

MEMORANDUM

TO: Faculty Senate Executive Committee
Katherine Frank, Provost and Vice President/Academic & Student Life

FROM: Honors Task Force Members

DATE: July 2, 2017

RE: Honors Task Force Interim Report

After receiving its initial charge on April 14th, the honors task force members met on three occasions (April 28th, May 12th and May 26th) and focused their attention on points one and two of the HTF charge, with implications for point three.

Definitions and Terms:

The HTF members began their work by defining the key terms and scope of the charge. Drawn from definitions of honors used here at CWU, the definition from the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), and definitions culled from honors colleges and programs throughout the US. HTF chose the following definition to guide our work:

Honors education ignites passion for lifelong learning and encourages student creativity, collaboration, and leadership in the classroom and beyond. It is characterized by in-class and extracurricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education.

The HTF decided to limit the scope of its work to honors opportunities offered at CWU and not include examination of “special opportunities for our strongest students.” The list of potential special opportunities was determined to be too long, lacking specificity, and without sufficient structure, to be effectively studied and included. The HTF also decided it appropriate to exclude external, national honors societies who have chapters at CWU.

HTF 02: Taking Stock

In addition to the William O. Douglas Honors College (DHC), there are eleven departments within the university which offer departmental honors (list attached). This information was gathered from CWU’s online catalogue. Searches of the relevant departments’ websites showed that not all of them contained information on their departmental honors program.

Conversations with faculty, advising and administrative staff within a number of these departments revealed a lack of awareness of the programs.

Examination of the requirements and standards of the various programs showed a key variation—some of the programs involve active participation on the part of the student while others involve passive participation. The HTF believes that an important component in the definition of honors is active participation, that students choose to participate in the program and take steps toward achieving it (as opposed to passive participation where the students receive departmental honors based entirely upon GPA). The requirements of the programs vary greatly across the eleven departments, revealing different standards and conceptions of what honors means.

The HTF requested data from the office of Institutional Effectiveness on the number of students who had graduated with departmental honors over the last ten years and the number of students who met the minimum requirements but did not graduate with departmental honors (data attached). This data showed that individual departments are responsible for monitoring/tracking if students meet the requirements and then recording it in the system. The data also showed that departmental honors is under-utilized.

HTF members spoke with a number of faculty and chairs of departments which do not offer departmental honors programs to ask why. Some faculty and chairs said that they were unaware that departmental honors were an option at CWU while others cited the additional administrative and advising work as obstacles and reasons not to offer departmental honors.

Based on information from the registrar's office, there is no clear and consistent way in which departmental honors are transcribed.

The examination of the programs and resulting discussion highlighted a number of issues of concern for the HTF regarding departmental honors at CWU.

- Lack of accessibility
 - Only eleven departments offer departmental honors, meaning that students' access and opportunity to participate is contingent upon which major they are enrolled in.
- Lack of awareness
 - Faculty and staff don't always appear to know that their departments offer departmental honors or what it involves.
 - Students within those majors are not aware of departmental honors options.
- Inconsistency across programs
 - Departmental honors are not transcribed in any clear or consistent way.
 - Departments' reported limited administrative and/or advising support as reasons for not offering departmental honors
- Variation in standards across programs
 - Programs include GPA minimums, thesis/undergraduate research, service learning, membership in national honors associations. Some programs involve

active participation while others are more passive.

Recommendations:

Based on these issues, the HTF members make the following recommendations.

- Make departmental honors available to all CWU students who choose to participate, irrespective of major
- Institute a minimum standard for departmental honors across all majors/departments
 - The HTF recommend the following minimum standard for departmental honors:
 - Cumulative GPA of 3.0
 - GPA of 3.5 within the major
 - Completion of a senior honors thesis/creative/research/capstone project
 - Completion of at least one honors course within the major
 - Students must declare their intention to complete departmental honors before beginning their senior year (active participation)
- Place advising and administration of departmental honors under the DHC
 - This would reduce the burden on individual departments and ensure consistency in recording and tracking students' work
 - This would allow for centralization of resources and information on departmental honors with the goal of improving accessibility and visibility
- Ensure consistency with how departmental honors are transcribed (registrar's office)

Future steps:

The HTF will continue to meet every two weeks in Fall term of 2017 to discuss point three of the original charge.