

**Recommendations
College Honors Task Force
Spring 2008**

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**Recommendations of Honors Task Force
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1. **The Process**

The Honors Task Force (Task Force) is composed of members appointed by Provost Beth Barnett. Task Force members include Susan Eisner, Bernard Langer, James Morley, Bernard Roy, Sharon Rubin, Marta Vides, and Eric Wiener. The first meeting of the Task Force took place on Monday, February 11, 2008. The Task Force received its charge from Provost Beth Barnett to re-vision our current Honors Program. According to the charge as articulated, the re-vision should include a new curriculum and features proper to Ramapo College culture. Furthermore, the re-vision would recognize that while the College Honors Program is to be used as a recruiting tool, it is not to be driven by Admissions. At that meeting, the Task Force members unanimously selected Bernard Roy and Marta Vides as Co-Chairs for the Task Force. From Wednesday, February 13, 2008, through Wednesday, April 30, 2008, the Task Force met every two weeks during which time the recommendations contained in this report were developed and articulated.

Guiding Principles emerged from the integration of independent ideas submitted by each member of the Task Force. A Mission Statement for the College Honors Program was derived from these Guiding Principles (Attachment A). The newly designed program shall be referred to as College Honors Program to distinguish it from the existing current Honors Program. In order to develop a concrete re-vision for the College Honors Program, members of the group worked alone or in teams to articulate certain parts of a program consistent with the Mission and Guiding Principles. The differences between these articulations were deliberated and resolved in a set of Common Understandings and Explicit Agreements (Attachment B). In addition to the deliberations of the Task Force, feedback from a focus group of students in the current Honors Program, together with students who are Honors eligible but not part of the program was included in the design of the College Honors Program (Attachment C). The Task Force recommendations that follow emerged from this collaborative and lively process.

2. **Mission Statement**

The Ramapo College Honors Program is a community of faculty and students dedicated to intellectual, creative and moral engagement. Honors students seek excellence through continual guidance and a distinctive curriculum of critical thinking, intercultural and international understanding, experiential learning, service, and interdisciplinary studies. The end of the program is the beginning of an enriched and accomplished life. Ramapo College invites all who have the aspiration, potential and passion for discovery to join.

The College Honors Program will be implemented for students entering the program in the academic year 09-10. At that time, students currently in the Honors Program may choose to

adopt the new requirements depending on their status in the program. These decisions will be made case-by-case by the Director. The newly envisioned College Honors Program will create and support its community of faculty by providing clear protocols and opportunity for dialogue about course design and about mentoring to those full-time, tenure track faculty who serve the College Honors Program. For students, community will be experienced in cohort, both in the classroom and in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, from the time they enter the program and for every year until their completion. Students will take one College Honors course every year of their program. Each year will offer choices of various specially designed Honors courses, usually to substitute a General Education requirement or School Core requirement. All students in the College Honors Program will be required to complete an “Honors in the Major” project of their own design. For both faculty and students, this learning community will provide an opportunity for joint research and work.

In the College Honors Program, intellectual development is inseparable from one’s own growth and development as a whole human being. Students will work with a faculty mentor who will monitor their progress as engaged learners, providing an annual evaluation. For these students, college is not a means to an end, such as a diploma or a job, but is an involvement with a community that is an end in itself. The recommendations set forth the structure of a program that supports this vision.

3. Recommendations

(1) *Distinctiveness.* The College Honors Program shall maintain a program distinguished in both recognition and operation from other programs of academic achievement at RCNJ. It shall be clearly designated as separate and distinct from other programs such as Latin Honors, Dean’s List or Honors/Honorary Societies in all College literature, online and in public presentations. The College Honors Program shall host a Ramapo Honors Symposium, a separate end of the year Spring event to recognize work within the College Honors Program. Eligible work includes College Honors Program submissions of work completed for Honors in the Major and/or Student-Faculty Research Collaborations. This will be a show-case event, with the merit of projects recognized by awards.

(2) *Admission and Continued Participation.* The College Honors Program shall consider both quantitative and qualitative measures. For admission, above-average GPA or SAT scores are a necessary, but not sufficient criterion. Qualitative measures shall assess the intellectual independence or engaged learning values of the applicant. For all applicants, admission requires an *admission essay*, with the option of using the College Admissions Essay or a portfolio paper as part of the application packet. For students already attending RCNJ, admission to the program also requires *faculty recommendations*. For any applicant seeking admission, an *admission interview may be requested* by the applicant.

Academic “engagement” is the essential criteria for admissions into the Ramapo Honors program. Academically engaged students are intrinsically motivated. They are not so much

motivated by external rewards, such as grades, status, and recognition, as much as they strive for the personal experience of fulfillment that comes from encountering new ideas and the scholarly pursuit of truth. Academically engaged students take up their scholarly research in a deeply personal manner. Intellectual strengths are essential to academic engagement but intellectual strengths, by themselves, are not adequate to define the attitude of academic engagement.

As “engaged learners,” College Honors students are committed to learning for its own sake. They are in college for no ulterior motive other than learning. Learning is the essence of being a College Honors student. In other words, to a College Honors student, grades are an important yet secondary concern. Good academic standing is a consequence of the engaged values of an honors student - not the primary goal. Self motivated intellectual independence from extrinsic rewards is the distinctive disposition of an honors student.

Objective test scores and grade point averages will be only one means of assessing a general readiness to enter the College Honors Program. It is feasible that a student could have high grades but lack in the intrinsic or “engaged learning” values necessary to function well in the College Honors Program. It is also possible that a student could have less than excellent test scores but demonstrate the “engaged learning” attitude necessary for entry into the program. This “honors attitude” toward learning can only be assessed through extended and personal teacher-student relations and exchanges. At no point will any students ever be admitted to the Ramapo College Honors Program on the basis of quantitative test scores alone.

For all applicants, one means for assessing the intellectual independence or engaged learning values necessary for admission into the College Honors Program will be an *admission essay*. This could be the student’s college application essay in the case of first year entering students and/or a distinct essay or portfolio paper, directed to the committee. All essays or portfolio papers will persuasively demonstrate to the selection committee that the applicant has the “intellectual independence” and “engaged learning” values necessary to succeed in the Ramapo honors program..

For students already attending Ramapo College, two *faculty recommendations* will be the most important means for assessing readiness for entry into the honors program. These will be written by faculty who can personally vouch for the student’s intellectual independence and overall attitude towards learning. Faculty who endorse students will support the student’s progress as an honors student.

Finally, an *admission interview*, at the option of the applicant, is another means for assessing the intellectual independence or engaged learning values of an applicant. The interview will be conducted by two College Honors Program faculty members. The interview protocol will allow the student applicant the opportunity to persuasively demonstrate to the interviewers the qualities of “intellectual independence” and “engaged learning” values. The faculty interviewers will then privately deliberate to decide on the suitability for admission into the College Honors Program.

Continued participation in the program will be based on progress assessed by both quantitative and qualitative measures. On-going, annual qualitative assessment shall include citizenship

contributions by the student to either college or the wider community and society. Entry in to the program is no guarantee of successful completion. Those students that appear to be losing interest in engaged learning, or begin to fail to demonstrate commitment to program goals will be issued a formal warning. If, after the formal warning, a student continues to show disengagement with the program the College Honors Director will withdraw the student from the program.

(3) Goals and Objectives.

The Goals and Objectives of the College Honors Program constitute a living document guiding the planning and assessment of the College Honors Program.

The College Honors Program shall have four general **Goals** guided by the Mission of the College Honors Program and the College:

1. To provide a **learning community** for its students and faculty including mentoring and **guidance for students** and **collegial collaboration for faculty**
2. To provide distinctive **academic programming** with content that will inspire the **intellectual, creative and moral engagement** of **students and faculty**
3. To provide distinctive **co-curricular and extra-curricular** programming containing content that will inspire the **intellectual, creative and moral engagement** of **students and faculty**
4. To prepare students for life of accomplishment through an understanding of **intercultural and international issues** considered critically in an **interdisciplinary** curriculum

The general **Objectives** of the College Honors Program include the following:

1. **Student-Faculty Collaboration** in both curriculum activities, such as the Honors in the Major project, as well as in co-curricular activities such as the bi-annual College Honors Lecture Series
2. **Intellectual Engagement**, such as in the student's ability to take responsibility for his or her own learning
3. **Creative Engagement**, such as in the initiation and design of learning and problem-solving strategies
4. **Moral Engagement**, such as in the students collaborative abilities and cooperative work with other students and faculty on academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities
5. **Critical Thinking**, as applied to both academic theory and its practical application

6. *Experiential Learning*, with opportunity for critical personal and theoretical reflection
7. *Service to Community*, such as college, local, national or international, assessed annually
8. *Interdisciplinary Competency* throughout the students participation in the College Honors Program
9. *International Competency*, which could include language proficiency, cultural proficiency or familiarity with countries through travel

(4) The Honors Curriculum. The College Honors Core Curriculum shall be structurally delivered at each level over four years via specifically designed Honors courses. These courses will be designed intentionally and collaboratively solely for the College Honors Program by full-time, tenure-track professors committed to the learning community of the College Honors Program. The design of the College Honors Program is based on currently accepted substitutions in General Education, School Cores, Majors and Capstones. The design reflects a focus on student priorities of coverage and integration. For this reason the design avoids inclusion of courses that are usually covered by Advanced Placement (AP) transfer courses completed by academically talented students. Opportunities for transfer students, and students joining the College Honors Program at the end of their first year, are necessary and the design that follows does not yet reflect the necessary substitutions for First Year Seminar (FYS) or other courses across the curricula. Likewise the new Honors Core Curriculum does not address the need to provide for completion of the current Honors Program by existing students. The protocol for design of Honors Independent Study courses to fill this administrative need shall be decided upon by the Director in consultation with relevant staff and faculty, prior to the implementation of the new core. In the first year of the College Honors Program, students will be mentored by their First Year Seminar professors. Subsequently, each student will be assigned a College Honors Mentor to guide the student through the four year curriculum and assessment of the student's progress. The year-by-year College Honors Core Curriculum is set forth below. See Attachment D for the College Honors Core Curriculum Plan including Learning Goals for each year. This Curriculum constitutes a living document guiding the planning and assessment of the College Honors Program Core Curriculum.

Part A – The College Honors Core Curriculum Four Year Sequence

Year 1: Honors First Year Seminar: special honors FYS courses that emphasize academic skills (critical thinking, writing, oral presentation) and experiential learning. Students choose one of three courses:

Honors First-Year Seminar: Encounter with the Other

Honors First-Year Seminar: Nature, Science and Society – An Ecological Framework

Honors First-Year Seminar: a third course (oriented toward social science?)

Year 2: Honors International Issues (satisfy International Issues Gen Ed category): special 200-level honors seminars that emphasize the international, intercultural and interdisciplinary pillars -highlighted by guest faculty lecturers and discussion leaders. Students choose one of three courses:

Honors Contemporary International Issues Seminar

Mix of guest faculty lectures, student seminars and discussions based on relevant readings.

Honors Language/Culture Immersion

Language training and cultural immersion; include guest faculty presentations during second half of course.

Honors International Business Seminar

Mix of guest faculty lectures, student seminars and discussions based on relevant readings.

Year 3: Honors Ethics (satisfy Topics Arts/Humanities Gen Ed category): 300-level honors seminars that emphasize exploration and development of personal values, civic engagement and ethics. Students choose one of four courses:

Honors Ethics

Honors Ethics in Business

Honors Media Issues and Ethics

Honors Bioethics

Year 4: Honors Senior Seminar (satisfy Contemporary Issues in Social Science Gen Ed category): 400-level honors Capstone seminars that emphasize interdisciplinary analysis and approaches to address contemporary social issues. The seminars include team projects, seminars and individual research papers associated with authentic learning experiences.

Part B - Honors in the Major

Upper level students (generally seniors) complete 2 semesters of one of three options that each afford in-depth, advanced study and experience.

OPTION A - Honors Research: guided closely by a faculty member; an original paper is completed during the second semester, and poster/oral presentation at

Ramapo Honors Symposium (held each Spring) and one outside conference

OR

OPTION B - Honors Experience: internship, study abroad, or service learning for one or more semesters, guided closely by a faculty member; an original paper is completed during the second semester - presented at Ramapo Honors Symposium (held each Spring) and one outside conference

OR

OPTION C: An Honors Research or Honors Experience completed as part of a capstone in a student's major, submitted in partial fulfillment of the Honors in the Major requirement. The student would also present the paper or poster at the Ramapo Honors Symposium and one outside conference.

(5) Learning Community

Engaged Learning & Teaching. The purpose of the design of the College Honors Program is to create a learning community of engaged students and teachers. The requirements for admission and continued participation in the program include qualitative measures in order to assess the student's vision of learning - particularly the ability to take responsibility for his or her own learning in a meaningful way, the ability to participate actively in developing learning and problem-solving strategies, the extent to which the student derives pleasure from learning and is intrinsically motivated, and the collaborative abilities of the student and the value placed on working with other students and faculty. The four year plan is designed to keep the students in community and in cohort over their four years at the College. Honors courses are 20-student courses promoting dialogue and exchange of ideas. The second year focused on international issues utilizes outside lecturers and immersion experiences to bring the student into relationship with real world problems and the complexity and interdisciplinary collaboration required to solve complex problems. The third year ethics course provides an opportunity for the student to reflect on empathy and character skills necessary for effective collaborative exploration in a learning community. The fourth year senior seminar deepens the experiential learning in the context of interdisciplinary research methodology. And finally, the Honors in the Major project provide the opportunity for students to show case their acquired cognitive skills and exploratory curiosity in a presentation that allows them to be collaborative teacher and producer of materials. Likewise, the role of the teachers in the College Honors Program will be as facilitator, guide and co-learner. Faculty designing College Honors courses will be able to dialogue with each other, the Director and the College Honors Program Advisory Committee as part of the professional community dedicated to providing the learning community needed by the students seeking the challenge of the College Honors Program. This professional community will be instrumental in the continuing assessment of the effectiveness of the course offerings in creating a learning community.

Honors Housing. Incoming first year students shall be offered the option of Honors Housing for the first year of their stay at Ramapo. Thereafter, they may choose to remain in such housing or choose from alternatives available to all students.

Honors Lounge. Central to a community is a place. College Honors students make up a community. This community, in turn, sits within the larger Ramapo College community. Service to this local community is one of the fundamental goals of the College Honors Program. The students and teachers of the College Honors Program need a place within which to build relationship and community. In order to generate a College wide excitement for learning, the space would ideally be a lounge within the classroom buildings. This lounge should provide some elegance, with a view on the College's Arch and visible to every member of the larger community.

The lounge is to be beckoning, hospitable, comfortable, and informative. The lounge is a place where ideas are exchanged. Ideas make up information. The hospitality consists of a genuine willingness to hear the ideas of others and of the generosity of sharing one's own ideas. The comfort is the intangible delight felt in being there. The welcome would include amenities such as coffee, tea, and snacks for hungry, working students. The lounge would also include a computer, printer, copier and other work tools required to actualize the projects and ideas of the learning community. Finally, the lounge would be located in close proximity to the office of the Director of the College Honors program to provide accessible advice and mentoring to students.

Extra & Co-Curricular Activities. These activities shall be designed to encourage cooperative and collaborative exploration. For example, *experiential learning* in First Year Seminar would ideally be a group activity. Research on the developmental stages of students confirms that starting with group service-learning activities encourages student confidence in new environments. *International experiences* such as study abroad or service learning would ideally be integrated in the second year coursework. *Symposia*, such as a Lecture Series event planned by third and fourth year students will further develop student confidence in the ability to engage groups in a critical and reflective way. Considering the need for student coverage of coursework, the fourth year *deepening of the experiential relationship between theory and practice* could include internships in majors such as Social Work, or student teaching for Teacher Education as adequate for partial fulfillment of seminar requirements. Finally, *service* to the Honors community, the College community and the wider society would be assessed as part of eligibility for continued participation in the College Honors Program. Ideally, project options for Honors in the Major would reflect a contribution that included service to society as part of the purpose for the research, experience or capstone project.

4. Incoming Director's Recommendations on Implementation

Introduction

On July 1, 2008, I will begin my two-year appointment as Director of the College Honors Program, reporting to Provost Beth Barnett. The following are my recommendations for implementation of the College Honors Program recommended by the Honors Task Force in May

2008. The recommendations by the Task Force are for a new curriculum and program for College Honors effective for students matriculating commencing the 2009-2010 year. My recommendations consist of Director priority tasks to be completed during the time periods covered and intended to give notice of institutional support that will be required. These are not comprehensive of all Director duties to be performed. ~ *Marta Vides Saade*

July 2008 – August 2008

Budget. For effective monitoring of the expenses dedicated to the College Honors Program, the Director will seek clarification of overall budget and line items necessary for implementation of new College Honors Program. All line items in the College Honors budget shall be for programmatic purposes of College Honors only. All previously conflated items supporting other programs recognizing academic achievement shall be eliminated from the budget. Estimated first year budget: \$30,000. See Attachment E for itemized Proposed 2008-2009 Budget. A proposed budget for operation of the College Honors Program will be established immediately, subject to revision based on actual enrollment, outside funds raised and cost of living contingencies.

Fund-Raising. Meet with Cathleen Davey to begin conversations regarding short-term and long-term funding of the College Honors Program. Immediate funding plans are for four-year scholarship grants and Honors in the Major Fellowship funding in Year Four for all incoming 2009-2010 students. Long-term plans include funding for sufficient scholarship grants and fellowship funding for all students in the College Honors Program. Long-term funding for the College Honors Program includes a fully funded endowment.

Advisory Committee. An Advisory Committee for the College Honors Program shall be formally appointed by the Director. Members shall serve for staggered two-year terms and may be reappointed once upon mutual agreement. Members of the current Task Force shall be invited to be part of the Advisory Committee with terms negotiated to allow for staggered service. Current Task Force co-chair, Bernard Roy, shall be invited to serve as Chair of the Advisory Committee. Furthermore, a member of the School of Contemporary Arts shall be appointed to the Advisory Committee.

Enrollment Management. Director will coordinate in all aspects of Enrollment Management in order to initiate the new College Honors Program for the 2009-2010 academic year. Tasks include but are not limited to regularizing Banner, registration and graduation processes for students in the College Honors Program and existing Honors Program.

Academic Review Committee (ARC). Director will draft documents for preliminary ARC approval of the College Honors Program curriculum.

Student Affairs. Director will coordinate housing needs of incoming College Honors students with Student Affairs.

Space Committee. Director will begin application process for Honors Lounge space. To the extent possible, Director will acquire space, refurbish space and prepare the space for incoming students in Fall 2008.

Sept 2008 – December 2008

Advisory Committee. With Director, commences work toward 2009-2010 College Honors Program curriculum for First and Second Year courses. Other priority tasks include: (1) Formalize elimination of H-Option . The H-Option will be replaced with Honors Independent Study. A protocol for Goals and Outcomes for Honors Independent Study will be developed consistent with the College Honors Program four-year Core Curriculum; (2) Design substitution courses for First Year Seminar and Year Two courses for transfer students incoming to the College Honors Program specifically for these students, or develop protocols for Honors Independent Study to fill those needs; (3) Design training, retreat and community-building opportunities for full-time, tenure track faculty interested in teaching in the Honors College Program. Materials, training and protocols include those necessary guides for teaching in Year One through Year Four courses, supervising Honors Independent Study, supervising Honors in the Major courses. (4) Design structure and protocols for mentoring students; (5) Design structure and protocol for assessing student applications. Additional priorities will be determined when this group reconvenes in Fall 2008.

January 2009 – June 2009

Advisory Committee. Focus will continue on developing the Core Curriculum for Years Three and Four, including extra and Co-Curricular activities necessary to complement the curriculum.

Fund-Raising. Focus on short-term and long-term goals continues. Major donors identified. Possibility of adding possible major donors to the Advisory Committee considered as part of long-term planning process.

July 2009 - June 2010

Curriculum: Implementation of College Honors Program Year 1 curriculum

July 2010 - June 2011

Curriculum: Implementation of College Honors Program Year 2 curriculum.

July 2011 - June 2012

Curriculum: Implementation of College Honors Program Year 3 curriculum.

July 2012 - June 2013

Curriculum: Implementation of College Honors Program Year 4 and Honors in the Major curriculum.

Fund-Raising Goal: Fully endowed College Honors Program.