Program Improvement Summary

7. Summary of Assessment Results with Focus on Program Improvement: Describe evidence-based changes that have taken place within the last few assessment cycles because of assessment. Statements must be supported by evidence from the assessment report(s).

Curricular Reform - The Honors College has continued the conversation of curricular reform with academic partners across campus and with the Honors Committee and made significant progress this past year. 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. Student feedback on surveys and in focus groups has been critical to our understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum. 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. 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 have begun the process of restructuring our curriculum. Specifically, we have had productive discussions amongst the members of the Honors Committee, current Honors students and faculty invested in Western Civ over the past year and have begun framing a new and exciting Honors Curriculum. A step forward has been the creation of an Honors Engaged course for freshman and an Honors Immersed course for upperclassman. These changes will allow students to become more invested in the community as freshman and have more opportunities to pursue creative experiences as upperclassman in the Honors College. The upcoming year, we plan to continue discussions with the relevant parties and propose more substantial curricular changes to be vetted by the faculty.

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. This past year, we continue to strengthen our professional and leadership development through a series of workshops led by trained staff and professionals from the community. For example, former CoFC president, Lee Higdon, taught a leadership course for the second time in spring 2016 to a group of honors students. Two years ago, we implemented a new advising system to ensure a more customized approach aimed to support the long-term goals of each individual student. We will
determine the full impact of this new system in future assessments, but are encouraged by some of the trends we are already seeing in the data. In the past two year we have focused on developing mentoring cohorts. While we do not have formal assessment on the success of these cohorts, anecdotal information suggests they are having a positive impact on student success. We will be creating additional mentoring cohorts this upcoming year in order to have a greater impact on student numbers. The goal is 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.

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 2015 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.

This past year, we have increased our effort to effectively communicate opportunities to the students through the Honors Hub. The Hub is managed by an Honors Office Intern and the Director of Marketing and Communications in Honors and is the “go to” place for current students to find out information regarding academic and professional opportunities. Data collected outside of compliance assist indicates students consider themselves well informed and supported to take advantage of opportunities both on campus and in the local and global community.