




**DATE:** May 31, 2011  
**FROM:**   
Rodney A. Erickson  
**TO:** Chris Brady  
**SUBJECT:** Core Council Recommendations Regarding the Schreyer Honors College

The Academic Program and Administrative Services Core Council (“the Core Council”) has discussed the recommendations received from Susan Welch, Chair, on behalf of the University Park Academic Review Coordinating Committee (UPARCC) regarding the Schreyer Honors College programs and operations, and the background information and strategic priorities you have provided about the College, its successes, and its challenges. The Campus Academic Review Coordinating Committee (CARCC) also reviewed curricular and operational matters that might affect one or more campuses and these comments were taken into consideration in the formulation of the UPARCC recommendations to the Core Council.

The purpose of this memo is to share with you the response of the Core Council to various Schreyer Honors College organizational and operational issues and initiatives, and to make recommendations for further changes based on the analysis and deliberations of UPARCC and the Core Council.

## Context

Although the Schreyer Honors College (SHC) offers no degrees and has no budgeted faculty, it is a very important component of the education Penn State offers to undergraduates. The SHC offers enriched honors education to about 1,800 students University-wide. Of those Schreyer Scholars in Spring 2011, fewer than 78 are located at the Commonwealth Campuses, including about 33 at Erie-Behrend, 3 at Altoona, 11 at Abington, 8 at Brandywine, and 23 at other locations. Most campus students enter at the sophomore and junior gate; most University Park students enter as freshmen, although the number entering through the “gates” is increasing. Of all the University Park SHC Scholars in Spring 2011, there were 369 majoring in Engineering, 341 are Liberal Arts majors, and 272 are students from the Eberly College of Science. Business had 195 and Health and Human Development had 148 students, and the remainder is divided among the other academic colleges.

For Fall 2010 admission, 2,800 students applied for freshman admission to the SHC and 334 enrolled. As you know, each student entering SHC as a freshman is awarded an Academic Excellence Scholarship (AES) of \$3,500, an amount scheduled to increase to \$4,000 in

2012-13. The AES is continued each year the student is enrolled in the Schreyer Honors College in good standing. The Schreyer Endowment mandates that all freshmen receive Academic Excellence Scholarships. The AES may be augmented with other scholarship funds from an academic college, special University scholarship programs such as the Bunton-Waller, or with SHC funds from other scholarship resources. Students entering through the sophomore or junior gate do not receive Academic Excellence Scholarships, although, like other Schreyer Scholars, they are eligible for support for study and research abroad and other student awards.

About \$4 million from the SHC and other general funds budgets is dedicated to Academic Excellence Scholarships. These funds come from central administration, from scholarship funds provided by Barnes & Noble, and from licensing agreements yielding revenue from the use of Penn State images. In addition, revenue from endowments and other income sources provides an additional \$1.5 million in scholarship aid.

The college's total General Funds operating budget in 2009-10 was around \$1.9 million, including around \$90,000 in fees received from application and thesis processing fees. To augment the General Funds operating budget, endowment income, which is funded from the Schreyer gift and other endowed gifts, provides around \$750,000 in need-based and merit scholarships; more than \$325,000 in student awards, including the global travel grants, internships, and research awards; and about \$250,000 in support of specific programs. This funding, derived from various endowments, supports recruitment, student programming and career development initiatives.

The overarching mission of the Schreyer Honors College is "to achieve academic excellence with integrity, build a global perspective, and create opportunities for leadership and civic engagement." The vision of the college is "to educate men and women who will have an important and ethical influence in the world, affecting academic, professional, civic, social, and business outcomes and to improve educational practice and to be recognized as a leading force in honors education nationwide." The Core Council recognizes the importance of an honors college to the quality of education at Penn State, and makes some suggestions and recommendations below for further improvement.

## **Recommendations**

- 1. Assessing Overall Performance.** The Schreyer Honors College clearly attracts very talented students and sends a high proportion of its graduating Scholars to graduate and professional schools. Each honors college across the nation is somewhat different, however, in its organization and operations and, as a result, little reliable benchmarking data are available. Our strongest competitors for top students are not necessarily other honors colleges but rather high quality institutions, and these institutions differ by field. In engineering, for example, they are institutions like Georgia Tech, MIT, and Purdue, while in the arts and sciences the competition is much broader and would include prestigious liberal arts colleges.

Our Core Council discussions expressed some concern that the very brightest students driven by their academic pursuits, the single-mindedly academically focused students (SMAFS), may be disadvantaged in the SHC selection process because they might not be as “well rounded” as some other students. In your meeting with UPARCC, you indicated that these SMAFS’s are welcome in the SHC, but went on to discuss admission procedures that give significant weight to other factors than grades and test scores. We do not argue that the SHC be comprised of a majority of SMAFS’s, but that they should be a significant part of the College even though they might eschew some volunteer work for time in their labs and libraries.

**The Core Council recommends that the SHC develop additional measures of success and then benchmark them, not necessarily honors-college-to-honors-college, but program-to-program and outcome-to-outcome.** We suggest that some of the benchmarking of outcomes be done against universities known for their academic quality, for example, Harvard, MIT, and Chicago. For example, what proportion of graduates goes on to graduate studies? What proportions go to professional schools? What percent of graduates win significant national awards, such as NSF fellowships and other honors? **The Core Council further recommends that the admission process for new students be reviewed to ensure that prospective students with exceptionally high scores, grades, and evidence of independent research accomplishments are not unduly disadvantaged in the selection process by the absence of social contributions.**

2. **Student Aid.** Competition for top students is obviously fierce, and this is especially true for top minority students. The fixed-amount Academic Excellence Scholarship given across the board is not strategic in attracting students. Students who do not need aid get the same scholarship offer as those with great financial need. Thus, children of Penn State faculty and staff, some of whom have no financial need (and are already getting the tuition discount), and out-of-state students from working class families are both offered a \$3,500 AES. Moreover, until significantly more money is raised, the requirement that the across-the-board excellence scholarship be given limits the number of students who can be admitted to the SHC freshman class.

The Schreyer Endowment agreement specifies both that all members of the class receive the AES, and that the minimum size of the entering class should be at least 300 students. Given these constraints, it is not surprising that the student body of the SHC has a higher proportion of in-state students (80%) than the University Park undergraduate student body as a whole. It is also not surprising that we are not competitive for many top minority students who typically receive large scholarship offers at prestigious colleges and universities.

We know that you are well aware of these problems, and have worked to develop additional funding sources and to use the non-academic excellence funds strategically. The \$100 million target in the current *For The Future* campaign for honors education is a worthy campaign goal. If all were targeted to scholarships, that target would provide another \$4.5 million annually that could be deployed to make freshman offers more competitive.

**The Core Council recommends that the size of the entering class should be held to the 300 maximum until more funds are raised for scholarships. We further recommend that Honors fund raising should focus on scholarships that can be deployed to students with financial need, out-of-state students, and other categories that will promote the diversity of the SHC. The University should provide funds, or redirect existing SHC scholarship funds, to help the SHC leverage college, campus, and other scholarship funds for freshmen.** Currently, many colleges do not offer scholarships to entering freshmen because they feel that they can be more strategically deployed to continuing students. Some kind of incentive program offered from general scholarship funds might lead more colleges to cooperate in offering larger scholarships to potential SHC students. (For example, for selected needy, minority, or out-of-state applicants, if an academic college would add \$2,500 to an offer, the SHC might provide an additional \$1,000 and the University another \$1,000, hence more than doubling the offer for some of these students). If this is tried, there should be an assessment of the plan's success.

- 3. Promoting Graduate School.** Because the SHC students are among Penn State's brightest, we would expect to see a substantial number going to graduate school; however, graduate students and professional students are combined in the data on post-graduate plans (as they appear to be among most of our university peers), so any definitive data about the post-graduate career tracks of SHC students do not exist. The Core Council's concern is that the SHC may not be as welcoming to the single-mindedly academic students as it might be.

One way to facilitate graduate study, as well as raise the prestige of Penn State programs, is to have more of our students compete for National Science Foundation and other prestigious graduate fellowships. The Graduate School, in partnership with several of the academic colleges, is trying to increase the number of our seniors who compete successfully for these fellowships. The initiative has led to some early successes.

**The Core Council recommends that the SHC be more aggressive in its work with the Graduate School and academic colleges in promoting applications for graduate study and prestigious graduate fellowships. To that end, we recommend that the associate dean of SHC convene a committee of interested parties, including high level representation from the SHC and**

representatives from the Graduate School who are working on this issue, to develop an augmented plan that would leverage the SHC and its resources as part of a larger effort.

- 4. College Infrastructure.** The College currently shares a human resources representative with some offices in Old Main, has a 25 percent share of a financial officer in another unit. Therefore, some organizational economies already exist. However, the Core Council believes that there is room for further streamlining of the SHC's organizational structure. Its structure appears somewhat redundant of other central offices. In particular, the offices of college relations, student programs, and development seem to have overlapping responsibilities. The development and alumni office has four staff members, 2.5 funded by central D evelopment. We also wondered why the SHC has its own career services personnel (a senior staff and part of a staff assistant) when the University invests significantly in a career development center and when a very large proportion of the SHC graduates go on to higher educational opportunities. We also wondered whether the SHC needs its own IT unit to service a relatively small group of staff as well as its own international programming staff when the University supports the Office of Global Programs.

Fund raising is obviously very important to the College, but most of the SHC alumni are young and probably solicited through the Annual Giving office. A significant portion of the SHC fund raising should be, in our view, partnering and coordinating with colleges and campuses

In general, we believe that there could be a savings of resources by reorganizing and reducing staff. These funds might be redeployed to augment the scholarships the SHC can offer. **The Core Council recommends that you commission an independent audit of the organizational structure of the SHC with a goal to create greater efficiencies.** We believe that this can be done by reducing central-SHC duplication in student and alumni services while still focusing on the unique programs of the College. The Core Council looks forward to seeing a report on this audit by October 1, 2011.

- 5. Honors Courses and Honors Theses.** The Schreyer Honors College provides funds to the academic colleges to offer General Education honors courses. SHC provides a flat fee of \$4,500 per course with the expectation that the course has a minimum of ten students and contains 50 percent honors students. In your meeting with UPARCC, you acknowledged that the system has some challenges and indicated an openness to change. One challenge is that departments may offer honors courses for which they are not reimbursed because 50 percent of the enrollment is non-honors students. Further, direct course-by-course negotiations takes a lot of SHC and college staff time. And finally, the reimbursement rarely covers the cost of instruction.

**The Core Council recommends some rethinking of the process of funding honors sections.** In particular, we suggest you explore a “block grant” to colleges (and campuses) commensurate with the number of seats the unit is expected to produce for the year. There should be discussion between the SHC and the college (or campus) about desirable courses, but there should not be micro-management beyond that. Then, the units should be held accountable at the end of the year for the requisite number of honors course seats offered.

In spring 2011, 374 Schreyer Scholars graduated with honors; however 44 students did not graduate with honors because they failed to complete an honors thesis. They graduated, but not with honors, even though the SHC has invested significantly in them. We found this discouraging to say the least. However, we understand that the attrition of freshmen who start in the SHC has dropped to about 20 percent from a higher rate in the 1990s (including dismissal, the thesis requirement, and other causes). Attrition from those admitted through the Junior Gate is lower, about 14 percent. Your policy requiring students to submit a thesis proposal report a year in advance of their graduation appears to have ameliorated this problem somewhat. If students do not submit such a report, they will be dropped from the program, if they are first-year admits, they lose their Academic Excellence Scholarship.

**The Core Council recommends that you continue the existing practice of dropping students from the program and financial support if they fail to produce a thesis proposal report and, as needed, use other means of leverage to stem drop outs at the senior year.** For example, further thesis progress could be mandated before their final semester in order to receive the final semester of tuition support.

6. **Campus College SHC Scholars.** The nearly 80 Schreyer Scholars at the Commonwealth Campuses provide a unique set of challenges for the SHC. Because the number of scholars on the individual campuses is so small, few honors courses are offered, many of the Scholars feel somewhat isolated, and Honors advisers are often not available in students’ majors.

**The Core Council recommends that you convene a strategic working group, jointly charged by the vice president for Commonwealth Campuses, to develop plans for meeting more of the needs of campus honors students, given the realities and constraints of having SHC students on the Commonwealth Campuses.** The group should share best practices, encourage all eligible campuses to complete the honors-audit, and set enrollment targets for certain campuses that demonstrate capabilities for further honors education.

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Several ideas have already emerged and should be considered. To populate honors courses and share faculty resources, you could encourage increased use of technology to deliver courses across campuses (originating at both University Park and the Commonwealth Campuses) and work with chancellors to schedule these courses. Honors advisers could be shared across two or more campuses, in keeping with initiatives to consolidate infrastructure. Campuses in geographic proximity could bring Schreyer Scholars together to share in co-curricular events and programming in order to promote a sense of community and maximize resources.

In advance of their changing assignment to University Park, campus-based Schreyer Scholars (and gateway admits) should participate in SHC-hosted orientation and information programs designed to ease the transition and clarify expectations.

Please report back to the Core Council the actions that have been or will be taken in response to these recommendations by July 1, 2011.

Cc: Core Council