

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 24-50

BOARD DATE: June 11, 2024

**RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM FOR
MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Middlesex Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for seven years, effective June 11, 2024.

VOTED: Motion approved and advanced to the full BHE by the Executive Committee on 6/3/2024; and adopted by the BHE on 6/11/2024.

Authority: Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines, as amended by the BHE in March 2022; G.L. c. 15A, § 9.

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Middlesex Community College Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

BACKGROUND

This motion concerns the continuation of Middlesex Community College's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program in accordance with the Commonwealth Honors Program Guidelines. Once Commonwealth Honors Program approval has been obtained by an institution, the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee will review the program every seven years. The report of the Committee shall be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education for approval. [Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines, March 2022](#)

REVIEW PROCESS

Middlesex Community College prepared a self-study document presenting its Honors Program structure and operation in terms of the Commonwealth Honors Program requirements. The report provided evidence documenting the fulfillment of the following criteria:

1. Alignment of the mission and goals
2. Organization and administration
3. Admissions criteria
4. Transfer criteria
5. Program curriculum
6. Graduation criteria
7. Program resources
8. Curriculum Review Process

VISITING COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On September 21, 2023, the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) Visiting Committee (Visiting Committee) conducted a day-long, in-person assessment of the Middlesex Community College's (MCC) Honors Program. The Visiting Committee consisted of Kate Martin, Coordinator of the Honors Program at Cape Cod Community College, and Chair of the Visiting Committee; Dr. Jenny Olin Shanahan, Associate Provost for High-Impact Practices, Bridgewater State University; and Jennifer Whitten-Woodring, Dean of the Honors College at UMass Lowell. Prior to the visit, the Visiting Committee received and studied MCC's application for reaccreditation of CHP status. The site visit was hosted and organized by Honors Program Director Binnur Ercem, Assistant Director Kate Baker, and Administrative Assistant Tracey Estabrook. The visit featured meetings with Professors Ercem and Baker; their immediate supervisor, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Arlene Rodríguez; and students, faculty, and other members of the

Commonwealth Honors Faculty/Advisory Committee. The visit concluded with an exit interview with College President Philip Sisson.

The Visiting Committee, in their report, commended MCC's Honors Program in several areas. These commendations included MCC's inclusive approach to Honors admissions, the large variety of honors courses allowing students to complete requirements in a timely manner, the high completion rate of honors courses indicative of successful course delivery and student support, the multiple course delivery modalities, and the close student to faculty relationships with strong mentorship. Additionally, the Visiting Committee commended the work of the Honors Program Director, Binnur Ercem, for her energetic and enthusiastic efforts to grow the program and effectively increase equitable access to Honors for MCC students.

The Visiting Committee was impressed by the Honors Program at MCC and recommends, without reservation, that MCC's Honors Program be granted re-approval.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. Increase the budget to support student research and travel to allow students to expand their opportunities to present at larger conferences;
2. Explore partnerships with local four-year institutions to increase experiential learning for students and promote familiarity with campuses and faculty to aid in successful transfers;
3. Provide increased support for Honors students with a pre-college workshop to build and enhance study and writing skills;
4. Develop a larger presence on the Bedford campus to house a distinct Honors Center with offices for the director and assistant director, a reception area for the administrative assistant, a seminar space for classes, and student work and gathering spaces, and;
5. Create an Honors Center on the Lowell campus to increase the Program's presence there and allow Honors students, whose classes are primarily on that campus, to gather and build community.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

MCC offered the following responses to the recommendations made by the Visiting Committee:

1. Increase the budget to support student research and travel to allow students to expand their opportunities to present at larger conferences: Research and travel opportunities can be transformative experiences for our students. Honors Program Director Ercem has submitted her budget for FY2025 requesting level funding. Should additional funds be required for student travel or to support student research during the fiscal year, we absolutely prioritize requests.

2. Explore partnerships with local four-year institutions to increase experiential learning for students and promote familiarity with campuses and faculty to aid in successful transfers: In 2023, MCC and UML were named the number one transfer dyad in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We are very proud of that designation and will continue to expand that transfer pathway for our students.

Our Honors Program has a special transfer articulation agreement with UML. MCC honor students are also participating in UML's student abroad program, with five MCC students participating. These students will be granted transfer honors credit. In addition, MCC sent five honors students to the UML Symposium and to the Mass Undergraduate Research Conference this year.

Finally, we are currently in the exploratory stages of a special transfer program with the University of Massachusetts Lowell which is modeled after the ADVANCE program between Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) and George Mason University (GMU). ADVANCE is a hybrid joint admissions/transfer program where NOVA students receive a GMU identification card once they identify GMU as their transfer institution. We will be sure to include our honor students in the model that we design.

3. Provide increased support for Honors students with a pre-college workshop to build and enhance study and writing skills: MCC has many models to address this recommendation, including one-credit interdisciplinary special topic courses. We can explore with Professors Ercem and Baker this and other possibilities to meet this recommendation.
4. Develop a larger presence on the Bedford campus to house a distinct Honors Center with offices for the director and assistant director, a reception area for the administrative assistant, a seminar space for classes, and student work and gathering spaces AND create an Honors Center on the Lowell campus to increase the Program's presence there and allow Honors students, whose classes are primarily on that campus, to gather and build community: MCC is currently in the final stages of a Facilities Master Plan. As we move ahead, we will make sure that space is allotted on both campuses for a well-developed Honors Center suite.

On May 3, 2024, the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee voted to reapprove Middlesex Community College's Commonwealth Honors Program.

RECOMMENDATION

Department 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 membership of **Middlesex Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.