

Best Practices for the Transition of an Honors Program to an Honors College (Optional Program Review Worksheet)

During the program review process, some institutions may be interested in exploring how to transform their honors program into an honors college. Such a transition can occur with a simple change of naming conventions from a program to a college, but doing so often puts the institution out of step with best practices and peer competitors. Honors colleges are “typically larger, more complex, and more autonomous units than honors programs in terms of enrollment, curriculum, administration and staffing, budget, fundraising, and co-curriculum.”¹ In short, honors colleges are designed with a more robust independence and leadership within the university, which enables them to more effectively work across the institution in order to advocate for honors students.

In identifying the distinguishing characteristics between a program and a college, the ideal hallmarks of an honors college include but are not limited to the following:

- Leadership for the honors college under a dean, who is empowered similar to other academic deans within the institution and included in the leadership council of the chief academic officer (typically the provost).
- An honors curriculum that constitutes a substantial portion of a student’s undergraduate degree, typically 20% or more.
- Adequate resourcing of the honors college so that it has considerable autonomy over the creation of honors classes and the appointment of faculty to teach those classes.
- Adequate resourcing of the honors college to service its students out of the honors office, including managing facets such as admissions, advising, co-curricular programming, residence life, and alumni engagement
- Space on campus that highlights the importance of the honors college, with branding and prominence commensurate with other colleges

If a program is considering a transition into a full-fledged honors college, then the following questions should be considered and may be addressed during the program review process where relevant. Please bear in mind that recommended changes may take several years to evolve and implement:

¹ Hottinger, Sarah, Megan McIlreavy, Clay Motley, and Louis E. Keiner, "Beyond the Letterhead: A Tactical Toolbox for Transitioning from Program to College" in [*National Collegiate Honors Council Monographs Series: Honors Colleges in the 21st Century*](#), ed. Richard Badenhausen (2023), 111.

- What will the mission, values, and goals of an honors education be under a newly constructed honors college? Please note that this should include input from students, faculty, and administration.
- How will the honors program leadership and staffing need to be restructured to make the honors college an autonomous unit on campus and commensurate with other colleges?
- What is the current resource allocation for the honors program, and how might that resource allocation need to change over the coming years to accommodate a transition to a college?
- What is the target size for enrollment in a newly constituted honors college, and how might it grow or change in the transition from a program?
- What curricular changes should be considered in the transition from an honors program into an honors college to reach the goal of 20% or more of a student's educational experience? Will the number of classes or seat counts need to grow? Will new curricular pathways or modalities need to be designed?
- Will the current allocation of space to the honors program need to be re-evaluated and potentially re-assigned in the transition to an honors college? Or, does the current allocation of space for honors already accommodate the future growth that is anticipated with a transition to an honors college?
- Knowing that honors colleges can be an effective means of drawing donors and collaborators to the institution, how might the honors program develop new relationships with its alumni and the office of development as it transitions into a college? Is it appropriate to develop new case statements for naming aspects of the newly constituted honors college?