

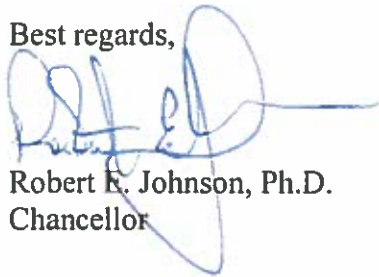
May 9, 2019

Martin Meehan, President  
University of Massachusetts  
One Beacon Street, 31<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02108

Dear President Meehan:

Please find attached a proposal for the establishment of an Honors College at UMass Dartmouth for consideration at the May 2019 CASA meeting.

Best regards,



Robert E. Johnson, Ph.D.  
Chancellor



Mohammad A. Karim, Ph.D.  
Provost

## **University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Honors College**

### **Full-proposal Submission**

#### **Proposal Development**

The proposed Honors College is a transformation of the current University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's current Honors program. The proposal aligns curriculum structure with the curricula of the University's colleges, University Studies (general education curriculum), and will require 24 credits of honors courses as well as co-curricular activities.

The Honor Committee (a Faculty Senate appointed advisory committee), facilitated by the Honors Program Director and Associate Director, developed the current proposal establishing an Honors College. This proposal has been approved at all levels of campus governance and is supported by the Office of the Provost. It was also circulated to all UMass campuses offering undergraduate degree programs and received support from all. It is anticipated that the University of Massachusetts Board of Trustees will approve the final proposal on June 20, 2019.

#### **Introduction**

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Honors Program provides a vibrant and innovative learning environment that engages and challenges academically talented students. Students educated in the Honors Program are competitive in both professional employment and academia and maintain a life-long love of learning. The program fosters a spirit of regional, national, and global community responsibility.

Over the last two years, the Program directors have worked with the senate-appointed Honors committee, surveyed faculty and students and reviewed the program of Honor Colleges of other UMass campuses. Changing from an Honors Program to an Honor College will better meet the needs of our students and maximize the likelihood of them graduating as Commonwealth Scholars. An Honors College also aligns with UMass Dartmouth's expansion as a national recognized Doctoral Research University.

#### **Vision**

Moving from an Honors Program to an Honors College is part of an overall driving vision of "transformation rather than expansion." The College will attract student who are seeking an expansive and rigorous educational experience, who otherwise may not have otherwise considered UMass Dartmouth as a college choice. We will offer our Honors students transformational learning experiences, both in the classroom and through extra-curricular activities. Moreover, an Honors College will not just offer transformation for individual students, it will also offer transformation in terms of its academic role within the University. It will be in

the forefront in implementing new and transformative courses and promoting high-impact teaching practices, such as undergraduate research, which will have an impact on the rest of the University.

### **Purpose and Goals:**

The Honors College will provide a creative, student-centered research community that will attract and graduate highly motivated, intellectually serious students from across disciplines. The College will function as an overlay structure, the dominant form in the United States, rather than a freestanding College with its own faculty and curriculum (see Sederberg 28). The College will provide these students with a rigorous educational experience that emphasizes high-impact learning practices and enrichment opportunities designed to help students mature into skilled researchers, innovators, and artists. In addition, the Honors College will promote collaboration between students, between students and faculty, and between students and the community. We shall draw on the regional resources that make UMass Dartmouth unique, such as our historical and cultural resources, to develop a College that has a local focus with a global vision.

The Honors College will be based on the Integrative Model of Excellent Performance (IMEP; Wofensberger, Drayer, & Volker; 2014). This model emphasizes the interactions of three dimensions that result in an optimal teaching and learning environment: integrated community, promotion of academic excellence, and bounded freedom (i.e., allow innovation in a supportive environment, give students freedom and responsibility for their education). Based on the IMEP, the proposed College has three primary goals: (a) build a vibrant educational community, (b) promote intellectual diversity and excellence, and (c) stimulate and support rigorous and impactful scholarship. Fortunately, our current Honors Program provides a foundation on which to build the proposed Honors College. In order to build a vibrant educational community, we will provide physical space for living and learning. Our College will be embedded in our geographic and cultural region, and all it has to offer, as a learning modality, whether our students study this region or give back to the region via internships, capstone experiences, service, etc. Our goal of promoting intellectual diversity and excellence will be achieved by continuing to offer course enrichment activities (e.g., trips to museums for the Art History courses) and expanding our course offerings. In order to stimulate rigorous and impactful scholarship, we will continue requiring students to complete an Honors Thesis in order to graduate. Engagement in research – active discovery through investigation – supports the mission of our campus. Through the establishment of an Honors College, the University will create a space for a hybrid educational experience where students develop multiple approaches and perspectives of critical problem solving and application of learning to society's needs. An Honors College will allow for an expansion of that project through a scaffold for the curriculum and additional funding for research projects.

Becoming an Honors College and reaching these goals will require additional personnel. However, rather than viewing this as an additional level of administration, we see it as an opportunity for the infusion of dedicated and talented faculty and staff who can support the mission of the Honors College and the University.

## **Justification:**

### *Need for Program*

As the Honors Program continues to grow, we will not be able to address all the basic learning needs of our students. For example, while Honors “contracts” can be used to resolve scheduling difficulties for individual students, increased demand has created problems. In one case, the number of requests to contract a particular course were enough to justify an entire course section. The larger unit of an Honors College would remove such difficulties by offering more course options and more flexibility to the students by ensuring that Honors learning is delivered in a variety of ways (e.g., offering more blended learning classes or “bundling” a series of connected 1-credit courses). In addition, the transformation into a College will allow us to increase the number of students in Honors. Our plan is to gradually increase the number of Honors students from 350 to 480 by 2023.

Is there a need for the unit that is not being met by other units? A comparison with other colleges or departments within UMass Dartmouth does not account for the “value added” nature of an Honors education. Rather, the point of comparison for an Honors college needs to be with *the current Honors program itself*, accompanied by national studies that demonstrate the value (on multiple levels) of an Honors college. The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) produced a 2012 census, which included a comparison of Honors programs with Honors colleges. A central point from the survey, focusing on similar institutions to UMass Dartmouth, is that for institutions that are not in the “highly selective” category Honors colleges “seem to perform somewhat better [than Honors programs] if the task is to provide a body of excellence within a larger university that does not start out with the resources of the public elites” (<http://publicuniversityhonors.com/2012/04/08/honors-colleges-vs-honors-programs/>).

In early 2018, the Honors Program Directors conducted a survey of faculty and Honors students regarding the development of an Honors College (see Table 1). Although some items are the same, there are slight variations to numbers 3 and 4 between the student and faculty survey (the changes are noted in parentheses). All items were scored on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Table 1. Mean Student and Faculty Responses**

Item	Faculty	Students
1. Becoming an Honors College would be beneficial to students.	5.51	5.69
2. I am supportive of the shift from an Honors Program to an Honors College.	5.21	5.77
3. I would like more Honors courses available (for students) to take.	5.92	6.17
4. I prefer (teaching) my Honors courses compared to my non-Honors courses.	4.69	5.09
5. Having an Honors College would increase the likelihood I would recommend UMD to a friend or family member.	4.76	5.05

These results indicate that students and faculty have generally positive attitudes towards the development of an Honors College. In an open-ended question asking about the development of an Honors College, students noted the importance of more classes, increased opportunity for research, and the prestige of being a part of an Honors College.

Honors colleges (as opposed to Honors programs) are part of a national trend to attract high achieving high school students in a competitive “market.” Beyond this strategic perspective, Honors colleges attract and retain students and faculty and *add value* to students’ educational experiences. What is “value added” education? Cost-conscious students and their families may see “value added” education as a small private school experience with a lower cost. This might include things like smaller classes and closer interactions with professors. In addition, “value added” education might include the opportunities afforded to Honors students, such as extra-curricular activities, opportunities to participate in research, assigned housing, early registration for courses. Perhaps most importantly, “value added” education is the “vision” of Honors at a particular institution: It is the identification of the best practices of an Honors education that are then applied to a particular institution’s individual character and strengths. These ideas move to the concrete and applied when they are transformed into conscious and reflective practice. Thus, the Honors program will use the production of a new unit to consider what constitutes an Honors education in the twenty-first century.

### *Benefits*

An Honors education has many benefits for the student, including cognitive development, enhanced classroom experiences (Seifert et al., 2007), and greater sense of community (Hébert & McBee, 2007). Moreover, Honors students have higher graduation rates (and graduate in a shorter period of time) compared to non-Honors students (Cosgrove, 2004).

Expanding from a Program to a College will also allow students more flexibility in integrating their Honors work into their major. This flexibility will allow the College to admit students later in their college career. Currently, students are not eligible to join the program after they earn 40 credits. Raising the credit cut-off point will, for example, allow first-generation students a bit more time to adjust to college life before they are ineligible to join the program. In speaking with the Dean of the Honors College at the University of Massachusetts Boston (the most recent UMass campus to switch from a program to a college), she said this is a big advantage for students who may take longer to acclimate or who were not well-prepared by their high school education.

Moving from an Honors Program to a College will also involve an increase in the number of required Honors credits from 18 credits to 24 credits. Although this will not radically change the curriculum, an increase in the number of courses will allow for innovations within the curriculum and allow students to explore academic areas of interest. We will be able to offer Honors courses in previously underserved departments or majors, or majors with few electives (e.g., STEM) by offering upper-level or more specialized courses and/or through offering University Studies courses that may be of particular interest. We will be able to consider different modes of delivery beyond the 3- or 4- credit course; for example, (following a model used by the College of Engineering) we could offer three interconnected 1-credit courses or put resources into exploring the full potential of blended learning. To fully realize the goal of offering a diverse and stimulating curriculum to students, it will require the infrastructure, stability, and resources that an Honors College will provide.

While UMass Dartmouth is a public research university, we are small enough to offer experiences to our undergraduates similar to a small United States private college or the Honors degree system in England. This includes the opportunity to work closely with faculty in research



and the opportunity for community engagement. However, not every educational experience results in increased awareness of community and responsibility to community. Large STEM classes or general education classes, on the whole, do not produce such results. A combination of class content and class format is required, such as classes where discussion-style learning is the norm, critical thinking is emphasized, and application of concepts are discussed. In other words, Honors classes.

In addition, creating an Honors College will:

- Allow the University to build on the success of the program to attract and retain top students by providing a high-quality education at a public university value;
- Provide a useful recruitment tool to attract high achieving faculty who are passionate about working with and teaching highly motivated students;
- Offer a more stable and diverse selection of Honors courses for students;
- Provide more resources and opportunities for student engagement (both in and out of the classroom); and
- Encourage the development of partnerships between the college and the local community, which will also further serve to elevate our region.

Borrowing from the successful Northeastern University model of incorporating internship/work experiences into undergraduate degree programs, an Honors college would allow the Honors program to harness the many community partnerships to provide students with practical real-world experiences in which they explore content specific problems in their curriculum.

Sometimes an Honors education/college is mistakenly associated with exclusionary practices or elitism. However, that is far from the case. For example, 2,546 individuals who were eligible for our Honors program applied to UMass Dartmouth for admittance in Fall 2018. 918 invitations were issued by Admissions, and 129 students accepted the invitation, with an expected “melt” during the summer months. Each year the Honors Program needs to put an artificial cap of approximately 100 acceptances, due to restraints of carrying capacity. If we admit too many students, then the quality of their educational experience will suffer. An Honors education is not simply coursework. If UMass Dartmouth is able to admit more students – while *increasing* the quality of their education– there would be multiple benefits.

The UMass Amherst campus provides an exemplar for scaling a “program” into a dedicated college with unique benefits, expanded in-depth learning strategies and community facilities. According to then acting Dean Daniel Gordon, in an effort to attract and retain high-achieving students from the Commonwealth and beyond, UMass Amherst moved from “a set of academic requirements” to “*a place, a community in space*” (Bombardieri, 2013, np, italics added for emphasis). The students of UMass Dartmouth deserve this same experience.

### **Administration and Operation:**

As the College develops, administrative staff will be expanded in separate phases to support faculty and students. These include:

Honors Dean: Reporting to the Provost and provides visionary leadership for Honors-related programs, requiring thorough knowledge of issues, best practices and administration for Honors education, student recruitment and success, and cross-campus collaboration. FY21

Assistant Dean: Responsible for the day-to-day running of Honors College; for example, degree certification, transcript issues, etc. An administrator, rather than a part-time faculty member, may be better suited to deal with the administrative functioning of the College and could make the organization of the College more streamlined. Reports to the Honors Dean. FY23

Full-time ESU (professional) staff person to be Honors academic advisor: Responsible for advising, overseeing peer mentors, internal recruitment, retention, supporting/collaborating with faculty assigned to research and Scholar Development (national scholarships). Reports to Honors Dean. FY20.

Administrative Assistant: Primary person providing office support, keeps student records and files, organizes Convocation, manages all accounts, tracks budget under direction.

## **Resources**

The transition to an Honors College will attract highly qualified first-year students, increase retention rates, and as such increase overall revenue for the University to be able to invest more in this College. A portion of the personnel and program resources required already exists, as an Honors College will be built upon the current Honors Program budget. Currently, the Program's operational budget covers the expenses for two third-time directors, 50% administrative assistant, office expenses (copier, newsletter, etc.), Convocation, and learning activities, such as our annual Art History trip to a museum in New York city. Additional funding will be provided by the proposed Honors College Fee and a percentage of tuition received.

## **Implementation**

Full implementation will be in three phases in consultation with the Senate Honors committee, with the third phase being an assessment and future planning phase.

### **Phase One**

The initial phase will focus on student recruitment (including multiple entry points), curriculum revision, design of external learning activities, and troubleshooting. This phase will occur primarily in the Fall and early Spring of academic year 2019-2020 in anticipation of the first cohort admitted into the College.

Crucially, this initial phase will include a "teach-out" plan of the Honors Program. Such a plan sets out the equitable treatment of students currently enrolled in the Honors Program in the event of the instructional and structural change from a Program to a College. The Honors College will ensure that learning experiences, resources, and support services are available to currently enrolled students, and will provide an educational program that is similar in quality and structure to the program promised to these students on their initial enrollment. It is important to recognize that the current notation on a student's final transcript of degree completion is "Commonwealth Honors Scholar," and it will continue to remain so with a new Honors College. In other words, students who are in their final two years at UMass Dartmouth, and thus who will have not taken

the full Honors College degree, will still have an Honors designated degree, a state and national recognition. Students in their final two years will be informed of the many benefits and options offered to them by an Honors College and encouraged to participate. Students not in their junior or senior year will be encouraged to take an Honors College degree through a series of strategies, such as special interest course topics and external learning activities, individualized research projects, or additional internships. Most importantly, these students will be provided with a designated Honors academic advisor to ensure they graduate with an Honors degree.

The current Honors Program curriculum stands at 15 credits of coursework, including a course that prepares students for research (HON 301) and a minimum of 3 credits of research (18 credits total). NCHC recommendations for an Honors College (see Sederberg 163) are at least 20% of a university degree coursework and required research, which would bring the minimum to 24 credits. These additional credits will provide an opportunity for creative course offerings; they are not simply additional humanities or social science courses. The curriculum will be developed in consultation with the Senate Honors Committee.

### **Phase Two**

There are three central components to phase two: (a) strategic recruitment planning to ensure the College consistently attracts top quality students including also from the transfers from community colleges, (b) advising and retention ongoing and planning, and (c) rollout of "Student Development Plans" for national scholarships and career strategies. The latter component will be one way the Honors College serves the entire institution.

### **Phase Three**

This phase is not only about student numbers and successes, it is also about ensuring that UMass Dartmouth's Honors College is at the forefront of Honors education, both locally and nationally. Assessment of the previous two phases will provide the College with its direction for the future. The first two cohorts of College students will have been recruited. Ideally, students at the junior and senior level will be participating fully in an Honors College degree.

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