

The College of New Jersey
Task Force on Honors and Scholars
Final Report
November, 2004

Charge to the Taskforce

In September, 2003, President R. Barbara Gitenstein created an Honors and Scholars Task Force at The College of New Jersey and charged it with reviewing the range of academic honors opportunities at the College. This was to include a review of the current Honors Program, a program that was established in 1978. In addition, the task force was charged with considering the array of departmental/programmatic honors programs at the college, the success of TCNJ students in achieving nationally competitive scholarships and fellowships, as well as institutional memberships in national and international societies, including Phi Beta Kappa. The final task force report was to include recommendations regarding these programs and any other pertinent programs and issues that would assure that honors opportunities for TCNJ students are the most appropriate and challenging for the current student body.

Overall Goals

In light of the extraordinary achievements of its entering students, the overarching goal of the Task Force on Honors and Scholars is to move The College of New Jersey from an institution that acknowledges and welcomes talented students to one that provides a multiplicity of opportunities that can be considered as honors experiences that enable students to grow intellectually, artistically, and professionally throughout their years at TCNJ and beyond. The College of New Jersey thus seeks to create and support a culture where seeking academic distinction is the norm. In light of that purpose, the goals that the Honors and Scholars Task Force identified were to:

- Think creatively about multiple options for TCNJ students to achieve academic distinction across their college career.
- Review the current Honors Program and recommend direction for its future development.
- Collect data on the range of honors opportunities and set realistic benchmarks for progressive improvement in increasing and enhancing honors opportunities.
- Identify means to increase the number of students receiving prestigious fellowships and other external awards.

In order to accomplish these goals the following means were selected:

- Make recommendations regarding the current Honors Program, reviewing and revising the program so that it is consonant with the transformed curriculum.

- Review departmental options for earning honors via a systematic survey to rationalize structure, identify common elements, and align outcomes and evaluation techniques.
- Review scholarships, fellowships and awards available to students and examine the institutional structures that support these awards.
- Review academic distinctions and honors at peer and aspirant institutions to evaluate principles for TCNJ regarding appropriate academic challenges.
- Coordinate the recommendations generated by this task force with those of previous task forces, particularly those on cross-cultural competence, first year experience, and advisement.

Method of Work

Two subcommittees were formed to collect information and to bring recommendations to the larger group: one on collegewide and departmental honors; the other on scholarships, fellowships, and awards. The first affirmed the importance of maintaining both college and departmental honors, but recommended significant revisions and additional options in light of curricular transformation and new directions. The second emphasized the importance of creating a culture of honors aspirations early in the college career, and the need to heighten student awareness of opportunities that are available—both the awards and fellowships themselves as well as the achievements that make students stronger candidates for such awards. Each subcommittee conducted in-depth discussions, collected data and created reports, which formed the basis for this document. In addition, a retrospective analysis of the characteristics and achievements of TCNJ previous honors students, completed by Brian Coar under the supervision of Raymond Barclay, informed this report. While it is not appropriate to include all of this material here, the Task Force has attached a brief summary of the work of the subcommittee on collegewide and departmental honors as Appendix A.

Also, in order to differentiate between current practice and proposed changes in how TCNJ implements an honors culture, the Task Force offers the following clarification of terminology used in this report:

- Collegewide Honors Opportunities = a wide array of courses and other academic experiences comprising opportunities for student participation. It is anticipated that a student who takes a specified number and configuration of these opportunities will graduate with Collegewide Honors. Students who take a smaller number of these opportunities will have those experiences noted on their transcripts but will not be designated as graduating with Collegewide Honors.
- College Honors Program = one of the array of Collegewide Honors Opportunities. It consists of designated honors courses taken as part of a clearly structured program. The College Honors Program described in this report represents a redesign of TCNJ's current Honors Program.

Recommendations Adopted by the Honors and Scholars Task Force

I. General Principles

Based upon the review by the subcommittees and the discussion and consensus of the Task Force, the following principles were adopted:

- Students should be able to engage in honors opportunities at multiple points during their academic careers and through multiple means (see “Elements of a Redesigned Honors Program” on p. 8).
- There should be an increase in the variety and availability of honors opportunities at The College of New Jersey.
- There should be an increase in the number and variety of external fellowships and awards earned by TCNJ students.
- The designation, “honors student,” should no longer be based upon admission criteria, but rather upon a student’s achievements at TCNJ.
- There should be a multiplicity of “Collegewide Honors Opportunities,” one of which is a College Honors Program.
- Collegewide Honors Opportunities should focus on interdisciplinary or other hallmark learning experiences such as community-engaged learning.
- Departmental and programmatic honors programs should continue but be better integrated with other honors opportunities.
- TCNJ should strive to continuously improve the array of honors opportunities and should benchmark its progress in comparison to peer and aspirant institutions.

II. Specific Recommendations: Multiple Honors Opportunities at TCNJ

These recommendations are intended to facilitate the creation of a culture at The College of New Jersey where earning honors and distinctions becomes the shared expectation. An array of opportunities will provide TCNJ students who seek intellectual growth, challenge, and achievement even beyond the scope of the transformed curriculum with options that may be earned at varying points in the college career. These include, but are not limited to: earning Latin honors (magna, summa, cum laude), invitation(s) to honor societies, departmental honors, and/or by participating in collegewide honors opportunities.

A. Collegewide Honors Opportunities

The current Honors Program has won respect and recognition at TCNJ and in the wider academic community, and it has served TCNJ students admirably for many years. However, as both TCNJ's curriculum and its student profile have changed, the nature of collegewide honors opportunities also should change. It is recommended that TCNJ's Honors Program becomes one of an array of Collegewide Honors Opportunities that offer experiences from which TCNJ students can choose. Such opportunities would enhance the breadth and depth of TCNJ students' education; most of those opportunities would be of limited duration:

- *A structured College Honors Program consisting of five intensive, interdisciplinary courses to which students may apply after the first semester of their first year.* The goal of the program is to foster an intellectual community of students and faculty that goes beyond the achievements possible even in the transformed curriculum. While the criteria for and distribution of courses would be determined by the Honors Advisory Council in collaboration with other appropriate individuals and groups, the Task Force recommends that courses identified for the College Honors Program meet specified criteria and expectations.
- *Full semester learning community experiences, consisting of interconnected courses and experiences and built around a thoughtful and involving theme.* TCNJ already has offered programs such as these in "Gender, Nation, and Democracy" and the "American Empire." Although existing courses would be drawn from across disciplines, there could also be courses unique to a particularly learning community. At least one of the courses would be a seminar or other research-intensive activity. All such communities would be structured so that in some way (outside speakers, symposia, exhibitions, etc.) the learning community would give something back to the broader campus community.
- *Collegewide Honors Opportunities based upon leadership, social activism, or community-engaged learning which would have a significant academic and/or research component.*
- *Off-campus experiences including time spent in another city (e.g., Washington, D.C. or New York), another country, or another field experience linked to a Collegewide Honors Opportunity.*
- *Individually designed majors and/or Interdisciplinary Option B for Liberal Learning for students.*

Successful completion of a specified number of Collegewide Honors Opportunities (perhaps, 5) would result in awarding appropriate recognition. Each

individual opportunity would be recorded on the student's transcript; and students would not be limited in the number of Collegewide Honors Opportunities they could take. Criteria and method of selection for designation of a program, course, or experience as a Collegewide Honors Opportunity would rest with the Honors Advisory Council, working in concert with appropriate governance bodies and administrators.

B. Departmental Honors

- All programs should be encouraged to develop departmental honors opportunities for their majors that deepen and focus their knowledge of their field.
- Clear and consistent guidelines should be developed to define the requirements of departmental honors.
- In addition to regular departmental honors, departments could create special honors opportunities with a tightly focused theme that pulls together courses not usually offered at the same time and/or adds special topics courses.
- Completion of departmental honors courses could, in principle, be counted towards Collegewide Honors, with specifics to be determined.

C. Honors Societies

The College already has many discipline-based honor societies as well as collegewide ones, such as Phi Kappa Phi. In addition, it recently submitted an application for a Phi Beta Kappa chapter. The College should take advantage of these societies to promote an honors culture across the institution by encouraging and supporting their sponsoring of lectures, academic and cultural events, and service opportunities both for the societies and for the broader campus community.

III. Specific Recommendations: Scholarships, Fellowships and Awards

These recommendations focus on the need to increase significantly the number of TCNJ students competing for and receiving highly competitive external scholarships, fellowships, and awards by identifying this as a campus goal and providing experiences and support for its attainment. Reaching the next level will require changing the campus culture, providing a better sense of common purpose, better training for faculty, and additional staff support to guide qualified students through the rigorous and time-consuming process of applying for competitive awards.

- Mentoring TCNJ students to prepare them to compete successfully for competitive scholarships, fellowships, and awards should begin at recruitment and continue through their college careers.
- A process should be developed (e.g., through the First Seminar Program and with departments) to prepare selected faculty in attracting, identifying, coaching, mentoring, and advising our ablest students to compete for national fellowships, scholarships, and awards. The college should consider engaging the services of a consultant from an organization such as the National Association of Fellowship Advisors in order to design and facilitate the faculty retreat.
- A “mentoring toolkit” should be developed for deans, chairpersons, and faculty and made available on the TCNJ website dedicated to honors and awards for all faculty, students, and prospective students to consult.
- Successful fellowship mentoring must broadly involve TCNJ faculty whose contributions are appropriately recognized.

A Suggested Structure for Implementing the Recommendations

An Office of Honors, Scholars, and Awards should be created to assume leadership and work collaboratively with schools and other internal units to promote, coordinate, and assess the efficacy of honors opportunities at TCNJ. A full-time director, reporting to the Provost’s office, would be responsible for overall design and coordination of recruitment, development, implementation, and evaluation of various honors opportunities. Specific duties would also include serving as liaison with collegewide honor societies, including Phi Beta Kappa, should a chapter be awarded, and Phi Kappa Phi as well as individual honor societies and working cooperatively with the deans and faculty and with the Directors of Liberal Learning, Undergraduate Global Programs, and Civic Leadership Development. This office would also be responsible for managing related activities, including the Annual Celebration of Student Achievement and the publication of the *TCNJ Journal of Student Scholarship*. Two faculty on administrative assignment within load would work with the Office, one for honors opportunities and the other for scholarships and awards,

Although many honors opportunities would need to be approved by deans and school curriculum committees, the Honors Advisory Council would participate in selecting and approving the activities that would be offered in a given academic year. Among the major roles of a redesigned Honors Advisory Council would be: 1) develop and monitor guidelines for various honors opportunities; 2) review and recommend appropriate honors opportunities; 3) encourage and promote new, challenging, and creative approaches to the offering of honors opportunities.

Action Items

1. Create, search, and fill leadership position in Office of Honors, Scholars, and Awards.
2. Provide two faculty alternate assignments within load on a rotating three-year term basis to work with the Director and faculty colleagues to implement, enhance, and assess the work of the Office.
3. Revise the charge and membership of the Honors Advisory Council to reflect the new nature and structure of all honors opportunities at TCNJ.

Next Step

The Task Force on Honors and Scholars will distribute its final report following its transmission to President Gitenstein and, subsequently, invite the campus community to participate in an open forum discussion.

Members of the Task Force on Honors and Scholars

Chair: Morton Winston, Professor of Philosophy

Convenor: Suzanne Pasch, Vice Provost

Chair, Subcommittee on Scholarships, Fellowships, and Awards: Rajib Sanyal, Professor and Division Head, School of Business

Chair, Subcommittee on General Honors and Department Honors: Sharon Sherman, Professor and Chair of Elementary and Early Childhood Education

William Ball, Associate Professor and Chair of Political Science

Jesse Bucher, Senior (major: history)

Chung Sum (Fanky) Chak, Assistant Professor of Art

Nancy Freudenthal, Executive Assistant to the Vice Provost

Christine Halloran, Assistant Director for Merit Scholars, Admissions

Lee Harrod, Professor of English and Coordinator of Honors Program

W. Steven Klug, Professor of Biology

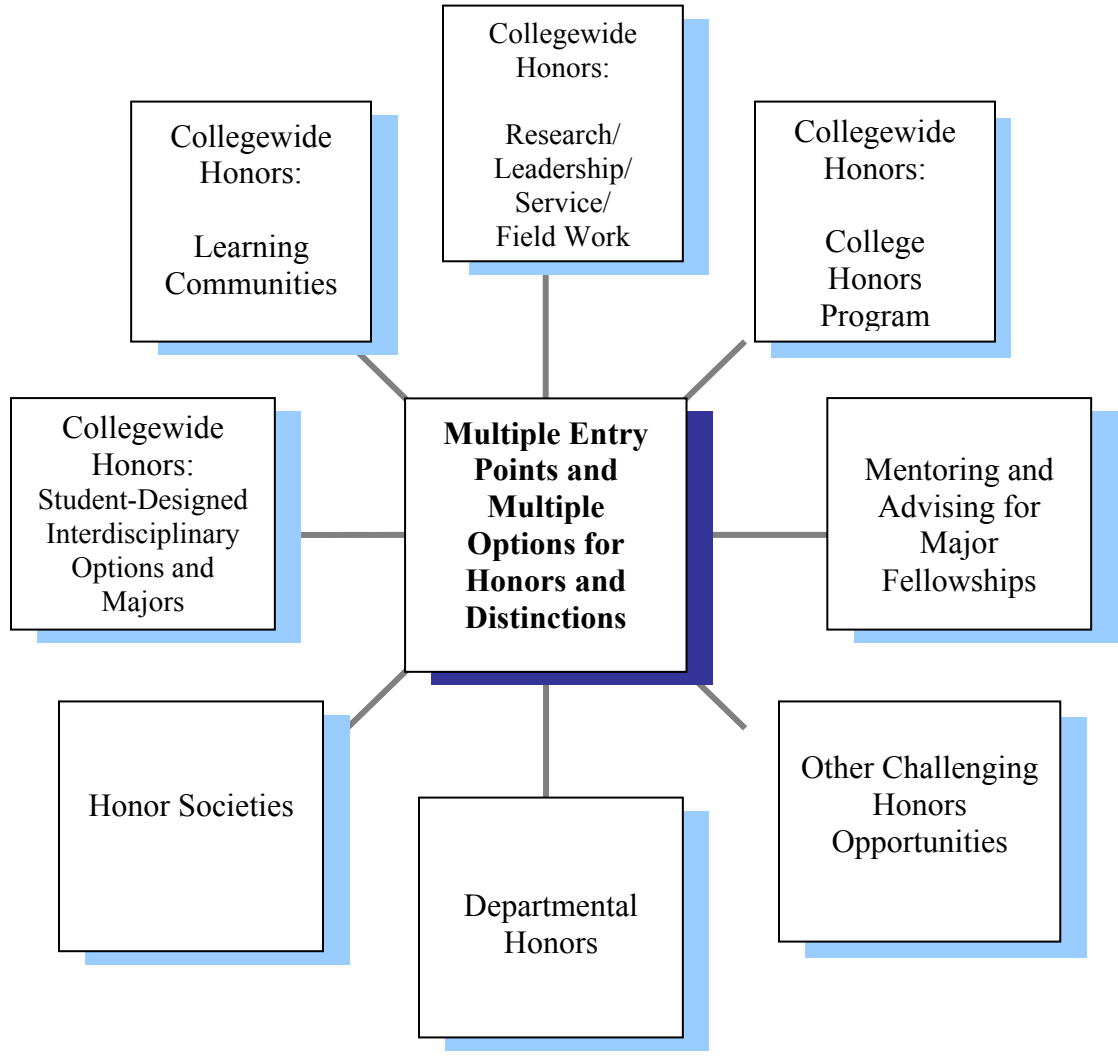
Jean Lutkenhouse, Junior (honors program; majors: management, communication studies)

Magda Manetas, Assistant Dean of Student Life

Nik Mische, Managing Assistant Director of Undergraduate Global Programs

Ceil O'Callaghan, Director of Career Services

Elements of a Redesigned Honors Program



Appendix A: Expectations of Honors-Level Courses

The goal of the Collegewide Honors Program is to foster an intellectual community of students and faculty that transcends even achievements possible in the newly transformed curriculum. The Subcommittee on General and Departmental Honors engaged in lengthy discussions of whether or not to retain a revised College Honors Program and, if so, what criteria such a redesigned program would meet. The Subcommittee recommends that redesigned honors courses meet the following expectations:

- In Honors courses, a higher intellectual standard must be established and maintained and greater academic rigor must be demonstrated.
- In Honors courses, specific intellectual competencies must be established and met, with the ultimate goal of becoming conversant in the disciplinary or interdisciplinary topic(s) of each course.
- In Honors courses, mechanisms for demonstrating competency should include written and oral presentations of student research and rigorous examinations. In each course there will be substantial writing, analysis and problem solving, and content coverage.
- In Honors courses, a challenging capstone experience will be established where competencies will be assessed.
- In Honors courses, an outcomes assessment sheet will be created, where the performance of each student will be evaluated. The results of each assessment will become a part of the student's Honors Portfolio established during his/her participation in College-wide program.