



### Honors Education Task Force: Principal Recommendations

The charge of the Honors Education Taskforce was to identify strategies to **increase the enrollment and retention of high ability students who choose to attend Florida Atlantic University because of its honors opportunities**. The taskforce concludes that the best possible way to achieve this goal is to *unite the University's honors experience around a single honors theme, with a single image of honors at FAU conveyed to both internal and external stakeholders*.

1. **Unified Theme:** The focus of all honors education at FAU will be *providing highly motivated students with an individualized pathway to a life of inquiry, discovery, and innovation*.
  - a. We shall use the new honors slogan of **Distinction through Discovery** to communicate this theme.
  - b. Our message will be that FAU can offer students an experience comparable to what they would have at an elite private university but with all the advantages of a state-assisted High Research Activity institution.
  - c. This framework will be used to unite FAU's University Honors Program, Wilkes Honors College, Upper-Division Honors Programs, and QEP under a single, easily understood concept.
2. **Unified Voice:** The University Honors Program and upper-division honors programs have suffered because there has not been a single individual to serve as the advocate, face, and voice of these experiences. We recommend that a charismatic leader be appointed to serve as an Honors Coordinator, be charged with seeing that the initiatives outlined below are implemented in a timely manner, and provide cohesion to honors education on the Boca Raton campus.
  - a. This individual should be based on the Boca Raton campus, have substantial experience as a faculty member, and work cooperatively with all those involved in honors education at the University.
  - b. Our recommendation is that this position be phased in, beginning with a faculty member who is granted a single course release each semester in 2012-2013, with his or her honors assignment increased as feasible in succeeding years.
  - c. Our ultimate goal is that the Honors Coordinator will hold a full-time position reporting to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and be based in the Center for Teaching and Learning.

### Implementation Steps: 2011-2012

1. **Designate an Honors Coordinator to begin Fall 2012.**
  - a. **Establish the position.** The Honors Coordinator will initially have the responsibilities and reassigned time described above.
  - b. **Plan to expand the position.** The released/reassigned time allocated to this position will be expanded over several years as the Coordinator's responsibilities increase. In order of priority, these responsibilities will be:

- i. Representing the University Honors Program to prospective students at recruitment events and answering the questions of prospective students as they arise.
- ii. Bringing students in the University Honors Program together on a regular basis for shared activities.
- iii. Developing sustainable plans for the Research Mentor Program.
- iv. Promoting pathways for University Honors Program students to enter upper-division honors programs in greater numbers.
- v. Providing workshops to faculty members on how to teach honors courses effectively and related topics.
- vi. Attending meetings of all FAU committees involved in honors education (such as the University Honors Council, the Faculty Assembly of the Wilkes Honors College, subcommittees devoted to upper-division honors programs, the QEP subcommittee, and the UUPC when it is addressing a relevant issue) in order to be an effective liaison, source of information, and knowledgeable recruiter of incoming honors students.
- vii. Planning how the University Honors Program can be improved and more completely integrated into the University's emphasis on undergraduate research.
- viii. Designing strategies for expanding honors education to additional FAU campuses.

## 2. Begin Research Mentor Program.

- a. **Select the first cohort.** The initial cohort of Undergraduate Research Mentors will be selected and begin to be trained in spring 2012 (with training continued during the 2012-2013 academic year).
- b. **Communicate the responsibilities.** The duties of each Undergraduate Research Mentor will be:
  - i. To meet at least three times per semester with each honors student in his or her mentoring group.
  - ii. To make recommendations to the honors advisee about how to begin planning for appropriate undergraduate research projects.

## 3. Get the Word Out.

- a. **Begin marketing efforts.** The office of Undergraduate Admissions will be directed to begin using the honors theme, *Distinction through Discovery*, in all promotional materials beginning with the 2012-2013 academic year.
- b. **Improve web presence.** A link to the honors "jump page" (<http://www.fau.edu/admissions/honorsprograms.php>) will be placed on the University's home page.
- c. **Plan additional improvements.** The University Honors Council will meet with the office of Undergraduate Admissions to explore ways in which this jump page and honors recruitment materials can be made even more effective in the future.

## 4. Reach the "Right" Students.

- a. **Make nomination easy.** An online resource, such as a form or webpage, will be developed so that faculty members can nominate any current FAU student who demonstrates high promise and initiative to participate in honors education.
- b. **Improve the nomination process even further.** Faculty focus groups will be scheduled to brainstorm strategies to extend and improve the process for nomination of potential students.
- c. **Increase merit-based scholarships.** University committees and administrators will be encouraged to develop a plan that would shift some of the University's funding from need-based to merit-based scholarships, beginning with the 2012-2013 academic year. This strategy will attract additional high ability/highly motivated students to FAU.

## 5. Gather the “Right” Information.

- a. **Conduct student focus groups.** Two student focus groups will be scheduled, each consisting of representatives from all the University’s honors pathways (the University Honors Program, the Wilkes Honors College, and Upper-Division Honors Programs), to determine what today’s students are looking for in honors education. One focus group will be held on the Boca Raton campus, the other on the Jupiter campus.
- b. **Administer an online survey.** An online student survey about honors education will be developed and administered. The link to this survey will be sent to all students currently involved in honors education at FAU and all undergraduates with a cumulative GPA of 3.75 or above in order to determine what today’s students are looking for in honors education.

## Implementation Steps: 2012-2013

### 1. Continue Progress.

- a. **Put established plans into effect.** All initiatives that were developed in 2011-2012 for implementation in 2012-2013 will be put in place and assessed for impact.
- b. **Learn from others.** The best ideas resulting from the student focus groups and surveys will be incorporated into a concrete implementation plan.

### 2. Create More Student Incentives.

- a. **Improve course schedule organization.** The University Honors Council will work with the registrar’s office to develop a mechanism by which all of FAU’s honors courses can be found in a single location in the course schedule. *The resulting incentive is increased ease in honors course registration.*
- b. **Increase honors distinctions.** The University Honors Council will work with the registrar’s office to find a way to record the word “honors” prominently on the *diploma* of every student graduating from an honors pathway at FAU. *The resulting incentive is greater recognition for student achievements.*
- c. **Communicate current opportunities.** The University Honors Council will make certain that all members of the faculty and staff involved in honors education at the University’ are aware of the regalia additions available to them, as per the *Honors Administrative Manual* ([http://www.fau.edu/divdept/honcol/honors\\_administrative\\_manual.pdf](http://www.fau.edu/divdept/honcol/honors_administrative_manual.pdf)). Additional commencement enhancements will be studied to determine whether they would be effective. *The resulting incentive is greater public acknowledgment of honors student achievement.*

### 3. Provide Faculty Training and Outreach.

- a. **Offer training.** Workshops will be held on such topics as Teaching an Honors Course, Implementing an Honors Compact, Designing an Honors Program in the Discipline, and Mentoring Honors students.
- b. **Advertise innovations.** Faculty members will be encouraged to use the nomination process for involving current FAU students in honors education.

### 4. Improve Administrative Support.

- a. **Revise organizational structures.** The structure and membership of the University Honors Council will be revised so that it becomes a *more inclusive* group with *greater responsibilities* for promoting honors education at FAU.
- b. **Improve capstone experience.** The University Honors Council will develop guidelines for what constitutes an acceptable capstone project for an honors student at FAU.

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- c. **Increase number of upper-division honors programs.** The Dean of Undergraduate Education, the Dean of the Honors College, or the Honors Coordinator will meet with all departments and/or colleges to promote the creation of additional upper-division honors programs.