

## A Community of Scholars: Engaging First-Year Students

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Overview of The Honors College

The Honors College is at the heart of the mission and strategic goals of the University of Arizona. Now in its 45<sup>th</sup> year, The Honors College is a university-wide academic college that serves nearly 4,000 high ability undergraduates at The University of Arizona. A strong and thriving Honors College is vital to the recruitment, retention and graduation of talented students at the UA. The College recruits high ability students to the University and plays an active role in building a more academically robust and diverse student body. Once students enroll at the UA, The Honors College creates a culture that supports academic excellence, interdisciplinary interests, and lifelong success. The College challenges students to set high expectations for their academic engagement and provides support so that students can reach their educational and career goals. The Honors College is central to creating a challenging academic atmosphere for non-Honors undergraduates. As all Honors students are seamlessly integrated into all colleges and programs on campus, the campus infused with greater academic stimulation enhancing the experience for all students.

*The mission of the Honors College is to foster an enduring spirit of inquiry and discovery so that artistically and academically talented students develop the courage to address uncommon challenges and the commitment to promote social responsibility throughout their lives.*

The vision of The Honors College is to be a premier Honors College within the American Association of Universities (AAU).

The values guiding the mission and vision of The Honors College are:

- **Excellence** in scholarship, learning, teaching, research and service
- **Responsibility** for selves and our communities
- Identifying and nurturing **talent**
- **Interdisciplinary** perspectives
- Building **community** and connections
- **Diversity** of intelligences, life experiences, values and perspectives

Honors is the third largest college on campus following Social and Behavioral Sciences and the Eller College of Management, yet The Honors College occupies a unique niche in that all of our students are members of at least one other college. One in four Honors students is pursuing a double major or seeking two baccalaureate degrees.

Honors students achieve high levels of academic success during their undergraduate years and beyond. Ninety-three percent of Honors students enroll for a second year at the UA compared to 77 percent of non-Honors students. In prior years when the number of incoming Honors freshman approached 1,000, the retention rate was 90 percent. Thirty-five percent of incoming freshmen do not meet the standards for maintaining their Honors status in their first year. With assistance from Honors advisors only two percent do not regain their good standing.

An important challenge faced by The Honors College is building community across 800 to 1,000 incoming freshmen representing 13 academic colleges and living off campus and in every hall on campus. No single event or venue can accommodate everyone. Building a sense of community and belonging becomes more difficult as the number of incoming students increases.

## Abstract

To assist in meeting UA enrollment goals in a challenging time, The Honors College admitted 860 more freshmen in 2009 than in 2008. If the number of students who enroll is similar to past years, this increase in admissions will yield an additional 345 Honors students increasing the first-year cohort by 50 percent. The UA faces a serious challenge in retaining these talented students if they do not to develop a sense of belonging. Research has shown that the first year is the most critical to retention, and that community building is the single most important element in a successful first year.

The Honors College seeks funds for the Passport to Success program to first-year students. This program provides an in-depth orientation, strategies for success in and out of the classroom, and a sense of responsibility for social engagement and leadership. Events will provide all incoming Honors students with a strong foundation. The Paladins Success course provides a small group context for students who are likely to experience a difficult transition to the UA (first generation, rural, small school, and younger than average students). Interactions with faculty in small groups will occur at the Forum Lunches, Common Reading events, field trips, cultural excursions and mentoring. All UA students will be able to attend the movie series.

## Statement of the Proposal

The Honors College offers students numerous opportunities to participate in programs and activities that build community, provide a sense of belonging, and bring students, faculty, staff and alumni together. Over the last two years, The Honors College has evaluated the effectiveness of several programs and found that student-faculty interaction, intellectual interactions, and early engagement are the keys to students' involvement and success. The Honors College admitted more students in 2009 in order to assist in meeting the UA enrollment goals. This 50 percent increase in the size of the freshman Honors cohort will make building community and retaining students more difficult. The Honors College seeks funds to offer the Passport to Success program that will provide all incoming Honors students with an understanding of an Honors education, strategies for academic success, and opportunities to engage in research and service learning. The Forum Lunches will enable students and faculty to interact in small groups. The Honors College seeks to expand the successful Paladins course, an effort to retain at risk students, from 120 to 200 and to build community through co-curricular activities (service learning and cultural events). The film series will build community among Honors students and provide a significant learning opportunity for any UA students.

This program has at least four benefits. First, it is a significant community-building experience, providing students with opportunities to meet and bond with each other and with faculty through a series of diverse events. Second, this program will increase academic success and help retain high ability students in The Honors College and at the UA. Third, community-building experiences are inherently intellectual; we engage students with each other and with faculty, staff and alumni through ideas, encouraging not just unity among our students, but thoughtful exchange. This is the enrichment that makes The Honors College a special destination on campus. Fourth, the Passport program is an outreach effort strengthening the link between Honors and other units around the University, including faculty, research centers, residence halls, alumni and the UA Parent and Family Association. More parents of Honors students will be familiar with the UA Parents and Family Association and participate in its activities.

Specific programs planned:

- Students enrolling in fall 2009 will participate in a one-day orientation program before classes start. During this program, students will learn about the opportunities for intellectual, personal and professional growth offered through an Honors education. Students will form friendships in small groups led by current Honors students and interact with faculty in lively discussions based on their academic interests. Students will receive a Passport to Success to encourage participation in events throughout the semester. Completion of the Passport Program requires students to see their academic advisor during the first semester.
- A movie series will be held in Gallagher Theater focused on the concept of memory. The theme of the Common Reading for 2009 is Make New Memories. The movie series will be available to any UA student who desires to attend.
- The Honors Forum Lunch series provides an opportunity for students and faculty to interact. A faculty speaker is featured who discusses his or her research. This series introduces first-year students to research opportunities on campus as well as guiding their course selection for second semester.
- The Paladins course is a successful student retention effort with a proven track record. First-year students participate in small sections led by a current Honors student preceptor. The curriculum provides strategies for academic and personal success, eases the transition to a large university, and encourages intellectual growth. Previous offerings of the course have proven successful in improving academic success. This funding will increase the course enrollment from 120 to 200 students and add a co-curricular component (service learning and cultural events) to build community.

This program will provide an overarching structure to the activities designed for first-year students. The events proposed will enable Honors to reach all incoming students in both a college-wide and small group context. The funding requested will significantly augment the opportunities for first-year students and enable the college to serve 50 percent more students.

The Honors College will evaluate the effectiveness of the various events in engaging first-year students for planning in subsequent years.

Itemized Budget

1. <i>Orientation</i>		\$ 1,950
800 students served	\$ 1,000	
Entertainment/music	\$ 500	
Materials/ handouts	\$ 250	
Printing of Passports	\$ 200	
2. <i>Movie series in Gallagher Theater</i>		\$ 3,000
Available to all UA students		
6 films @ 500 each		
3. <i>Honors Forum Lunch Series</i>		\$ 6,400
525 students + faculty @ \$12 each		
4. <i>Paladins Success Course</i>		\$ 3,900
200 students enrolled		
Training for 15 preceptors	\$ 300	

Food for final presentations	\$ 600	
Cultural excursions (\$15 co-pay for tickets)	\$ 3,000	
Total requested		\$ 15,250

Contributions from UA Honors College

Programs for First-Year Students		\$24,175
New Student Welcome	\$ 1,900	
Common Reading Books	\$ 8,000	
Common Reading Events	\$ 1,250	
Convocation	\$ 2,500	
Passport Celebration	\$ 625	
Field trips/cultural excursions	\$ 1,500	
Orientation newsletter	\$ 1,600	
Facilities for Forum Lunches	\$ 1,200	
Honors College play	\$ 3,600	
Student-Mentor Events	\$ 2,000	
Personnel		\$57,735
Academic Advisor for Paladins		
20 % salary + ERE	\$ 9,550	
Events Coordinator		
30% salary + ERE	\$ 9,984	
Academic Advising		
80% salary + ERE	\$38,200	

(Time of Administrative Assistant, Administrative Secretary, Associate Dean, and Dean not estimated.)

The Honors Passport to Success will be seen as successful if more Honors students are retained in The Honors College and at the UA. The increase in size of the freshman class would predict a drop in retention. Specific measures to be used include:

1. Number of new students officially joining Honors during fall semester
2. Number of new students attending orientation
3. Number of new students completing Passport to Success program
4. Number of faculty, alumni and staff participating in one event with first-year students
5. Number of students and family members attending Family Weekend Honors Convocation
6. Number of opportunities for students to interact with faculty in small group settings
7. Student report of engagement and belonging on fall semester survey of satisfaction
8. Level and quality of student responses to the Common Reading text
9. Student report of satisfaction with events on spring survey