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From Program to College: The Vision and Curriculum Evolution of the Virginia Tech Honors College

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Abstract: This article describes one program’s thoughtful and strategic transition to a college and subsequent innovations to its curricular framework. Acknowledging that such a change affords honors practitioners the opportunity to implement best practices established within the honors community, authors describe the unique evolution of the honors college experience at their institution by way of expanding collaborative transdisciplinary courses, offering a new diploma option, and increasing opportunities related to undergraduate research. Collaborative transdisciplinary courses encourage critical thinking about complex problems in a small group setting. A new diploma option combines disciplinary depth with transdisciplinary capabilities through a four-year, multidisciplinary studio curriculum. Expansion from a single research training course to a suite of course offerings, or “guided research experiences,” strengthens the college’s goal of fostering undergraduate research. Authors suggest that the innovative curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop as change agents and global scholars. The triad of changes are derivative of the college’s core values: to foster meaningful and sustained relationships with faculty, provide resources for independent learning, promote engagement in undergraduate research, yield and advance place-based and problem-focused experiences, guide students through intellectual engagement in global contexts, and seek to better engage students in their learning processes while preparing them for graduation.

Keywords: curriculum planning; transdisciplinarity; inquiry-based learning; project method in teaching; Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VA)—Honors College

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JUSTIFICATION FOR TRANSITION

The Virginia Tech (VT) Honors College evolved from an honors program with roots in the 1970s, when the first undergraduate honors theses were recorded at the university. The original thesis program was reimagined as a substantive honors program with a focus on promoting academic merit in the early 1990s. The honors program transitioned to an honors college in 2016 to offer diplomas that attract and engage high-achieving students in the seven VT colleges offering undergraduate degrees (Adams, 2016). This transformation into the VT Honors College was an effort to return to the spirit and purpose of early-1960s honors experiments and address critical gaps in undergraduate preparation that can delay professional success after graduation (Sederberg, 2008). The goals of honors education at VT had outgrown the governance and policy limitations placed on programs, necessitating the shift to a college. As a college, its curriculum could be developed to create an honors degree option; a small number of faculty could be hired to revamp the curriculum; and the college could make larger financial requests for a substantial portfolio of pilot academic endeavors. Subsequently, the college has made substantial headway and adopted a broad curricular focus on social responsibility. The characteristics of the VT Honors College mirror elements recorded by Sederberg (2008) in his survey of honors colleges at NCHC member institutions, leading to a freestanding college structure with dedicated faculty responsible for developing honors-specific curricula. Additionally, the college is motivated to recruit stronger students to the university through improving educational opportunities on campus, with the long-term goal of elevating the honors profile at the university (Sederberg, 2008). Characteristics less common to honors colleges that define our college are upper-division courses and degree options.

As part of the transition from program to college, honors diplomas were designed to be flexible. Students are expected to earn thirty credits across four areas. Three required areas are explorations of disciplinary depth, development of transdisciplinary capabilities, and engagement in undergraduate research and experiential learning; the fourth optional but strongly encouraged area includes classes in the honors curriculum. Students are free to select elements of their in-major requirements that they wish to explore with greater intellectual depth. They can enrich their learning experience through the honors course offerings and opportunities, which include training in research practices and mentored professional skills development. The shift mirrors

best practices and “strong tendencies” of other colleges and programs within the honors community (Scott et al., 2017).

The university’s mission is to improve “the quality of life and the human condition” within Virginia and around the world (Virginia Tech, 2019). From a university viewpoint, merging liberal education with development of employable skillsets is important pedagogically. The university has developed the VT-shaped student initiative, where the nationally recognized “T-shaped learner,” known for disciplinary depth and transdisciplinary capabilities, is enriched by informal communal and guided experiential learning (Blieszner et al., 2015). These ideals mirror traits desired by employers and hiring managers when interviewing recent graduates to work at their companies (Hart Research Associates, 2018). While employability after graduation is not our primary focus, we recognize that our students are concerned about learning skills that will make them competitive in the professional world. The VT Honors College is working to move beyond generally siloed degree programs in order to provide students with opportunities to develop transdisciplinary identities and professional capabilities. While there is no single definition of transdisciplinarity, the concept typically refers to elements from two or more disciplines combined to find a new strategy or framework for identifying and solving problems, thus moving beyond the composite areas in order to integrate methods and knowledge in a stronger approach to a complex issue. We have conceived of transdisciplinarity this way in designing and teaching transdisciplinary courses.

The college houses two departments, with three faculty dedicated to the overarching Honors Laureate Diploma and four faculty dedicated to the specialized Honors Diploma in Collaborative Innovation. The college is also working with campus partners to offer additional specialized degree options that these partners can manage while at the same time encouraging students to pursue new learning opportunities through honors. Honors faculty work together to advance the college’s core values of meaningful and sustained relationships with faculty, independent learning, undergraduate research, place-based and problem-focused experiences, and intellectual engagement in global contexts (Schuman, 2014). These values and the associated learning outcomes are important not only because they exemplify the overarching goal of the college to promote social responsibility but also because they afford us ways to continue fostering the classical liberal education practices of critical thinking, lifelong learning, ethics, and creativity.

TRANSDISCIPLINARY COURSE OFFERINGS

The most recent and significant addition to our curriculum is an update to a series of special topics courses titled “Discovery and Innovation Studios.” They are based in part on findings from Carnegie Mellon’s Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation that suggest studio courses are a way for students to practice complex problem-solving through hands-on learning, with scaffolding by faculty. While a traditional studio course typically seen in architecture or design is composed of daily large blocks of time spent practicing task-oriented building and design techniques, our studio courses encompass the creativity and exploratory aspects of that type of learning environment while intensifying the critical thinking and knowledge exploration associated with honors-level coursework. The result is a hybrid seminar and studio course with learner-centered discussion and work sessions. The classes are designed and taught by either honors faculty or faculty from other colleges. Faculty members mentor students through discovery and definition of critical real-world problems, reflective evaluations of individual and collective problem solving, and communication of solutions to individuals outside the classroom. The transdisciplinary learning space allows students from different majors to learn communication skills with individuals who are unfamiliar with their primary knowledge and to engage in conversations that show how new disciplines emerge within the transdisciplinary realm. While instructors can use the course to explore novel ideas and rarely explored problems beyond the realm of their daily research or academic focus, the small groups of students serve as apprentices, who are guided through thought exercises. These reimagined studios provide the type of engagement and interaction in small groups that students seldom encounter in their majors at a large research institution like ours.

In this new take on a studio environment, students from a variety of majors work in teams that allow them to explain disciplinary norms to their peers and incorporate the norms of others into their disciplinary discourse. Our course offerings have become a space where students strengthen practices for navigating this style of collaboration. The small course sizes foster strong relationships between faculty and students while also providing an avenue for faculty from other colleges to engage honors students in conversations that maintain our culture of intellectual curiosity. We tap into Samuel Schuman’s concept of matching the right faculty member to the student’s interest in order to increase the quality of the student’s education (Schuman, 2005).

To date, the Honors Laureate Diploma faculty have developed different iterations of these courses each semester; rather than teaching a defined set of topics repeatedly, they develop new offerings based on their expertise and student interests. Courses have focused on current events and global issues like natural hazards, fire management, healthcare for older adults, robotics in society, and cryptocurrency. In these courses, students build communication and problem-solving skills through a combination of group and individual work. Most sections also include explicit discussions about ethics and ethical decision-making in relation to the focus area of the class and from various viewpoints. This inclusion of explicit ethics discussions about judgment and decision-making follows the university-wide redirection for general education courses to include cross-disciplinary concepts like ethical reasoning and intercultural awareness.

Among the many projects developed within these courses, students have produced pamphlets, research posters, research reports, and public education videos. Student products aim to address community needs or provide educational or policy recommendations to share with the public. Through the design and production of the course-specific artifacts, students are encouraged to collaborate across majors by integrating different perspectives into a comprehensive understanding of complex societal problems. As a first iteration of new course offerings, the Discovery and Innovation Studios have provided context and student perspectives for how the college can expand our course offerings to include preparation for similar experiences that typically occur outside of the classroom through experiential learning and undergraduate research. These courses have also reinforced the need to provide students opportunities to engage critical thinking, ethical considerations, and discussions of the human condition.

For example, a recent section on human-environment interaction, natural hazards, and hazard-response systems required students to reflect on their expectations beforehand and then critically evaluate their changes in understanding based on readings and class activities. Students first examined readings on topics like historic dispersal of modern humans in the late Pleistocene, the work of nonprofit groups to shape physical environments, and the effects of travel to the moon on our culture here on earth. Next, students discussed social environments and social construction in relation to ideas like social networks. Before grappling with bureaucratic systems and policies for responding to natural hazards, students also examined invisible interactions in the environment. Concurrently, students from this section met

with students from a different but parallel course section about healthcare data. They co-taught lessons and group exercises, and they covered shared concepts in policy processes, the effects of healthcare on individuals, and hazard policies, ethics, and equity. Written reflections and class discussions on these topics resulted in critical evaluation of the connections between human responses to events, effects of these responses on humans, and the systems developed to govern and manage significant events. The successful learning outcomes of the shared classroom sessions suggested the potential benefits of scaling the experience to more topics under a shared theme.

The evolution of the topic studio courses is the VT Honors College SuperStudio, currently entering its third semester. Students enroll in concurrently scheduled three-credit topics courses and a one-credit transdisciplinary studio course. All course sections are scheduled to meet in a large modular learning space so that sections can combine for team-taught activities and shared experiences and then split into individual sections for in-depth topic exploration. Much like students in the single-topic Discovery and Innovation Studios, SuperStudio students critically evaluate a specific topic in their sections and use the transdisciplinary class to discuss connections between the topics under the shared theme. The concurrent course offerings foster collaboration between the multidisciplinary teams in each section, where students bring in concepts from outside their primary majors to develop understandings of complex societal issues and policy contexts. The students can research key topics in a creative space where they question ideas in a low-risk/high-reward setting and work collaboratively toward transdisciplinary solutions while tapping into the training and discussions of their peers in the other sections. The SuperStudio was developed by three Honors Laureate Diploma faculty with three affiliated faculty from other colleges, a model within the college for fostering campus partnerships and collaborative pedagogical practices for students.

SuperStudio includes course sections on environmental policy and social change, data analysis for health reform, innovation for the public good, the future of higher education, and the future of employment. These topics converge through examination of the challenges with and potential of the Green New Deal, which is an emerging framework for addressing interconnected crises in climate change and economic inequality. We developed a series of integrated syllabi for the individual three-credit topics courses and an additional syllabus for the one-credit co-requisite course. Faculty for each of the five topics sections identified overlapping concepts and developed a series of

shared lessons that involve two or more sections meeting together each week. For instance, the environmental policy and data analysis sections share a lesson on mis- and dis-information and misrepresentation of data; sections on innovation, employment, and education share concepts in AI and machine learning. Students meet once a week to discuss overarching concepts like problem framing, ethics, equity, and innovation that bridge individual topics and must be interrogated in order to understand the history, purpose, and potential outcomes of the Green New Deal. The updated course structure will serve as a catalyst for development of relationships between students and faculty across all five of the course sections rather than within a single section. This team-taught approach to transdisciplinary honors courses, which is a valued best practice in honors education (Schuman, 2014), cultivates connections between concepts and fields of study. Since SuperStudio development has thus far occurred without dedicated funding, all faculty voluntarily participated in planning meetings over the course of a year of development and are doing so to address student interest and pedagogical expansion. Through a set of carefully curated best practices, the SuperStudio empowers students to confidently engage in the collaborative work they will need as professionals and citizens to address critical twenty-first-century issues. As students branch out in their exploration of experiential learning opportunities, the college strives to support them through development of knowledge and capabilities that will propel them toward lifelong learning outcomes

A NEW DIPLOMA OPTION

In addition to transdisciplinary topics courses and the more ambitious SuperStudio format, the VT Honors College has worked to develop new diploma options for students, among which is the Honors Diploma in Collaborative Innovation offered through the Calhoun Discovery Program (CDP). After the transition from program to college, the VT Honors College received a generous gift from a Virginia Tech alumnus and accounting graduate, David Calhoun, to “support the launch of a pilot model of collaborative learning” with the intent of “equipping graduates with knowledge and skills to succeed in today’s complex and dynamic society” (Polikoff, 2018). This four-year pilot program—the Honors Diploma in Collaborative Innovation—would need to be separate from the Honors Laureate Diploma. The proposed diploma structure aims to avoid pitfalls of recent graduates who lack fundamental problem-solving capabilities in industry and, therefore, lack the skills to integrate knowledge across disciplines to tackle transdisciplinary

problems. The program design brings together students from select degree programs across several colleges. Funding from Calhoun provides four-year scholarships for the students, enrichment funds to sponsor experiential learning opportunities with affiliated companies, curriculum development by dedicated faculty, and establishment of the Calhoun Center for Higher Education Innovation as an unaffiliated center for program evaluation. Most of the funding provides support and resources to the select group of honors students within the program who provide feedback to faculty as they cultivate the new curricular approach. Funding support provided for CDP is dedicated specifically to this pilot program and is separate from funding for the college from the university.

In honors education, common practices that make up the structure of courses are “thesis requirements, capstone courses, service learning, experiential education, and courses that combine class meetings with an online or course-ware component” (Scott et al., 2017, p. 207). We have implemented an empirical analysis protocol for honors education that is rooted in demography (Scott & Smith, 2016; Smith & Scott, “Demography,” 2016; Smith & Scott, “Growth,” 2016; Scott et al., 2017). The design for the Collaborative Innovation diploma combines these elements to provide a flexible, in-depth experience to a cohort of students with diverse backgrounds and experiences. The program requires students to work continuously and collaboratively on projects where they can combine their in-major knowledge with general education concepts and skills outside their primary majors. CDP scholars participate in a curriculum that includes module-based classes for general education elements, annual studio experiences of practice-like interactions, regular mentoring sessions with faculty and representatives from partner companies, at least one scheduled internship, and a capstone experience. Like the SuperStudio courses, CDP studios are co-taught by academic faculty and industry professionals, providing students a chance to learn about topics from different fundamental perspectives. The CDP studios include critique and feedback elements as well as mentoring opportunities that foster sustained relationships with faculty. The Honors Laureate Diploma and Collaborative Innovation Diploma faculty work together to facilitate elements of the curriculum, with the Collaborative Innovation faculty as the leads for instruction. The goal is to graduate lifelong learners capable of driving innovation with awareness of societal impact.

The most transformative component of the Collaborative Innovation curriculum is the one-credit, module courses. A working group composed of

faculty from each of the participating degree programs identified threshold concepts from each major. These concepts were used to develop a series of short-courses that could be combined to create semester-long courses, which would teach non-majors about the concepts that govern practices in a specific discipline. For instance, an engineering student would participate in a set of modules to learn the fundamentals of communications while a communications student would simultaneously enroll in a set of modules to learn the basics of engineering. Students could also pick learning experiences based on recognition of missing or unknown knowledge: a communications student might identify a design deficit that would prevent him or her from communicating the significant relationship between structure and function for a project and, therefore, would take a set of modules to learn this skill set.

Understanding of many threshold concepts is discipline-specific and “can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something” that can come about as a sudden realization or as part of a slow process (Meyer and Land, 2003, p. 1). Such concepts may initially seem “counterintuitive or even intellectually absurd at face value” (Meyer and Land, 2003, p. 2). To ensure that students had a sense of the importance and meaning of threshold concepts from other majors in CDP, module-based teaching and studio components—both with online and in-person elements—became the hallmark for the program. The modules shape the overall curriculum structure, with the studios serving as a means for students to tie learned concepts together and derive meaning. The studios help students see the gaps in their knowledge that can be filled by additional module courses through “just-in-time” online learning.

The studio element was heavily discussed by working-group and teaching faculty because the term “studio” can have disciplinary-specific definitions. Ultimately, the program was framed such that students will experience four years of learning, practicing, and honing the process skills necessary to develop critical thinking skills, iterative learning, considerations of the human element, and productive teamwork skills. The studios serve as sandbox learning environments, where faculty and company partners can challenge the students to think about complex problems. The sandbox framework allows for students and industry professionals to discuss, develop, and explore problem spaces that have no single, correct solution but, if resolved, can translate to significant social impact on a large scale. This experience is supplemented by tutoring from honors college faculty as experts in their fields, industry partner representatives as “professors of practice” with specific experience related to

the sandbox framework, and faculty from the represented majors as an additional level of teaching and research expertise within the students' primary disciplines. Students participate in an internship at a nonprofit or industry partner organization between their junior and senior years to improve their engagement in their capstone projects. The studios serve as the common element occurring throughout the four-year program, continuously challenging the students to explore unstructured problem spaces and interact with individuals outside their major. Student scholars are further able to tap into study abroad and other supplemental experiential learning opportunities through the Presidential Global Scholars program and reserved experiential learning funds. Contact with industry partners provides students additional opportunities to develop critical thinking and communication skills, providing a context in which students can grow and learn to advocate positions and ideas that focus on societal innovation and improvement of the human condition.

Best practices learned from the Discovery and Innovation Studios within the overarching honors curriculum have translated to curricular elements of the Collaborative Innovation framework. As with the SuperStudio courses, some of our faculty have voluntarily taken on overload schedules in order to contribute to the development process because of our strong belief in the learning outcomes of the experience. Initial feedback from students indicates that they engage in critical thinking and consideration of systems more deeply given these types of opportunities than in traditional lecture-style classes taught by individual faculty. The faculty believe strongly in serving as role models for the type of learning, exploration, and service that we expect from our honors students.

EXPANDED RESEARCH COURSE OFFERINGS

The adjustments to the college curriculum that resulted in the development of the studio courses precipitated a need to evaluate the learning outcomes and identify potential gaps not addressed by this teaching approach. Preliminary student perceptions of learning within our honors courses indicated that students did not see all the elements necessary for them to confidently participate in independent research experiences. Therefore, the Honors Laureate Diploma faculty expanded our course offerings to include exploratory courses on basic methodology of quantitative and qualitative research practices that would be applicable in the social, physical, and life sciences. Previously, the college had two approved research course offerings: an introductory course on research practices taught through guided

development of a group research proposal and a research principles course explaining the theory behind transdisciplinary research. Courses on research, like topics courses, are common in honors colleges and programs (Scott et al., 2017; Sederberg, 2008). We imagined the research courses as an integrated suite of courses in quantitative and qualitative undergraduate research practices, from introductory to advanced levels. The college now provides research training in theory and practice structured as four scaffolding courses that cover smaller collections of relevant material each semester so that students have more time to grapple with research question design, identifying extant research, building the foundations for framing a research proposal, and engaging some of the skills necessary to become research practitioners. The outcome from the course suite remains development of a research proposal of the students' choosing, but the path to get there will include additional steps along the way to ensure that students understand why each step is a necessary and effective part of the research process. The courses progress from foundational concepts through intermediate practices for establishing a research project, concluding with an in-depth study of analytical techniques for drawing conclusions from quantitative and qualitative data. Students can enter and exit the suite of courses at any point based on their individual needs for research training and participation in experiential learning opportunities that result in similar learning outcomes.

Clearly explaining and defending research questions, designs, and outcomes can be tricky and require a mastery of discipline-specific vernaculars, a confidence in the interpretation of results, and opportunities to practice applying research skills. Mastering foundational research skills and defending research decisions is one way these course offerings can help students develop strong oral communication skills. Through both informal discussions and formal presentations, students highlight research ideas of interest to them without enrolling solely in courses that are labeled as public speaking or debate courses. Rather than teaching communication and discourse as separate, isolated topics, the courses apply context through use of these skills in a research environment.

The introductory research course in the series focuses on critical practices in quantitative and qualitative research, providing an overview of the research process and development of research questions. The next offering in the series takes on intermediate-level study of critical practices in quantitative and qualitative research for honors college students, including identification of funding opportunities for research, collaborating across disciplines,

designing introductory research protocols, managing research projects, and using posters to present research findings. The third course focuses on designing quantitative and qualitative research protocols, applying principles of transdisciplinary project management, refining research protocols based on the feasibility of data collection, maintaining research ethics and integrity, planning for data collection, and planning for dissemination of research findings. The fourth in the series focuses on data collection and analysis, including working with multiple types of data, data cleaning and managing, evaluating the work of others, and communicating conclusions to general audiences. Classes are intended to be taken as needed, and we anticipate that some students will take a single course in the suite while others will take all of the courses as a preparatory series for engagement in independent research. Again, the goal is to foster development of competitive professional skills while encouraging curiosity about research topics, with the added benefit of curricular training for engagement in undergraduate research opportunities.

We recognize that the course suite does not address the full breadth of research methods, which we attribute to the limited faculty cohort size and need to incorporate additional professional backgrounds into our instructional faculty roster. The benefit of the current suite to honors education is the initiation of conversations with the students about research as the first step in encouraging them to find meaning and value in similar processes in all professional fields. As the Honors Laureate faculty work toward building partnerships with other colleges and campus partners, we hope to expand the types of research that our students can practice. Future course proposals may include elements of participatory action research, citizen and community science, and translational research.

CONCLUSIONS

The general trajectory of growth in honors education seemingly involves the transition from program to college like the one Virginia Tech is undertaking, but research shows that faculty in colleges are less likely to confer with the head of honors about course offerings (Scott et al., 2017). Additionally, many of the faculty teaching honors courses are borrowed from other areas of the university (Scott et al., 2017). As Scott et al. point out, gaps in communication may make it difficult for students to internalize an honors mission if the faculty teaching the courses are somewhat removed from the honors environment. The VT Honors College has taken the approach of hiring a small number of dedicated internal faculty and involving them in the process

of curriculum development and implementation from the start. Supporting this small core of dedicated faculty means they can focus on developing experiences for and relationships with honors college students and can help them develop critical thinking skills that are not typically paramount in one disciplinary home or another but serve as a bridge between disciplines. This objective requires the selection of perceptive, resilient faculty dedicated to creating engaging and interesting experiences for students that often take more time and effort to develop than would traditional courses.

The Discovery and Innovation Studios, SuperStudio, and research suite arose from a collective effort by the three Honors Laureate faculty to provide different approaches to teaching that can be combined to better engage students while helping them identify and refine their own approaches to navigating the world. The CDP and Collaborative Innovation faculty expanded our in-house expertise while providing the more senior Honors Laureate faculty with peers as mentors and collaborators on the common elements of the two diploma systems. The different disciplinary backgrounds of the faculty drive us to constantly examine and update our understanding of global issues and approaches to navigating transdisciplinary problem spaces. Our efforts demonstrate the depth and scope of curriculum development that can be accomplished by faculty working in small teams to meet the large goals of developing critical thinking skills or considering the human condition. Rather than focusing on specific topics as individual practitioners, we develop shared contexts and experiences in which students can develop those skills.

The faculty accomplish this task through constantly collecting student perceptions of their learning process in each course, regularly updating our data collection process, evaluating learning objectives and outcomes at regular intervals throughout each semester, and communicating successes and areas for improvement with our peers on campus and at national conferences. The faculty serve on committees within the college, where we are involved in activities like developing the strategic plan for the college and the process for awarding student scholarships. We also serve on university committees so that we can report back to the college about diversity and inclusion initiatives for recruitment of faculty and students, student engagement in experiential learning, and university initiatives to update the academic experience of our entire student population.

Development of the current course offerings also requires patience and willingness to iterate. Several of the ideas for curriculum and course offerings were initially more narrowly conceived, but as courses were developed and

taught, feedback from students encouraged us to push new offerings further. The flexibility to continually refine and develop courses allows us to respond to student needs and feedback efficiently and effectively. Collaborative course development and iteration are acknowledged by members of the administration and are reported on annual faculty reviews to show that we are advancing the college and university missions; thus, decision-makers value our work and the time we spend doing it. Students have also acknowledged the value of the work we do in fostering critical thinking and creativity, articulating how the skills they learned here translate to other classes and future professional endeavors.

When we take a step back from all that has been developed within the college over the last three years, we see that we have been and continue to model the transdisciplinary capabilities we wish to instill in our students. Although ambitious given the timeline, the collaboration and communication that occur within the college have motivated our success. Getting to this point took time, effort, and a substantial amount of civil debate to show the importance of thinking beyond the norms of general and honors education. A willingness to obtain student perspectives and translate their constructive thoughts to actionable items has resulted in a positive response from students despite some initial resistance to significant changes. Most of the initiatives explained here (CDP is the exception) were carried out by a small group of faculty members with minimal budgetary contributions outside of faculty salary. While the Honors Laureate faculty are an added benefit to the effort, affiliate faculty and those interested in focusing efforts on honors education could accomplish the course development outlined here. The tradeoff in this case would be the need for a longer timeline for faculty with duties elsewhere at the university and for less bandwidth for faculty to complete the assessment elements that we implemented for beneficial short-term adjustments.

Structurally, we were able to align the goals of the many interested parties to make the college transition a success. The dean serves as an advocate for change, regularly sharing our efforts with the university administration, and trusts the recommendations of the faculty based on evidence from the body of literature on teaching and learning as well as data collected from students. The faculty constantly question if the current state of our courses appropriately meets the established goals of the collective, occasionally pushing to update goals that no longer make sense for the academic needs of the students. The dean and faculty are vigilant in efforts to connect with individuals and groups on campus who could benefit from and would elevate what we are

doing in the college. The students are willing to engage in experimentation with their learning process, recognizing that the honors experience should be about engaging in opportunities to challenge their expectations for academic success.

We have highlighted here the achievement of our goal to become vanguards for change and to foster positive societal impact as a valuable avenue for engaging in honors education. Moving ahead, we look forward to following and contributing to the continuing conversations about shifts in higher education that are happening within and outside of honors.

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