Blueprint for Quality Enhancement at USC

SOUTH CAROLINA
HONORS COLLEGE (SCHC)
2014

Draft
3/18/14

Vision:

   By attracting a diverse group of high-ability, high-aspiration students to the University of South Carolina, and by providing them with an extraordinary education, the South Carolina Honors College will continue to prepare its graduates for leadership roles in all fields and continue to be recognized as a pre-eminent Honors College.

Mission:
   The South Carolina Honors College (SCHC) will serve its students by offering a rich curriculum of core, major, and special-interest courses, featuring small enrollments and excellent teachers; by providing individualized and insightful advising that leads to academic success, on-time graduation, and meaningfully focused lives after college; by creating and fostering a nurturing and stimulating learning community; by requiring and enabling transformative "out-of-the-classroom" experiences (study abroad, internships, service learning, undergraduate research); by working cooperatively with other units on campus to enhance students' experiences and to achieve the University's expanding mission; and by engaging with parents, alumni, supporters, and donors to assure that the SCHC continues to thrive and improve.

I. Executive Summary

A) How does the Honors College contribute to meeting the Dashboard targets? The SCHC elevates the *total UG enrollment* and the *average SAT score* by attracting exceptionally strong students, enhancing the profile and reputation of the University. Our most recent incoming class of 411 is the largest and most accomplished in our history, with an average SAT score of 1431, an average class rank of top 4%, and an average ACT of 32.1. Our surveys continue to indicate that a majority of our students—up to 70%--say they have chosen USC because of the Honors College. Our *Freshman retention rate* is outstanding, averaging 97.4% over the past four years, which rivals or surpasses the nation's most prestigious schools: Columbia, U Penn, and Yale are at 99%; Brown, Cal Tech, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford and six other schools are at 98% (Source: Collegedata.com). Similarly, our most recent *six-year graduation rate* has moved up to 91.67%. The SCHC also helps lower the *student to faculty ratio* by offering over 400 courses with an average enrollment in the range of 14 to 17.

In terms of *research expenditures*, the Honors College provides to students over $235,000 each year for undergraduate research, in addition to significant investments (over $45,000) in student travel for study-away experiences, with another $75,000 devoted to student internships. The Honors College contributes significantly to the pursuit of *national scholarships and fellowships* (which we substitute here for the Dashboard target of *national honors and awards for faculty*): Although Honors students comprise only about 6% of the student body, over the past decade they have consistently generated over half of the applicants and winners of USC's prestigious scholarships and fellowships. Finally, instead of the Dashboard target of *doctoral degrees*, we track our *graduation "with honors" rate*, which we expect to be above 75% this spring. (According to an informal survey of other SEC honors college deans last year, graduation-with-honors rates are typically in the 30 to 40 percent range.)

B) The SCHC contributes to the first Key Performance Parameter (KPP), *teaching excellence*, by helping the University to attract the most talented, motivated faculty, who want to teach exceptional students. We monitor student evaluations closely and work with chairs and directors to secure the strongest possible teachers and courses for our classes. For the second KPP, we focus on *reputation and undergraduate research*. Honors students engage in research as part of their requirements, publishing in professional journals, presenting at meetings, working with faculty and graduate students to create knowledge, insight, and art. Our students are engaged in many s*ervice* endeavors (the third KPP), including service learning courses, theses, projects, Waverly Community Tutoring, the Carolina Science Outreach, and Communities in Harmony. The statewide high school writing contest, a new outreach, was successfully launched. Finally, the Honors College is enhancing the *sustainability* of its mission, the fourth KPP, by vigorously pursuing funding for generous scholarships to attract students: we played a crucial role in acquiring the Stamps funding and the matching funds. We have substantially increased the funding for the Carolina Scholars program.

II. Meeting the University's Academic Dashboard Targets

Our strategies to address the Dashboard measures focus on the following: a) recruiting, b) curriculum, c) beyond the classroom, d) community and student experience, e) facilities, f) alumni and development.

a) *Recruiting* is crucial to the first four measures--total UG enrollment, average SAT score, freshman-sophomore retention rate, and six-year graduation rate. Our success is the result of close cooperation with Admissions throughout this process, helping to develop the application questions at the outset, responding to appeals at the end, and much in between, including extensive involvement in the Carolina, McNair, and Stamps recruitment. Our redesigned website is part of our recruiting strategy: Drawing on data gathered by students, the Cyberwoven-created site is dynamic, scalable to all devices, and has just won an Addy award. Our yield has exceeded the target (411 versus 350-375), and average SAT/ACT increased again this year. To continue to recruit these top students against increasingly fierce competition, our strategy going forward will be to continue to improve every existing aspect of the SCHC and to create new assets. We will soon be proposing, for instance, a seven-year combined BARSC/MD degree. There are at least 47 BS/MD degrees in the U.S., and they attract superb students.

b) Our *student to faculty ratio*, the fifth Dashboard measure, is crucial to our *curriculum*, which is at the heart of our mission and the primary reason for our top ranking. To deal with unexpected enrollment increases this year, some of our class sizes have grown larger than we would like, especially in Math, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, and we face staffing problems in Business and Engineering; still, the overall average of our 400 classes is around 17 students. To get tenure-track faculty who are accomplished teachers and researchers, our strategy going forward will include the contribution of the Core Faculty: 12 have been appointed already, and another 6 to 8 faculty will be coming on board in the Fall, teaching half their courses in the SCHC and cultivating other faculty and courses. In Math, with the approval of Arts and Sciences, we are intervening directly by hiring (with the provost's support) an Instructor to teach some classes and free up faculty to teach others. We hope to get approval for similar hires in Biology and Chemistry next year, and a similar approach may be desirable in Business and Engineering.

c) Our *Beyond the Classroom* requirements relate to the remaining adapted Dashboard measures of *research expenditures*, *national honors and awards for students* (rather than "for faculty"), and *graduation "with honors"* (instead of "Doctoral degrees"). Our strategy has been to raise the expectations for staff working in this area. Kay Banks, who was hired as our new senior thesis director and advisor, was previously the dean of students at Newberry College, indicates our hiring strategy for the future. Likewise, two tenured faculty, Kimberly Simmons and Pearl Fernandes, are now serving as associate deans, and they are focusing on beyond-the-classroom efforts, in particular by expanding our study-abroad offerings and by adding rigor and visibility to our undergraduate research funding and our senior theses. The SCHC policy committee and the student advisory committee will be consulted about adding scholarship applications to an

enlarged list of "out of the classroom" activities. We are involved in a number of initiatives to increase the number of students who apply for and win major scholarships and fellowships, ranging from greater recognition for past winners (to inspire potential winners to apply), to making the identification and encouragement of candidates an explicit part of the EPMS review.

d) Graduation "with honors" is a function of students' experiences as a whole, including their sense of community. The number and the quality of events for students has increased significantly, ranging from the Freshman Floatilla at the beginning to the all-college Ivy Ball at the end of spring. Our traditional events have been given more weight and pageantry, and students have responded well to our events, both major and minor. We will continue to add events next year and enhance our communications with students.

e) Housing the first-year students in the Honors Residence is certainly an important part of our community-building strategy. We have encountered however an apparent shortage of honors housing for next year. Our options to continue to grow the SCHC include adding the planned wing to the Honors Residence (rooms, offices, and classrooms), assigning a block of rooms in the new public/private dorm to Honors, converting some portion of an existing dorm, or even adding to the outer Horseshoe by constructing a dorm and offices behind Harper. Whatever we decide to do, other honors colleges have been investing heavily in their facilities: we must not lag behind. We also need to provide a gathering space for juniors and seniors who live on the Horseshoe. Getting the Gressette room unlocked during the daytime has been valuable; now we need to create a space students can enjoy. We have painted and re-carpeted Harper, providing a more appealing image, but we still need to address the rotting windowsills and the decrepit bathrooms.

f) Fund raising is an important aspect of our strategies to recruit the strongest possible students, support our various out-of-the-classroom initiatives, and guide students to graduation "with honors" and on to their best possible futures. Our efforts, led by Chappell Wilson, have been successful—we should easily and substantially exceed our campaign goal. My partnership board is eager to involve alumni in an optional interview process with prospective students; our alumni gatherings have been robustly attended, and we will expand the number of those. As our alumni increasingly begin to get their own children through college, and achieve financial independence, we have an opening window of opportunity. What we do not have on the horizon, unfortunately, is that donor with the potential for a naming transformative gift. Our strategy going forward must include somehow finding that person.

III. Unit's Goals and Contribution to Key Performance Parameters

2014-2015 Academic Year Goals

Goal One: *Implement and develop the Core Faculty.*

    i) How this goal contributes to the KPP: primarily by enhancing teaching excellence, putting some of our best faculty with superb students, although there will be other good effects.

    ii) Progress: Despite some tedious delays, Arts and Sciences faculty are appointed; Business, Engineering, and other schools will be in place by the Fall.

    iii) Plans: Core faculty will teach half their courses for the SCHC, advise and mentor students, cultivate courses and other faculty, and work to advance the Honors College.

Goal Two: *Evolve processes, structures, and staff performance to deal with Banner, registration, advising, new orientation schedule, Core Curriculum, growth, and other challenges.*

    i) How this goal contributes to the KPP: Every parameter depends upon the Honors College's basic functions: we must be able to advise and register students, for instance.

    ii) Progress: To focus on just one process: The implementation of Banner has caused innumerable problems for the Honors College. Because we are not coded as a college, it has been extremely difficult to answer simple questions such as "How many students are in the Honors College, and who are they?" We do not have sufficient numbers to list our courses, and we were unable to see which courses departments were scheduling as honors classes. Because our advisors cannot yet register students, we must send an email for every student to the Registrar indicating the classes for which that student should be registered. Tedious, time-consuming, irritating to our students, this process also sometimes fails when a class has been filled while the request is being carried out.

    iii) Plans: We are undergoing lots of changes. We will encourage and train the staff, and deal with each problem by dividing, delegating, and conquering.

Goal Three: *Strengthen our relationship with and offerings in Business and Engineering.*

    i) How this goal contributes to the KPP: Over 40% of our students are majoring in these two colleges. We must have excellent teaching, mentoring, research direction, and student engagement in these fields.

ii) Progress: We are still in the problem identification stage. Business believes it does not have enough regular faculty to serve our students effectively. Engineering also needs more teaching power to be able to offer more stand-alone honors classes, and some faculty in Engineering continue to tell incoming and continuing students that there is no need for them to be in the Honors College, that it is just about impossible to major in Engineering and be in the SCHC.

iii) Plans: I have met with the leadership in both colleges, and now I'll meet with all the department chairs. I will offer to speak briefly to each department, and if the chair agrees I'll explain why the Honors College is good for everyone, and how they can help us. Appointing Core Faculty in these fields will help.

Goal Four: *Continue to improve and expand activities to support students, build community, increase diversity, and enrich students' educational experiences.*

i) How this goal contributes to the KPP: Although this goal affects all of the Key Performance Parameters, one might argue it is most acutely relevant to serving the state, community, profession, and university.

ii) Progress: We have made considerable progress here, adding dozens of events and activities. We have had significant success increasing diversity by identifying and transferring students into the SCHC.

iii) Plans: We will continue to expand our offerings.

Goal Five: *Shift more attention to student outcomes.*

i) How this goal contributes to the KPP: Service and sustainability: We need to know with more clarity what our students do when they graduate, and we need to be thinking with them, throughout their undergraduate experience, about their options and opportunities.

ii) Progress: We have made some efforts, especially at Revocation, to determine what our students will be doing next, but our data is incomplete and thin.

iii) Plans: We will refine our Revocation strategy, and we will involve the advisors in gathering this information. By setting up an alumni network, we will make clear to students the advantages of communicating with us. We will create a series of speakers who will talk with students about careers. (Bedtime Stories in the dorm?)

Five-Year Goals

Goal One: *Students: Continue to increase the number, diversity, quality, and retention.*
- Size: we could reach in five years a first-year class of 500 without sacrificing quality. The overall size could reach 2100.
- Diversity: from 3% to ~6% minority students
- Quality: maintain or increase average SAT and/or middle 50%
- Retention: maintain our current stellar freshmen to sophomore retention, and increase the percentage of students graduating "with honors" to 80%.

Goal Two: *Multiply the effects of the Core Faculty, rotating additional faculty and building a cohort of faculty informed about and advocates for the Honors College.*

- Core Appointments: two years, a portion of teaching/service assigned to SCHC
- Core Profile: ~20 faculty selected; fields representative of the curriculum.
- Involve more faculty in mentoring and advising (career and research).

Goal Three: *Expand and improve the Honors curriculum, reducing class sizes even in congested science classes; introduce Harkness-style pedagogy.*

- Identify courses that need to be added or altered; review teachers and take action where needed; explore special Honors programs/partnerships in high-profile areas (Marine Science, Digital Humanities).
- Improve the advising by the staff (more communication with departments; more assessment and training; use technology to reduce rote tasks, freeing time for engagement).
- Import the interactive pedagogy of Harkness teaching by training selected faculty.

Goal Four: *Expand students' opportunities for personal growth and enrichment within a vibrant and inspiring community of learners.*

- Continue to sponsor programs, including at least one major service initiative per year, and expand and refine Study Abroad, Service Learning, Internship, and Undergraduate Research opportunities.
- Evolve the Honors Rowing Club into a campus-wide intramural competition, based on dorm residency.
- National Scholarships, Fellowships: Increase participation and success.
- Community: Continue and expand the ongoing social and educational events. Create landmark events and traditions for each class year.
- Spaces and tools: Create a multi-use student gathering space in the Gressette Room in Harper, targeting in particular junior and senior Honors students who may live on the Horseshoe and have no common space. Populate the staff offices in the dorm. Renovate Harper. Working with Housing, maintain the new dorm and increase its appeal.

Goal Five: *Development: Expand and intensify focus on raising funds for scholarships, construction, and faculty; increase parental and alumni involvement and giving; nurture a commitment among students before graduation.*

- Scholarships: Enhanced and more numerous scholarships will help us to attract the best students.
- Construction: More dorm, office, and classroom space.
- Faculty: Create endowed chairs as part of the Core Faculty.
- Alumni and Friends: Formalize networking opportunities; create biographical profiles for each class; expand the advisory board in number and activity; launch Gameday activities on the Horseshoe for students, parents, and alumni (food and busing).

IV. Appendices

Appendix A: Resources Needed:

We seriously need additional dorm and office space. Student housing fees would seem to be a resource to fund the addition of new dorm rooms and/or the renovation of existing rooms. The additional wing of the dorm has been on the University's construction calendar previously: we just need to get it back on there. My development team is currently occupying space that I am renting from Religious Studies, and I have advisors who are floating from office to office.

We have funding for the Core Faculty, but we will need additional funds to hire teaching faculty to cover our classes and reduce average class sizes. These faculty may teach honors classes or non-honors. "Instructor" is not an appealing title: it would be good for recruiting, I think, to call these positions something else.

Appendix B: Benchmarking Information

Top Ten, Peers: The following public universities have honors colleges/programs that would widely be considered among the top ten: Arizona State, Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, Oregon, Michigan State, Penn State, UT Austin, Texas A&M, and Washington. The South Carolina Honors College is competitive with all of these and arguably superior to them—although the dissimilarities of Honors Colleges make evaluative comparisons difficult and subjective. We are stronger than we were when we submitted the data that resulted in the #1 ranking. Although John Willingham is changing his formula in some ways that I have questioned, we should in any reasonable assessment be at or near the top. There is no time for complacency or self-congratulation, however.
Here is the ranking from John Willingham's *Review* according to "honors factors only":

1. University of South Carolina
2. University of Texas at Austin
3. University of Michigan
4. Arizona State University
5. Michigan State University
6. University of Georgia
7. University of Delaware
8. University of Virginia
9. University of Minnesota
10. Penn State University

And here is the initial ranking if the Honors College is considered within the context of the University as a whole:

1. University of Michigan
2. University of Virginia
3. University of Texas at Austin
4. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
5. Arizona State University
6. University of Washington
7. University of Minnesota
8. Michigan State University
9. University of South Carolina
10. University of Georgia

The first ranking considered these factors: honors curriculum, honors retention and graduation rates, honors housing, study-abroad programs, and priority registration. The second ranking added "prestigious undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships." We now have priority registration.

C. **Strengths, Accomplishments:** Our "top strengths and important accomplishments achieved in the last five years" are the following: increasing the size and quality of the incoming classes, cultivating a strong partnership board, increasing the graduation with honors percentage, enhancing the College's ceremonies and community events, expanding and enriching the "Honors Beyond the Classroom" requirement, expanding the development program for the SCHC (and raising substantial funds), creating an internships program, creating a service learning initiative, supporting undergraduate research, developing the College's brand and image, and delivering a varied and large selection of Honors courses.

D. **Weaknesses and Plans:** At least three items listed as "important accomplishments" in previous blueprints are nonetheless still very much works in progress: diversity, course compensation, and alumni relations. We have comprehensive strategies to address these complex and longstanding issues, but we can certainly refine or change them. Briefly: To increase diversity, we have worked with Admissions to will enlarge the pool of potential students (eliciting more applications and considering a larger group on empirical measures: that is, we will consider the essay portions of a larger group of students). We will also continue to recruit transfers from within, target high schools, and continue high-visibility programs such as the statewide writing contest. To change how departments think about course compensation, we will need to create slots designated for the Honors College, shifting away from the idea that the Honors College is an external contractor, purchasing the services of faculty (at bargain rates). We want to move to the awareness that the Honors College is part of every unit's core mission: the entire University benefits from the Honors College, which serves the entire University. To strengthen alumni relations, we will focus more staff effort on increasing contact and events. Strong alumni relations begin during the undergraduate years, and a major focus going forward will be enhancing the undergraduate experience, providing landmark events for each class year

and more frequent and better organized social and educational events.

We are blessed with an excellent facility in the Honors Residence Hall, but we need to renovate Harper, complete the Residence, expand living opportunities for juniors and seniors to live on the Horseshoe, and find additional office space. We also need to raise additional funds for targeted scholarships: as I've said, it is a fierce competition for the best students.

Appendix E: Unit Statistical Profile (from Institutional Research and Assessment)

I did not find any data for the Honors College listed on the web site. The Honors College, so far as I could see, does not appear. Similarly, I did not receive any data from Information Technology and Data Management—understandably, since the SCHC does not have its own faculty or externally funded research at the moment.

Steven Lynn
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