Academic Affairs

Honors College

Program Improvement Summary

Summary of assessment results with focus on program improvement (to be shared publicly)

Curricular Reform - The Honors College has begun the conversation of curricular reform with academic partners across campus and with the Honors Committee. During 2014-15, using a combination of data from our own assessments of the curricular components of our program and data from the National Collegiate Honors Council, we will begin the process of restructuring our curriculum. Given the quality of student we have the privilege of recruiting to the Honors College, our goal is to create a curriculum that builds on the strong foundation that these talented students have when they arrive on this campus, that draws out the natural curiosity and sense of intellectual purpose that characterizes talented students, and that encourages deep engagement with faculty and innovative approaches to global issues and big ideas. Currently, although our students reflect positively on the core classes of the Honors College (Western Civilization and the interdisciplinary seminars), they also express frustration with the limits that requirements place on exploring their individual interests and on seeking experiential learning through study abroad and internships. We believe that we will be able to develop a curricular structure that encourages exposure to the full range of high impact practices, including research, study abroad, internships and community engagement.

Professional Development: A primary aim of the Honors College is to prepare students fully for post-graduate pursuits. While coursework is central to this goal, we also know that transferable skills and professional tools are essential. Therefore, we aim to provide students with the guidance and support to create compelling resumes and professional narratives, to develop strong communication skills that would be evidenced in an interview, and to collect the necessary artifacts that might be presented to a graduate selection committee or to an interviewer for a job. In the first semester, honors students produce the first version of professional portfolio during the honors first-year seminar. The Honors College continues to support the development of the portfolio throughout the four years on campus through workshops, networking with professionals, and one-on-one mentoring. Although improvement in resumes has occurred across time, we still have work to do. This year, we will strengthen our professional and leadership development through a series of workshops led by trained staff and professionals from the community. We will also strengthen our advising system to ensure a more customized approach aimed to support the long-term goals of each individual student. We also have created two new mentoring initiatives - one for students interested in the health professions and one for students interested in computer science - both with the goals to expose the students to professionals in the relevant disciplines, to guide students as they make decisions that might affect their competitiveness for post-baccalaureate training or jobs in the relevant disciplines, and to prepare students for success in the chosen disciplines. These mentoring programs are a direct response to the feedback we have received from students and from our assessment of gaps in preparation. In addition to these programs, former CoC president, Lee Higdon, will teach a leadership course in spring 2015 to a select group of honors students.

Scholarly Engagement: Honors students come to the College of Charleston with high expectations about engagement with like-minded peers, engagement with faculty, and engagement with professionals both locally and nationally. Our review of the bachelor’s essays is one metric for determining the extent to which honors students have participated in a collaborative project that represents best practices in the discipline. Review of bachelor’s essays from spring 2014 suggests that, for the most part, honors students are having an experience of high quality that has exposed them to the tools of the discipline. However, there is some unevenness in the quality of the essays across discipline. Therefore, in our curriculum reform, we plan to consider strategies for standardizing the quality of the bachelor’s essay project, while maintaining the uniqueness of the discipline. Also, in terms of scholarly engagement, we have focused appropriate resources on invitations to professionals in a range of discipline to visit campus and work with students either via small group discussion or workshops. We plan to expand this program in the upcoming year.