Honors College

Curricular Reform - Last year, our stated goal was "...to continue conversations with departments to determine how they would be interested in participating in the new curriculum. Finally, our goal is to put forth the new curriculum proposal to the Faculty Curriculum Committee and the Senate this academic year (2017-18)." Working with our campus partners, we are elated to say that a comprehensive reformation of Honors College curriculum was finalized and approved by the Senate in the spring of 2018 and was implemented this fall. This new curriculum is the culmination of four years of research, discussion and negotiation with numerous faculty and administrators across campus. Given the quality of student we have the privilege of recruiting to the Honors College, we have created 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. Although our students have always reflected positively on the core classes of the Honors College (Western Civilization and the interdisciplinary seminars), they expressed frustration with the limits that requirements place on exploring their individual interests and on seeking experiential learning through study abroad and internships. Thus, the new curriculum eliminates the Western Civilization requirement and replaces it with a more flexible set of courses from which the students can choose. We believe that our new curricular structure encourages exposure to the full range of high impact practices, including research, study abroad, internships and community engagement. The new curriculum has evolved from our own assessment data, data from the National Collegiate Honors Council, and extensive conversations with the Honors Faculty Committee and departments across campus. A few years ago we took a step forward by creating the Honors Engaged course for freshman and an Honors Immersed course for upperclassman. These requirements have allowed our students to become more invested in the community as freshman and have more opportunities to pursue creative experiences as upperclassman in the Honors College. We are assessing the impact of these changes. As part of the new curriculum development, we have restructured our assessment of the entire curriculum (See attached "Curriculum Map and Assessment" in the Program Information and Assessment Tab).

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 transferrable 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 CoC president, Lee Higdon, taught a leadership course for the forth time in spring 2018 to a group of honors students. In the new curriculum, we have provided an opportunity for the development of courses that directly impact the student's professional development. We anticipate these will be one credit courses with a specific focus on an aspect of professional development. Four 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 four years we have focused on developing mentoring cohorts. Last year, our goal was to expand the mentoring cohorts to impact more students. We were successful in achieving this goal and are pleased to say that in the current year, we were able to offer 100% of the incoming class entrance into one of these cohorts, despite the nearly 40% increase of incoming students. The sustainability of this program relies on our campus partners as well as resources for faculty fellows. In addition to our mentoring cohorts, we also have plans to strengthen the William Aiken Fellows program. To do this, we will need to hire an additional staff member that will focus primarily on the Aiken fellows. We are developing formal assessment on the success of these cohorts. However, anecdotal information suggests they are having a positive impact on student success. This upcoming year, we will continue to strengthen our mentoring cohorts and including some cross-cohort events to provide more opportunities to students. 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, developed 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. Finally, we have committed funds to purchase a platform for students called the Student Opportunity Center. Students can search over 11,000 research, conference and publication opportunities. We will evaluate the effectiveness of this platform over the course of the upcoming year by soliciting feedback from students and reviewing the analytics.