

University Honors-program Oversight Committee (HOC)

Report to the Faculty Senate: May/2016

During the 2015-2016 academic year the University Honors-program Oversight Committee (HOC) met twice in fall and three times in the spring. The committee's faculty members are: Erik Cordes (biology), Paul Swann (film & media arts), Claudia Pine Simon (computer & information science), Vallorie Peridier (mechanical engineering) and Lila Corwin Berman (history). The committee also has two at-large members, Therese Dolan (art history) and Peshe Kuriloff (education).

Owing in part to Temple's extraordinary University Merit Scholarship program, Temple Honors continues to experience particularly rapid growth. At this writing, while the number of paid deposits for the University overall is up nine percent from last year, the corresponding number of paid deposits for incoming freshmen with SAT>1300 is up an impressive thirty-nine percent

Furthermore, it is good news that Temple University is drawing upon an even more geographically-diverse application pool. Paid deposits to Temple University for non-PA residents is up by nearly twenty-five percent over last year. However, the one-two punch of Temple's Honors program + Merit Scholarships has proved an especially strong draw for non-PA residents: out-of-state student deposits with SAT>1300 are up nearly forty-eight percent as compared to last year.

This influx of Honors students has put further even greater pressure on the Honors course inventory. Recall that the academic requirements of the Honors program includes the completion of ten Honors courses, with four of these at the 2000 level or higher. The six-course requirement at the lower level is commonly satisfied with Honors Gen-Ed classes. However, the four upper-level Honors courses are often more difficult for students to schedule, and there are two reasons for this. First, Honors courses are capped at twenty students, and it has proved a perennial challenge for the smaller colleges to provide upper-level Honors courses. Second, a sizeable portion of Honors students are in STEM disciplines which: (i) lack upper-level Honors courses in the curriculum, and (ii) have so many programmatic requirements in the major that there is little flexibility for taking upper-level classes outside of the major, Honors or otherwise.

The current Honors-program work-around for students who lack upper-level Honors-course options is a device called "contracts". In an Honors "contract" the student, in lieu of an upper-level Honors class, either: (i) negotiates with the professor of a regular undergraduate class to do extra work, or (ii) takes a graduate course. In either situation the Honors advising staff must monitor the students' individual compliance with their respective contracts, and the arrangement has administratively ballooned owing the substantial increase of Honors students in STEM where these contracts are especially commonplace.

So in this academic year a substantial portion of HOC's deliberations was taken up with the question of whether or not the academic requirements for Honors should be modified, given the difficulty in providing upper-level honors courses. However, a prudent compromise was ultimately settled on that preserves the current academic requirements of the Honors program. It was decided that the Honors program would expand its pre-existing Honors "petition option" to enable students, who cannot complete the Honors Program academic requirements through standard course options, to apply for permission to substitute either an additional contract or a co-curricular-experience waiver.

Additionally, HOC participated in the revision of the Honors Program mission statement, which now more accurately conveys the vision of Dr. Rust Ost and her extraordinary (and growing) staff of academic advisors.

Respectfully submitted,

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04/May/2016