

Student Services Program Review Report

Sierra College, 2018-19

Department/Program Name: Honors
Date Submitted: April 24, 2019
Submitted By: Jason File

Ideally, the writing of a Program Review Report should be a collaborative process of full-time and part time faculty as well as well all other staff and stakeholders invested in the present and future success of the program at all sites throughout the district. The Program Review Committee needs as much information as possible to evaluate the past and current performance, assessment, and planning of your program.

1) Relevancy: This section assesses the program’s significance to the students, the college, and the community.

1a) To provide context for the information that follows, describe the basic functions of your area and/or program. If applicable, also describe how the program aligns with state mandates, priorities set by external agencies, or any other relevant organizations.

The Sierra College Honors Program is administered by the Honors Committee, a standing committee of the Academic Senate. The mission statement of the Honors Committee is as follows:

Oversee and regulate the Honors Program at Sierra College including creating and revising options for honors-level coursework for students, reviewing and approving honors contracts, and expanding the Honors Program. [\[Honors Committee link\]](#)

The Academic Senate describes the committee as follows:

This committee was implemented to oversee the Honors program and its contracts, along with establishing program specifics that allow our Honors students to be recognized at transfer institutions for their advanced work [\[link\]](#)

The Honors Committee is comprised of 12 members: a chairperson, a representative from student services, and 10 faculty members from a range of disciplines. The Committee meets once or twice a semester in two-hour blocks.

The Honors Program functions through a contract between individual instructors and individual students. The template for the contract is made publicly available on the Sierra College website [\[link\]](#) or by request to any Honors Committee members. Instructors and students collaborate to design and then sign the contract proposal (in the first 3-4 weeks of the semester). These contracts are then sent to the Honors Committee for review, approval, and signature. They are then sent to the appropriate dean for final signature.

Either students or professors may initiate the contract proposal, and professors may refuse for any reason.

When an Honors Contract is successfully completed, the relevant information is sent to Admissions and Records, and the designation "Completed with Honors" then appears next to the course on the student's official transcript. When a student has completed 5 such contracts, the designation "With Honors" appears next to the Degree Title on the student's official transcript.

1b) How does your program support the district mission, as quoted below, and align with student needs? Please include an analysis of how your program supports ISLOs (Institutional Student Learning Outcomes) and/or or the district's strategic planning goals.

Sierra College provides an academic environment that is challenging and supportive for students of diverse backgrounds, needs, abilities, and goals with a focus on access, equity, student-centered learning, and achievement. The college is committed to practicing diversity and inclusion and recognizes that a diverse and inclusive curriculum and workforce promotes its educational goals and values. Institutional learning outcomes guide the college's programs and services, encouraging students to identify and expand their potential by developing knowledge, skills, and values to be fully engaged and contributing members of the global community. Sierra prepares students by offering Associate's and transfer degrees, certificates, career and technical education, foundational skills, as well as lifelong learning and enrichment.

The Honors Program may be seen as a value-added component to all existing instructional programs. It is intrinsically designed to further Sierra College's mission to help students "identify and expand their potential by developing knowledge, skills, and values", but the context within which it functions varies according to interest area, degree type, program, and course. Put another way, the Honors Program potentially supports every instructional ISLO, PSLO, and CLSO, and in any given semester actually supports a variable range of them.

1c) Please analyze your program's effectiveness in supporting the strategic goals with which your program aligns. Please provide evidence in support of this analysis, including service or student learning outcomes, equity data, or other measurements of success.

Goal 1: Achieve equitable access and increase student success, retention and persistence in order to increase the number of students who complete certificates and degrees or transfer to four year colleges and universities while maintaining high levels of academic integrity.

The Honors Program does not primarily function to achieve and/or increase access, success, retention and persistence. The program does, however, allow equal access in the sense that it is open to all students, regardless of past academic record, GPA, or the degree type they are pursuing.

Goal 2: Identify and close success and equity gaps amongst underserved and/or underrepresented student populations.

It would be possible for the Honors Program, in collaboration with the Research Office and

Interest Area Support Teams, to undertake this goal, but we currently have no past record of doing so and have not discussed it in committee meetings. Our involvement in and possible contribution to Sierra College's equity goals will be a discussion item in our Fall 19 Committee Meeting, and an action item for the Spring 20 meeting. The discussion and action items will engage the comments at 3c and 3e.2e below.

Goal 3: Provide professional growth and develop a climate of inclusion in order to support highly effective and innovative teaching and learning, support services, operations, and collaboration.

The Honors Program functions primarily to provide professional growth and development in order to support highly effective and innovative teaching and learning (1.a above)

Goal 4: Meet and exceed external standards through an outcomes based framework for continuous quality improvement

The Honors Program functions primarily to help faculty and students exceed the standard outcomes based framework in a class (CSLO/s) and meet new, higher ones, which are specified in the text of the Honors Contracts (1.a above)

Goal 5: Modernize, revitalize and develop new facilities and infrastructure based on the current Facilities and Technology Master Plans. [N/A]

Goal 6: Expand community partnerships and funding opportunities to support strategic goals and leverage resources. [N/A]

Please discuss any developments related to MAPS, guided pathways or interest areas that have impacted and/or will impact your program's support for these goals:

Guided Pathways may provide an opportunity for the Honors Program to be promoted and tailored to instructional programs in the context of the several Guided Pathways. We currently have no record of doing so and have not discussed it at committee meetings.

1d) Optional Additional Data: Describe any other relevant contributions of your program not incorporated above. These may include but are not limited to contributions to diversity, campus climate, cultural enrichment, community ties, partnerships, and service. Please include specific data and examples when these are available and relevant to the analysis.

We have only anecdotal material about these contributions, but taken in aggregate the Honors Contracts do undeniably contribute to campus climate, cultural enrichment, and community ties. In particular, they help foster closer relationships between faculty and students.

2) Currency

2a) Service Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: Considering any relevant information, please describe and analyze your program's development and assessment of Service Assessment Outcomes and/or Student Learning Outcomes, including any relevant information regarding diversity and equity goals. Please describe any improvements or changes made to the program as a result of this analysis.

N/A; the Honors Committee does not have Service Outcomes or SLO Assessments; for data on Program effectiveness, see below (3).

2b) Professional Development: Describe how departmental activities serve to improve student service and student outcomes. Include flex activities, departmental meetings and activities, conferences, outreach to other colleges, research and implementation of best practices, changes in legislation, mandates from regulatory agencies, required faculty certifications, health and safety trainings or other factors. How do these activities contribute to your program's self-assessment and planning?

N/A; the Honors Committee does not have Student Service and/or Student Outcomes; for discussion of Program effectiveness, see below (3).

2c) Optional Additional Data: Provide any other information, not included above, that contributes to your program's success in supporting student service and student outcomes.

N/A

3) Effectiveness: This section assesses the effectiveness of the program in light of traditional measurements.

3a) Retention and Success/Service Outcomes: Please analyze your success in achieving your program goals using whatever data is relevant to your program, including service outcomes and/or student learning outcomes. Describe any changes you have made that have improved the effectiveness of the program as well as any barriers you may have encountered in making these or other changes.

Data: Over a 3 year period from Spring of 2016 to Spring of 2019, the Honors Committee has received an average of 54 contract proposals per semester, with an average of 33 successfully completed (61%). The high number of contracts in a semester was 68 (Spring 18), the low was 40 (Spring 19).

3b) Usage Trends - Identify and analyze the usage trends relevant to your program for the last three years. Address separately the data for on ground and on-line services, as well as usage at the various centers when applicable. Analyze these trends as well as any challenges experienced by the program in terms of providing timely and effective student service. If you determine that you need to improve the program's performance in any way, please describe how you plan to achieve this goal.

As relevant, please address any impact of the development of Interest Areas and Guided pathways on program planning and assessment.

These numbers (3a) are on average modestly above those reported in the previous program review (HonorsPR2015-16.doc; ed. Rebecca Quinn). Worthy of note is a fairly significant drop-off after Spring 2018. The two most recent semesters have had the lowest number of submissions in the 3-year cycle (49 in Fall 18, 40 in Spring 19). We will attempt to address the recent drop in Contract Proposals submitted through the steps outlined in (3e) below.

We believe that Guided Pathways and Interest Areas will have negligible impact on the Honors Program

3c) Equity: Analyze and evaluate your program's performance in promoting and/or achieving equity. Based on this analysis, describe any plans you have to sustain or improve the program's contribution to student equity as a central component of student success.

As mentioned above (1c.Goal1), the Honors Program is already open access to all students across every Sierra College instructional program. It would be possible to target underrepresented students (and the faculty and staff who serve them) in outreach and advocacy for Honors Program participation, though currently we have no record of doing so and have not discussed it in Honors Committee meetings.

3d) Please provide any additional information relevant to the assessment and evaluation of your program.

In Committee discussion, we decided, based on our own experiences and in consultation with other faculty and students, that the current contract may be improved in terms of layout, language, and section simplification (see also Academic Senate Recollections, 3/13/19, at IV.Jason File). We also realize that paper- or doc-based methods of dissemination could be improved and simplified greatly by the sorts of form programs produced by Microsoft, which Sierra College users may access on the Sharepoint platform. Since the contract template is the cornerstone of the entire Honors Program, we deemed it critical that it be as simple, clear, and user-friendly as possible, and that improvements towards that end were possible.

3e) Referring to the analysis in 3a-3d, your departmental planning document, and relevant outcomes assessments and evaluation, please describe your program's plans to maintain or increase its effectiveness and evaluate your efforts to achieve these goals.

The Honors Committee decided in Spring 2019 to increase program effectiveness in two stages.

1. Revise the contract itself. Based on the considerations in (3d) above, we resolved to have a revised and simplified form ready to submit for approval to Academic Senate by Fall 2019, and if approved to replace the current contract template for use that semester.

2. By Spring 2020, once the contract itself and the processes associated with it have been simplified and streamlined, we will focus on scaling up participation in the program. This will be done through
 - a. A revised Marketing/email campaign
 - b. A revised description of the Program on Sierra College's Website
 - c. Coordinating with Interest Area instructional and support staff to embed the Honors Program option in their relevant materials
 - d. A FLEX workshop for faculty
 - e. Outreach to faculty and staff who are significantly involved with underrepresented students
 - f. Advocating for the Sierra College Honors Program through Phi Theta Kappa (a national honors society which counts hundreds of current Sierra College students in its membership roster). In addition, we can leverage PTK committees to push the Honors Program and Contracts on a class-by-class and instructor-by-instructor basis
 - g. Including the Honors Program information in all relevant onboarding materials

4) Resources: This category assesses the adequacy of current resources available to the program and describes and justifies the resources required to achieve planning goals by relating program needs to the assessments above.

4a) Please describe the future direction and goals of your program for the next three years in terms of sustaining or improving program effectiveness, relevance, and currency. Please include any analysis of relevant performance assessments in your explanation and of any impacts on program planning and development related to guided pathways, student equity, and student success.

See (3e) above.

The desired outcome of this plan is to scale up by an order of magnitude both awareness of and participation in the Honors Program. If this occurs, we may need to re-evaluate the processes of contract review and approval, since it is conceivable that the workload could become unsustainable for a committee of 10.

It is also possible that we may open exploration into the creation of Honors Classes, though when we have looked at this before, it has presented significant challenges in terms of scheduling and loading. Those challenges notwithstanding, Guided Pathways and/or Interest Areas may be an ideal context within which to work out an Honors class pilot program.

4b) Please describe and justify any projected requests for additional staff, new or augmented technology/equipment, and additional or remodeled facilities necessary to support the goals presented above. Please incorporate any relevant data related to service outcomes, student success, and equity. N/A

4c) Please check the appropriate boxes in the chart below indicating the general reasons for the resource requests described above (please check all that apply): N/A

Function/Role	Maintenance	Development	Growth	Safety	Outcomes	Other success measures	No Requests
							X

5) Summary/Closing

5a) Briefly summarize the program’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities/future directions, challenges.

The strengths of the Honors Program are

1. It is open access
2. It fosters meaningful and influential student/professor relationships
3. It creates immediate and desirable short-term goals for students as they work through their completion processes
4. It enhances students’ transcripts, and increases the likeliness that they will have access to impactful letters of recommendation to use in their transfer and scholarship applications

The weaknesses of the Honors Program are

1. Students and faculty must design and sign the contract in the first month of the semester, when they (often) do not know each other well, and when students haven’t yet felt the full burden of their work/school balances (and so are prone to over-commit themselves)
2. Lack of awareness of the Program by faculty, staff, and students
3. Hesitancy on the part of faculty to take on the extra work required to design supervise an honors contract. This is mitigated somewhat by the FLEX credit earned - 3 hours per contract, up to 15 each semester, but is not totally eliminated. Furthermore, part time faculty who teach one or two classes, and who already get FLEX credit for department meetings and other FLEX-week activities, have no incentive to design and supervise an honors contract.
4. Complexity and redundancy in the contract itself, and also in the process by which they are submitted, evaluated, and processed.

5b) How has the author of this report integrated the views and perspectives of stakeholders in the program?

Views and perspectives accessed through consultation with Committee Members at Committee Meetings, and also through Q & A at Academic Senate (3/13/19)