

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 25-47

BOARD DATE: June 17, 2025

**RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM FOR
FRAMINGHAM STATE UNIVERSITY**

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee and renews the membership of **Framingham State University** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for seven years, effective June 17, 2025.

VOTED: Motion adopted by the BHE on 6/17/2025.

Authority: Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines as Revised by the Board of Higher Education in March 2022; G.L. c. 15A, § 9.

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June 2025

Framingham State University Renewal of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

BACKGROUND

This motion concerns the continuation of Framingham State University'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.

REVIEW PROCESS

Framingham State University 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 November 22, 2024, the Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) Visiting Committee (Visiting Committee) conducted a day-long, in-person assessment of the Framingham State University's (FSU) Honors Program. The Visiting Committee consisted of Dr. Nicole Rosa, Coordinator of the Honors Program at Worcester State University, and Chair of the Visiting Committee; Dr. Mari Castaneda, Dean of the Commonwealth Honors College at UMass Amherst; and Panteha Sanati Zaker, Director of the Honors Program at Massasoit Community College. Prior to the visit, the Visiting Committee received and studied FSU's application for reaccreditation of CHP status. The site visit was hosted and organized by Honors Program Director Greg Halfond. The visit included meetings with President Nancy Niemi, Provost Kristen Porter-Utley, Dean Patricia Thomas, Dean Susan Dargin, faculty, and students.

The Visiting Committee, in their report, commended FSU's Honors Program dedication to its students, highlighting the Honors house located near the center of campus being available 24/7; the variety of courses offered through the general education program; the multitude of co-curricular and extra-curricular cultural and educational; and the deep commitment by all faculty and staff. For these reasons and more, the Visiting Committee recommends reapproval and continued Commonwealth Honors status at FSU.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee included the following:

1. Provide a multi-year contract and increased summer funding to the Faculty Director.
2. Reinstate the Assistant Director role.
3. Consider increased flexibility in courses that can earn honors credit, particularly in upper level courses.
4. Increased collaboration across departments and programs to better incorporate the CHP into the campus culture.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

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

1. Provide a multi-year contract and increased summer funding to the Faculty Director: FSU concurs with the site team's recommendation. Beginning in academic year 2025-2026, Alternate Professional Service (APR) Agreements for Honors Program Directors will stipulate that a term of office shall be of three (3) years' duration, and that an individual Director may not serve more than one, three-year term, unless special circumstances dictate an extension. This new language will align the position of Honors Program Director with the terms of FSU's director in the office for Center for Excellence in Learning, Teaching, Scholarship, and Service. A summer stipend of equal value to the "stipend per semester" for department chairs, as defined by Article VI.G.2 of the MSCA Collective Bargaining Agreement (currently \$2,865), will be available in summer 2025. As part of this summer stipend, the new Director, in addition to regular duties, will design a plan to engage the FSU Honors Council, the Provost's Office, and other relevant campus constituencies in a 5-year strategic planning process focused on the improvement and diversification of graduates from the Commonwealth Honors Program at FSU.
2. Reinstate the Assistant Director role: The University will commit to potentially reinstating the Assistant Director position, contingent upon the Director's completion of a strategic plan. The Plan, in addition to outlining the 5-year trajectory of the program, will provide a justification for the Assistant Director position, as well as a revised description of duties for each staff member supporting the Honors Program. The Assistant Director will

receive a course reduction appropriate to the work assigned to the position and hold a term of office of three years' duration. Possible key responsibilities associated with this position, may include (1) the promotion of equitable access to, and success in, the Honors Program, with focused attention on inclusion of students from minoritized and underserved communities; (2) planning, organizing, and attending events associated with the Honors Program for the purpose of strengthening community and retention; (3) developing volunteer/civic engagement programming for Honors students..

3. Consider increased flexibility in courses that can earn honors credit, particularly in upper level courses: In concurrence with the site team's recommendation, FSU commits to making more upper-level courses available for Honors credit. FSU has already begun the process of developing a new General Education curriculum that will allow students to take upper-level courses for GenEd credit. Once this new curriculum is approved by University governance, the Honors Director will coordinate with academic department chairs to identify – and ultimately schedule – upper-level courses to be offered regularly with Honors status. FSU will also increase the number of allowable “contract courses” from one to two by the end of Academic Year 2025-2026. Honors contracts allow students to take non-Honors 300-400 level courses for Honors credit by special arrangement with the instructor.
4. Increased collaboration across departments and programs to better incorporate the CHP into the campus culture: Beginning in Academic Year 2025-2026, the Honors Program will allocate a portion of its programming budget to co-sponsoring events with other campus departments and centers with the specific aim of identifying programming that reflects the interests and needs of a diverse student body.

Further, following conversations with the Review Team, FSU looks to improving equitable access by 1) raising the number of admitted students into its CHP, 2) creating CHP opportunities that are attractive to diverse populations of students, 3) creating ways to help all students thrive in its CHP, and 4) creating and implementing practices that improve full CHP completion. FSU commits to more strategically embedding policies and practices that appropriately advance these objectives into the work it does through its CHP to amplify the excellence its students, the majority of whom identify as people of color. It also commits to improving the gender balance in the CHP program, which right now is primarily filled with students who identify as female.

On April 11, 2025, the Commonwealth Honors Council Executive Committee voted to reapprove Framingham State University'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 **Framingham State University** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.