

WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Middletown, Connecticut 06457

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MEMORANDUM

To: The Faculty
From: The ad hoc Committee on Honors and General Education
Subject: The new Honors System
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REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON
HONORS AND GENERAL EDUCATION
ON THE NEW HONORS SYSTEM

A. Preface

The Educational Policy Committee Report adopted by the faculty on May 12, 1977 and amended on November 22, 1977 called for eliminating Latin Honors (based on the student's grade point average) and replacing the present University-wide Honors program administered by the Honors College with a dual system consisting of Departmental Honors and Honors in General Scholarship. The legislation stipulated that University Honors be awarded only "to those students whose work in their major program and whose general scholarship were judged... to be truly exceptional" (faculty Minutes, Nov. 22, 1977).

In the fall of 1978 the ad hoc Committee on Honors and General Education was convened to design the new Honors program. During its year-long deliberations, the Committee found it necessary to interpret and modify certain aspects of the enabling legislation. The following paragraphs attempt to describe the general principles that guided the Committee in its work, the relationship of the Committee's proposed program to the original legislation, and the Committee's expectations with regard to the new program.

As it worked out the details for Departmental Honors and Honors in General Scholarship, the Committee felt itself charged with fulfilling the faculty's manifest desire for departmental autonomy in granting Honors on the one hand, and cross-disciplinary integration on the other. The Committee conceived of the two programs as symmetrical, equal in quality and prestige. A student receiving High Honors in either program might qualify for and achieve University Honors. The majority of the Committee construed the legislation of 1977 (as amended) to mean that a student need achieve High Honors in only one of the two programs in order to become a candidate for University Honors. Departmental Honors recipients would need to demonstrate excellence in general studies, Honors in General Scholarship recipients excellence in the major.

Creating the program of Departmental Honors presented few difficulties, since the Committee's role consisted largely of setting up the minimum expectations, collecting information on the individual departments' criteria, and establishing certain uniform procedures designed to ensure fairness to all Honors candidates. The chief concern voiced by members of the Committee, individual faculty members, and departments, was that the Committee might lack power to guarantee "parity" among the different departmental Honors programs. In light of this concern, the Committee urges all departments to establish and maintain from the outset high standards of excellence for their own Honors candidates. The Committee feels that if patterns of serious inequity emerge, it will be the Committee's task to work with the involved department(s) to correct the situation.

The proposed program of Honors in General Scholarship represents a new emphasis on general studies at Wesleyan. The Committee conceives of this program as closely linked to the development of Stage I and Stage II generalization, which aims at encouraging integrative thinking at both the introductory and the advanced level. It is felt that at the beginning few students may choose the General Scholarship path to Honors, but that the new generalization curriculum will create increasing interest in crossing departmental and divisional boundaries and will thereby make the program attractive and accessible to growing numbers of students. Prospective participants may be:

- Majors in a single department whose interests carry them beyond the traditional confines of the discipline.
- Double majors who intend to explore linkages between their majors or between their majors and other fields.
- Members of the Colleges who plan to investigate connections and relations not usually covered in the College curricula.
- University majors.

After considerable debate within the Committee and at the March 6, 1979 faculty meeting, the Committee concluded that the term "interdisciplinary" might prove misleading if used in connection with the program of Honors in General Scholarship, since a number of departments and programs at Wesleyan regularly engage in studies involving several traditional disciplines. Instead, the principle was adopted that the Honors in General Scholarship program should provide an administrative framework for students whose Honors projects did not fit neatly into their major departments or programs. But the criterion for entering the Honors in General Scholarship program should not be merely linking subject matters or disciplines not conventionally joined in departments or programs. Students should also be asked to show awareness of the methodological implications of these linkages.

The legislation of 1977 suggested four ways in which a student might achieve Honors in General Scholarship (Section II, c, 1-4). The Committee combined suggestions (2) -- a student-initiated project -- and (3) -- a thesis -- to form Track I of its proposal. The Committee chose to ignore suggestion (1) -- passing a comprehensive examination on a group of books selected by the Committee or in consultation with it -- as too complicated to implement in a year in which the Committee had many other pressing tasks. Suggestion (4) -- participation in a planned series of seminars -- has been sketched out as Track II of the present proposal. Student demand and faculty support for such a track must be ascertained and staffing provided before such a series of seminars can become a reality. The Committee feels that one person, possibly the Coordinator of University Courses, or a group of interested persons, should assume responsibility for designing Track II in detail.

To support the new Honors system, the Committee proposes that a standing committee on Honors and General Scholarship be established. (see 1977 EPC Report, Appendix II). It also proposes that the Honors College be retained. The Committee agrees that the educational and cultural value of the programs traditionally sponsored by the Honors

College will enhance the new Honors program. In addition, the Honors College can provide a functioning administrative structure with established procedures for setting and enforcing deadlines, receiving petitions, arranging for projects to be evaluated, and organizing examinations for Honors candidates.

As the Committee submits its plan for the new Honors system to the faculty for its approval, two caveats seem in order. First, under the old Honors system, approximately one-quarter of the senior class received English Honors through the Honors College. The Committee trusts that introduction of the Departmental Honors program will not result in a lowering of the standards for Honors. Second, the guidelines set forth by the Committee should not be regarded as rigid and immutable, but rather as open to such revision as experience may direct.

B. The new Honors Program: Description

I. Departmental Honors

(Definition: for purposes of this section, "department" shall be taken to mean any department, program, or College authorized to accept majors.)

a. Establishment of criteria

Primary responsibility for establishing and publishing criteria and procedures, and for supervising and evaluating candidates rests with the departments. The Committee on Honors and General Education must review all criteria and procedures, but its role remains advisory, except in cases of serious inequity among departments. To ensure fairness and administrative efficiency, the Committee sets uniform schedules or timetables for submission of special projects.

b. Candidacy

Each Honors candidate makes a commitment to candidacy in advance. By October 1, the student files with the department and the Honors College a written statement of his or her intention to stand for Departmental Honors. The requirement of prior commitment to candidacy implies that a department may not confer Honors ex post facto.

c. Guidelines for criteria

While departments may require a minimum departmental grade-point average or level of achievement for Honors, Departmental Honors may not be awarded solely on the basis of such factors. A special project, course of study, or research project must be required, except in those departments that normally expect a senior thesis or project of all majors. In such departments candidacy may involve submitting the Honors project to evaluation under special procedures established by the department.

Suggested criteria for Departmental Honors are:

- 1) Completion of an Honors thesis or research project in the major field
- 2) Presentation of a public performance or exhibit
- 3) Participation in a special program of Honors courses or seminars
- 4) Undergoing a departmental examination not routinely administered to all majors in the department.

c. Deadlines

The department nominates candidates for Departmental Honors to the Honors College by February 1. Nomination should occur only if it appears reasonably certain that the candidate will complete his or her work on time and in the desired form.

All theses and written projects must be submitted by April 15. Suitable deadlines will be arranged by the department, in cooperation with the Honors College, for public exercises, exhibits, completion of work in special courses, and departmental examinations.

e. Award of Honors

Each department determines its own procedures for evaluating the work of its Honors candidates. Departmental Honors will be awarded only to those students who have met the departmental criteria with work of distinguished quality. High Honors will require work of unusual distinction. Formal fulfillment of departmental criteria does not in itself qualify a student for Honors. Some departments will choose at least one evaluator from outside the department.

Students graduating with Departmental Honors will have the words "With Honors/High Honors in the Department of _____" inscribed on their diplomas.

II. Honors in General Scholarship

Track I: Student-initiated Projects

a. Establishment of criteria

The Committee on Honors and General Education establishes and publishes the criteria and procedures for Honors in General Scholarship and supervises and evaluates candidates, with the assistance of their tutors and sponsors. It enforces the same schedules or timetables that apply to candidates for Departmental Honors.

b. Candidacy and eligibility

Each Honors candidate makes a commitment to Honors candidacy in advance. To become a candidate, a student must have fulfilled the

expectations for generalization, Stage I.

In the spring of the junior year or the early fall of the senior year, the student must formulate a project and enlist one faculty member to serve as tutor, and one or two additional faculty members to represent disciplines other than the tutor's and to serve as sponsors. Some students may wish to work primarily with the tutor, consulting the sponsor(s) only occasionally. Others may treat the tutor and sponsors as a committee, meeting with them on a regular basis and soliciting their advice and criticism on all aspects of the project. Once the project has been formulated and the tutor and sponsors found, the student must present, by October 15, the following documents to the Committee on Honors and General Education through the Honors College:

- 1) A written description of the project, including details on its scope, on the plan for research or preparation, and on the student's reasons for choosing it.
- 2) A transcript of the student's academic record, accompanied by a statement showing how Stage I generalization expectations and Stage II objectives have been, or will be, fulfilled, and explaining how the transcript reflects (or fails to reflect) the student's commitment to general scholarship. If the record appears not to reflect such a commitment, the student should show how summer school courses, independent study, work experience, and the like may have contributed to his or her intellectual formation.
- 3) Statements of support from the tutor and sponsor(s) commenting in some detail on the originality and feasibility of the project, on the student's grasp of the material and the implications of the project, and on the understanding reached between the student and the faculty member as to the latter's role in supervising the project.
- 4) A statement from the student's major department(s), indicating that the student is in good standing in the major(s). In the case of a University Major, such a statement must be supplied by the supervising committee.

c. Criteria

The honors project must entail two or more semesters of intensive effort resulting in a written thesis, a performance or exhibit, or a public exercise such as a formal lecture. The subject matter should be recognizably cross-disciplinary, and the methodology employed should reflect the student's awareness of the diverse approaches that may be suggested by the various disciplines involved. For projects that do not culminate in a conventional thesis, the student should be prepared to offer some written statement in support of the final product. This statement should explain what new perspectives or findings the general-studies approach affords. It need not be lengthy. The Committee will give the student guidance as to what kind of statement is suitable.

d. Deadlines

Submission to the Honors College of the proposal and all supporting documents must occur by Oct. 15. By Oct. 25 the Committee on Honors and General Education must accept or reject the proposal. Acceptance may be provisional, pending certain modifications suggested by the Committee. If it appears necessary, the Committee may interview the student and his or her tutor and sponsors. (Refusal by the Committee to admit a student to Honors in General Scholarship candidacy carries no penalty. Work already in progress may quite properly be carried to its natural conclusion outside the program and receive normal course credit.)

By February 1 the tutor must nominate the student to candidacy for Honors in General Scholarship. Nomination should occur only if it appears reasonably certain that the candidate will complete the project on time and in the desired form.

The deadline for submission of theses and other written projects is April 15. Suitable deadlines will be arranged by the Honors College for public exercises and exhibits.

e. Award of Honors

The project will be evaluated by the tutor, the sponsors, and one or more members of the Committee on Honors and General Education. Honors in General Scholarship will be awarded only to those students who have met the criteria with work of distinguished quality. High Honors requires work of unusual distinction. Students graduating with Honors in General Scholarship will have the words "With Honors/High Honors in General Scholarship" inscribed on their diplomas.

Track II: Planned Curriculum

A proposed second track to Honors in General Scholarship will entail a sequence of Honors seminars, possibly three or four, whose faculty will be recruited initially by the Coordinator of University Courses. While staffing changes will occur over the years, the curriculum will remain stable, focused on classic problems in areas of central concern, studied by way of primary sources. Any modifications of the curriculum would be approved by the Committee on Honors and General Education. The student pursuing Honors by this track might commence the sequence in the second semester of the sophomore year or the first semester of the junior year. Part of the senior year might be devoted to a project, such as preparation of a thesis or a public presentation. Another possible culmination for this track is an oral or written examination. Evaluation of a student's performance and the recommendation to award Honors will be the task of the faculty members involved in teaching the seminars, in conjunction with the Committee on Honors and General Education.

III. University Honors

a. General description

University Honors constitute the highest accolade Wesleyan can confer upon a graduating senior. Only students who have achieved high distinction in the Departmental Honors program or the program for Honors

in General Scholarship can be invited to stand for the examination. A student who has received Departmental High Honors should be nominated by his or her department only if the overall record shows evidence of excellence in general scholarship as well as in the major. For students receiving High Honors in General Scholarship, excellence in the major department(s) or in a University Major must be documented before the student is invited to stand for the examination. In both cases the Committee on Honors and General Education determines whether the student's record and recommendations give promise that he or she will be a truly strong candidate for University Honors.

b. The examining committee

The examining committee consists of three Faculty members of the Committee on Honors and General Education. The three members represent the three academic divisions. The Chairman of the Committee is present ex officio. The tutor also participates in the examination, as well as a faculty member whom the student may invite to represent one of his or her areas of specialization.

c. The examination

The examining committee prepares for the examination by reviewing the candidate's Honors project and academic record. It then conducts a one-hour interview with the student, or, at the student's option, administers a written examination, to explore the candidate's breadth and depth of knowledge and intellectual acuity.

d. Award of University Honors

University Honors are awarded only upon unanimous concurrence of the four members of the Committee on Honors and General Education on the examining committee. Students receiving this award will have the words "With University Honors" inscribed on their diplomas.

C. Summary of Proposals Requiring Faculty Approval

The ad hoc Committee on Honors and General Education proposes that an Honors program be instituted during the academic year 1979/80 with the following provisions:

1) That a standing Committee on Honors and General Education be constituted. It should include nine faculty members, both tenured and non-tenured, at least two from each of the academic divisions, serving staggered three-year terms; three student members serving one-year terms; the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Coordinator of University Courses, and the Director of the Honors College serving ex officio. The Advisory Committee will nominate the nine faculty members to the faculty. The student members will be elected by the Wesleyan student governing body.

2) That departments, Colleges, and programs establish their criteria and procedures for Departmental Honors according to the guidelines set by the Committee on Honors and General Education and, with the Committee's approval, publish these criteria and institute their Honors programs. Honors and High Honors in the given department will be awarded by the

- 3) That the Committee on Honors and General Education be empowered to establish and administer the described program of Honors in General Scholarship, which accommodates projects or a planned curriculum whose subject matter and methodology extend beyond the boundaries of existing programs and departments. Awards of Honors and High Honors in General Scholarship will be made by the Committee.
- 4) That the Committee on Honors and General Education consider for University Honors only those students who have received High Honors in the Departmental Honors program and have also achieved excellence in general scholarship, and those students who have received High Honors in the Honors in General Scholarship program and have also achieved excellence in the major(s).
- 5) That the Honors College be retained to serve as the administrative headquarters of the Committee on Honors and General Education and to sponsor events of intellectual and cultural significance that will promote the larger aims of the Honors Program.