a clearinghouse for student opportunities

2) If one or more of these functions was reduced or discontinued, what would be the impact on: (Not all elements may be relevant for your unit. Only address relevant items.)

a. More students persisting and completing educational goals?

Educational goals, like conducting research, going to graduate school, or receiving a nationally competitive scholarship (e.g., Fulbright or Goldwater) would be much more difficult for our students to achieve without the Honors College programming. Other goals, such as degree completion, are dramatically affected by high impact practices, such as those embedded in the Honors College. Small seminar classes, community engagement, and undergraduate research are all proven to increase retention and completion. At UAA, students who enroll in honors and complete at least one course are twice as likely to graduate as a normed peer group.

b. Supporting overall student, faculty and staff success in meeting UAA's mission?

Honors supports students, faculty, and staff in myriad ways. Students are supported through our curriculum, enrichment activities, living/learning community, advising, undergraduate research grants, and major scholarship advising.

Students

For the past three years, UAA alumni have been the keynote speaker at the annual Undergraduate Research and Discovery Symposium. All three speakers talked at length about the impact of Honors and undergraduate research on their ability to pursue their advanced degrees and their careers. Just recently I was speaking with one of those alumni, who told me that without undergraduate research grants, she wouldn't have completed her degree at UAA. Another student told me that during a medical school interview, the faculty only wanted to talk about his undergraduate research grant and the project he did. One of the joys of being the Honors Dean is that I hear stories like these on a regular basis. Many of the stories I hear are not about preparation for graduate school, but students who felt better prepared for their career due to their experiences in Honors. Students found that they were more competitive when applying for jobs because of their enhanced communication skills, research experience, and community engagement experience.

In many ways, honors programs were the original student success centers where high impact practices were clustered together for a group of students. As high impact practices are shown to have greater impact on students from historically underrepresented backgrounds, honors is particularly important for UAA—whose students come from diverse backgrounds. One of the strengths of the Honors College is that it is a cross section of UAA's student population—almost exactly reflecting the diversity of the student population.

The undergraduate research grant program is a key part of what Honors does to support student success. Without the funding provided by the Honors College, students would not have the opportunities to do the field work, lab work, community-based research, or creative projects that they now do. Several UAA students patented the product of their undergraduate research projects. These are examples that involve a small number of students, but a large measure of success. UAA has only had one student receive a Rhodes Scholarship, but that is one more than any other university in Alaska.

In addition to supporting research, Honors provides funding for student activities that cannot be found anywhere else at UAA. For instance, The Honors College funds student travel to present research. In my time in Honors, every other funding source for undergraduate travel to present research has gone away. Honors helps a small group of students each year (perhaps 20-25) travel to present their research. These experiences are intrinsically valuable, but also help our students improve their research, develop presentation skills, and be competitive for graduate school. Besides benefitting the students, these activities are good for UAA's reputation and provide good stories for PR.

And then there are all the random ways that students are supported by the Honors College. Seemingly random emails requesting students for internships, research positions, or (and this really happened) to attend a presidential debate in 2016 seem to appear in my inbox regularly. There is so much going on in Anchorage and in Alaska and organizations have trouble making connections. So, many people and organizations choose the Honors College as the place to connect with UAA. This visible point of contact for external partners results in many opportunities for our students that we may not otherwise pursue. For instance, two years ago, we received an invitation to nominate two students to the Korea Arctic Academy, an all-expenses paid ten-day intensive in South Korea through the University of the Arctic and the Korean Maritime Institute. The opportunity came to Honors about a month before the deadline. We put together a nomination process and managed to nominate two students, one of whom was accepted into the institute (only 20 students were accepted out of over 100 nominees).

Faculty

Honors supports faculty in several ways: development, research support, grant support. Honors provides several types of faculty development opportunities. Allowing faculty to teach unique classes to highly engaged students is one area of faculty development. Honors (through the Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarship) also provides training to faculty on mentoring undergraduates (and has a handbook on mentoring undergraduate researchers). Honors also provides development through a faculty grant opportunity called the FLEUR (Faculty Lead Experience in Undergraduate Research). This grant (funded entirely by donations) provides funding for faculty to incorporate undergraduate research into a course in a novel manner.

The Honors College also supports faculty by preparing students to do undergraduate research. Through the Honors curriculum (including URS 121, a course designed to prepare first year students for research opportunities later in their academic career) and through support of grants such as BUILD EXITO and URISE, Honors helps provide faculty with students who can meaningfully contribute to their research.

Through its curricular and co-curricular programs, Honors supports grant activity. Honors was central to the successful application for the BUILD EXITO grant, providing the required courses for EXITO students and assisting with numerous activities required by the grant, while also providing letters of support for the initial grant and the renewal. Similarly, Honors is supporting URISE and INBRE activities through curriculum, enrichment activities, and letters of support.

Honors also provides basic pedagogical support for faculty (and students) by printing posters so that their students can do poster presentations as part of a class. To have the posters printed by GSS costs students about \$45, which is prohibitively expensive for many students.

In addition to these standard types of support, participating in the Honors College is very rewarding to faculty. Not only is it enjoyable to teach Honors seminars, such teaching, as well as mentoring undergraduate research, have been shown to increase faculty satisfaction with their job and faculty retention.

Staff

The staff in the offices of Advancement and Recruitment receive the most support from Honors. However, we also support staff in the Multicultural Center, Residence Life, and other offices.

Honors works directly with Advancement on fundraising and public relations. The Honors College frequently sends stories to Advancement about student achievements that appear on the UAA website or in the *Green and Gold*. Honors also has a strong track record for raising funds. Last year, the Alaska Cardiovascular Research Foundation created an undergraduate research endowment with an initial commitment of \$75,000.

Honors works with the Alumni Center in Advancement in several ways. Most notable is that in the past 3 years Honors has brought in an alum to serve as the keynote speaker for the Undergraduate Research and Discover Symposium. Each of the years, through a partnership with the Alumni Center and the speakers' home academic department (psychology, economics, and computer science), we have held an Alumni event prior to the keynote address.

Honors supports staff efforts in Recruitment in various ways. Honors directly recruits students through high school visits, mailings, and advertisements. Honors also participates in campus-wide recruitment events, college fairs, and UA Scholars nights.

Additionally, Honors has been working with Recruitment on an event tied to the Undergraduate Research and Discovery Symposium. On the night of the keynote address, Honors and recruitment organized an event for prospective students. Prior to the keynote, there is a reception for prospective students, a mock class taught by an Honors professor. Everyone then attends the keynote address.

Honors also supports staff in other offices. Honors is a strong advocate of study abroad and community engagement. Honors works with Residence Life to hold events for the honors/scholars residential community.

- c. Impacts to UAA's reputation, and ability to attract and retain students and/or external support?

The Honors College is emblematic of UAA's aspirations. Significantly reducing or eliminating the Honors College would signal that UAA aspires to be, at best, a shining example of mediocrity. This would certainly have negative effects on UAA's reputation and ability to attract and retain students. Many donors would be less inclined to support UAA.

I could answer at length to this question, but it would be largely anecdotal and speculative. I think it is more worthwhile to point out that a disproportionate number of commencement speakers, subjects of *Green and Gold* stories, and students featured in recruitment publications are Honors students.

In fact, enhancing the Honors College would be prudent at this time. Signaling to students that while we may have fewer programs, we are delivering them in the most impactful way is a good message. Budget cuts always make people feel like there is a dwindling number of opportunities. To combat that misconception by demonstrating a commitment to robust opportunities through Honors could help with recruitment and advancement (as well as retention and completion on the other end of the equation). As Honors is currently in the process of revising its curriculum to be compatible with more degree options at UAA, there is an opportunity for greatly increasing the impact of Honors on UAA more broadly. Honors can be enhanced in many ways other than through budget. Having greater capacity to recruit faculty to teach for Honors would be a wonderful enhancement that would resolve many long standing problems with delivering the Honors curriculum.

3) Identify measures and targets used to monitor the impact of functions on each of the above (not all elements may be relevant for your unit, only address relevant items).

- d. More students persisting and completing educational goals?

The appropriate measure to use is to compare Honors College students to a GPA normed peer cohort. Last time I checked this comparison, Honors Students (those who enrolled in Honors and took at least one honors course) were graduating in 6 years at nearly twice the rate of their GPA normed peer group.

- e. Supporting overall student, faculty and staff success in meeting UAA's mission?

Tracking graduate school admissions, Major Scholarship and other award recipients, and student publications/performances/exhibits among Honors/Undergraduate Research students and other students would provide a way to track the potential impact of Honors programming internal to UAA. However, comparing UAA to peer institutions in terms of major scholarships, student publications, and graduate school admission would provide another point of comparison. Between these two points of comparison (which are currently not available), we could develop a good model for assessing the impact of Honors programming on student success.

Faculty and staff success would be much harder to measure as the contributions from Honors are more difficult to discern. Tracking the ability to recruit and retain UA Scholars or APS recipients would be one measure of support for recruitment. With advancement, things are much less clear. Obviously, we could simply track donations made directly to Honors/Undergraduate Research, but the larger public relations function would be much harder to quantify.

- f. Impacts to UAA's reputation, and ability to attract and retain students and/or external support?

Impact to reputation from a particular program being reduced or eliminated is difficult to gauge as we do not have the data to form a meaningful baseline. However, I opine that a sufficiently skilled social scientist (which I am not) could devise some surveys that would help shed light on this matter.

Determining measures and targets around attracting and retaining students and external support would be easier, as those are quantifiable. Tracking UAA's ability to recruit UA scholars, APS recipients, or students graduating high school with a GPA of 3.5 or greater would provide measures and targets. Without the historical data, it is impossible to develop meaningful targets, but a brief analysis of the historical data would allow for the development of targets and measures. Similarly, external support can be simplified to mean donors or community partners. Then those can be tallied and measured against historical numbers.

4) What improvements have been achieved over the last five years?

Over the past five years, there have been many improvements in student outcomes, student opportunities, campus partnerships, external funding for undergraduate research, resources for students, and student engagement.

In terms of student outcomes, the number of Honors College graduates has grown dramatically. The Honors College now graduates 2-3 times as many students every year as it did from 2007-2014. The number of undergraduate research grants has trended upward and participation in the Undergraduate Research Symposium has grown by over 20%. Also, the Honors College has supported the first UAA student to win a Rhodes Scholarship as well as the first UAA student to win a Humanities in Action Scholarship. We have recently been listed as a top producer of Fulbright Award recipients. In terms of all three of Honor's major functions (curriculum, undergraduate research, and major scholarships) we have seen significant improvement in student outcomes in the last five years.

Student opportunities have also increased. Due to a new partnership with the Murdock Charitable Trust, UAA is invited to bring up to 8 students per year to a scientific undergraduate research conference hosted by the Murdock Charitable Trust. The Trust provides lodging and meals for students. Participating institutions only need to provide transportation. Also, Honors has formed a partnership with the Ludwig Foundation in Cuba, providing the opportunity for 3 students per year to conduct undergraduate research in Cuba. Through Honors' partnership with the College of Health in supporting the BUILD EXITO grant, students have had the opportunity to participate in an NIH funded undergraduate research development program in the health sciences. UAA's cohort size is 10 students. Out of the first cohort, three students are now in medical school. (In a way, this demonstrates how listing opportunities and outcomes as separate categories is a flawed approach. Opportunities lead to outcomes. If we take away student opportunities, such as those provided through the Honors College, outcomes will suffer.) Student opportunities in undergraduate research have also been increased by securing an endowment for undergraduate research funded by the Alaska Cardiovascular Research Institute. Student opportunities have also increased due to Honors developing strong relationships with academic departments across campus. Prior to five years ago, most courses in honors were taught by adjuncts or staff. Very few faculty from academic departments were involved with Honors. Now, almost all classes are staffed by faculty from academic departments with some long term commitments now in place for faculty to teach Honors classes.

The Honors College has developed so many partnerships over the past five years. Detailed above, in response to other questions, is the work with advancement, recruitment, the BUILD EXITO program, and ADAC. Honors has also worked to support undergraduate research conferences in psychology, history, English, and chemistry while also extensively supporting projects in nursing. The Student Showcase, an important part of student life for decades, was moved to the Honors College this year as they needed assistance assuring the long term viability of this program that

celebrates the great work UAA students do. Honors has also had a very good relationship with the MCC. Honors regularly participates in and support efforts of the Multi-Cultural Center and MCC staff recommend many of their students to the Honors College.

The Honors College has pursued an increase in student engagement through programming such as a beginning of the year retreat, social events, cultural events, and enrichment activities (workshops on writing a resume, etc..) Increased student engagement is one of the key catalysts for increased outcomes. The new space for Honors that we moved into this academic year has assisted greatly with our ability to engage students and it is expected that the increased engagement will produce increased outcomes in subsequent years.

5) What efforts have your unit made to improve efficiencies and reduce costs? What was the result?

Eliminated administrative assistant position (approximately \$55k savings)
Reclassified Associate Dean to Program coordinator (approximately \$30k savings)
Dean has taught classes, served as OURS director (saves approximately \$25k annually on buyouts)
Alumni keynote instead of nationally recognized speakers (saves approximately \$5k on speaker fees)
Eliminated several grants (saves \$5-10k annually)
Eliminated convocation (saves \$10-15k annually)

6) List and briefly describe any current or proposed Board of Regents Policy, State or Federal mandates, or laws that require the continuation of your core function(s).

Not applicable.

7) Potential cuts: Please describe any function reductions or eliminations that are feasible without significantly affecting UAA's mission fulfillment or its compliance mandates? Are any functions within your unit are duplicated elsewhere at UAA? Is there an opportunity for efficiency to be created by partnering or combining functions? Please describe the opportunities you identify within your unit and include the approximate dollar values and savings that would result.

Sharing staff with other units (\$30-50k depending on amount of time shared)
Eliminate student assistants (\$15k)
Pay replacement value (adjunct cost) for faculty buyouts (\$30k)
Consolidations of disparate relevant functions from outside of Honors College to be in the Honors College (\$100k) (This potential cut actually falls outside of the

requested suggestions for reductions by suggesting that there are efficiencies to be found not only within administrative units, but across them.)