

DATE: 29 June 2011

FROM: Christian M. Brady

TO: Rodney A. Erickson

SUBJECT: Response to the Core Council Recommendations Regarding the Schreyer Honors College

This letter is the reply requested in your memo addressing the six recommendations made by the Core Council. We are very grateful for the work of the University Park Academic Review Coordinating Committee (UPARCC) and the Core Council in assessing the programs and operations of the Schreyer Honors College (SHC).

In addition to simply stating what action is or will be taken in response to the six recommendations, the following response will also include additional information about the SHC, its mission, and operation. We feel that, in some instances, the Committee and Council may not have a complete or clear picture of the unique position and mission of the SHC. That such confusion is present makes it clear that, in addition to the specific recommendations of the Council, we also need to work harder to ensure that our own community better understands the SHC and its role within Penn State.

Responses

1a) (Responding in opposite order of the recommendations given in #1 in order to begin with admissions and conclude with outcomes and assessment.)

The Core Council further recommends that the admissions 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.

Each year the SHC selection team reviews our entire process, from the questions asked to the profiles of the students admitted and the high schools represented. This review process engages the faculty who review the applications as well as staff within the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and our colleagues in the academic colleges at University Park. We will thus continue in this manner while paying particular attention to the concerns expressed by the Committee and the Council. That having been said, a few words about the SHC selection process and suggestions for how Penn State as a whole can better recruit "SMAFS" ("Single Minded Academically Focused Students") is appropriate.

When the SHC was founded as a college in 1997 by the generous gift of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Schreyer, the mission of the college was crafted to reflect the desire to

recruit and develop well-rounded students. The mission is to “achieve academic excellence with integrity, build a global perspective, and create opportunities for leadership and civic engagement.” Furthermore, our vision states that the college will “educate men and women who will have an important and ethical influence in the world, affecting academic, professional, civic, social, and business outcomes.”

Each incoming first-year class is to be at or near 300 students and these students are selected in accordance with the mission. The greatest emphasis in our selection process, which includes all applications being read by at least two faculty members (over 120 faculty members participate in this process each year), is placed upon the transcript. The student’s academic performance is of primary import. The next greatest weight is placed upon the three essays that the students are required to answer. These give us a sense of the student’s vision of the world and how they hope to contribute in a positive way, both in college and beyond. In this way we moved from over 2,900 applications this year to offers to 750 students and a yield of 301 students who will matriculate in fall 2011.

While these students clearly have broad interests, their academic credentials are impeccable. With the vast majority of our applicant pool having a high-school GPA weighted at well over 4.0, the criteria for selection, guided as always by our mission and vision, has to be holistic in nature. While it may seem to some that the “SMAFS” are at a disadvantage in this process, such is not the case since each student admitted to the SHC are, regardless of whatever other interests they may possess, first and foremost, focused upon their academics. But again, we can only enroll 300 first-year students.

With an incoming first-year class at University Park campus alone numbering over 7,000 students, the SHC is not capable of and cannot be expected to recruit all of the very top students that we hope to have enrolled at Penn State. The SHC has worked very diligently, however, in concert with Undergraduate Admissions and our colleagues in the other academic colleges, to aid them in recruitment. We have found, for example, that of those students who apply to the SHC but are not admitted to the honors college, historically, around 40% of those students ultimately enroll at Penn State. Furthermore, we work with those colleges that offer scholarships to incoming first-year Scholars so that the student will receive a single letter, signed by the deans of both colleges (for example, Engineering and the SHC) welcoming them and offering their full scholarship package. Over the last five years we have seen a slight increase in our ability to recruit the absolute best academic students as a result of such collaboration. The competition for such students is, of course, extremely difficult and, as will be discussed below, we need to leverage all of the scholarship opportunities for these students since they are often receiving full financial aid packages from such schools as Princeton and Cornell. (Further comments about how our peer institutions recruit and admit students are below.)

We leverage, then, our connection with the academic colleges and the admissions office in order to reach as many students as possible and recruit the best class of

300 students. The challenge is that many of the academic colleges seem to assume that it is *solely* the responsibility of the SHC to recruit the top students. While we will continue to work with the colleges' admissions officers, we hope that each academic college will make it their priority to recruit the highest performing students based upon the criteria that their units value most.

1b) The Core Council recommends that the SHC develop additional measure 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 on to professional schools? What percent of graduates win significant national awards, such as NSF fellowships and other honors?

As the Council noted, since every honors program is quite distinct, each reflecting the larger institution of which they are a part, establishing benchmarks is quite difficult. The suggestion that we benchmark outcomes with individual programs, rather than institutions, as a whole is an excellent one and will be followed up. We already solicit and maintain data on our students' outcomes so such comparisons can be easily made, so long as the other institutions track the same data.

A quick review of the websites of the universities suggested for benchmarking (certainly not an exhaustive list) resulted in the following report. It is worth noting that while we have the data on SHC graduates broken out by professional *and* graduate school (see Recommendation 3 below) most universities do not make this data available, rather they simply report a combined figure for graduate and professional school.

		GRADUATING CLASS		
INSTITUTION		2010	2009	2008
Chicago	work force	36.00%	38.00%	43.00%
	grad/prof school	23.00%	19.00%	18.00%
MIT	work force	49.00%	37.00%	45.00%
	grad/prof school	40.00%	47.00%	42.00%
Harvard	work force	67.00%	60.00%	NA
	grad/prof school	23.00%	21.00%	NA

PSU/SHC	work force	40.00%	34.00%	37.00%
	grad/prof school	42.00%	40.00%	35.00%

Based on this comparison, the Schreyer Honors College successfully competes with MIT in graduate and professional school placement, and outperforms both Chicago and Harvard on these measures.

In further comparisons with these schools and related to the first recommendation considered, it should be noted that they each use a “holistic” review process. For example, the **University of Chicago** states on its website that

- There is no minimum GPA or test score.
- No course load is mandatory, but a standard college prep program is recommended.
- Every high school is different. Regional counselors with specific knowledge of their territory read all applications first.
- Applications are reviewed multiple times and presented to an admissions committee.
- There is no one quality that can determine the strength of an application.

MIT and Harvard express similar expectations of applicants.

MIT

We are looking for students who fall in line with MIT's educational philosophy - students who want to invent, enact change, and better society. We want students who have demonstrated initiative and dedication, risk-taking and resiliency as well as strong interpersonal skills. Due to the self-selective nature of our applicant pool, MIT tends to see a large number of applicants with very strong academic qualifications.

Harvard

There is no formula for gaining admission to Harvard. Academic accomplishment in high school is important, but the Admissions Committee also considers many other criteria, such as community involvement, leadership and distinction in extracurricular activities, and work experience. Each case is different. Harvard seeks to enroll well-rounded students as well as a well-rounded first-year class.

It is worth noting that in our initial, admittedly brief, survey we could not find any data that indicated what percentage of any institution’s class wins fellowships, nor could we find, in the last four years, any discussion of that topic on the National Association of Fellowship Advisors (NAFA) listserv. Schools are not necessarily notified by the awarding agency, thus there may be winners that have not been identified by the institution.

While comparing percentages of graduates who receive prestigious awards may not be possible, over the next year we will create a set of criteria and establish a routine comparison with an established list of peers.

2) 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.

This recommendation is in line with the current activities and goals of the SHC. The current capital campaign, *For the Future: The Campaign for Penn State Students*, includes a \$100M goal for “Enhancing Honors Education.” The SHC is responsible for \$54M of that goal and our development staff is working closely with their colleagues in the other academic colleges who are responsible for the remaining \$46M. Of that total, 90% is dedicated for scholarship funds. To provide further context, the table below shows the EHE fundraising goals and current totals of the other UP units. While the SHC is over 46% of the way towards our goal of \$54M, helping the other units achieve their goals is a significant challenge that remains before us.

University Park Unit	EHE Goal	Total raised to date	% achieved
Ag Sciences	\$2,000,000	\$562,500	28
Arts & Architecture	\$750,000	\$1,000,000	133
Communications	\$1,000,000	\$152,500	15
EMS	\$1,750,000	\$353,898	15
Eberly Science	\$6,000,000	\$967,787	16
Education	\$1,000,000	\$363,833	36
Engineering	\$10,000,000	\$2,900,484	29
Health & Human Development	\$2,500,000	\$562,020	22
IST	\$500,000	408,334	82
Liberal Arts	\$6,000,000	\$5,398,404	90
Schreyer Honors College	\$54,000,000	\$47,320,801	88
Smeal Business	\$9,250,000	\$1,386,328	15

As noted earlier, the SHC routinely collaborates with other academic colleges to package scholarship awards to new Schreyer Scholars. The following colleges currently provide a match to the SHC’s Academic Excellence Scholarship (AES), or some scholarship funds, to entering freshmen Scholars: HHD, Agricultural Sciences, Education, EMS, and IST. The College of Engineering also provides numerous scholarships to entering students, many of whom are new Schreyer Scholars. Offer

letters sent from the Honors College notify new freshmen of both the AES and any academic college award, and are co-signed by the Dean of the Honors College and the Dean of the awarding academic college.

We have also worked diligently to diversify the scholar population. We have a few scholarship funds available to help us attract underrepresented populations and we work together with the academic college multicultural coordinators in identifying highly qualified applicants. This is an extremely competitive market, with every top university in the country recruiting high-achieving diversity candidates. We have offered as much as \$10,000/year to deserving minority candidates, only to see them turn it down to attend other top universities. We will, however, continue to increase our scholarship funds and work with our colleagues to support our students and recruit a strong and diverse student body.

3) 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.

While we have not worked directly with the Graduate School in the past, something that we will do in the future, we do work very closely with the University Fellowships Office and our honors faculty advisers to promote and prepare our students for post-graduate fellowships. (We have made inquiries in the Graduate School about the partnerships being developed with the other colleges described in the Council's recommendation, but no one knew of any specific program.) The SHC involvement with the UFO exceeds any other unit and we concur with the report that a collaborative, campus-wide effort is imperative to raise awareness of these opportunities not only to Scholars, but to the faculty who work most closely with them in a research environment.

For example, in 2009, the SHC Associate Dean (Dr. Judy Ozment), Director of University Fellowships (Ruth Mendum), and SHC Career Development Coordinator (Lisa Kerchinski) met with the academic units across the university. The Associate Dean and all Scholar advisers were invited to attend each session. The discussions and the materials provided were tailored to suit the specific academic units. The need for partnership and referrals was emphasized as students typically will not seek out these opportunities on their own, but will investigate them if they are encouraged to do so by faculty or staff who recognizes their potential.

One concern mentioned in the Council's report is that the SHC may not be as welcoming to SMAFS and that this may hinder our fellowship outcomes. Fellowships

that are discipline specific, such as National Science Foundation (NSF) grants, are best fostered within the academic discipline, thus our initiative of 2009.

Yet most criteria for fellowships that are often seen as most prestigious, such as the Rhodes and Marshall, all include criteria beyond outstanding academics and research. Historically, Penn State has not been very successful in this arena. There have only been two Rhodes Scholars in the history of Penn State, both were Schreyer Scholars, and this is a fact that we are working diligently with the UFO to rectify.

It is worth noting that many of our students come to Penn State with a very modest yet respectable ambition: to become gainfully employed. While the percentage of Schreyer Scholars who go on to professional or graduate school is as high or higher than Harvard, Chicago, and MIT, many of our students reasonably view their education as key to becoming successful in their chosen career. We have a program, again in conjunction with the UFO and honors advisers, to encourage our students to think more broadly about their future to include graduate school and research fellowships. At the same time, we should respect and support those who feel it is important to begin their careers.

4) 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.

We have already met with Bob Fantaske from university Human Resources. He will begin the audit later this summer, after completing a similar review of another university unit. However, given the Committee and Council comments, a few words about our organization size and structure are appropriate since our unique position within the university often leads to such questions.

Any honors program or college exists only through collaboration with the rest of the university. Faculty tenured in various departments and colleges offer honors courses, many of whom also advise honors students. Furthermore, Scholar alumni and donors are all also connected to other academic colleges across the university. Consequently, the first instruction that *every* SHC employee receives is to reach out to their counterpart on campus, not only to collaborate but also to ensure that we are not duplicating work and services already offered elsewhere in the university. At the same time, an honors college experience is one that provides additional attention and opportunities that other students do not receive. In the same way that Scholars have honors courses available to them that are smaller in size and more challenging in work, they also receive greater attention in their life outside the classroom. From honors housing and SHC-sponsored student programming to assistance in developing career goals and preparing for graduate school, the

Schreyer Honors College has established an environment for students to thrive. While many of our staff has titles identical to those in other units, their role is complementary and additive.

This is particularly true with regards to our career development coordinator. The university's Career Services office is a wonderful resource, but as stated in its own audit, they are simply unable to manage the demand that 39,000 undergraduates place upon them. That is why every academic college at University Park provides career resources for their students. Our career development coordinator has met with every career unit on campus and makes referrals to each unit including our central services, depending upon the major and needs of the Scholar. We have also partnered with the university's Career Services office to promote various initiatives to coordinate efforts across the PSU career services units. Thus providing specialized service to Scholars has led to a higher level of career services being available to all students across University Park, not just Scholars.

Career Services has described our partnership as "the perfect collaboration" to help students get the most from all the resources. They find the networking and encouragement to diversify contacts across campus to be efficient and effective. The SHC "does it better than anybody" regarding partnership, referrals, and maximizing student resources. It is also worth noting that some of the Council's recommendations – promoting graduate fellowships and post-graduate study – are responsibilities that would fall under our Career Development Coordinator. The central Career Services Office is clearly not staffed to serve this purpose.

As noted earlier, Enhancing Honors Education is a featured objective of the university's capital campaign with a goal of \$100M. The central office of Development and Alumni Relations largely funds the development staff that is currently in the SHC (the college only funds 1.5 FTE) and its structure is intended to coordinate, collaborate, and support one another. At the conclusion of this campaign, it is expected that the size of our development staff will be reduced.

Finally, the Council questioned why we would need our own IT staff. Our IT staff coordinate and leverage the various services provided by the university. They also, however, develop and maintain an entirely separate application process for the selection of Scholars, another program for the selection of students in the Presidential Leadership Academy (PLA), and a web-based advising and counseling program (the Student Record System, SRS) for use by over 370 faculty advisers to track our 1,800 students. This is in addition to the usual support roles for the SHC and PLA staff and maintenance of various online resources such as the college website, blogs, and podcasts. It should be noted that the current size of our IT staff is the result of an IT audit that was performed in 2008. That report recommended that our staff be increased to two FTE and that recommendation was then acted upon.

(The Council also questions the presence of our own international programming staff member. We do not have a separate staff member for this duty. Our director of

selection also oversees managing those international programs that we fund and the allocation of Schreyer Ambassador Travel grants. It is a small portion of his time.)

5) 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.

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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.

The funding of courses does indeed remain a problem, particularly in these budgetary times. We have already begun to explore other possibilities, including a block grant, which will be implemented on a trial basis this coming year. We do not fund honors courses on campuses other than University Park.

Our increased discipline in monitoring students’ progress and dismissing those who have not made appropriate progress is making an impact. Students seem to be more vigilant about appropriate planning for their thesis and submitting forms in a timely fashion. Our new SRS which goes online this August should help us considerably in this effort.

6) 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.

Such a group has existed for over ten years. The Honors Consortium meets every semester and includes the directors of the honors programs at each campus and is led by the dean of the SHC. The vice president for Commonwealth Campuses has been invited to meet with the group each semester, but has been unable to do so in the last year. I have already spoken with Dr. Hanes, and we are planning to meet this summer to discuss honors at the campuses and how their programs can be supported. The Honors Consortium has proved over the years to be an excellent resource for all involved and an ideal way to share ideas and concerns. It certainly will be continued.