

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Assessment and Accountability **NO.:** AAC 07-33

COMMITTEE DATE: June 6, 2007

BOARD DATE: June 14, 2007

**RENEWAL OF BRIDGEWATER STATE COLLEGE MEMBERSHIP
IN THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM**

MOVED:

The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and renews Bridgewater State College's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program for six years effective June 14, 2007.

Authority: Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines as Revised by the Board of Higher Education in November 2006.

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June 2007

Bridgewater State College

Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

Background

This motion concerns the continuation of Bridgewater State College's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program. According to the Commonwealth Honors Program Guidelines, once Commonwealth Honors Program approval has been obtained by an institution, the Program will be reviewed every six years by the Executive Committee. The report of the Committee shall be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education for approval. This is the first renewal cycle for Bridgewater State College.

Bridgewater State College's Honors Program is a campus-wide program, and students from all majors in every college are eligible to join. In 2000 the program served fewer than 100 students; now it serves over 400 through Honors courses, specialized colloquia and upper division research/thesis courses. The program also offers a variety of educational, service, social, and advising opportunities.

Review Process

Bridgewater State College prepared a self-study document presenting the Honors Program's structure and operations in terms of the Commonwealth Honors Program requirements. The report provided evidence documenting fulfillment of the following criteria:

1. Alignment of the mission and goals of the Honors Program with those of Bridgewater State College
2. Organization and administration
3. Admissions criteria
4. Transfer criteria
5. Program curriculum
6. Graduation criteria
7. Program resources
8. Approval procedures for new courses
9. Student enrollment for past three years
10. Approval procedures for new courses

Review Team Findings and Recommendations

On March 27, 2007, a review team (Assistant Professor Ginger Hurajt, Northern Essex Community College, Honors Program Coordinator; Professor Rod Kessler, Salem State College, Honors Program Coordinator; and Meredith Lind, Director, Academic Programs, Commonwealth College, University of Massachusetts Amherst), appointed by the

Commonwealth Honors Council, conducted the six-year review. The team spent the day meeting with various stakeholders, including Bridgewater State College President Dana Mohler-Faria; Andrew Harris, Assistant to the President; Honors Program Director Sandra Neargarder; Assistant Director Jordon Barkalow; Associate Vice President Ron Pitt; Provost Nancy Kleniewski; members of the Honors Committee; faculty and students.

The review team was impressed by the thoroughness of the materials presented in application to the Board of Higher Education for re-approval and found a uniformly high level of enthusiasm and support for the program and its mission on the part of students, faculty, and administrators, including the president. On the basis of the campus visit, the review of the self-evaluation, and the materials received during the on-campus visit, the team concluded that the Bridgewater State College Honors Program is meeting the honors program review criteria and successfully delivering high-quality education to its talented students. The review team recommended to the Commonwealth Honors Executive Committee that it renew Bridgewater State College's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program.

To improve communications and interactions amongst students and faculty, the review team suggested that the Honors Program install a program-wide email listserv, extend the hours of the Honors Center lounge area, develop a student organization for the Honors Program, and augment program-specific and small-group access to campus speakers and noteworthy visitors. The review team suggested that greater institutional resources be devoted to increasing student attendance at national and regional student research conferences, hiring more faculty to offer smaller honors courses, and promoting honors-level interdisciplinary (e.g., team) teaching. Finally, the review team suggested that Honors Program scholarship students be selected through the Honors Program office, rather than by Admissions.

Response

Bridgewater State College acknowledged the visiting team's concerns and stated that the College will explore creating a listserv and honors student organization as well as extending hours for the Honors Center. The College will consider ways to build statewide conference presentations and develop events solely for Honors faculty. The College is planning to significantly increase the number of faculty lines in the next few years, which will improve the ability of faculty to teach small Honors courses and to engage in Honors-level interdisciplinary team teaching. In regard to scholarships, the College noted that the Honors Directors play a significant role in how scholarships are awarded. Further, the Honors Program Directors are developing an electronic student database to examine honors student completion rates.

Bridgewater State College will provide a status report on its response at the spring 2008 Commonwealth Honors Council meeting.

Recommendation

Board of Higher Education staff thoroughly reviewed all documentation received from the Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and recommends that the Board approve the renewal of Bridgewater State College's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program.