

**New Brunswick Faculty Council
Curriculum Teaching and Honors Committee
Concerns and Recommendations Regarding the New Brunswick Honors College
April 2015**

Executive Summary

The Curriculum, Teaching, and Honors (CT&H) Committee of the New Brunswick Faculty Council (NBFC) has carefully considered the charter document for the New Brunswick Honors College A [*Community of Scholars*](#) and has also examined the planning process for the Honors College. The Committee supports the Honors College goals of attracting more very high-achieving students to Rutgers – New Brunswick and providing an additional very appealing honors option to the strongest students from its undergraduate schools. Members of the Committee also like many features of the Honors College curriculum and proposed co-curricular opportunities. We have, however, a number of concerns about the planning process for the Honors College and about several aspects of the Honors College as it is described in the charter document.

Our primary concern with the planning process for the Honors College is that it was carried out without appropriate community input. The Faculty Planning Committee did not seek wide community input during its deliberations and its final report was accepted as soon as it was submitted without any opportunity for feedback from members of the university community. This lack of community input has resulted in widespread ignorance about and lack of support for the Honors College within the university community.

The CT&H Committee also has concerns about several aspects of the Honors College:

- We are concerned that sufficient funds may not be raised to support all the costs of the Honors College and that the shortfall may be made up by taking funds from the school honors programs or other academic programs.
- We are concerned that the existence of the Honors College may make it difficult for the school honors programs to continue to recruit very strong students since the school programs will be perceived as second-tier honors programs.
- We are concerned that there may not be sufficient faculty “buy-in” to make the Honors College succeed.
- We are concerned that lack of community support for the Honors College may have a negative impact on recruiting.
- We are concerned that the complexity of simultaneously satisfying the requirements of the Honors College, the requirements of a student’s major, and the graduation requirements of his or her school of matriculation may cause problems for some Honors Scholars, particularly those in the professional schools.
- We are concerned that the highly unusual administrative structure of the Honors College, in which a faculty academic dean and a staff administrative dean both report directly to the New Brunswick Chancellor, may cause serious problems.

These concerns are presented in more detail in section II of this report, together with a number of detailed recommendations to address each area of concern. Our major recommendations can be summarized as follows:

1. The Administration should make endowing the Honors College one of its very highest fundraising priorities. Until sufficient funding for the Honors College is in hand, the shortfall should be covered without harming the school honors programs or other academic programs.
2. In order to mitigate the harmful effects of the “two-tier” honors system, the Honors College should provide benefits to all honors students in New Brunswick, such as making the public areas of Honors College building a hub for all honors students, sponsoring lectures, films, panel discussions, etc. jointly with appropriate school-based honors programs, and hosting social events open to all honors students. We also recommend that Honors Scholars not be segregated from other honors students in honors housing after the first year.
3. In order to enhance faculty buy-in, the Rutgers administration should recognize, in practice as well as in rhetoric, faculty authority and control over the curriculum and requirements of the Honors College. This means that:
 - The faculties of the participating New Brunswick schools must have final legislative authority for and oversight of the Honors College’s admissions policy, curriculum, scholastic standing requirements, and requirements for the Honors College designation on a student’s transcript.
 - While the participating faculties may delegate most of these responsibilities to the Honors College Faculty Board, the faculty of each participating school must still approve each course offered by the Honors College in order for the Honors Scholars from that school to receive graduation credit for the course.
4. The participating New Brunswick faculties should be partners with the Administration in designing the co-curricular programs of the College and in determining the faculty role in those programs.
5. The administration should launch an effective campaign to educate faculty, staff, current and prospective students, alumni, and interested members of the general public about the Honors College: its vision and goals, what it offers high-achieving students, how it differs from the school-based honors programs, and what potential benefits it will provide to the whole university community.
6. Strong efforts should be made to integrate the Honors College into the larger Rutgers - New Brunswick community. These efforts should include Honors College sponsorship of programs open to the whole community and encouraging Honors Scholars to offer services, such as tutoring or mentoring, to non-honors students and to be actively engaged in the wider student community.
7. The Honors College deans should work closely with the participating schools and their academic departments to make sure that all the Honors College curricular requirements are compatible with graduation requirements in the participating schools, with requirements for majors, and with requirements for departmental honors. Honors College advisors need to become very familiar with the requirements of each participating school and with how the Honors College requirements can best be met in each school.
8. The administrative structure of the Honors College should be changed to have the Administrative Dean and the entire Honors College staff report to the Academic Dean.

We hope that our recommendations will help Rutgers – New Brunswick build a successful Honors College that will achieve its goals and benefit the entire university community.

I. Background

The New Brunswick Faculty Council (NBFC) has followed the planning for the New Brunswick Honors College, and provided input whenever possible, since fall 2013, at which time some members of the Council first learned that serious planning for the Honors College was well underway. The NBFC Curriculum, Teaching and Honors (CT&H) Committee was charged with making recommendations concerning the Honors College and did so on an accelerated basis after learning that the new Honors College dormitory on George Street was projected to open in fall 2015. The result was a brief [report](#) and set of recommendations, which were approved by the whole Council on December 13, 2013. The chief recommendation was that a primarily faculty task force be appointed jointly by the administration and the Faculty Council before the beginning of the spring 2014 semester and charged with producing a detailed proposal for the Honors College. In addition, the report recommended a composition for the task force, proposed a series of guiding principles to be followed in the planning process, and made a few broad recommendations regarding the nature, and funding of the Honors College.

The Honors College Faculty Planning Committee was established early in the spring 2014 semester with input from the Chair of the Faculty Council. Three Faculty Council members served on the Planning Committee and they provided input from the Council throughout the Committee's deliberations. The Faculty Planning Committee presented its final report entitled *A [Community of Scholars](#)* in December 2014; it was quickly accepted by Chancellor Edwards and became the charter document for the Honors College.

All members of the Faculty Council were provided with an electronic copy of *A Community of Scholars* in January 2015. Honors College Academic Dean Matt Matsuda and Administrative Dean Paul Gilmore then came to the January 30th meeting of the Council to answer questions about the Honors College and to hear members' concerns and suggestions. This report is based on the concerns expressed at that meeting, on input from other faculty members, and on a careful analysis of the charter document by the Curriculum, Teaching, and Honors Committee.

II. Concerns and Recommendations

The NBFC Curriculum, Teaching, and Honors Committee supports the Honors College goals of attracting more very high-achieving students to Rutgers – New Brunswick and providing an additional very appealing honors option to the strongest students from its undergraduate schools. Members of the Committee also like many features of the Honors College curriculum and programming including the highly integrated first-year living-learning experience, the emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches to real-world problems, the emphasis on research and inquiry-based learning, and the wide range of co-curricular opportunities to be offered. We have, however, a number of concerns about the planning process for the Honors College and about several aspects of the Honors College as it is described in *A Community of Scholars*.

Our primary concern with the planning process for the Honors College is that it was carried out without appropriate community input. The Faculty Planning Committee did not seek wide community input during its deliberations and its final report was accepted as soon as it was submitted without any opportunity for feedback from members of the university community, not even feedback on the curriculum from the faculties of the participating schools. This lack of community input has resulted in widespread ignorance about and lack of support for the Honors

College within the university community. While we realize that the lack of opportunity for appropriate community input was due, at least in part, to lack of time, we believe that the last-minute rush could have been avoided if the Faculty Planning Committee had been appointed a year and a half earlier when detailed administrative planning for the Honors College apparently began. To many members of the NBFC, this is another example of the administration's pattern of seeking input from the faculty on important proposals very late in the planning process after most major decisions have already been made.

The CT&H Committee also has concerns about several aspects of the Honors College; namely, funding, the relationship to the school honors programs, faculty participation, community support, the relationship to schools and academic departments, and administrative structure. These concerns are presented in some detail in the remainder of this section, together with a number of recommendations to address each area of concern. We hope that these recommendations will help Rutgers – New Brunswick build a successful Honors College that will achieve its goals and benefit the entire university community.

Funding

Concerns: Doubling the number of honors students in New Brunswick is going to be very expensive: funds will be needed for additional scholarships, for compensating departments to replace faculty who teach Honors College sections, for paying the Honors College staff, and for funding the promised co-curricular opportunities for Honors Scholars. If sufficient funds cannot be raised to support all these expenses, we fear the shortfall will be made up by taking funds from the School honors programs or other academic programs.

Recommendations:

- The Administration should make endowing the Honors College one of its very highest fundraising priorities.
- Until sufficient funding for the Honors College is in hand, the shortfall should be covered without harming the school honors programs or other academic programs.
- In order to achieve cost efficiency in providing honors education at Rutgers – New Brunswick, there must be maximum coordination, cooperation, and sharing of resources between the Honors College and the school honors programs.

Relationship to the School Honors Programs

Concerns: In order to double the number of honors students and raise the profile of our student body, it is necessary for the school honors programs to continue to prosper as well as for the Honors College to succeed. The existence of the Honors College as an “independent” entity may well make it difficult to recruit strong students into the school honors programs since prospective honors students who are not offered admission to the Honors College may be reluctant to join what will be perceived as a second-tier Rutgers honors program. This may cause at least some of the school honors programs either to lower their admission standards or substantially reduce the size of the program. Also, the disparity between what is offered to honors students in the school programs compared to what will be offered to Honors Scholars may breed resentment and lower morale in the school honors programs.

Recommendations:

- To mitigate the harmful effects of the “two-tier” honors system, the Honors College and its new facility should provide benefits to all honors students in New Brunswick. In particular:
 - Make the Honors College facility a hub for all honors students by inviting honors students from the school programs to lectures and programs at the facility and possibly setting aside a room or lounge as a home away from home for honors students whose primary home is on Busch or Cook/Douglass.
 - Sponsor lectures, films, panel discussions, etc. jointly with appropriate school-based honors programs.
 - Host social events open to all honors students.
- Honors Scholars should not be segregated from other honors students in honors housing after the first year.
- The administration should devise a clear and effective explanation for prospective honors students and their families of the differences in focus and requirements between the Honors College and the school honors programs.

Faculty Participation

Concerns: We are concerned that there may not be sufficient faculty “buy in” to make the Honors College succeed. There are several reasons for this concern:

- The current school honors programs already have difficulty recruiting enough faculty members to teach honors seminars and mentor honors students. Doubling the number of honors students is going to make recruiting faculty much more challenging.
- At present, most faculty members feel no ownership of the Honors College since they had no input while the Honors College program was being developed and they have not been asked to approve its curriculum, admissions standards, or requirements. A substantial number of faculty members view the Honors College as something imposed on them by the University administration without regard for the principles of faculty governance.
- Many faculty members currently active in teaching and mentoring honors students are wary of the Honors College because they fear it will seriously damage the school honors program to which they feel a strong loyalty.

Recommendations: The most important way to enhance faculty buy-in is for the Rutgers administration to recognize, in practice as well as in rhetoric, faculty authority and control over the admissions policies, curriculum, and curricular requirements of the Honors College. The Honors College will not have a faculty body of its own; its responsible faculty body must therefore be the combined faculties of the participating New Brunswick Schools. This means that:

- The faculties of the participating New Brunswick schools must have final legislative authority for and oversight of the Honor College’s admissions policy, curriculum, scholastic standing requirements, and requirements for the Honors College designation on a student’s transcript.
- The participating faculties may delegate most of these responsibilities to the Honors College Faculty Board, but the faculty of each participating school must still approve each course offered by the Honors College in order for the Honors Scholars from that school to receive graduation credit for the course.

- The voting members of the Honors College Faculty Board should all be tenured faculty members from a participating school.
We suggest that the Faculty Board consist of (i) one tenured faculty member chosen by each participating school, with an extra member or two from the SAS, (ii) two tenured faculty members from participating schools chosen by the New Brunswick Faculty Council and (iii) the Director of each of the school honors programs or his or her designee. The Honors Directors or designees should be nonvoting members. The Board should be constituted as soon as possible, but no later than the end of the spring 2015 semester.

Additional recommendations for ways to enhance faculty buy-in and participation are as follows:

- The participating New Brunswick faculties should be partners with the Administration in designing the co-curricular programs of the College and in determining the faculty role in those programs.
- A campaign should be launched to educate the New Brunswick faculty about the Honors College vision and initial plans and to get broad faculty input concerning the best way to implement various aspects of the Honors College Faculty Planning Committee report.
- Efforts to recruit faculty to teach Honors College courses, mentor honors scholars, and particulate in co-curricular programs should concentrate on attracting a new group of faculty members excited by the Honors College vision rather than on “poaching” faculty members active in the school honors programs.

Community Support

Concerns: In order for the Honors College to prosper and achieve its goals, it needs to be widely accepted and supported by Rutgers – New Brunswick students, staff, and alumni, as well as by the faculty. We are concerned that lack of knowledge about the Honors College, combined with concerns regarding funding and impact on other programs, may lead to resentment of and even antipathy to the Honors College. Such a lack of community support could have a very negative impact on recruitment to the Honors College and on the experiences of Honors Scholars in the larger university community.

Recommendations:

- A high priority for the administration should be educating the Rutgers – New Brunswick community about the Honors College, including its vision and goals, its interdisciplinary emphasis, what it offers to high-achieving students, and the potential benefits it will provide to the whole university community.
- Strong efforts should be made to integrate the Honors College into the larger Rutgers - New Brunswick community. These efforts should include Honors College sponsorship of programs open to the whole community, opening the Honors College facilities to student groups or programs on a space-available basis, and encouraging Honors Scholars to offer services, such as tutoring or mentoring, to non-honors students and to be active members, even leaders, in the wider student community.

Relationship to the Schools and Academic Departments

Concerns: Honors scholars will simultaneously have to satisfy the requirements of the Honors College, the requirements of their major, and the graduation requirements of their school of matriculation. This can be complicated, especially for students in the professional schools. Without close coordination among advisors in the Honors College, the participating schools, and academic departments, Honors Scholars may receive incorrect advice which may lead to bad choices of courses and even to inability to complete all requirements in a timely manner.

Recommendations:

- The Honors College deans need to work closely with the participating schools and their academic departments to make sure that all the Honors College curricular requirements are compatible with graduation requirements in the participating schools, with requirements for majors, and with requirements for departmental honors. Particular emphasis needs to be placed on making sure that Honors College requirements for the capstone experience are compatible with the capstone requirements in schools and departments and that the Honors College forum and seminars satisfy requirements for electives in the professional schools.
- Honors College advisors need to become very familiar with the requirements of each participating school and with how the Honors College requirements can best be met in each school.
- The Honors College needs to make sure that academic advisors in the schools and academic departments are aware of the Honors College requirements and how they can be combined with school and major requirements.

Administrative Structure

Concerns: We have one major concern with the administrative structure of the Honors College; namely, the fact that both the Academic Dean (a faculty member) and the Administrative Dean (a staff member) report directly to the Chancellor rather than having the Administrative Dean report through the Academic Dean. This structure is, we believe, unprecedented at Rutgers – New Brunswick. Every New Brunswick degree-granting unit has always had a faculty member Dean to whom the rest of the decanal staff, academic and administrative, report. This is also the case for the Douglass Residential College, which – like the Honors College – does not grant degrees nor have matriculated students. While we believe that Matt Matsuda and Paul Gilmore can probably make the current structure work in the short term, we fear that “down the road” with different people in charge this structure may lead to serious problems, including reducing the Academic Dean to little more than a figure head.

Recommendation: We strongly recommend that the administrative structure be changed to have the Administrative Dean and the entire Honors College staff report to the Academic Dean.

III. Resolution

Whereas, the Curriculum, Teaching and Honors Committee has carefully considered the charter document *A Community of Scholars* for the New Brunswick Honors College and identified a number of faculty concerns with the Honors College as described in the charter document; and

Whereas, the Curriculum, Teaching and Honors Committee has also expressed concern with the lack of appropriate community input during the planning for the Honors College; and

Whereas, the Curriculum, Teaching and Honors Committee has made a number of recommendations to address its concerns; and

Whereas, members of the Faculty Council have considered the Curriculum, Teaching and Honors Committee's concerns and recommendations and found them to be sound,

Therefore, be it resolved that the New Brunswick Faculty Council agrees with the Curriculum, Teaching and Honors Committee's concerns, endorses its recommendations, and calls upon the New Brunswick administration to implement the Committee's recommendations.