

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**  
**REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION**

**COMMITTEE:**      Assessment and Accountability                      **NO.:** AAC 07-34

**COMMITTEE DATE:** June 6, 2007

**BOARD DATE:** June 14, 2007

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**MOVED:**                      **RENEWAL OF FITCHBURG STATE COLLEGE MEMBERSHIP IN  
THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM**  
The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the  
Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and renews  
Fitchburg State College Leadership Academy'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.  
Contact:                        Francesca B. Purcell, Ph.D., Director for Academic Policy

# BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

June 2007

Fitchburg State College

## Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

### **Background**

This motion concerns the continuation of Fitchburg 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 Fitchburg State College.

Established in 1997, the Fitchburg State College Leadership Academy is a campus-wide program and students from all majors in every college are eligible to join. Today, the College enrolls over 70 students, offers over 100 unique honors courses and a variety of educational, service, social, and advising opportunities, and provides leadership and support for the system of public honors programs.

### **Review Process**

Fitchburg 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 Honor's Program with those of the Fitchburg 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 26, 2007, a review team (Stephen Adams, Honors Program Chair, Westfield State College; Susan McPherson, Honors Program Coordinator, Quinsigamond Community College; and William Nelles, University Honors Program Director, University of Massachusetts

Dartmouth) appointed by the Commonwealth Honors Council, conducted the six-year review of the Fitchburg State College Leadership Academy. Prior to the on-campus visit, the team reviewed the self-evaluation prepared by the College. The team spent the day reviewing additional documentation and meeting with various stakeholders of Fitchburg State College. These meetings included the Academic Affairs team, faculty teaching in the program or serving on the Leadership Academy Curriculum Committee, and students ranging from the freshman to the junior class.

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 the Fitchburg State College Leadership Academy meets all of the major guidelines of the Commonwealth Honors Program and offers its students a unique choice in the linking of honors to leadership education. Special mention was made of the program's careful and thorough articulation of its mission.

The reviewers noted that it was unclear how many students, who did not enter into the Leadership Academy, were electing to complete a Leadership minor. The Curriculum Committee was encouraged to continue their current study of the design and possible growth of the minor program. Another area of clarification concerned the number of transfer credits that could be counted toward the minor. The review of about 20 theses completed over the last three years revealed an inconsistency in quality, resulting in the team recommending an improved process for ensuring that honors theses meet suitable standards. The team encouraged the program to continue monitoring the results of its steps towards improved advising. Lastly, the team encouraged the enrichment of the program through budget provisions for outside speakers.

### *Response*

Robert Antonucci, President of Fitchburg State College, acknowledged the team's concerns and responded that the College will review the design and structure of the Leadership minor and clarify the minimum requirements for transfer students to obtain Commonwealth Honors Program status through the minor. The College will follow the team's recommendations to improve a process for ensuring that all honors theses meet suitable standards and continue to gather data and take steps to make improvements to advising. The College noted that funds are available for enrichment programs, including outside speakers, and will capitalize on these resources to pursue these opportunities.

Fitchburg 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 the Fitchburg State College Leadership Academy's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program.