

**Robert V. Antonucci**

PRESIDENT

Date: January 16, 2013

To: Commonwealth Honors Program, Executive Committee  
C/O Director of Academic Policy  
Board of Higher Education  
One Ashburton Place, Room 1401  
Boston MA 02108

CC: Tona Hangen, Site Visit Chair

Re: Fitchburg State University Honors Program Site Visit

The Fitchburg State University Honors Program Director and Curriculum Committee would like to thank the Site Visit Team for their hard work and interest in the Fitchburg State Honors Program and for their service in providing thoughtful ideas for making further improvements to the program.

In their report, the team made four recommendations. Those recommendations are listed below, along with our plans for addressing them:

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Students and faculty both see a greater need for education about the new program among its current students, the faculty at large, and the admissions department. Some students seemed unclear on the requirements and policies of the new program or on appropriate course substitutions. Specifically, students recommended a stronger honors presence at SOAR and in academic advising/course selection for incoming first-year students. The program and its rules seem clear, but perhaps aren't yet fully understood by all participants or by the greater campus community.

**RESPONSE 1:** The Honors Director has already begun meeting with the Director of Admissions in order to create new introductory letters for admitted honors students, better explaining the requirements of the program. In addition, we will be having current honors students making follow-up phone calls to accepted students to answer any of their questions. The Honors Director will also overhaul the materials distributed at SOAR to clarify the program requirements.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Some students expressed a desire for greater social connection—they value the friendships they have, and would like to be even more

inclusive in the connections they're making. Many suggested a Facebook group for asynchronous connection and communication. Perhaps a planned social event at the start of each year would be a possibility, as a complement to the existing end-of-year celebration.

RESPONSE 2: We will reinstitute the beginning-of-the-year welcome event that we held in past years so that new students can meet each other, more advanced honors students, and honors faculty. We will also explore how we can best set up and oversee a Facebook page. We also hope that our new Honors Common, slated to open January 2014, will provide a more central social and study space for our students. At that time we will also take advantage of the work-study student funding we have in our budget. We plan to have the work-study student focus on out-reach, academic, and social events for our honors students. We hope to see an increase in our budget for social events and outside speakers so that we can support these initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Since team teaching is already a possibility at Fitchburg State, we recommend greater opportunities if they can be adequately supported; faculty specifically mentioned how much they enjoy this kind of collaboration and its educational benefits are clear. Even without official team-taught courses, faculty would welcome the sense that the courses they teach are connected, in concept and practice. An overall attention to interdisciplinarity is one of the program's strengths—increased support for team teaching and faculty development would enhance this already strong aspect.

RESPONSE 3: We would like to organize bi-annual meetings among current honors faculty to discuss their teaching methods and connections between the courses. We will also explore the possibility of creating learning communities between some of our first-year courses. The Honors Director is slated to conduct a sabbatical project in Spring 2014 that will explore methods of teaching in honors, culminating in a presentation/discussion with our honors faculty.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Our final recommendation would be for the university to consider expanding the program to more than 25 students in each incoming class. We noted that faculty expressed interest in bringing the size of the incoming honors class back to what it was when the program began and had grant funding. Originally, 50 incoming students were accepted into the program; at present, only 25 enter each year, a number dictated by limited scholarship funding. Were it possible to fund 50 students at the current level, faculty agree that the university at large would benefit—"honors students have a ripple effect throughout the school," one said, and that would raise the bar in all the classes they attend. Although we recognize this would represent a significant commitment on the part of the university in resources, program support, and faculty development, we would encourage Fitchburg State to invest in its future by investigating ways to scale up its model in a sustainable way.

RESPONSE 4: Given that the number of matriculated incoming honors students has not quite reached the established cap of 25 students these past few years, we will focus on achieving a full class of 25 students. Our recent name change, changes to the Admissions review process including earlier review of files and offers to students, and greater outreach by current students will hopefully help us reach our 25-student cap. If we are able to consistently fill the 25 slots, our Vice President has indicated that we can then raise the cap of the program to 35 students.

Thanks again to the Site Committee for their service and support for the work of the Fitchburg State University Honors Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert V. Antonucci".

Robert V. Antonucci  
President