

Blueprint for Quality Enhancement at USC

**SOUTH CAROLINA
HONORS COLLEGE (SCHC)
2016**

Final
5/15/15

Vision:

By attracting a diverse group of high-ability, high-aspiration students to the University of South Carolina, and by providing them with an extraordinary education, the South Carolina Honors College will continue to prepare its graduates for leadership roles in all fields and continue to be recognized as a pre-eminent Honors College.

Mission:

The South Carolina Honors College (SCHC) will serve its students by offering a rich curriculum of core, major, and special-interest courses, featuring small enrollments and excellent teachers; by providing individualized and insightful advising that leads to academic success, on-time graduation, and meaningfully focused lives after college; by creating and fostering a nurturing and stimulating learning community; by requiring and enabling transformative “out-of-the-classroom” experiences (study abroad, internships, service learning, undergraduate research); by working cooperatively with other units on campus to enhance students’ experiences and to achieve the University’s expanding mission; and by engaging with parents, alumni, supporters, and donors to assure that the SCHC continues to thrive and improve.

I. Executive Summary

A) How does the Honors College contribute to meeting the Dashboard targets? The SCHC elevates the *total UG enrollment* and the *average SAT score* by attracting exceptionally strong students, enhancing USC's profile and reputation. Our most recent incoming class of 437 is the largest ever (2013: 411; 2012: 349; 2011: 349; 2010: 338). Applications for Fall 2015 are up 16.5% this year, and up 43% over the past four years. The 25 to 75 percentile SAT scores for the 2014 freshmen class are 1390 to 1470, which are at or above the scores of previous years (2010: 1370-1450; 2011: 1380-1470; 2012: 1390-1470; 2013: 1390-1465). We are in other words growing without diminishing the quality of students enrolling. Our surveys continue to indicate that a majority of our students—over 70%—say they have chosen USC because of the Honors College. Our *Freshman retention rate* is outstanding. According to most recent data available, we've averaged 97.4% over the past four years, which approaches the nation's most prestigious schools: Columbia, U Penn, and Yale are at 99%; Brown, Cal Tech, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford and six other schools are at 98% (Source: Collegedata.com). Similarly, our most recent *six-year graduation rate* has moved up to 91.67%. The SCHC also helps lower the *student to faculty ratio* by offering over 500 courses with an average enrollment in the range of 14 to 17.

In terms of *research expenditures*, the Honors College provides to students over \$235,000 each year for undergraduate research, in addition to significant investments (over \$45,000) in student travel for study-away experiences, with another \$75,000 devoted to student internships. The Honors College contributes to the pursuit of *national scholarships and fellowships* (which we substitute here for the Dashboard target of *national honors and awards for faculty*): Although Honors students comprise only about 6.7% of the student body, over the past decade they have consistently generated over half of the applicants and winners of USC's prestigious scholarships and fellowships. Finally, instead of the Dashboard target of *doctoral degrees*, we track our *graduation "with honors" rate*, which we expect to increase again up to 80% this spring: we have 290 students on track to complete their theses and other requirements this year. This percentage is excellent compared to other honors colleges, which typically have rates of 30 to 50% based on much lower requirements.

B) The SCHC contributes to the first Key Performance Parameter (KPP), *teaching excellence*, by helping to attract the most talented, motivated faculty. We monitor student evaluations and work to secure the strongest possible teachers and courses for our classes. For the second KPP, we focus on *reputation and undergraduate research*. Honors students engage in research as part of their requirements, publishing in professional journals and other venues, presenting at meetings, working with faculty and graduate students to create knowledge, insight, and art. Our students are engaged in many *service* endeavors (the third KPP), including service learning courses, theses, projects, Waverly Community Tutoring, the Carolina Science Outreach, and Communities in Harmony. The statewide high school writing contest, a new outreach, is now in its second year (*Writing South Carolina* will be available from USC Press in a few weeks). Finally, the Honors College is enhancing the *sustainability* of its mission, the fourth KPP, by vigorously pursuing funding: we played a crucial role in acquiring the Stamps funding

and continue to raise the matching funds. We have substantially increased the funding for Carolina Scholars. We reached our goal for Carolina's Promise over a year ahead of schedule, and we currently have substantial gifts in progress.

II. Meeting the University's Academic Dashboard Targets

Our strategies to address the Dashboard measures focus on the following: a) recruiting, b) curriculum, c) beyond the classroom, d) community and student experience, e) facilities, f) alumni and development.

a) *Recruiting* is crucial to the first four measures--total UG enrollment, average SAT score, freshman-sophomore retention rate, and six-year graduation rate. Our success is the result of close cooperation with Admissions throughout this process, helping to develop the application questions at the outset, responding to appeals at the end, and much in between, including extensive involvement in the Carolina, McNair, and Stamps recruitment. To continue to recruit these top students against increasingly strong competition, our strategy going forward will be to continue to improve every existing aspect of the SCHC and to create new assets. We need for instance to complete the Honors Residence Hall as soon as possible, adding the final wing. The new facility developed by the Ed Foundation and a private company, which offered priority reservations to Honors students for this coming fall, is fully subscribed with a waiting list at this point. This facility offers an appealing supplement/alternative to on-campus housing, but our goal is expanding traditional on-campus living for sophomores and juniors. Another example of the kind of innovations we are pursuing would be the seven-year combined BARSC/MD degree, which will accept its first class this fall.

b) Our *student to faculty ratio*, the fifth Dashboard measure, is crucial to our *curriculum*, which is at the heart of our mission and the primary reason for our continued top ranking. For multiple reasons, class sizes have grown larger than we would like in Math, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. We would like more stand-alone honors courses in Business and Engineering. The overall average of our honors-only classes has grown to around 18 students. Our strategy has been essentially to put on as many honors classes as we can acquire from the various units. Our challenge will be acquire more STEM honors classes, shift H10 (hybrid) sections into H01 sections (stand-alone), and continue to provide innovative, unique, transformative offerings. The Core Faculty (or Honors College Faculty Fellows) have proved to be a valuable asset, providing teaching, mentoring, advice, program development, recruiting assistance, and community building. This program is very much still developing and has a tremendous potential to benefit the Honors College in a multitude of ways. In Math, to avert an enrollment crisis, we intervened directly by arranging for the hiring (with the provost's support) of an Instructor to teach some classes and free up faculty to teach others. This is working well. We hope to see similar hires in Biology and Chemistry for the coming year, and a similar approach may be desirable in Business and Engineering.

c) Our *Beyond the Classroom (BtC)* requirements relate to the remaining adapted Dashboard measures of *research expenditures, national honors and awards for students*

(rather than “for faculty”), and *graduation “with honors”* (instead of “Doctoral degrees”). We have added a second layer of “beyond the classroom” requirements, which include applying for a national fellowship or scholarship, along with other enriching activities. Preliminary results from the Office of Fellowships and Scholar Programs indicate a significant increase in the number of students applying. Participation in Study Abroad is at record levels: we have 109 students doing a semester abroad in Spring 2015, up about 20%, and 22 more students this year participating in Maymester and summer trips. Research, internship, and service activities by students are all also at record-setting levels. We have hired a new Internship director, who is off to an excellent start.

- d) Graduation “with honors” is a function of students’ experiences as a whole, including their sense of community. We continue to increase and enhance the number and the quality of events for students. Our traditional events have been given more weight and pageantry, and students have responded well to our events, both major and minor. A new and attractive weekly “Honors Newsletter” is helping keep students informed about opportunities and events.
- e) Housing the first-year students in the Honors Residence is certainly an important part of our community-building strategy. The new dorm will provide even more honors community housing, but it will not have resident mentors, and is not fully “on campus” in terms of its supervision. We will however do what we can to cultivate a community there. Harper now has new carpet and painting; the decrepit bathrooms will soon be renovated. We are working on plans to expand office space.
- f) Fund raising is an important aspect of our strategies to recruit the strongest possible students, support our various out-of-the-classroom initiatives, and guide students to graduation “with honors” and on to their best possible futures. We are launching a small trial optional interview process with prospective students, using selected partnership board members. We will continue to expand our alumni engagement, as Beth Watson’s focus has been shifted to Alumni Engagement.

III. Unit's Goals and Contribution to Key Performance Parameters

2015-2016 Academic Year Goals

Goal One: Develop and Expand the Faculty Fellows (Core Faculty).

- i) Contribution to the KPP: Enhances teaching excellence, putting some of our best faculty with superb students; increases communication with the units; provides mentoring resources for students; enhances virtually every aspect of the College, from recruiting to placement.
- ii) Progress: Fourteen are in place and participating. We are developing and refining their activities.
- iii) Plans: Create the process to name the second group of Fellows and expand the number to 20. Expand activities.

Goal Two: Continue to evolve processes, structures, and staff performance to deal with Banner, registration, advising, new orientation schedule, Core Curriculum, growth, and other challenges.

- i) Contribution to the KPP: Every parameter depends upon the Honors College's basic functions: we must be able to control our curriculum and advise and register students effectively, for instance.
- ii) Progress: We have made progress in some areas, evolving for instance an advising procedure for incoming students compatible with the new orientation. We have developed work-arounds for other problems, especially those related to Banner, which are numerous and frustrating to students and staff. But we are far from having an efficient process yet.
- iii) Plans: We are continuing to solve or work out ways to live with our logistical problems, one by one. Our goal is to provide students with superb multi-faceted advising, which will include digital access to student records.

Goal Three: Expand course offerings in the STEM and Business fields.

- i) Contribution to the KPP: We must have excellent teaching, mentoring, research direction, and student engagement in these crucial fields. Students are increasingly moving to major in these areas, and resources for these units are, we know, strained.
- ii) Progress: The model of hiring an Instructor in Math, to teach courses and free up regular faculty to teach honors courses, is worth pursuing in other fields. Some units currently have no financial incentive to offer honors courses, and are pressed by enrollment pressures in non-honors courses.
- iii) Plans: We will continue conversations with the units involved; propose hiring Instructors or (even better) Honors College faculty; propose raising student fees to generate more funds to work with; and enlist the Faculty Fellows in solving this challenge.

Goal Four: Continue to improve and expand activities to support students, build community, increase diversity, and enrich students' educational experiences.

i) Contribution to the KPP: Although this goal affects all of the Key Performance Parameters, one might argue it is most acutely relevant to serving the state, community, profession, and university.

ii) Progress: We have made considerable progress here, adding dozens of events and activities. We have also had significant success increasing diversity. Obviously, increasing the diversity of the staff is helpful, and I have added some superb people: Kay Banks (advisor), Kimberly Simmons (associate dean), and Thomas Holmes (IT). With Jim Burns and Debra Boulware, about one-fifth of our staff is now African American. We now have increased the diversity of the Honors College to have at least 61 African Americans, 12 American Indian, 93 Asian, and 39 Hispanic students. (I say "at least" because some students do not identify themselves.)

iii) Plans: We will continue to recruit students, both incoming and transfers. What we are doing seems to be working fairly well. Associate dean Kim Simmons is focusing on this issue.

Goal Five: Continue to focus on student outcomes.

i) Contribution to the KPP: Service and sustainability: We need to know with more clarity what our students do when they graduate, and we need to be thinking with them, throughout their undergraduate experience, about their options and opportunities.

ii) Progress: We have performed a complete analysis of last year's graduating class, and we have much more data about the courses they took, honors credits, beyond the classroom activities, and their future plans.

iii) Plans: We will capture this graduating class's plans (job placement, graduate school admission, etc.), and we are replacing Debra Boulware, who is retiring, with a student services person who will help to gather and analyze data. We hope to involve alumni in creating a career network, and to establish an alumni speaker series next year.

Five-Year Goals

Goal One: Continue to increase the number, diversity, quality, and retention, while at the same time delivering the nation's strongest, most comprehensive student experience.

- Size: With sufficient resources and management, the SCHC can continue to grow and deliver a diverse and challenging curriculum.
- Diversity: Maintain and if possible increase our diversity; consider other kinds of diversity in admission criteria.
- Quality: maintain or increase average SAT and/or middle 50%
- Retention: maintain our current stellar freshmen to sophomore retention, and increase the percentage of students graduating "with honors" to 80%.

Goal Two: *Multiply the impact of the Faculty Fellows, rotating additional faculty and building a cohort of faculty informed about and advocates for the Honors College.*

- Core Appointments: two years, a portion of teaching/service assigned to SCHC
- Core Profile: 30 faculty selected; fields representative of the curriculum.
- Involve more faculty in mentoring and advising (career and research).

Goal Three: *Expand and improve the Honors curriculum, adding science classes especially for non-science majors, and reducing class sizes in congested science classes; introduce Harkness-style pedagogy.*

- Identify courses that need to be added or altered; review teachers and take action where needed; explore special Honors programs/partnerships in high-profile areas (Marine Science, Digital Humanities).
- Deliver superb advising and mentoring.
- Import the interactive pedagogy of Harkness teaching by training selected faculty.

Goal Four: *Increase the value of an SCHC education.*

- Build corporate and academic partnerships
- Expand awareness of the Honors College and the quality of students' experience.
- Focus on student outcomes.

Goal Five: *Development: Expand and intensify focus on raising funds for scholarships, construction, and faculty; increase parental and alumni involvement and giving; nurture a commitment among students before graduation.*

- Scholarships: Enhanced and more numerous scholarships will help us to attract the best students.
- Space: More dorm, office, and classroom space will be needed.
- Faculty: Create endowed chairs as part of the Faculty Fellows.
- Alumni and Friends: Formalize networking opportunities; create biographical profiles for each class; expand the advisory board in number and activity.

IV. Appendices

Appendix A: Resources Needed:

1. Space (relates to Goals 4 and 1, annual and 5-year): We very much need additional dorm and office space. Although the new foundation-funded dorm will be helpful, adding a wing to the Honors Residence Hall is still a priority. Such space should emulate the facilities at Penn State and Arizona State, and include classrooms, gathering spaces, staff offices, and recreational areas. Unless a major donor is identified, the strategy here must be to follow up on the University's master plan for facilities, which has had this expansion on the list.
2. Science classes (relates to Goals 3 and 3, annual and 5-year): We have been losing non-major science seats steadily since at least Fall 2013, when we had 284 non-major seats. In Fall 2015 we will have only 166, as things stand now. In the last rankings, honors science courses earned bonus points, recognizing both their importance and the difficulty of scheduling them. The minimal solution (assuming the units do not have the capacity to solve this problem): Hire Instructors in Chemistry and Biology to open up teaching capacity. The optimal solution: Hire faculty to serve as Honors Faculty, increasing the unit's teaching capacity for honors courses by assigning their teaching to the SCHC (other faculty could fill in, and the designation would rotate). Strategy: Increase student participation fee; recover tuition funds from Washington Semester (no funds were transferred when SCHC took on this program, which generates tuition); increase efficiency. As a long-term strategy, hiring faculty who occupy Honors-designated teaching slots, which could be assigned to other faculty, will eventually alter the funding model of the Honors College, making providing Honors classes an essential mission for units.
3. Engineering and Business classes (also Goals 3 and 3, annual and 5-year): Too many of our courses in these fields are hybrids, which were discounted in the last ranking and could cause problems for us in any future ranking. I do not see any options other than those described above to solve this problem. Same as for #2 above.
4. Advising staff: Our goal is to deliver the best advising and the best student experience in the nation. To keep advisors at about 150 advisees, we will need to hire at least two more advisors next year (depending upon growth). We have three excellent part-time advisors, but we know at least one, who does a full advising load (Jim Burns), plans to phase out by December. Strategy: Use savings from upcoming retirements and increased efficiency.
5. Student fee: We have proposed, with the encouragement of the former provost, an increase in the student participation fee in order to bring our budget into balance and maintain our current expenditures. Any cost savings going forward will be shifted to fund courses, study abroad, internships and mentoring, service learning, and undergraduate research.

Appendix B: Benchmarking Information

Top Ten, Peers: The second edition of the *Review of Fifty Public University Honors Programs* (2014), as you know, abandoned numerical rankings in favor of categories. In the previous rankings (2012), we were #1 when honors colleges were compared to other honors colleges (#11 when honors colleges were considered in the context of their universities). In the current ranking, our placement in the top category is especially remarkable. We are in the top group with Arizona State; Kansas; Michigan (the LSA Honors Program); Penn State; UT Austin, Plan II Honors Program; and University of Virginia's Echols Scholars Program.

C. Strengths, Accomplishments: Our “top strengths and important accomplishments achieved in the last five years” are the following: increasing the size and quality of the incoming classes, cultivating a strong partnership board, increasing the graduation with honors percentage, enhancing the College’s ceremonies and community events, expanding and enriching the “Honors Beyond the Classroom” requirement, expanding the development program for the SCHC (and raising substantial funds), creating an internships program, creating a service learning initiative, supporting undergraduate research, developing the College’s brand and image, implementing the Faculty Fellows program, and delivering a varied and large selection of Honors courses.

D. Weaknesses and Plans: At least three items listed as “important accomplishments” in previous blueprints are nonetheless still very much works in progress: diversity, course compensation, and alumni relations. We are making progress on all three, and our comprehensive plans remain intact. Briefly: To increase diversity, we will continue to work with Admissions to enlarge the pool of potential students (eliciting more applications and considering a larger group on empirical measures: that is, we will consider the essay portions of a larger group of students). We will also continue to recruit transfers from within, target high schools, and continue high-visibility programs such as the statewide writing contest. To change how departments think about course compensation, we will need to create slots designated for the Honors College, shifting away from the idea that the Honors College is an external contractor, purchasing the services of faculty (at bargain rates). We want to move to the awareness that the Honors College is part of every unit’s core mission: the entire University benefits from the Honors College, which serves the entire University. To strengthen alumni relations, we will continue to focus on increasing contact and events. Strong alumni relations begin during the undergraduate years, and a major effort going forward will be toward enhancing the undergraduate experience, providing landmark events for each class year and more frequent and better organized social and educational events.

I have mentioned space already, and I believe we are making progress there. We are blessed with an excellent facility in the Honors Residence Hall, but we need to complete the Residence, expand living opportunities for juniors and seniors, and find additional office space. We also need to raise additional funds for targeted scholarships: as I’ve said, it is a fierce competition for the best students.

Our most critical weakness now is the need for stand-alone courses, especially in the sciences, but also in Engineering and Business.

Appendix E: Unit Statistical Profile (from Institutional Research and Assessment)

At the time of writing this blueprint, I did not find any data for the Honors College listed on the web site.

Steven Lynn
Dean, South Carolina Honors College

Five Percent Exercise

South Carolina Honors College

Increase Scenario

With a 5% increase in funding to our base budget (\$134k), we would hire an additional advisor to focus on community and events—planning and executing. We would also increase funding to students for study abroad and research.

Decrease Scenario

With a 5% decrease in funding, we would convert our magazine to a digital format, saving about \$35k. (My development director, at this suggestion, immediately provided several stories of donors who gave sizable gifts in part because we have kept in touch with them via our magazine, of course. We believe that a physical publication gets more readers than a digital publication, and is the worth the funds—but we are continuing to assess this.) We would reduce our office supplies by \$12k, reducing or eliminating free student printing. We would cut out Parents Picnic and other receptions and non-essential events, such as the Freshmen Floatilla, Oktoberfest, Palmetto Ivy Ball, which total about \$45k. We would reduce staff travel, sending one person or no one to the National Council of Honors Colleges (NCHC) conference, the Honors Education in Research Universities (HERU) meeting, and the SEC honors deans annual conference, saving about \$20k. We would reduce or eliminate the use of student employees in the Honors College (about \$15k to \$20k).

We would not reduce the number of classes or increase class sizes because these are critical for our mission, the rankings, and the promise we made to students when we recruited them.