



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

ONE SHIELDS AVENUE  
DAVIS, CA 95616-8611

January 15, 2014

Dear Bruno,

I write to seek feedback from the Senate about ongoing plans for possible changes in the University Honors Program. I am including with this later a slightly longer document that explains the impetus for and some specifics about these changes. I would also be happy to meet with any interested members of the Senate.

In the meantime, I have some answers to your preliminary questions:

1) Honors courses will be selected first by offering priority to those faculty members who have taught successfully in Honors in the past, then by backfilling courses that we absolutely need in order to deliver the outlined curriculum (see the included document for details), and then, finally, by seeking offerings from Senate Teaching Prize winners. We anticipate having an Honors Committee (please see below for more about this committee) to help with the vetting process and other issues.

2) Students will be admitted via two portals: first, as in the past, Regents Scholars will automatically be offered a slot in Honors; and second, also as in the past, additional students will be offered a chance to apply for admission to the program. We hope that the Honors Committee (mentioned above) will help with the admissions process, which we anticipate will not be especially onerous or time-consuming.

3) For the foreseeable future, we anticipate that the size of the program will remain much as it has been for the past several years: 200-250 entering students.

4) We have money earmarked for course buyouts at a rate of \$7500/course. We anticipate offering a total of not more than 45-50 courses per year. As I mentioned to you in past conversations, honors courses will be capped at 25 students.

The Provost and the Deans have also agreed to "hold harmless" those faculty members who agree to teach in the Honors Program. Which is to say, those faculty members will not be penalized if, as seems likely, their Honors courses generate fewer student credit hours than said faculty would have generated otherwise. This, and the buyout mentioned above, will allow faculty to teach in Honors as part of their base teaching load, rather than teaching on an overload basis, as in the past.

5) As noted above, we anticipate creating an Honors advisory committee. Whether this committee will be part of the Senate's Undergraduate Council, I honestly do not yet know. I can see many good reasons for having such a committee be part of the Senate, but I don't want to create more work for an already overburdened body. This is something I would like to discuss with you and the rising Senate chair.

I believe that should do it for now. But having said all of that, I want to reiterate that I hope to have the new University Honors Program off the ground for this coming fall (2014). The current program is in dire shape. Maintaining the status quo does not appear to be feasible. And with the Provost and Deans now on board with the idea of Honors classes being taught as part of a faculty member's base load, I want to strike while the iron is still hot. If there's anything at all I can do to help make this happen, please let me know. Regardless, thanks, as ever, for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ari Kelman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ari Kelman  
Professor of History  
Associate Vice Provost, University Honors  
Principal Investigator, The UC Davis History Project

# Proposal for University Honors

January 9, 2014

## **Introduction:**

On July 1, 2013, we began analyzing the effectiveness of the University Honors Program, which is currently made up of the Davis Honors Challenge (DHC) and the Integrated Studies Honors Program (IS). We used a report generated in February 2010 by Professor Diana Strazdes, former chair of the Academic Senate Committee on Special Academic Programs, to frame our conceptual approach to honors on campus. From this point forward, we will refer to this document as the Strazdes Report. One key recommendation in the Strazdes Report was that any appraisal of the honors programs should involve input from students and faculty outside the program as well as those who are part of the honors community. To that end, we discussed honors with more than fifty members of the faculty community and university administration and more than sixty students – a few of whom had not taken part in honors, and several of whom had chosen to sever ties with honors.

The Strazdes Report also noted that many students who are eligible to participate in honors do not do so – that, in other words, it may be worth considering whether there are barriers to entry or insufficient incentives to motivate students to join the program – and also that the program has a higher rate of attrition than would be ideal. Beyond that, the Strazdes report suggested that University Honors does not work hand-in-hand with the various majors that have honors programs, and, more broadly, that honors does not capitalize on the excellence of education in the majors across the campus. Finally, the Strazdes Report raised question about the efficacy of the two-stream structure of honors.

## **Preliminary conclusions:**

From the above interviews and through discussions with faculty and student advisory committees, several issues with honors as it is currently constituted became clear:

- 1)** The two-stream approach to honors – DHC and ISHP – leads to many inter-program rivalries that compromise efforts to create a university honors community. Students in DHC are jealous of the extra privileges that they perceive as being afforded to ISHP students, while students in the ISHP are jealous of some of the course offerings in DHC.

**2)** The two-stream approach also creates difficulties when it comes to recruiting faculty to teach in honors, as many faculty members have, over time, come to associate their honors teaching solely with one program, and are thus reluctant to teach in the other program.

**3)** A problem mentioned by every student who had left the program, and by nearly every student who is still in the program, is that the vast majority of honors courses are offered as electives. Which is to say, few honors courses provide credit for the University's General Education (GE) requirements, and they also do not fulfill requirements in the students' majors. Because students in both programs are taking honors courses as electives, they are often forced to choose between taking part in honors or pursuing research and/or completing their major required courses. This choice is, it seems, the cause of much of the remarkably high rate of attrition among students in both honors programs.

**4)** Related to the above, honors students are forced to fit their honors courses into already full schedules – and since the majority of the honors students are in BioSci or Engineering, their schedules are impacted. Many honors students respond to this state of affairs by suggesting that, because their honors courses are typically electives, those classes should be relatively easy. Many honors students then pressure their honors professors to lighten the workload in honors courses, leaving faculty members frustrated by the disjuncture between their expectations for teaching in honors and the reality of the experience.

**5)** The overwhelming majority of teaching in honors is done on an overload basis. Faculty are teaching honors courses on top of their own departmental teaching load, and thus are sometimes unable to focus as much time on their honors courses as they would like.

**6)** The fact that most of the teaching in honors happens on an overload basis also leads to a perpetual shortage of professors to teach honors courses. This shortage has only grown more acute in recent years, restricting potential course offerings in the honors programs substantially and in some cases forcing honors advising staff into the role of instructors.

**7)** Honors programs often are used as recruiting tools at universities. The two-stream honors structure here, though, hampers such efforts. Admissions officers explain that they find the structure of honors very confusing, and also that prospective students find themselves unable to understand the existence of two different honors options.

To address these issues, we propose the following:

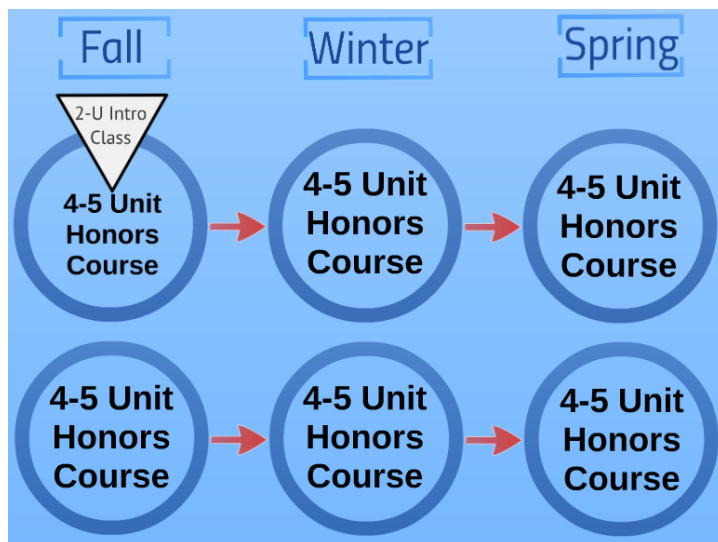
**1)** Combining the DHC and ISHP into one honors program. Beginning next fall, new honors students should be admitted as members of a single University Honors Program with all the same privileges and course options. All UHP students will have the option of living in an Honors Residence Hall, though it will not be required of them, as it is now for ISHP.

2) Making honors teaching on-load for faculty. Departments will be offered a buyout to offset the loss of faculty teaching in honors. Faculty will be “held harmless” for the difference in credit hours generated by a departmental course they might have offered and an honors course they will be offering instead. (Faculty who wish to teach in honors in exchange for a grant of unrestricted research funds will continue to have that option.)

3) Creating an honors curriculum that fulfills GE (and very occasionally, as in the case of BioSci, Math, and perhaps Chemistry) major requirements in the first two years, offers flexible research and community service options in the third year, and culminates in a choice of several kinds of capstone experiences (please see below for more information).

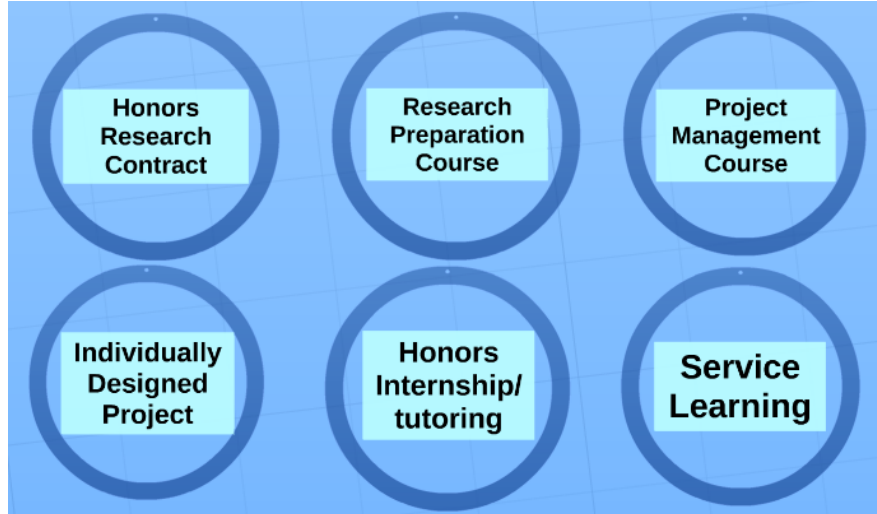
4) Offering small honors courses. For students in the first two years in the program, courses will be offered through individual departments, but these courses will be restricted to not more than 25 honors students. For example, Math 17A – “Calculus for Biological Scientists” – typically enrolls ~150 students. An honors version of the course would still fulfill the same GE and major requirements as the larger course, but would offer the professor the opportunity to engage with exceptional students in an interactive setting. By offering honors courses through departments, UHP students will no longer struggle to fit their honors courses into their schedules as electives, thus decreasing student attrition.

#### **First and Second Years:**



5) Complementing rather than competing with majors and campus research opportunities. Currently, the third year is the moment at which many students leave the program. The combination of inflexible requirements and students engaging in research and beginning upper-division coursework forces students to narrow their options. In the new program, then, students will choose only one honors option per quarter from a variety of research and service offerings, allowing scheduling flexibility and preparing them for their capstone.

### **Third Year: one option per quarter**



6) Providing an array of attractive capstone experiences that will not poach students from majors. In the new program, students will be able to complete their fourth-year capstone in a number of different ways, including undertaking a departmental thesis, research opportunity, or enrolling in the engineering senior design project. Students whose majors do not offer such an option, or students who do not feel their interests are suited to a departmental research project, will be able to choose one of the UHP capstone options.

### **Fourth Year: Capstone**

Honors Thesis (through UHP or home department)  
Honors Team Project  
Community Service Project  
Laboratory Research and Presentation  
Senior Departmental Project  
...Design your own capstone...

### **Conclusion:**

This proposal for a new University Honors Program has been designed to fit within the preexisting structures of the university curricula, to build on what UC Davis already does well. The new honors program will short-circuit the feedback loop that now leads to high rates of attrition among students and low expectations within honors courses. At the same time, by making honors teaching on load, faculty will be able to approach honors courses as

an integral part of their work responsibilities, identify particularly talented undergraduates in a small-classroom setting, and pilot new ideas or pedagogical initiatives if they wish.