

March 7, 2014

**ARI KELMAN**

Associate Vice Provost, University Honors  
Acting Director of the University Honors Program

**RE: University Honors Program Proposal**

The proposal to amend the University Honors Program was forwarded to all Davis Division of the Academic Senate standing committees and Faculty Executive Committees (FECs) from the Schools and Colleges. Responses were received from Graduate and Undergraduate Councils and the Faculty Executive Committees from the Colleges of Engineering and Letters and Science.

The Academic Senate recognizes the benefits that the new proposed Undergraduate Honors Program can bring to our students and faculty. The program redesign is consistent with an earlier Academic Senate report regarding undergraduate honors at UC Davis. The proposal offers a mechanism to increase faculty participation in honors and options to allow students to incorporate honors into their degree course work. The proposal shows recognition of the challenges facing faculty and departments who wish to support the Honors Program but are allocated resources based on student numbers, and it provides funding to address this problem. The proposal provides an opportunity for our honors students to thrive by providing them with a consistent program of study implemented with consistent and transparent procedures.

Undergraduate Council (UGC) and the College of Letters and Science Faculty Executive Committee concerns fell into two categories:

1. UGC urges the Honors Program to maintain and improve efforts toward diversity in admissions and retention. The program should include students with widely varying perspectives and experiences, as this will enhance the overall quality of the experience. We hope that the program will continue and strengthen outreach efforts to students from underrepresented groups. The council notes that study abroad is an option within honors and hopes that this will remain a key component of the updated program.
2. We strongly support the proposal's efforts to hold program faculty "harmless" for teaching smaller sections in the Honors Program than they would otherwise teach. Concrete assurances that this approach will be sustained over the long run would be welcome. Furthermore, there is concern that simply offering excellent professors an opportunity to teach a small class of bright, highly motivated students is an excellent idea, but this could leave other large courses to lecturers, who would have to be hired on an ad hoc basis, with many unpredictable but potentially bad outcomes for students. The new Honors Program should include small classes taught by top-tier professors, but this should not be at the expense of the quality of the mainstream courses.

Having an excellent Honors Program would be a plus for honors students and for the University, but eroding the already strained mainstream course offerings to achieve it would be a major mistake. As the faculty grows, both the honors courses and the mainstream courses should be kept in mind, and the honors offerings should not grow faster than the departments' ability to staff those courses and their regular courses with excellent teachers.

The Davis Division of the Academic Senate supports the new University Honors Program and offers the concerns listed above for your careful consideration. We would appreciate receiving a brief reply explaining a plan to address these concerns.

Sincerely,



Bruno Nachtergaele, Chair  
Davis Division of the Academic Senate  
Professor: Mathematics