

National Collegiate Honors Council Program Review Instrument for Shared Principles and Practices (2024)

[The Shared Principles and Practices](#) ratified by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) Board in February 2022 creates a new landscape for honors programs and colleges to reflect on how they evaluate themselves and how they relate to their peer institutions. In response, the NCHC Assessment and Evaluation Committee members have revised this program review instrument, a tool for honors program leaders to evaluate themselves according to best organizational practices. Likewise, this tool will be utilized by honors program reviewers as a guiding framework, so that they may promote honors program strengths at an institution and advocate for resources to address areas of need. It is intentionally organized to mirror the arrangement found in the Shared Principles and Practices.

Please note that no honors program or honors college can be expected to include all of the practices and features listed below. Diversity abounds in honors, reflecting the rich breadth of higher education institutions, and this is welcomed. As stated in the NCHC Shared Principles and Practices, “many of these principles and practices are aspirational even though they may not necessarily be applicable to all honors programs or colleges.” Assessment of an honors program or college should incorporate the features below that align with its own mission, as well as the mission of its institution. What does that mission promise? How well does honors achieve that mission, and what are some ways that honors may improve in the future? To that end, practices below that are irrelevant to an institution’s mission may be omitted in the review process. It is also important to bear in mind that all honors programs and colleges are on a journey to continuous improvement; no one has arrived at the completion of honors education. This document can and should be used to help identify where a particular honors program is on that journey of improvement and how to prioritize future initiatives.

There are two optional documents that may also be used in the program review process, the “NCHC Program Review Rubric” and “Transition from Honors Program to College.” These optional tools may be used by honors leaders in the self-study process if it suits their needs and will only be used in the final program review report if requested of the review team.

Please contact the national office of the National Collegiate Honors Council with initial questions about self-study or the program review process (email hello@nchchonors.org or call 402-472-9150). They will be able to direct you to resources, applications for program review, grants for program review, and leadership of NCHC’s Assessment and Evaluation Committee.

MISSION, VISION, VALUES

Narrative Description of Honors Mission, Vision, and Values

Honors programs and colleges should have a mission statement or charter document that clearly and specifically defines the objectives, responsibilities, and distinct curricular focus of honors. An honors mission statement should correlate with the institutional mission and promote inclusive excellence.

Honors programs and colleges are most successful when strategic planning and assessment practices are widespread, fully integrated, and regularly practiced in honors. When the honors program or college is part of the institution's strategic planning process, honors plays a key role in advancing institutional goals including:

- Supporting institutional enrollment, yield, retention, and graduation rates
- Enhancing institutional prestige through student achievement
- Advocating and utilizing innovative pedagogy across units
- Sustaining campus-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts
- Advancing alumni engagement and giving

Mission Alignment

Does the honors program or college have a mission statement?

If so, when was it created and does it include the objective of honors education?

Does the honors program or college align itself with the mission of the institution?

Is now a time to consider revising the honors mission statement to better align with institutional planning?

Does the honors program or college have a vision statement?

If so, when was it created and does it envision the ideal impact of honors education and the aspirational values of an honors education?

Does the honors program or college align itself with the vision of the institution?

Is now a time to consider revising the honors vision statement to better align with institutional planning?

Strategic Planning and Partnership

Does the honors program or college have a strategic plan?

If so, does it respond to the program's core values?

Does it embrace student-centered practices?

Does it actively welcome diverse faculty, professional staff, and students into its community?

Does it align with the strategic plan of the institution?

Is now a time to consider creating a new strategic plan?

Does the honors program or college appear in the institution's strategic plan?

Does the honors program or college advance other units' strategic plans?

Does the honors program or college employ program-wide goals and student learning outcomes?

If so, do these goals and outcomes further its own clearly articulated mission to serve its diverse student population?

Do these goals and outcomes support the overall aims of the institution?

Inclusive Excellence

Does the honors program or college serve as a model for inclusive excellence of students, faculty, and professional staff across the campus?

ADMINISTRATION

Narrative Description of Honors Administration

Honors programs or colleges serve as a highly regarded cross-campus conduit for information and ideas. Honors is typically situated within Academic Affairs where the honors dean/director reports to the chief academic officer, or their designate, depending on the institutional context.

Honors programs thrive when they forge strong administrative partnerships across the institution, including:

- Admissions, for a clearly articulated philosophy of honors admissions that embraces inclusiveness
- Faculty, through a standing committee or council that works with the dean/director on curriculum, retention, governance, and policy
- Students, through a student committee or council that can advise on policy and direction of the program ensuring that it remains student-centered.

Administrative position

Is the honors academic unit administratively situated in a way that is consistent with the mission and culture of the institution?

Is honors a permanent, stable, and highly regarded academic unit that contributes to a lasting tradition of excellence on campus?

How well does Honors collaborate with other units across campus, such as:

- Student Affairs
- Residential Life/Housing
- Advancement/Development
- Enrollment Management/Admissions

Reporting Line

Does the Honors unit leader report directly to the chief academic officer (typically the Provost)?

If not, discuss the efficacy of the current reporting structure in getting programmatic needs met from the institution.

Does the Honors unit leader have a regular assessment and appointment/reappointment process that is consistent with other campus leaders at their level?

Governance with Faculty and Students

Does the honors unit have an associated representative committee or council of faculty members that meet regularly with the unit leader to discuss issues of mutual concern?

If so, how are members of the committee or council selected and what is their tenure of service?

How effective is the committee or council in sharing governance of honors?

Does the unit have a diverse and representative student advisory board?

If so, how are members of the board or council selected?

How effective is the committee or council in advising the direction of the honors program?

Recruitment, Admission, and Scholarships

Does the unit have a clearly articulated honors admissions philosophy?

How transparent is the honors admissions process?

Does the honors admissions process employ a wide range of inclusive practices that ensure honors is attracting and supporting diverse student populations?

How are honors enrollment management strategies aligned with the institution's overall objectives?

When scholarships are available in honors, do the scholarships promote student success and align with enrollment strategies?

Do policies and processes connected to scholarships align with the honors program and financial aid protocols?

Retention

Does honors employ policies that clearly specify requirements for maintaining status in the program and achieving degree completion?

Do retention policies acknowledge the varied needs of diverse populations of students who develop academically and socially at different rates?

Is the GPA retention requirement appropriate or artificially high?

Does the probation process include enough time for students to recover and rise to the standard?

Is there a petition process for students to remain in honors when they have fallen short of the retention policy?

Articulation Agreements

Does the unit have articulation agreements appropriate for the clientele it serves and or seeks to serve?

Communication across Constituencies

How effectively does honors communicate across the constituencies it serves?

Does the honors website effectively and accurately convey the mission of the honors program or college? Does it serve as a useful resource for prospective students?

Are committee and advisory board meetings effectively documented?

Does the honors office issue an annual report? If so, what is included?

How does the honors office connect with its students? If social media is used, how active and effective is it?

TEACHING & LEARNING

Narrative Description of Teaching and Learning

Successful honors programs and colleges offer curricular requirements that offer flexibility, and are satisfied in numerous ways, including stand-alone honors seminars (often interdisciplinary in nature), departmental honors, cross-listed classes, and honors options/contracts. Some programs lean heavily on a robust curricular model where honors courses make up some, most, or all of a student's general education requirements, while others may engage students through co-curricular experiences like experiential learning, arts events, leadership training, civic engagement, etc. Honors is well-positioned to serve as an innovation hub because interdisciplinary spaces tend to be generative, students have self-selected into a program focused on challenge, and team-teaching can lead to cross-disciplinary experimentation.

Like all academic units on campus, an honors program or college depends on consistent faculty staffing of its classes whenever possible, whether that takes the form of dedicated faculty lines in honors, shared faculty lines with other units, or honors "fellow" arrangements that attach disciplinary faculty to honors for a fixed amount of time.

Curricular Requirements

Does the honors program or college offer carefully designed educational experiences that meet the needs and abilities of the undergraduate students it serves?

Does the honors program or college offer curricular flexibility?

Is the curriculum of the honors program or college designed so that, when appropriate, honors students may satisfy general education requirements?

Is the curriculum designed so that honors students may complete major or disciplinary requirements as well as pre-professional or professional training requirements?

Is the curriculum designed so that honors students are prepared to speak to issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and global understanding?

Is the curriculum designed so that honors students can participate in community-engaged learning and research?

Does the honors program or college offer a sufficient number of classes at a variety of days/times and modalities to ensure students have enough options to persist in the program?

Curricular Scope

How many credit hours does the honors degree require?

Are the number of credit hours appropriate to creating a sufficiently unique honors experience for the institution? Typically, a robust honors curriculum is 20-25% of a student's credit hours, while few fall below 15%.

Are there curricular adaptations for students, such as transfers, who enter the curriculum at a later stage of development?

Are there co-curricular requirements to enhance the regular curricular requirements?

If so, identify the co-curricular requirements and how they met honors goals.

Curricular Modalities

How are curriculum requirements designed to ensure that all honors classes are well-aligned with the mission of the honors program or college? Examples of curricular modalities include:

- Honors seminars (often interdisciplinary)
- Departmental honors
- Cross-listed courses
- Honors contracts or honors options
- Honors capstone experiences

Are there more than one honors degrees or certificates offered? If so, please explain how the different offerings on campus align with the mission of the honors college or program.

Inclusive Pedagogies

How does the honors program or college ensure that the voices of historically minoritized and underserved populations are represented in readings and other course materials?

How does the honors program or college encourage faculty to employ inclusive teaching practices?

Are these teaching practices reflected in course design, syllabus construction, classroom climate, learning activities, and modes of assessment?

Do the teaching practices acknowledge the varied experiences, identities, backgrounds, and learning differences of students?

Does the honors program or college support inclusivity by offering cultural competency training and workshops on inclusive pedagogies?

Departmental Honors (if applicable)

If an institution employs departmental honors offerings, best practice indicates the honors program or college should have some coordinating responsibility over those offerings. What role does the honors program or college play in coordinating departmental honors offerings on campus?

How are departmental honors offerings aligned with the honors program or college mission, learning outcomes, and/or distinctive honors-specific pedagogies?

Laboratory for Innovation

How does the honors program or college serve as a campus laboratory for diverse students and faculty to experiment with pedagogical and curricular innovation?

How does the honors curriculum utilize high-impact practices to make honors education deeper, broader and more complex? Examples of common high-impact practices in honors includes but is not limited to:

- Colloquia
- Undergraduate research
- Independent-study options
- Experiential learning
- Study abroad
- Service-learning
- Academic conference preparation

Honors Faculty

How are honors faculty selected to teach honors courses on campus?

Is consideration to teach honors based on a faculty person's preparation for and commitment to the pedagogy and curriculum of the honors program or college?

How do honors teaching faculty provide intellectual leadership and mentorship for diverse students?

Do honors faculty willingly support the mission of honors?

Does the honors program or college have stable staffing arrangements that afford honors the autonomy to operate similarly to other units on campus and ensure pedagogical sustainability to meet the needs of students? Examples of honors faculty staffing includes but is not limited to:

- Fully dedicated honors faculty lines
- Shared-arrangements for honors faculty with other units
- "Fellow" arrangements that allows for disciplinary faculty to serve in honors for a fixed

amount of time

Do honors faculty have the ability to earn tenure and promotion within the honors program or college?

If yes, has the honors program or college established clear and specific requirements for achieving promotion and tenure?

Honors has often historically restricted access to underrepresented populations. How inclusive is the selection of honors faculty and professional staff for teaching or serving in the honors program or college?

If present, do faculty with dedicated lines in the honors program or honors college play a significant role in program or college governance and operations?

Global Orientation

How does the curriculum of the honors program or college support the growing higher education emphasis on internationalization?

Does the honors program or college seek to attract international students through productive partnerships or collaborations?

How does the honors program or college support students studying abroad?

How does the honors curriculum integrate global issues and concerns?

Regular Assessment

How does the honors program or college assess and evaluate program goals and learning outcomes?

Are honors assessments or program reviews undertaken regularly?

Does the honors program or college appear on the institution's regular program review rotation, and when conducted, are program reviews conducted by qualified personnel, such as [NCHC-trained and approved program reviewers](#)?

Are the honors program or college learning outcomes appropriate to the institution's culture and mission?

How do the honors program or college learning outcomes align with the [NCHC Definition of Honors Education](#)?

Are course and program level assessment practices widespread and fully integrated into the practices of the honors program or college?

Is data regularly gathered and used to improve the design/delivery of courses and the program or college?

CO-CURRICULUM

Narrative Description of Co-curriculum

Healthy honors programs and colleges provide multiple, diverse opportunities for students to participate in civic engagement, leadership, cultural programs, community service, and other extra- and co-curricular activities. While expectations for student involvement in such extra- and co-curricular activities vary across institutions, such opportunities play a vital role in building a community of scholars and in preparing honors students for leadership roles and professional challenges through which they will exert a positive impact on local, national, and global issues. One of the hallmarks of honors education is the community that emerges from a shared experience featuring robust student-to-student and mentor-to-student interaction in an engaging learning environment.

Co-curricular Opportunities

How does the honors program or college provide diverse opportunities for students to participate in co-curricular opportunities? Examples include but are not limited to:

- Civic engagement
- Leadership
- Cultural programs
- Community service

In what ways are co-curricular opportunities aligned with the mission and learning outcomes of the program or college?

Does the honors program or college offer a peer mentoring program to support new students in connecting with experienced peers and co-curricular opportunities across campus?

Does the honors program or college offer civic engagement programming to help students connect their academic work and leadership training with off-campus partners?

Does civic engagement programming have a positive impact on the community and not just the honors students?

Fellowships

How does the honors program or college prepare students for additional opportunities available through nationally competitive fellowships, scholarships, and graduate study?

Is there mentorship of students through complex processes for applications?

Does the honors program or college utilize faculty across disciplines to identify honors candidates for specific post-undergraduate opportunities?

Does the honors program or college receive institutional support from higher administration for engaging honors students in post-undergraduate opportunities?

Has the honors program or college made efforts to support students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education in accessing fellowship and graduate opportunities?

Honors Community

How does the honors program or college promote community? Examples of community promotion in honors includes but is not limited to:

- Honors orientation programs
- Peer-mentoring programs
- Residential-life opportunities
- Ongoing annual programming

How successful are efforts in promoting community in honors? How are they assessed?

Is the honors program or college adequately resourced to support the building of an honors community? Important resources for such efforts include but are not limited to:

- Financial
- Personnel
- Space

Student Professional Development

How does the honors program or college provide opportunities for honors students to develop professionally? Examples include but are not limited to:

- Recruitment of prospective students
- Service on faculty and staff search committees
- Interaction with donors
- Peer mentor roles
- Leadership in the design of co-curricular and/or social programming

INFRASTRUCTURE & RESOURCES

Narrative Description of Infrastructure and Resources

Successful honors programs and colleges are adequately resourced to serve the mission of honors with an infrastructure that reflects that honors has been fully institutionalized within the larger college or university. Budgets are appropriate to meet the demands of honors students and the mission of the honors program, and the honors enterprise is supported with sufficient faculty, professional staff, and administrative support to achieve its aims.

Honors students receive honors-related academic advising from qualified faculty and/or professional staff who have appropriate caseloads and utilize inclusive-based strategies for student-centered growth. When appropriate to institutional culture, honors students may receive priority enrollment. Honors spaces on campus are adequate, accessible, and inclusive to all members of the honors community. Honors programs and colleges typically engage in robust alumni outreach through an advisory board and other mechanisms.

Personnel

Is the permanence and stability of the honors program or college ensured through adequate professional staff and administrative support?

How are honors administrators and staff structured within the institution?

Is the administrative staffing structure of the honors program appropriate to the mission and functions of honors?

Does the current administrative staffing structure of the honors program or college need to change to accommodate new or future expectations, such as increasing enrollment or undertaking new initiatives?

Is the permanence and stability of the honors program or college ensured through adequate faculty support?

How are honors faculty structured within the institution?

Is the honors faculty structure appropriate to the mission and functions of honors?

How dependent is honors on the good will and energy of particular faculty members for survival?

Budgetary Resources and Program Fees

Is the permanence and stability of the honors program or college ensured through appropriate budget?

To what extent has the honors program been allocated an appropriate budget to support the mission and functions of honors?

Identify any areas of misalignment between annual budget and current expectations for the mission of honors.

Are there ways in which lack of funding is inhibiting growth or development in certain areas of honors?

Does the current administrative staffing structure of the honors program or college need to change to accommodate new or future expectations, such as increasing enrollment or undertaking new initiatives?

Are there any ways in which the current funding structure limits access and equity to students or faculty?

Are there any program fees for participation in honors, or are there any other funding mechanisms that may limit access and equity for students or faculty? If so, are there any mechanisms designed to support less-privileged students to reduce barriers to participation in honors?

Honors Advising

How do honors students receive honors-related academic advising? How is advising structured?

Who provides honors advising to students?

Does the current advising allow the honors program to meet its current mission?

Are honors advisors caseloads appropriate to the size of the honors student body?

How do honors advisors utilize inclusive-based strategies?

How do honors advisors facilitate student-centered growth?

Do honors students receive priority enrollment? If not, please describe the current institutional culture around priority enrollment for different populations on campus.

Honors Spaces

Are there appropriate honors physical spaces on campus that are accessible and inclusive to all members of the honors community?

How does the space provide for student needs through materials/resources, lounging/reading, and appropriate technology?

How does the space provide for faculty/staff needs through materials/resources, lounging/meeting, and appropriate technology?

How is the honors space featured in a way to aid in recruitment on campus?

How does the honors space support or accommodate commuter students?

Do honors spaces on campus need to be reimaged moving forward to better meet the future direction of the honors program?

If appropriate to the institution and its culture, is there an honors residential space on campus that is able to meet the mission of the honors program?

How does the honors residential space provide curricular or co-curricular programming, like in a Living-Learning Community?

How does the honors residential space meet the social needs of students?

How is demand for the honors residential space? Is the space well-maintained, well-equipped, and enticing to students?

Does the honors residential space need to be reimagined moving forward to better meet the future direction of the honors program?

Alumni Engagement

How does the honors program currently engage with alumni?

Are alumni involved in any of the program's mission or goals, either as a target population or as advisors to the program mission?

How closely does the honors program work with the alumni affairs and/or the development office?

If there is an honors alumni advisory board? If so, how does the board function in areas of advocacy, fundraising, mentoring, and recruitment? If there is not an honors alumni advisory board, is it appropriate to consider one moving forward?