

SPECIAL REPORT

of the

**ACADEMIC MATTERS, ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND
PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCILS**

concerning

**REVISION OF THE
COMMONWEALTH HONORS COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS**

**Presented at the
769th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
May 4, 2017**

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ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL

The Commonwealth Honors College (CHC) is proposing to reinstate the requirement of a senior thesis or project in order to receive an Honors designation at graduation. A few years ago, requirements were changed to make it possible for students to receive an Honors designation (General Studies Honors) without doing a thesis. The CHC now believes that in order to maintain the reputation of the program, it is important that students produce independent research or creative work. The CHC is very aware of concerns about the advising and resource burdens this might impose on departments, especially those in STEM. They are undertaking several initiatives to try to lessen the burdens, in particular, by having the CHC take on the responsibility for training students in non-discipline specific thesis skills (the research and writing process) in the first three years through thesis seminars, thesis workshops, a multidisciplinary junior-year honors course, etc. Advisors would then be responsible for supervising students in their discipline-specific thesis research. The Program Subcommittee agrees that an independent research experience is valuable for students, and that requiring that experience is important for the stature of the program. We also are convinced that the CHC is committed to efforts to making this requirement work for both the students and the academic programs. Hence, we recommend approval of the proposal.

At its meeting on February 15, 2017, the Academic Matters Council voted unanimously to recommend Faculty Senate approval of the Revision of the Commonwealth Honors College Requirements. It was submitted as Proposal #3621 in the Course and Curriculum Management System.

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES COUNCIL

On February 24, 2017, the Academic Priorities Council endorsed approval of this proposal #3621.

PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCIL

The Commonwealth Honors College (CHC) proposes that all students entering CHC, starting in the Fall semester of 2017, will be required to produce a thesis or project as part of their graduation requirements. This is a reinstatement of previous requirements that were in place until three years ago. It responds to the greater number of Honors students who have been choosing not to do a thesis/capstone and will affect only the students who, after entering CHC, do not complete a thesis or project. They no longer will receive any Honors designation when graduating. CHC is establishing a new series of seminars and plans to move away from the one-on-one model of thesis delivery. The thesis project will not have to be done within a student's major. CHC is "hoping not to significantly increase faculty hours or budget resources."

At its meeting on April 19, 2017, the Program and Budget Council unanimously approved (14-0-0) the Revision of the Commonwealth Honors College Requirements, Proposal #3621 in the Course and Curriculum Management System.

MOTION: That the Faculty Senate approve the Revision of the Commonwealth Honors College Requirements, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 17-077.

Provide a brief overview of the proposal.

We propose that all first-year students entering Commonwealth Honors College (CHC) in the fall of 2017 will be required to produce a thesis or project, as well as all classes entering after that date.

The change does not add a requirement to the program of students who choose to do a senior thesis or project. These students always have received a degree stating that they have achieved either Multidisciplinary or Departmental Honors. It will affect only students who, after entering CHC, do not complete a thesis or project. In the past three years, these students could have decided not to do a thesis or project and still be graduated with General Studies Honors. They no longer will receive any Honors designation when graduating.

Describe the existing requirements, listing any required courses, various means toward completion, and any other information relating to current practices.

The requirements at present (for students entering in 2016) are:

1. ENGWRIT 112H – College Writing (if College Writing is completed prior to CHC admission, any Gen Ed honors course of 3 or more credits may be substituted)
2. HONORS 201H – Ideas that Change the World (Gen Ed “I”, 4 credits)
3. HONORS 391AH (1 credit)
4. Gen Ed honors course (3 or more credits)*
5. Gen Ed honors course (3 or more credits)*

For Multidisciplinary Honors (MH)

6. One any-level honors course
7. One 300-level or higher Honors course
8. Honors thesis or project (6 or more credits on one topic)

For Departmental Honors will meet or exceed these criteria

6. One any-level honors course
7. One 300-level or higher Honors course
8. Departmental honors thesis or project (6 or more credits on one topic)

Describe the proposed requirements, including all course requirements or other means toward completion, as well as any admissions or continuation requirements.

The proposed requirements for an Honors degree from CHC are 6 credits of a thesis or a project in senior year. Normally, the format is a 3-credit course in each semester of the senior year.

The requirement can be satisfied by individual work with a faculty sponsor and a second thesis or project committee member or by completion of a thesis in a seminar in which several students (up to 15) work within a common seminar topic on individual theses or projects.

Note that this is not a change in the requirement, per se. It is an extension of an existing requirement to all students entering CHC as of fall 2017. Under the rules in place for the past three years, students can elect not to do an honors thesis or project and receive General Studies Honors.

Provide a rationale for these revisions.

The proposal is to restore the requirement of a thesis or capstone project for all Commonwealth Honors College students. Three years ago, the option of replacing the thesis or capstone project with General Studies Honors (GSH) was implemented to allow certain students, those with compelling circumstances, to graduate with CHC honors without completing a thesis or project (Faculty Senate Doc. No. 10-050A). This option quickly and steadily snowballed to become an option of choice, even now among first-year students just entering CHC. After a year-long discussion of the problem in a variety of fora, including an Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee, the Honors Council and the College Advisory Board, the consensus emerged to return to requiring a thesis or project to graduate with CHC Honors. All groups concluded that in order to be a viable and respected honors college, within UMass and around the Commonwealth and the country, students should be required to produce independent research and/or performance work.

List the degree programs (majors) that will be affected by these revisions. If the proposal is the change University-wide requirements (such as General Education requirements), note that it will affect all majors.

It will affect all majors that have students in CHC. The impact will depend on the increase in the number of students requiring thesis or project supervision. This, in turn, depends on the number of students who will choose not to do any Honors degree because the thesis or project is now required relative to the number who now are choosing GSH but would do a thesis or project if required.

If any programs or departments outside of the proposing college will be affected by the proposed revisions, describe those relationships here and include any memoranda of understanding from those colleges and departments as appendices to this proposal.

There are no formal MOUs with departments concerning the senior thesis or project. We are working steadily with departments to encourage research seminars, preparation, and even to offer honors thesis courses within CHC.

If this proposal requires no additional resources, say so and briefly explain why. If this proposal requires additional resources, explain how they will be paid for. For proposals involving instruction, indicate how many new enrollments are expected and whether the courses have room to accommodate them.

CHC has put together a package of senior thesis/project support options, using the partial restitution of base funding to the college. This includes a part-time coordinator of thesis preparation activities in the College, including workshops and thesis seminars. Therefore, no further funding is required.