

University Honors The Path to a University Honors College Strategic Plan 2018 - 2023



Vision Statement

University Honors will be nationally recognized as a model college that produces graduates who are highly sought for premier opportunities and who continue to develop as lifelong learners, engaged citizens, and future leaders.

Mission Statement

University Honors engages a diverse community of students, faculty, and staff in the creation of global citizens through high-impact experiences that emphasize original scholarship, contribution, creativity, and innovation.

Three Pillars of Excellence

1. *Promoting* Creativity and Innovation
2. *Cultivating* a Culture of Contribution
3. *Celebrating* Diversity and Global Citizenship

History & Background of University Honors at UC Riverside

In 1987, an ad hoc Academic Senate Committee was formed, at the request of the Committee on Educational Policy, to draft a proposal to the Ford Foundation for the creation of an Honors Program at the University of California, Riverside. The proposal aimed to “strengthen the involvement of faculty in undergraduate teaching and, through doing so, improve the quality of undergraduate education.” This proposal was funded at the requested level of \$250,000, with the proviso that UC Riverside match the grant on a two-for-one basis.

With these resources, the University Honors Program was established in 1988. The initial design of the program called for a four-year program with a thesis component, but, in the 1990’s, it was transitioned into a lower-division and upper-division program. The lower-division program was designed as an enrichment program emphasizing lower-division coursework (honors seminars and sections) and opportunities to participate in community life and community service. The upper-division program was designed to focus on completion of a “senior essay.” Students who completed lower-division honors received a lower-division honors notation on their transcripts and were given an opportunity to proceed to upper-division honors. An additional benefit to students who completed lower-division honors and maintained a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.20 was access to all program benefits, including priority registration. These benefits minimized the incentive for students to proceed to upper-division honors. Eligible students who did not participate in lower-division honors were invited to participate in upper-division honors. Students who completed upper-division honors, regardless of whether they also participated in lower-division honors, and submitted their “senior essays,” received an upper-division honors notation on their transcripts.

During the 2009 - 2010 academic year, the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education, David Fairris, charged a faculty workgroup to “re-envision” UCR’s University Honors Program. The members of the workgroup consisted of eight faculty members, from diverse scholarly disciplines, who had been, or, at the time, were, involved in the University Honors Program. The workgroup’s [“Re-envisioning Report”](#) recommended a University Honors College for the UCR campus, which would be led by a dean, overseeing a number of instructional lines, filled by ladder-rank faculty, on a three-to-five year (partial FTE) rotation, from campus departments, and devoted to a population of students representing between five percent and eight percent of the undergraduate student body.

The University Honors College would provide interdisciplinary, curricular tracks that would fit into, and align with, degree-granting college and major requirements, with a normative time to degree of four years. Completion of the University Honors College curriculum would result in a University Honors distinction attached to the degree granted in the major. The University Honors College Dean would be appointed by the Provost and would lead a dedicated faculty to create an intellectually challenging and exciting personal experience for the campus’s very best students.

The workgroup recommended that faculty would be offered partial FTE within the University Honors College to promote a sense of allegiance and dedication. To mitigate the instructional loss at the departmental level, the portion of the appointment in the University Honors College would be returned to the faculty member’s home department. Service to the University Honors College would become a significant component of the regular merit and promotion process. Honors faculty would collaborate to develop and deliver contemporary, novel, interdisciplinary

curricula that would attract motivated students with potential to become academic and societal leaders.

The University Honors College would also have an appropriate number of permanent staff lines, for administrative support and professional advising, and a designated space large enough for faculty offices, administrative and support-staff offices, classrooms, conference rooms, study rooms, and a common lounge that could be used as a venue for events, speakers, presentations, and other creative endeavors. A residential component was also strongly recommended, where all Honors students would live during their first two years at UCR.

The workgroup also recommended that the program move from a lower-division and upper-division program to a four-year program. The four-year program would provide guidance and preparation to students who demonstrated academic excellence and interest in research, or creative activity, that would lead to an Honors thesis project. Based on the recommendations, the University Honors faculty and staff worked to redesign the program and the curriculum, which resulted in the establishment of a four-year program in the fall of 2011.

The four-year program was designed to consist of entry portals for first-year, second-year, third-year, transfer, and fourth-year students, and established curricular objectives for each student's developmental stage, as outlined in an annual Honors Learning Commitment. The first year of the program was designed to emphasize the transition to University Honors and included a freshman transition course (HNPG 1A); an "ignition seminar" (HNPG 15), designed to "ignite" students' interest in one of several academic disciplines, each taught from an interdisciplinary perspective; and a course focusing on the motivation and integrity of an Honors student (HNPG 1B). The second year of the program was designed to emphasize civic engagement and included a course on the science and academic study of civic engagement and social issues (HNPG 2A), in which research can play a critical role. Students were given the option to continue the course by taking elective units (HNPG 2B, HNPG 2C) focused on solving societal problems on campus and in the community. The second year also included a course on research across the academic disciplines (HNPG 150). The third year of the program was designed to emphasize the development of individual scholarship and included a course (HNPG 151) to prepare students to understand how research is conducted in their chosen discipline and to engage in the process of developing their own research or creative activity. The fourth year of the program was designed to emphasize completion of the Honors thesis and to provide students with the necessary support.

In addition to the curricular objectives, the workgroup also recommended that every University Honors College student would be required to pursue intellectual growth by taking a course in critical thinking, participating in an experiential learning opportunity (e.g., education abroad, UCDC, community internship, etc.), maintaining an ongoing involvement with the arts, and completing an Honors thesis (e.g., research or creative project), all while pursuing a thematic track in the University Honors College simultaneous to earning a degree in his/her major of choice. Personal development was recommended by the workgroup in the form of having students participate in co-curricular activities, reflect on personal growth, participate in events (e.g., symposia, exhibits, and seminars) planned by the University Honors College, take classes that embed the foundations of personal growth and reflection, and receive developmental advising from professional Honors counselors. The workgroup also

recommended that the University Honors College should promote student involvement in meaningful public service that positively impacts the campus, region, nation, or global communities.

Finally, the workgroup recommended that a faculty group should be charged with crafting the curriculum and seeking approval from the Academic Senate for the proposed academic vision. Ideally, that faculty group would be the inaugural faculty to hold appointments in the University Honors College. Support and professional staff were also strongly recommended by the workgroup, as were infrastructure decisions regarding space for the University Honors College and dedicated space in student housing for Honors students. The workgroup recommended hiring a dean and then tasking that person with the oversight of development and execution of the infrastructure, faculty, and staffing plans.

Implementation of the “Re-Envisioning Report” and the Four-Year Program between 2011 - 2014

Establish a University Honors College:

Establishment of a University Honors College has not yet been accomplished, but was included within Strategy #2.B.4: Creating Honor Experiences for High-Achieving Students in “UCR 2020: The Path to Preeminence.” “Going forward, UCR will conduct an in-depth, evidence-based analysis of the possible establishment of a University Honors College, including a comprehensive business plan.”

Hire a Dean for the University Honors College to Oversee Faculty Lines Filled by Ladder-Rank Faculty:

Between 2011 - 2014, University Honors continued to be led by a 50% Faculty Director. Up to eight “engaged faculty members,” from various departments across campus, were paid an annual stipend to engage with University Honors students and contribute to the teaching of select University Honors courses. University Honors did not oversee any faculty lines.

Serve a population of students representing between five percent and eight percent of the undergraduate student body:

During the 2011 - 2012 academic year, student enrollment in University Honors numbered 277 students, which comprised 1.4% of the 18,523 undergraduate students at UCR. During the 2012 - 2013 academic year, student enrollment in University Honors numbered 512 students, which comprised 2.7% of the 18,539 undergraduate students at UCR. During the 2013 - 2014 academic year, student enrollment in University Honors numbered 570 students, which comprised 3.0% of the 18,621 undergraduate students at UCR. By the Fall of 2017, that percentage had increased to 3.9%, and, by the Fall of 2018, [that percentage had reached 4.2%](#). A consequence of this increased growth has been [decreased scholarship support](#) for University Honors students over that same time period, decreasing from an average of \$586/student in 2012 to under \$350/student in 2018.

Provide interdisciplinary, curricular tracks that would fit into, and align with, degree-granting college and major requirements:

Interdisciplinary, curricular tracks were not developed.

Promote a normative time to degree of four years:

Of the students who were admitted to University Honors in Fall 2010 and remained in University Honors for four years, 100% graduated within four years. Of the students who were admitted to University Honors in Fall 2010, regardless of whether they remained in University Honors for four years, 59.9% graduated within four years. Of the students who were admitted to UCR, in general, regardless of whether they were admitted to University Honors, and regardless of whether they remained in University Honors for four years, 47.2% graduated within four years.

Have an appropriate number of permanent staff lines for administrative support and professional advising:

Between 2011 - 2014, University Honors experienced a number of staffing changes: (1) a Student Development Coordinator was hired in July, 2011, to assist with counseling students; (2) an Assistant Director was hired in September, 2011, to assist with oversight of student affairs, but vacated the position in April, 2013; (3) an Assistant Student Development Coordinator was hired in April, 2012, as a temporary position, to assist with counseling students and programming, but vacated the position in December, 2013 (The position subsequently was approved as a permanent position.); (4) the permanent Student Development Coordinator position was filled in January, 2014; (5) a Student Development Coordinator position was vacated in May, 2014; (6) the Administrative Assistant was out on maternity leave from late-2012 to early-2013 and again in early-2014 to mid-2014; (7) the Associate Director became the Director in 2012 and vacated the position in September, 2014; (8) an Assistant Director was hired in May, 2014, and became the interim director in October, 2014; and (9) a new, full-time Faculty Director was appointed in July, 2014. At the conclusion of 2014, the following staff members were employed by University Honors:

- Faculty Director
- Interim Director
- Two Student Development Coordinators
- Administrative Assistant

Have a designated space large enough for faculty offices, administrative and support-staff offices, classrooms, conference rooms, study rooms, and a common lounge that could be used as a venue for events, speakers, presentations, and other creative endeavors:

University Honors occupied 2316 Olmsted Hall, which consisted of one faculty director office, five administrative and support-staff offices, one classroom, one conference room, and a common lounge. The location did not include any faculty offices or study rooms, and the common lounge was not large enough to be used as a venue for events, speakers, presentations, or other creative endeavors.

A residential component, where all Honors students would live during their first two years at UCR:

First-year students who opted to live on campus were required to live together in a living-learning community in the Pentland Hills residence hall. The option to remain in the Pentland Hills residence hall for the second year did not exist.

Move from a lower-division and upper-division program to a four-year program leading to an Honors thesis project:

A four-year program was implemented in Fall 2011, which led to the submission of an Honors thesis project at the end of the fourth year.

Establish entry portals for first-year, second-year, third-year, transfer, and fourth-year students, and define established curricular objectives for each student's developmental stage:

Entry portals and associated curricular objectives were established for first-year students (Transition to University Honors), second-year students (Understanding Civic Engagement), third-year/transfer students (Developing Individual Scholarship), and fourth-year students (Completing the Honors Thesis).

Redesign the Curriculum:

The curriculum consisted of the following required courses: HNPG 1A, HNPG 15, and HNPG 1B during the first year; HNPG 2A and HNPG 150 during the second year; and HNPG 151 during the third year. The curriculum consisted of optional HNPG 2B and HNPG 2C courses during the second year.

Require students to pursue intellectual growth by taking a course in critical thinking, participating in an experiential learning opportunity, maintaining an ongoing involvement with the arts, and completing an Honors thesis, all while pursuing a thematic track in the University Honors College simultaneous to earning a degree in his/her major of choice:

All first-year students were required to take a course in critical thinking (PHIL 7H) during Fall 2011, but the requirement was eliminated in Fall 2012 due to the course not meeting the intended student learning outcomes. Although students were encouraged to participate in an experiential learning opportunity through advertising and workshops to students for study abroad, UCDC, and similar programs, it was not required. Maintaining an ongoing involvement with the arts was neither required nor specifically promoted. Every University Honors student was required to complete an Honors thesis prior to graduating with University Honors distinction, but the pursuit of a thematic track simultaneous to earning a degree in his/her major of choice was not developed.

Promote personal development in the form of having students participate in co-curricular activities, reflect on personal growth, and participate in events planned by the University Honors College:

University Honors planned and sponsored numerous co-curricular events to promote personal development of students. These opportunities included community service projects, field trips, Honors-only workshops for personal and professional development, and on-campus partnerships to provide volunteers for various events and activities. Throughout the various versions of the program that were explored during this time period, the personal reflection essays that were required for certain cohorts after engaging in co-curricular activities were determined to be generally unsuccessful in achieving the intended student learning outcomes. Plans to implement reflection of personal growth and development were determined more appropriate in sustained learning environments (e.g., Honors courses, other learning communities), where students could receive meaningful feedback and engage in dialogue about their experiences.

Provide developmental advising from professional Honors counselors:

Student Development Coordinators, as opposed to Honors Counselors, provided cohort-specific developmental advising to every Honors student on a quarterly basis.

Promote student involvement in meaningful public service that positively impacts the campus, region, nation, or global communities:

Other than through the required HNPG 2A course and the optional HNPG 2B and HNPG 2C courses, student involvement in meaningful public service was not consistently promoted. However, students were connected to many community service opportunities as outlined in the “co-curricular activities” section appearing above. In various versions of the program that were explored throughout this time period, students were alternately required, or given the option, to engage in community service through the opportunities provided by, and through, University Honors. Additionally, the Honors Leadership Council (HLC), led by Honors students, included a Service Committee that focused on providing community service opportunities to Honors students.

Charge a faculty group with crafting the curriculum and seeking approval from the Academic Senate for the proposed academic vision:

Other than HNPG 1A, HNPG 15, HNPG 2A, HNPG 2B, HNPG 2C, HNPG 150, and HNPG 151, no other courses were added to the curriculum or proposed to the Academic Senate.

Implementation of the National Collegiate Honors Council External Review Report between 2014 - 2017

After implementing the new, four-year program from September, 2011, through January, 2014, the [National Collegiate Honors Council](#) (NCHC), the oldest and most established educational organization that supports and promotes undergraduate honors education, was contacted to conduct an [external review](#) of University Honors. NCHC has established [best practices](#) describing the “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program” and the “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College.” The external reviewers used these characteristics as the primary criteria for the external review. While the characteristics are common to successful, fully-developed honors programs, the NCHC notes that not all are necessary for an honors program to be considered successful and/or fully developed. Additionally, the 2011 - 2014 review period was considered, in some ways, premature as: (1) a majority of students from the previous program continued under the new program, but opted to complete the old requirements; (2) staff turnover and continually vacant positions impacted the program; and (3) multiple components were changed quarterly to adjust to the “growing pains” of the new program. Thus, while several of the recommendations from the 2011 - 2014 review were implemented, some were adjusted to fit the feasibility and infrastructure unique to University Honors at UCR, and others are still in development.

While several components of University Honors were indicated as successful in the review, the NCHC recommendations included minor to major changes that were subsequently implemented in varying degrees between 2014 - 2017:

Mission Statement:

The previous mission statement was described as overly narrow, compared with national best practices, and omitting features characteristic of other honors programs, such as: the breadth of interdisciplinary learning; the gains achieved through active learning activities, such as community engagement/service; inquiry-based investigation; the importance of leadership training; the awareness of globalization issues, and others. As a result, University Honors developed a mission statement that more fully encompasses the breadth and depth of University Honors. The new mission statement reads as follows:

University Honors engages a diverse community of students, faculty, and staff in the creation of global citizens through high-impact experiences that emphasize original scholarship, contribution, creativity, and innovation.

Additionally, the following three Pillars of Excellence were identified to guide curriculum and programming:

- 1) *Promoting Creativity & Innovation*
- 2) *Cultivating a Culture of Contribution*
- 3) *Celebrating Diversity & Global Citizenship*

Outreach:

Previously, outreach to students outside of UCR had not been very well established, due to limited staffing. However, some efforts had been made by staff, student leadership, and volunteers to recruit high school and community college students during Honors and campus-wide events. Building upon those efforts, in December, 2014, the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education provided funding for an Honors Counselor charged with outreach and recruitment. Since that time, University Honors has established an [Honors-to-Honors Partnership Agreement with the Honors Transfer Council of California](#) (HTCC), resulting in partnerships with over 50 community colleges, to encourage community college honors students to transfer to UCR and to provide them with an efficient transition process. The Honors Counselor charged with outreach and recruitment has also partnered with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions to schedule high school and community college visits, host on-campus recruitment events, and create marketing materials for students throughout the Inland Empire and the State of California.

Admissions:

The previous admissions portals included incoming first-year students, continuing second-year students, continuing third-year students, incoming transfer students, and continuing fourth-year students. The admission of continuing fourth-year students became problematic because those students did not have sufficient time to benefit from the curriculum, research development, and engagement associated with University Honors. Beginning with the 2015 - 2016 admissions cycle, fourth-year students were no longer eligible to apply for admission to University Honors.

Retention GPA:

The previous retention GPA of 3.5 was considered high against national best practices and punitive in terms of quarterly monitoring. After a few iterations between 2014 - 2017, the retention GPA is now monitored annually and, effective Fall 2017, is 3.25 for second-year,

third-year, and fourth-year students. First-year students had a retention GPA of 3.0 during the 2017 - 2018 academic year. Beginning in Fall 2018, the first-year retention GPA increased to 3.25 to match the retention GPA of the other cohorts.

Full-time Faculty Director:

National best practice stipulates that the Honors Faculty Director's effort be devoted full-time to Honors, given the complexity of the Honors mission and operation; however, the Honors Faculty Director in University Honors was only a part-time (50%) appointment. Additionally, the change in leadership every few years that had occurred in the recent past was indicated as placing Honors in the position of having to frequently "start from scratch." NCHC noted that the strongest Honors programs and colleges have a history of long-term leadership stability. In the previous 30-year history of University Honors, the [longest term served](#) by a Faculty Director had been eight years. Due to the strain that the part-time appointment and frequent turnover of Faculty Directors created in the past, the Honors Faculty Director position was converted to a 100% appointment, effective July, 2014.

Courses:

At the time of the external review, the University Honors courses were in a transitional state, and NCHC noted that some of the recommended hallmarks of a "fully-developed" Honors curriculum were still emerging at that time. During the period between 2014 - 2017, the following changes were implemented: (1) HNPG 1A was eliminated for first-year students and replaced by the requirement for them to enroll in one of their respective college's learning communities to provide supplemental support and leverage the existing resources available to students provided by their college; (2) HNPG 2A has explored different civic engagement themes and teaching styles through various faculty and community partners each year; (3) HNPG 2B was offered as a new course entitled, "Engaging Riverside," which provided a select group of students with an opportunity for personal connections with leaders from throughout the City of Riverside, as well as hands-on service with community organizations; (4) HNPG 150 has been moved to the fall quarter and is now required for third-year and transfer students (Previously, the course was required for second-year students.), to more appropriately provide developmental and transitional support to students, as they secure a faculty-mentor and begin preparations for their Honors theses. (In 2014, the term, "capstone project" replaced "Honors thesis" to describe the culminating project in University Honors, in order to acknowledge the breadth of disciplines pursued by University Honors students.) [HNPG 150](#) has also been changed to implement practical guidance and assignments to students on how to secure a faculty-mentor and begin thinking about research from an interdisciplinary perspective, to better prepare them for the capstone project in their fourth year. In addition to HNPG courses, University Honors also offered a variety of [Honors elective \("H"-designated\) courses](#) between 2014 – 2017.

Engaged Faculty:

At the time of review, University Honors had an active and supportive faculty committee that was noted as enhancing the program; however, two challenges were identified: (1) getting the faculty to serve as effective representatives and carry the Honors "flag" to the rest of the faculty, and (2) to establish a clear charter and governance system. Engaged Faculty have since been renamed [Honors Faculty Fellows](#) and have increased in number from eight to as many as ten, in order to keep pace with the growing population of University Honors students. The [appointment letter](#) for the Faculty Fellows address the two deficiencies noted in the

external review report and now establishes clear governing guidelines and the expectation to act as a representative of University Honors within their respective departments.

Counseling:

Previously, individual counseling was provided quarterly to students, based on cohort, by three Student Development Coordinators, who were each assigned to one or more cohorts. While survey data generally reflected high marks for this particular service, NCHC noted the strain on the staff to continue this frequency of counseling, in addition to their extensive peripheral responsibilities. It was also noted that, nationally, honors programs and colleges typically only require one annual meeting per student. Beginning in Fall 2014, the frequency of individual counseling was changed to annually, instead of quarterly. Additionally, Student Development Coordinators were renamed Honors Counselors and became generalists, counseling students from all cohorts, each assigned to students based on alphabetic designation. This distribution contributed to a more equitable workload among counselors, while also providing cross-training on how to counsel all cohort levels.

Staffing/Workload:

During the review period, and soon thereafter, there were a number of vacant positions in University Honors. NCHC noted the importance of becoming fully staffed to equitably distribute and streamline tasks. The following hires were made between 2014 - 2017: (1) Administrative Director; (2) Full-time Honors Faculty Director; (3) Honors Counselor charged with outreach & recruitment; (4) Office Coordinator; (4) Lead University Honors Counselor; (5) Honors Counselor charged with marketing and media; and (6) Honors Counselor charged with admissions and courses. As of February, 2017, University Honors was fully staffed, and no position in University Honors has been vacated since October, 2014. (In 2018, University Honors began [reporting to the Provost](#).)

Additionally, the review indicated the importance of alleviating the extensive, peripheral duties associated with each of the Honors Counselor positions. To that end, at the end of Summer 2014, the Summer University Honors Program (SUHP), a two-day orientation for Honors students, was eliminated, due to the high cost, diminishing benefit to students, and the disproportionately time-consuming workload for Honors Counselors. (Honors orientation is now embedded within the first session of the existing, two-day, UCR Highlander Orientation.) The review also noted that the Administrative Director position should not be overseeing the national and prestigious scholarships process for the entire campus, which resulted in low numbers of those scholarships being won relative to the size of the UCR campus. In 2014, a new position was created in the Office of Undergraduate Education (Director of Student Success Programs) to oversee national and prestigious scholarships, which resulted in the responsibility being eliminated from the job description of the Administrative Director position. Lastly, [Audeamus](#), the multidisciplinary honors journal, previously overseen by one of the Honors Counselors, was transitioned to a faculty-advisor in 2017.

Student Leadership & Opportunities:

Previously, the Honors Leadership Council (HLC) existed as the student voice in University Honors and assisted with programming for University Honors. While HLC provided a platform to promote both community and service, there was a lack of governance and expectations. HLC was dissolved in 2015 and replaced by the [University Honors Ambassadors](#) and the [Media Team](#), each of which have clearly outlined contracts and expectations. Similarly, the

review indicated the need for students to have more opportunities to participate in regional and national conferences, community service, and other types of experiential education. University Honors coordinated Honors students' travel to, and presentations at, the [Western Regional Honors Council \(WRHC\) Conference](#), in 2014 and 2015; hosted the WRHC Conference, in 2016; and coordinated travel for *Audeamus* student leadership to present at the Idea Exchange at the 2016 [NCHC Conference](#). Additionally, the newly established Pillars of Excellence guided University Honors programming to provide "Creativity & Innovation" (conferences, undergraduate research) opportunities, "Culture of Contribution" (service-learning) opportunities, and "Diversity & Global Citizenship" (study abroad, UCDC, UCCS) opportunities.

Honors Space:

At the time of the review, University Honors was housed in Olmsted Hall. While the review described the location as light, inviting, and appropriate to student needs, it also indicated that the space was nearing the end of its utility as an Honors facility. The review indicated the need to expand the space to eventually accommodate additional students, classroom space, and offices for when University Honors would be fully staffed. The suggestion to explore a truly Honors-centered living and learning complex that combines residential space for the students, ample administrative space for the Director and staff, plus appropriate classroom and multi-use spaces for the Honors curriculum is being pursued as the North District Project is being developed. In the meantime, during Summer 2016, University Honors did move to a new building on campus (Skye Hall) that is larger in square footage than the previous space.

The Future: Vision for a University Honors College

Since 1988, University Honors has attracted and supported high-achieving students who actively participate in a holistic, educational experience, consistent with the mission and goals of a research-intensive university. At its origin, the University of California, Riverside, stood alone in the University of California system as providing a liberal arts education, in conjunction with a historically impactful agricultural research enterprise. As the university grew, maintaining its stature as a robust liberal arts college became challenging, and the transition from a single College of Letters and Science to multiple colleges with distinct missions, goals, and administrative structures has, arguably, created natural tensions between the research and teaching missions of the university. Since its inception, the University Honors Program (1988 – 2010) and then University Honors (2011 – present) has endeavored to mitigate those tensions by intentionally intertwining those missions while maintaining UC Riverside's core values, as it takes its place as a leader in educational and research initiatives that serve a growing and diverse global citizenry. Indeed, University Honors vision as a "model college that produces graduates who are highly sought for premier opportunities and who continue to develop as lifelong learners, engaged citizens, and future leaders" provides the foundation for creating the next generation of undergraduate research scholars. This view was supported by the 2014 external review report that stated:

The Honors Program can provide a strong liberal arts education for students with high academic potential and provide them unique opportunities for intensive interdisciplinary and disciplinary education. The University certainly can make use of its Honors Program to promote quality learning campus-wide, not merely as one more access to a college degree. In addition, an Honors Program can provide a stronger intellectual climate on campus.

As outlined in the previous sections, University Honors has expanded in both size and scope, while maintaining a [diverse population](#) of creative and innovative students, faculty, and staff. As a fully functioning honors program, University Honors has achieved most of the goals outlined by the National Collegiate Honors Council. However, while many of the challenges brought on by increased growth have been met, the current structure of University Honors has encountered a number of obstacles, including meeting the needs of students from different colleges and schools and funding high-quality, honors-specific experiences. With the program anticipated to [grow beyond 1,000 students](#) in the next five years, and, ultimately, providing an Honors education for 5 – 7 % of the undergraduate population, it is time for University Honors to evolve into the University of California’s first, bona fide Honors College. This aspirational goal was articulated in UCR’s own strategic action plan, “UCR 2020: The Path to Preeminence,” in which, as part of its strategies for enhancing undergraduate education (Strategy #2.B.4), it promoted continued development of an already strong honors program and then:

Going forward, UCR will conduct an in-depth, evidence-based analysis of the possible establishment of a University Honors College, including a comprehensive business plan.

Thus, the generation of this University Honors strategic plan seeks to achieve this goal by providing the path to an independent college with unique expectations and requirements that are supported by its established mission and the three Pillars of Excellence.

The [distinctions between honors programs and honors colleges](#) are outlined and supported by the National Collegiate Honors Council. The major difference between honors programs and stand-alone, honors colleges is that colleges exercise substantially more autonomy over their curriculum and business operations than programs, which are controlled by the individual colleges and schools at a university. Many of the elements put into place over the past decade, in response to direction from the faculty workgroup and the recommendations of the external review, have resulted in University Honors clearly moving in the direction of an Honors College. The final steps, involving consultation with the UCR Administration, Academic Senate, and, ultimately, UC System-wide, need to be realized over the next few years, in order for the University Honors College to take its place as an exemplar for the State of California and the nation.

As the University Honors College, we aspire to achieve the following strategic goals as UCR’s newest college and the University of California’s first honors college:

1. Provide a stimulating curriculum that ensures that all honors courses satisfy breadth and/or major requirements:

To be successful, the University Honors College must develop a learning community that reflects the vision and mission of the University Honors College; that incorporates a challenging and rigorous curriculum that is aligned with the three Pillars of Excellence; that maintains an Honors Faculty Fellow-to-Honors student ratio of 1:75; and that consists of University Honors College-specific award, convocation, commencement, and capstone symposium opportunities. As a stand-alone college, University Honors will establish a mechanism for supporting courses through tuition reimbursement, consistent with the other colleges and schools on campus, and will have more authority to expand existing courses, such as ignition seminars, research courses, and special-interest courses, from across all colleges and schools to across the university; to define and incorporate Honors-specific courses that satisfy breadth and/or university requirements;

and to develop a writing course that satisfies the final course in the required university writing sequence (ENGL 1C), which will prepare students for their capstone projects.

In addition, the University Honors College will work with departments from other colleges to develop Honors-level courses that will count towards students' majors, thereby increasing the number of honors courses that students are required to take, without adding to their overall course load. Students who enter into the college as freshmen will take a standardized set of courses that represent a first-year learning community emphasizing interdisciplinary scholarship, civic engagement, and global perspectives. Existing courses in ethnic studies and history will be taught as honors courses for those students, which will allow them to have a true honors experience while also counting for university-wide requirements.

Coursework in the last two years will focus on research and the completion of the capstone project. By the end of their third year, all students will be required to prepare a capstone project proposal and a detailed prospectus/timeline, outlining their specific faculty-mentored project, as required in a discipline-specific research course. In the final year, students will enroll in an Honors research course (HNPG 199H), with required elements of writing and presentation of their work.

2. Establish a dynamic living-learning community that engages students, faculty, and staff:

The University Honors College will continue to build upon, and develop, unique and engaging living-learning environments that are inclusive of all Honors students across their undergraduate career. Funding will be secured to support and house 100% of first-year Honors students, who will be required to reside in the Honors living-learning community. The living-learning community will consist of a physical space that is uniquely identified as the natural home for the University Honors College and that will include classrooms, conference and study rooms, administrative and counseling offices, social spaces, and a number of residential spaces. Additional resources will be provided to support upper-classmen and transfer students with the cost of optional Honors housing.

Honors students residing in these living-learning communities will be connected to a supportive community of faculty, staff, and peers and will have multiple opportunities to engage in scholarly and co-curricular programming that contribute to their personal and professional development. These living-learning communities will be developed through: the improvement and increase of structured residence hall programs by Honors [Faculty-in-Residence](#); collaborations with campus partners to provide additional resources and opportunities to Honors students; establishment of theme-based halls that foster interest and growth in a variety of interdisciplinary subjects and in civic engagement; and residential events/programming around the three Pillars of Excellence.

3. Secure ongoing financial resources to support Honors students and programs:

Financial resources will be secured to support University Honors College students and programs at a level consistent with premier honors colleges at peer institutions. The financial support will allow the University Honors College to establish a sustainable financial model in support of financially healthy programs and resources, to achieve efficiency on the return on investment per student, and to eliminate the possibility of ever assessing a fee to students to participate in the University Honors College. By

securing ongoing financial resources for University Honors College students and programs, the University Honors College will be able to compete for high-achieving students, to provide students with an affordable living-learning community, to offer competitive [scholarship funding](#) to eligible students to support high-impact educational experiences, and to support student research in pursuit of the capstone project.

To secure ongoing, financial resources, the University Honors College will develop alumni relations, in conjunction with the Office of Alumni and Constituent Relations, in order to establish contacts between University Honors College students and alumni, and to schedule regular alumni events within the University Honors College. The University Honors College will establish donor relations, in conjunction with University Advancement, to pursue extramural grant funding for student programs; to establish relationships with companies and graduate schools to obtain funding in exchange for promoting their opportunities to University Honors College students; to identify foundations that support prestigious scholarships and awards for high-achieving students; to leverage financial resources with campus partners to fund opportunities for students; to provide students with information and resources pertaining to available scholarships and other sources of support; and to establish funding for endowed chairs, programs, and programmatic spaces within the University Honors College.

4. Increase persistence, four-year graduation, and the percentage of students who complete capstone projects:

The University Honors College will continue its emphasis on student success by promoting persistence, improving four-year graduation rates, and increasing the number of students who complete [capstone projects](#). These initiatives will be achieved by maintaining an active counseling program, with a student-to-counselor ratio not to exceed 250:1; by providing Honors-specific opportunities that are aligned with the University Honors Pillars of Excellence; by continuing to offer priority registration for all University Honors College students; by ensuring that all University Honors College courses also satisfy breadth and/or major requirements for students; by improving the messaging to both students and faculty, via e-mail, workshops, and handbooks, pertaining to the capstone project requirement; by developing University Honors College courses that provide early and sufficient preparation for the capstone project experience; by maintaining flexibility in University Honors College requirements, in order to accommodate students from various majors; by surveying students throughout their University Honors College experience to identify obstacles to capstone project completion and planning applicable intervention methods; and by requiring students to enroll in courses during their final year that will allow them to earn academic credit for the research and writing related to the capstone project and that will provide them with additional motivation to complete their capstone projects.

All University Honors students who complete a capstone project will continue to be recognized at the annual University Honors Cording Ceremony, where students are presented with Honors cords by their faculty-mentors and where select [students](#), [professors](#), [faculty-mentors](#), and [graduate teaching assistants](#) are recognized for their contributions to University Honors during the preceding year.

5. Identify innovative and creative initiatives to attract the best and brightest undergraduates to UCR, while maintaining a diverse undergraduate population:

The University Honors College will aggressively pursue strategies for providing the best possible educational experience for all students. The University Honors College will become a national exemplar for recruitment and admission practices by recruiting greater numbers of high-achieving students from high schools and community colleges, as the UCR undergraduate population continues to increase, in addition to recruiting rising sophomores and juniors from UCR. The University Honors College will also establish a brand that is consistent with the UCR brand and that highlights the unique aspects of the University of California's first, true Honors College, such as freshman ignition seminars; exclusive, high-impact, educational experiences consistent with the three Pillars of Excellence; the University Honors Ambassador program, which engages in the recruitment of new students and the support of existing students; and scholarship funding for University Honors students, consistent with funding opportunities for high-achieving students at other campuses. To recruit community college transfer students, the University Honors College will cultivate its Honors-to-Honors Partnership Agreement with the Honors Transfer Council of California. The University Honors College will employ a holistic admission policy that maintains diversity in all categories (e.g., ethnic, gender, cultural, religious, sexual orientation, first-generation, disciplinary, etc.) and will continue to attract students from underserved populations by working with cultural-based offices on campus. By implementing best practices from other campuses, the University Honors College will improve the persistence of students in the University Honors College, resulting in an increase of completed capstone projects in the senior year.

6. Maximize student contact and high-impact programs by streamlining administrative processes:

Administrative processes will be streamlined for faculty and staff to provide clear decision-making guidelines and appropriate resources to improve the ease and efficiency of day-to-day tasks. A University Honors College Advisory Council, consisting of faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners, will be established to guide the University Honors College in implementing measures that will support University Honors College students and programs. These measures will include: creating straightforward and simple requirements, policies, and procedures for all Honors components; eliminating processes that do not contribute to the ease and efficiency with which tasks are completed; streamlining data collection, assessment, evaluation, and reporting processes to track student progress, assess program effectiveness, and provide information to campus communication and advancement outlets; and establishing a database of best practices and tools for implementation.

These efforts will aid faculty and staff in creating high-quality programming and meaningful student engagement that, whenever possible, will be incorporated into existing coursework. Among other programming, the University Honors College will work with the Office of Undergraduate Education to enhance service learning, academic internship, and extramural (e.g., UCDC, UCCS, etc.) educational opportunities for Honors students and to increase the number of students who compete for [prestigious scholarships and awards](#); with the Office of International Affairs, to increase the number of Honors students who participate in [education abroad experiences](#); and with the [Exceptional Research Opportunities Program \(EXROP\)](#), [Maximizing Access to](#)

[Research Careers Undergraduate Student Training in Academic Research](#) (MARC U-STAR), [Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship](#) (MMUF), and other programs to cultivate future leaders and facilitate a student's successful completion of Honors and optimal student outcomes.

7. Promote and provide professional development opportunities to staff and faculty to ensure continuous learning that will benefit students and programs:

The University Honors College will promote and provide professional development opportunities to support its staff and faculty in gaining skills and developing networks that will translate into outstanding services and programming for Honors students. These will include, but not be limited to: participation in applicable conferences, trainings, seminars, courses, and certifications; post-baccalaureate education; access to peer-reviewed academic literature; professional memberships; sharing best practices through conference presentations and publication submissions; and on-the-job developmental opportunities.

Next Steps on the Path to an Honors College

The University of California, Riverside, established its honors program thirty years ago and has engaged thousands of students in academic excellence, personal growth, and preparation for successful careers in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. During that time, the undergraduate population at UCR has increased in size and improved in college preparedness, which have placed greater demands on University Honors, as it endeavors to add more courses, co-curricular experiences, civic engagement opportunities, and financial support for its students. To maintain its level of service to students, centered around its three Pillars of Excellence, Promoting Creativity and Innovation, Cultivating a Culture of Contribution, and Celebrating Diversity and Global Citizenship, University Honors requires a new, sustainable model that is consistent with the University of California's mission to serve society as a center of higher learning that includes undergraduate education, research, and public service.¹ This new model would be best supported by establishing the University of California's first, bona fide honors college.

Honors colleges have existed at many of the nation's leading, public, research universities for decades, including Hutton Honors College at the University of Indiana, the Honors College at Michigan State University, Schreyer Honors College at Penn State, Purdue University Honors College, Rutgers Honors College, Stony Brook University Honors College, the University of Arizona Honors College, University at Buffalo University Honors College, University of Maryland Honors College, University of Missouri Honors College, and Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon. In addition to the long-standing honors colleges that exist across the country, there has been a significant increase in the [establishment of new honors colleges](#) in the United States in the recent past. Establishing an honors college at UC Riverside would fulfill the recommendation of the 2014 National Collegiate Honors College External Review Report to transition to an honors college:

¹ The Mission statement from the *University of California Academic Plan, 1974 – 1978* reads: "The distinctive mission of the University is to serve society as a center of higher learning, providing long-term societal benefits through transmitting advanced knowledge, discovering new knowledge, and functioning as an active working repository of organized knowledge. That obligation, more specifically, includes undergraduate education, graduate and professional education, research, and other kinds of public service, which are shaped and bounded by the central pervasive mission of discovering and advancing knowledge."

The two main values of honors are (1) the community and camaraderie of other top students (that is, basically, what parents think they are paying for at a private college or university), and (2) facing the challenge of deeper courses and the thesis that – together - set them up as more confident, effective people when they go on in life. It is thus imperative that an honors experience comes as close to making these two things happen as it can.

It would also contribute to the goal of “achieving the profile of an AAU member institution,” similar to the institutions listed above, as stated in “UCR 2020: The Path to Preeminence.”

While the University of California does not currently have an honors college, it does maintain campus-wide honors programs at UC Davis and UC Irvine, and college- or department-specific honors programs at UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara, and UC Santa Cruz. A distinctive college structure, such as the one proposed in this strategic plan, is not unique to the UC system, as evidenced by the six, innovative, undergraduate colleges at UC San Diego and the College of Creative Studies at UC Santa Barbara. Through years of hard work, University Honors at UC Riverside has created a unique, interdisciplinary curriculum; built a team of dedicated faculty and staff; developed and supported student-led initiatives; and implemented other best practices consistent with the National Collegiate Honors Council’s Basic Characteristics of a [Fully Developed Honors College](#). As such, it is well-positioned to take the next step as the flagship honors program in the UC system by becoming a stand-alone college. The UCR Honors College would have a unique identity that supports outstanding undergraduate scholarship, in partnership with the other schools and colleges on campus, and would elevate the reputation of UC Riverside as a premier, undergraduate university in the nation.

This can be achieved by using this strategic plan as the “in-depth, evidence-based analysis of the possible establishment of a University Honors College” described in “UCR 2020: The Path to Preeminence,” and by “hiring a Dean and then to task this person with overseeing development and execution of the infrastructure, faculty, and staffing plans. This has the advantage of establishing a person who directs the process from the very beginning,” as recommended in the 2010 “Re-Envisioning Report.”