

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

**COMMITTEE:** Academic Affairs

**NO.:** AAC 15-36

**COMMITTEE DATE:** June 9, 2015

**BOARD DATE:** June 16, 2015

---

**RENEWAL OF MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS MEMBERSHIP IN  
THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM**

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for six years, effective June 16, 2015.

**Authority:** Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines as Revised by the Board of Higher Education in November 2006; G.L. c. 15A, § 9.

**Contact:** Angela Coletta, Assistant Director for Program Review & P-16 Collaborative Initiatives

## **BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**June 2015**

### **Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program**

#### **BACKGROUND**

This motion concerns the continuation of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts 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 Commonwealth Honors Executive Committee. The report of the Committee shall be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education for approval.

#### **REVIEW PROCESS**

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts prepared a self-study document presenting its Honors Program 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
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

#### **REVIEW TEAM FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

On February 19, 2015, a review team consisting of Glen Brewster, Ph.D., Honors Program Director, Westfield State University; Ginger Hurajt, M.A., Honors Program Coordinator, Northern Essex Community College; and Meredith Lind, M.F.A., Executive Director, Commonwealth Honors College, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, conducted a day long assessment of the Mass. College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) Honors Program. Prior to the on-campus visit, the team reviewed the self-evaluation prepared by the College.

During the site visit, the team met with the Co-Directors of the Honors Program, faculty members of the Honors Advisory Board, a group of honors students, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs, Monica Joslin, and the Interim President, Cynthia Farr-Brown. The Review Team made some suggestions for improvement, but overall, found that the honors program satisfies all of the above criteria, and, therefore recommends that MCLA continue to be granted Commonwealth Honors Program status and recommends the re-approval of MCLA's Honors Program.

Recommendations from the visiting committee included:

- Develop strategies to improve Honors student graduation rates. The student enrollment data provided by the program show that the total number of honors students has been consistently high for the last several years (approximately 15% of the total MCLA student population), while a relatively small number of students complete a thesis for the Commonwealth Honors Scholar designation, a requirement for CHP graduation.
- New faculty members should be formally notified about opportunities to teach honors courses and sit on the honors advisory board.

### **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE**

The institution responded substantively to all of the recommendations as follows:

- MCLA will provide targeting honors advising to juniors and first-semester seniors to ensure all students understand honors program completion requirements.
- MCLA has been reaching out to new faculty and will now formally add honors programming to new faculty orientations.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Department of Higher Education staff thoroughly reviewed all documentation received from the Executive Committee and recommends that the Board approve the renewal of the membership of **Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.