

Pierre Laclède Honors College
Accreditation 2009

Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching. The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

1) How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, and degrees?

- a) The Honors College mounts a certificate program open to all undergraduate majors, requiring 40 hours for four-year (native) students and 22 hours for two-year (transfer) students. The certificate's learning goals are conditioned by our identity as a General Education Program and by students' needs to meet their General Education requirements and certain other graduation requirements, e.g. global awareness, cultural diversity, and writing/communication.
 - i) The Mission and Vision statements of the College provide several directions for the formulation of learning outcomes. Here is the core direction.
 - (1) "The primary mission of the Pierre Laclède Honors College is to enrich its students by providing a challenging general education curriculum based on the traditional disciplines of the arts and sciences and framed by the General Education policy of the state of Missouri [see the *Frontispiece*, opposite the table of contents, for that policy's rationale] and its approved curricular goals."
 - ii) To this are added several others, including development of independent habits or modes of study (e.g. guided reading, undergraduate research, internships). The mission statement goes on to specify the chief pedagogical means and some ultimate ends of honors learning.
 - (1) "The College encourages students to cultivate their intellectual capacities through a seminar-based pedagogy where a student's work is judged on the quality of his/her ideas and the firmness of their foundation in academic study, in critical thought, in clear expression, and in personal and cultural experience. Thus the College provides a climate in which democracy, diversity, excellence, and civility are fundamental, coequal values and to produce graduates whose liberal education readies them for a lifetime of learning in, and from, a professedly civil, democratic, diverse, and meritocratic society."
 - b) From 2000, the College has sought to insure the integrity of these goals by specifying them to faculty in its regular (each semester) "call for courses", asking faculty to identify their proposed course's curricular goals, and to align those goals with two of the state's eight General Education curricular goals (one skills goal and one learning goal is recommended).
 - i) We have been slower to specify learning outcomes (or, in the language adopted by the state, student competencies), using instead competencies "suggested" by the state document.
 - ii) As a part of our accreditation review, however, it was decided to move ahead on the project of defining student competencies/learning outcomes, and the process was started by our 100% FTE faculty, who have produced a list of sixteen outcomes. This will be fully discussed by both the Assembly and the Council, with a view towards establishing a list of outcomes consistent with state guidelines and appropriate to our mission.
 - iii) The draft learning outcomes are below. They reflect or mirror the stated Missouri goals, but they also heed the reality that our certificate requirements must fit students who will meet some (or even, in the case of many transfer students) all of their General Education requirements outside the Honors College. The draft document also gives explicit attention to other features of our program such as its seminar structure, its independent study requirement, and the opportunities for collegiate experience it offers to our students.

c) Pierre Laclède Honors College Student Learning Outcomes (DRAFT)

- (1) Through coursework comparing and contrasting diverse cultural viewpoints, academic disciplinary approaches and information, Honors students will demonstrate the ability to synthesize knowledge from various perspectives.
- (2) Honors Students will exhibit the ability to communicate effectively in groups by presenting, reflecting on and evaluating information and perspectives.
- (3) Through the written assignments required in all Honors courses, Honors students will demonstrate effective writing (employing correct diction, syntax, usage, grammar and mechanics) that focuses on various purposes, audiences and disciplinary approaches.
- (4) Honors students will exhibit the ability to distinguish among opinions, facts and inferences; to identify underlying or implicit assumptions; to make informed judgments; and to solve problems by applying evaluative standards.
- (5) Honors students will display the ability to locate, access, synthesize and annotate information from print, electronic, and other sources; they will demonstrate the ability to distinguish between scholarly and non-scholarly sources in preparation for higher-order thinking.
- (6) Honors students will demonstrate the ability to analyze and synthesize information from a variety of sources, to apply the results to resolving complex situations and problems, and to defend conclusions using relevant evidence and reasoned argument.
- (7) Honors students will demonstrate the ability to utilize cultural, behavioral, and historical knowledge to clarify and articulate a personal value system while recognizing the ramifications of personal value decisions on the self and others.
- (8) Honors students will display the ability to identify conflicts within and between multiple perspectives and value systems, to recognize and analyze ethical issues in a variety of contexts, and to employ standards of logic to formulate a reasonable position among multiple perspectives.
- (9) Honors students will demonstrate understanding of fundamental mathematical concepts and their applications in various disciplines. They will display a level of quantitative literacy that would enable them to understand and analyze quantitative data, draw conclusions, and solve problems.
- (10) By participating in Honors courses in the social and behavioral sciences, Honors students will exhibit understanding of themselves and the world around them through study of the content and methodologies used by historians and social and behavioral scientists to discover, describe, explain, and predict human behavior and social systems. Honors students will demonstrate understanding of the diversities and complexities of the cultural and social world, past and present, and come to an informed sense of self and others.
- (11) Honors students participating in Honors courses in the humanities and fine arts will exhibit understanding and critical analysis of the ways in which people have addressed their condition through literature and art. Honors students will demonstrate their understanding of these cultural works and their historical circumstances, and will formulate aesthetic judgments of these works.
- (12) Honors students participating in Honors courses focusing on life and physical sciences will exhibit knowledge of scientific principles, research procedures and empirical methods of scientific enquiry. Honors students will display their understanding of how scientific discoveries affect and are affected by theoretical views of the world and human history.
- (13) Through their participation in internships, independent study and undergraduate research, Honors students will develop and demonstrate advanced knowledge in a discipline, professional skills, and greater understanding of career and educational goals.
- (14) Through their creation of an Honors Writing Portfolio, Honors students will demonstrate the ability to assess their writing skills and development; their creation of documents for employment searches or graduate school applications will exhibit their ability to formulate and pursue specific career goals.
- (15) Through their participation in Honors College social and service activities, such as PLCSHA, the Honors Convocation and student orientation, Honors students will participate more fully in the academic community and develop relationships with fellow students, faculty and support staff.
- (16) By participating in Honors College programs such as admissions interviews, faculty advising, and exit interviews, Honors students will master strategies to assess and guide their own educational progress.

2) *What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?*

- a) Assessment instruments.
 - i) As a General Education/Certificate program, the Honors College has little use for discipline-specific assessment instruments. However, we have learning goals that are specific to our stress on seminar pedagogy, intensive reading and writing, and independent work, and we have been using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to measure honors student cohorts against main campus cohorts. In these reviews, statistically significant variations (showing a greater degree of engagement in their studies) have been recorded by honors students in many of the main headings. See annual reports from Institutional Research (Westermeyer).
 - ii) The campus has in 2006 undertaken to use CLA in future assessments of General Education outcomes, and if practicable we will apply the NSSE “honors cohort” mechanism to profit from CLA.

- b) Program assessment. As we approached the 1999 accreditation, we had no formal means of program assessment, and at that time an honors writing program was deemed the best method of repairing this gap. That program was designed by a lecturer in the English department (and particularly noted by the 1999 Site Visit). That lecturer moved to honors, became Director of Writing, and latterly was appointed Associate Dean. Meanwhile, the potential of the writing program as both program assessment and a guide to each student has continued to be explored. As of this writing, its main elements of program assessment are:
 - i) Period portfolio review and special mentoring.
 - ii) Honors 4100: "The Portfolio Course".
- c) Internship assessments. An internship evaluation form is submitted, at the inception of each internship, to the internship supervisor at the cooperating institution, firm, or organization. In addition, most students completing an internship must submit to the College a report (which takes various forms). Although both the evaluation form and the student's report are intended mainly to provide a means of assessment for the student's work, they do provide insights as to whether the internship program is addressing, and meeting, its stated outcomes goals. The Evaluation Form itself provides a kind of breakdown of those goals.
- d) Postgraduate (alumni) engagement. We have not repeated the experiment (1997 and 1999) of sending out questionnaires to graduates (as instruments borne down by their overloading of goals), but we do pay heed to our graduates' view of the program.
 - i) We use exit interviews. These these are conducted by one person, the member of office staff directly concerned with the college's advisory system.
 - ii) The main event of the year for the Honors College Alumni Association is the Annual Alumni Lecture (or panel discussion), where the main item on the agenda is always the same: "the continued relevance (or irrelevance) of a liberal education."

3) *In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?*

- a) At present, the main evidence of student learning is provided by writing program review of students' portfolio essays.
 - i) Heretofore, review of each student's work was carried out principally by the Director of Writing, with some assistance from other faculty most experienced in writing instruction and evaluation.
 - ii) This evaluation provides evidence not only of student learning but also evidence concerning the design and delivery of honors seminars.
 - (1) In the former category, the baseline is provided mainly by the credentials students present at admission: GPA, class rank, test scores, and (particularly) two admissions essays that are graded by our faculty.
 - (2) In the latter, the main available "baseline" are the student evaluations of the course(s) in question.
 - iii) Honors 4100, the "Portfolio Course", a one- or two-credit capstone, is a required course and thus provides a more regular, institutional setting for the process of review. Here the student is brought into the process and asked to review, comment on, and where appropriate edit and rewrite portfolio essays.
 - iv) An effort to extend and systematize the work of portfolio review has begun in Fall semester 2007, in which each member of academic staff reviews and holistically grades (according to the same rubric used to grade admissions essays) the work of 50-70 students. Taken together, these measures should provide us with excellent qualitative reviews of individual students' progress as viewed from different perspectives. Grades will also be recorded to see whether a valid statistical picture emerges.
- b) NSSE data are used in a general sense, but it is not abundantly apparent what lessons can be drawn from them. We should be very alarmed should the honors cohort show significantly

lower levels of engagement, but that has not happened. However, it is not clear what operational significance can be drawn from the datum that our students' performance is better "to a statistically significant level" in thirteen of the main categories of the NSSE instrument. Some guidance may be gleaned from which of those variations are most, and which least, marked, but all this is complicated by the fact that, statistically and on average, our students have better academic records than main campus students *before* they entered UM-St. Louis.

- c) If it proves feasible to select out honors students from the forthcoming CLA assessment, that will be done and should provide a more specific, statistical review of their accomplishments in the academic program areas for which the college is responsible.

4) *How do you insure shared responsibility for student learning?*

- a) Among those who share this responsibility are students. As the College's mission statement has it, "*with these [program] goals in mind, the College admits undergraduates who have the potential to act as producers, rather than consumers, of their own education.*"
 - i) Seminar pedagogy and the independent study requirement stress student responsibility.
 - ii) Honors College course evaluation questionnaires, besides focusing sixteen questions on the instructor's work, ask students questions designed to measure the level of commitment they gave to the course. These questions remind students of their shared responsibility.
 - iii) Honors College students belong to the Pierre Laclède Honors College Student Association (PLHCSA), which mounts a program and organizes student representation on main campus bodies and committees. It also elects the student representatives on the Honors College Assembly (12) and the Honors College Council (one, the President of PLHCSA).
 - iv) The college works to build a culture of success by publicizing student achievements such as inclusion in the dean's list (requiring a 3.5 GPA) or other notable accomplishments such as national scholarships, publications, or admission to graduate school. In addition, the college has reallocated scholarship budget to provide achievement awards, notably the Fausz Scholarship (which goes to students whose *annual* GPA places them in the top 10%).
 - v) The *Bellerive* Seminar, in the writing program, is a student responsibility, and its success in producing a literary magazine not only brings the college publicity but offers a visual demonstration of student achievement. *Bellerive* students solicit writings, decide which to publish, enter into editorial relationships with the authors, design layout and artwork, work with the printer, set a selling price, and organize the annual launch party.
- b) Main campus and adjunct faculty are involved primarily as instructors, but the college communicates regularly with all faculty about events on and off campus, opportunities for students, and news about the college, and urges them to encourage students to take part (by in-class announcements, serving as referees, etc.). All faculty who have taught in the college in the past four years are also *ex officio* members of the Honors College Assembly, and the Assembly serves as the constituency for electing faculty to the College Council.
- c) Honors 100% FTE employees, faculty and staff, are fully engaged in the college's activities. For instance all attend the fortnightly staff meetings where operational items of importance are discussed. Each of the three office staff have duties requiring their engagement with the college's educational mission.
 - i) The seven honors FTE faculty, including the dean and associate dean, have jobs which assume their shared responsibility for the college's achieving its mission goals. These include instruction, of course, but in addition academic staff have played lead roles in the development of the writing program, the internship and independent study programs, and the reform and reorganization of the freshman year curriculum. A college scholarship committee, made up of NTT faculty, decides on the award of all named scholarships. And all academic colleagues are heavily involved in admissions interviews and academic advising. In the latter role, each faculty member specializes in a particular group of

majors, and so becomes reasonably expert in the requirements faced—and opportunities to be explored—by honors students in their majors.

- ii) These are heavy (as well as shared) responsibilities, and were indeed given as the essential ground to each progressive expansion of the college's academic staff (from two in 1998 to its present seven).

5) *How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of your efforts to assess and improve student learning?*

- a) This question has been addressed, directly or implicitly, in many of the sections above. Here we narrate one such process, which led to our current Freshman Year program. The freshman year was from the first mission-driven, and its goals were to introduce students to university learning (and to the university), to impart some essential skills, and to engage in an orderly effort to understand some of the powers of the traditional cores of a liberal education. What those platitudes meant provoked much discussion, and whether each successive experiment achieved these goals produced more discussion. Taking part were students (certainly through their course evaluations), and at first faculty planning groups (two, in 1998 and again in 1999-2000) drawn from outside the college (for we had only two faculty in the college). In the process, we went through several designs of the symposium course (the core course of the freshman year), a redesign of the freshman comp course (put in train with the adoption of the writing program in 1999), and various experiments with the critical thinking course of the freshman syllabus. At each stage, results were studied and discussed, aims revisited and revised, and practical issues confronted from budget to room sizes. In 2003, a University task force on the Freshman year (which had its chair and two members from the Honors College), cast the issues in a somewhat different light and provided a new focus based on the importance of student acculturation, engagement, and program awareness. By 2005 we had agreed on the issues of content, but a further year's experimentation with pedagogy ensued, with the final abandonment of the idea that the "core" course should, by rights, be a lecture/seminar course. The lecture idea proved unpopular with faculty, but it was so unpopular with students that it was abandoned in favor of the current model, which had its first full airing in 2006-2007 and was deemed successful (by the several measures we had used, with some consistency, to evaluate the previous experiments). In fact, it was extremely successful, and all the more enjoyable because so many people had worked together on the project, and were (or became) aware that their views of how it was going would be heeded.

6) *In what ways do you inform the public about what students learn—and how well they learn it?*

- a) University publicity has dealt with these questions through admissions publicity, alumni publications, and news releases. Honors College student success has also, from time to time, informed chancellor's reports (to the community, to the curators, to the system president), although generally in an anecdotal rather than analytical way.
- b) Likewise, the Honors College itself produces admissions and other publicity materials. The target audiences are, of course, potential students and their families, but also current students (the culture of success), main campus colleagues in faculty and administration. In all these we have had a care for truthfulness, both as to the college's character and mission and as to student outcomes. But for the most part, these publications provide information anecdotally rather than systematically. The most notable among them are *Provenance*, a magazine-newsletter for alumni and friends, our admissions brochure, and the shorter admissions "teaser." Another and significant contribution to the store of public information about the college is the student literary publication, *Bellerive*, which reaches many alumni and friends as well as students, families, and faculty.

- c) Our growing and more orderly contact with organizations and firms providing internships and, crucially, internship supervision also provides an avenue for information flow about the college generally (and not just internships).
- d) With the assistance of University Advancement, we are in the process of creating an effective advisory board. It already has an existence (and seven members drawn mainly from the professions) and has met twice in session. The dean has met more frequently, on specific issues, with individual members. But it cannot be said to be a mature body. Part of the issue, yet to be resolved, is whether the advisory board should also have a leading role to play in fundraising. The original view was that it should not, but considerations of available time may lead us to a different view.