

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION**

**NO.:** BHE 24-51

**BOARD DATE:** June 11, 2024

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

**MOVED:** The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Northern Essex 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.

**Contact:** Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Keith M. Connors, Program Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success

# **BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

**June 2024**

## **Northern Essex Community College Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program**

### **BACKGROUND**

This motion concerns the continuation of Northern Essex 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**

Northern Essex 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 October 26, 2023, the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) Visiting Committee (Visiting Committee) conducted a day-long, in-person assessment of the Northern Essex Community College's (NECC) Honors Program. The Visiting Committee consisted of Tiffany Magnolia, Coordinator of the Honors Program at North Shore Community College, and Chair of the Visiting Committee; Kimberly Poitevin, Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Honors Program Area Chair at Salem State University; and Mari Castaneda, Dean of the Honors College at UMass Amherst. Prior to the visit, the Visiting Committee received and studied NECC's application for reaccreditation of CHP status. The site visit was hosted and organized by Honors Program Director Ginger Hurajt.

During its review of NECC's Honors program the team found a vibrant and essential program that is woven into the college's fabric and supported at all levels. The faculty and students were engaged and positive about the program, the administration was committed both with resources and priorities, and the coordinator was excited about the program's future. The site team has no reservations about recommending the program for re-approval.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. Designate Advisors: The current advising model for Honors isn't particularly well suited for a large and growing program. Students aren't always aware that they are in an Honors section of a course, which is problematic for both the student and the faculty. Designated advisors, a cohort model, or making the Honors coordinator a monitoring advisor are all possible solutions to ensuring that students who are in Honors courses are there intentionally and that students moving through the program understand their options with regards to transfer.
2. Create a Visible Presence: Physical visibility needs to mirror the college's efforts in virtual visibility. Signage and bulletin boards are just two ways that students can "see" the Honors program's presence on the Haverhill campus. Efforts should be made to achieve equity visibility at the Lawrence campus.
3. Establish a Tracking System: The current system for coding Honors courses and students is cumbersome. With the program's growing size, the college needs to find a way to systematically track students' progress within the program outside of just pulling transcripts, which is the current process. Course coding for Honors courses needs to be formalized within systems as well for transfer ease.
4. Provide Opportunities for Honors Faculty to Meet: Faculty meet individually with the Honors coordinator regarding Honors education, but the program would benefit from opportunities for Honors faculty to meet with one another to discuss Honors pedagogy and expectations.

## **INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE**

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

1. Designate Advisors: The Honors Coordinator will be integrated into Navigate student profiles as an Honors Advisor which will facilitate seamless access for students wishing to participate in the program.
2. Create a Visible Presence: An Honors lounge has been established on the Lawrence campus and the college is in the process of furnishing it. We will also provide a bulletin board in the Haverhill campus classroom building to advertise upcoming Honors events and courses.

3. Establish a Tracking System: Honors students are now appropriately coded in Banner. The college is working with various departments to ensure similar coding in Navigate.

On May 3, 2024, the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee voted to reapprove Northern Essex 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 **Northern Essex Community College** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.