

Blueprint for Quality Enhancement at USC

**SOUTH CAROLINA
HONORS COLLEGE (SCHC)
2017**

*Draft
3/10/16*

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) Dashboard Targets: The SCHC elevates the *total UG enrollment* and the *average SAT/ACT scores* by attracting high-achieving students (average SAT/ACT of our most recent class: 1431/32.4). About 65 to 70% of our students consistently report that the Honors College was a crucial factor in choosing USC. Our applications, up 59.5% over the past five years, increased this year 13.8% to 3152, and we've grown from 1458 students in 2011 to 1758 in 2015. Our *Freshman retention rate*, 97.92%, is exceeded only by Yale, Chicago, and Columbia at 99%, and Brown, Dartmouth, MIT, Princeton, Stanford, Notre Dame, and U Penn at 98%. The SCHC positively impacts the *six-year graduation rate* (91.67%), and we also help lower the *student to faculty ratio* by offering smaller classes. We have added classes aggressively, increasing from 419 in 2011 to 534 this year, and our stand-alone Honors courses typically average in the 15 to 19 range.

In terms of *research expenditures*, the Honors College provides to students over \$370,000 each year, allotting ~\$235k for undergraduate research, ~\$45k for student travel for study abroad and research presentations, ~\$75k for internships, and ~\$15k for senior thesis support. The SCHC contributes to the pursuit of *national scholarships and fellowships* (replacing *national honors and awards for faculty*): Although our students comprise only about 6.7% of the student body, they have consistently generated over half of the applicants and winners of USC's prestigious scholarships and fellowships. Finally, we track *graduation "with honors"* (replacing *doctoral degrees*), which has increased from an excellent rate of 75% in 2011 to a phenomenal 80% in 2015 (4-year rate; 84% over 6 years).

B) Key Performance Parameters (KPP): We promote *teaching excellence* by striving to offer small, innovative classes taught by research-active faculty; by monitoring student evaluations and working to secure the best possible teachers and courses for our classes; and by helping to recruit and attract the most talented, motivated faculty to USC. For the second KPP, we focus on *reputation and undergraduate accomplishment*. Our students' first-time acceptance rate to medical school is a spectacular 84%, and students applying to graduate schools and law schools often must choose among the top programs in the world. Our students enhance USC's reputation by engaging in research as part of their requirements, publishing in professional journals and other venues, presenting at meetings, winning national and international awards. SCHC students engage in many *service* 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 is now in its third year; *Writing South Carolina*, with a preface from Pat Conroy, the contest's head judge for its first two years, is available from USC Press. Finally, the Honors College is enhancing the *sustainability* of its mission, the fourth KPP, by vigorously pursuing funding: we played a crucial role in acquiring the Stamps funding, and have successfully raised the matching endowment funds of \$3m. We are working now to double the number of Stamps Scholars, from 20 to 40. We reached our goal of \$18m for Carolina's Promise over a year ahead of schedule, raising \$24m, which included increased funding for Carolina Scholars.

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 everything we do and affects most directly the first four measures--*total UG enrollment, average SAT score, freshman-sophomore retention rate, and six-year graduation rate*. We work closely with Admissions, from our initial contact with prospective students, to closure with advising and summer orientation. We are involved in many large-scale events and individual meetings. Strategies and actions employed over the past year to sustain and increase our success include the following: a) making the application itself more inviting and revealing by reducing the essay prompts to only two—one focusing on the applicant's intellectual life, and the other focusing on leadership and service; b) hiring and training a new recruiting coordinator, an SCHC graduate; c) involving more students, associate deans, and staff in the process; d) offering separate information sessions on Mondays and Fridays for sophomores/juniors and seniors (who have different needs and interests); e) expanding the success of our Greenville alumni gathering (which invites prospective students and guidance counselors) to other regions; f) exploring the role alumni might play in recruiting by using Partnership Board members as test cases; g) creating a new position that combines alumni and development; h) expanding scholarship funds; i) working to evolve the unique role of 650 Lincoln as honors housing; j) developing an earlier and more effective award process for our scholarships, including the Belser; k) launching successfully the BARSC/MD program, which has enrolled its first class and attracted considerable attention from prospective students; and l) involving the Faculty Fellows in recruiting.

Our strategies going forward must include adding the final wing to the Honors Residence Hall as soon as possible, and also enhancing the sense of an Honors community at 650 Lincoln. The wing at 650 Lincoln offers priority reservations to Honors students, and has provided a housing opportunity for sophomores and juniors who would otherwise be squeezed out of honors housing. The facility is located on campus, but is not fully “on-campus” housing. Most notably, it lacks the mentoring system and the leasing flexibility provided by University Housing. Next year our students will occupy a larger wing of 650 Lincoln. We have arranged to schedule Honors classes there, but there is only one classroom. We are hiring an additional advisor whose duties will include evolving the sense of community there. The opportunity to live in on-campus Honors housing, not only in the freshman year but also beyond, is important to prospective students, and many of our competitors have recently built, or are in the process of building, impressive facilities for their Honors 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 continued top ranking. For multiple reasons, our class sizes have grown larger than we would like in some key courses. We initiated hiring a Math Instructor, which has been helpful, but

were unable to hire Instructors in other fields. And, in fact, research-active faculty, not Instructors, are the teachers we need. We also need more stand-alone honors courses in Business and Engineering. Our strategy has been essentially to put on as many honors classes as we can acquire from the various units, aggressively using funds from student fees. Our challenge will be to acquire more STEM honors classes, shift H10 (hybrid) sections into H01 sections (stand-alone), and continue to provide innovative, unique, transformative offerings. The Honors College Faculty Fellows have proved to be a valuable asset, providing teaching, mentoring, advice, program development, recruiting assistance, and community building. Next year we plan to focus the duties, reduce the salary supplements, and expand the number of Fellows from 15 to 25. By working individually and creatively with colleges, departments, and programs, we hope to generate more teaching capacity and lower our class sizes. Our goal is to cap Honors classes at 18 by Fall 2017.

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”). Last year we added a second layer of “beyond the classroom” requirements, which included applying for a national fellowship or scholarship, along with other activities. We did see an increase in the number of students applying for awards, but we have concluded that the increase is not related to the requirement, and that there are more effective ways to promote these activities. We have experienced numerous problems with implementing this second layer, and our Policy Committee has thus returned to our earlier policy, while maintaining our requirements at 45 credit hours. Participation in Study Abroad is again at record levels, as are research, internship, and service activities. Our new Internship director, hired last year, continues to do an excellent job.

d) Graduation “with honors” is a function of students’ experiences as a whole, including their sense of community. We continue to increase and enhance the number and the quality of events for students. Our traditional major events have been given more weight and pageantry. Our weekly “Honors Newsletter,” launched last year, is keeping students informed about opportunities and events in an appealing format. Our alumni magazine, *AHA!*, has improved dramatically.

e) The acquisition of DeSaussure has had a positive impact on students and staff alike, as we now have adequate space for advisors. We are planning with the University architect, Derek Bruner, to use the state appropriation for Honors laboratories and classrooms (\$930k) to create a very smart classroom and an advanced computing lab in DeSaussure. Painting and renovations in Harper and DeSaussure, and the addition of a small garden outside Harper, have contributed to the quality of life.

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

2016-2017 Academic Year Goals

Goal One: *Evolve the procedures and resources needed to establish clear and shared expectations for essential courses, and to limit class sizes to 18 by Fall 2017.*

i) Progress: The foundation for our success is our curriculum, as the Honors College is noted and celebrated for a) the number of classes offered in fields across the curriculum, allowing us to require 45 honors credits to graduate “with honors”; b) the individual attention made possible by the small class sizes; and c) the quality of the faculty, who have primarily comprised the University’s most accomplished teachers and researchers. These features allow us to recruit outstanding students and enable the excellence of the teaching in the Honors College.

Enrollment pressures, teaching quotas, changes in budgetary policies, and various other factors have made it increasingly difficult, however, to deliver the curriculum we have promised students. We have improved the percentage of H10 to H01 classes (hybrid or mixed to honors-only) slightly, from 36.7% in 2012 to 34.2% in 2015. But class sizes in some H10 (or hybrid) sections and some crucial science classes are unacceptably large.

Although we have reduced pressure by revising our requirements (increasing electives, eliminating one lab science and one English), this measure has provided only temporary and very partial relief. With our largest class ever expected in the Fall, the situation will not improve without action, as we have had successive years of substantial growth, exceeding expectations: in 2015, we had 488 entering freshmen students, almost equally in- and out-of-state; in 2014, we had 436; in 2013, 411; 2012 and 2011, 349; and in 2010, 338. In my 2012 Blueprint, I envisioned that the Honors College, with careful planning and adequate resources, might grow to 400 incoming students and 1600 overall by 2018. Although our class sizes have grown, and we have seen some housing pressures, our ability to deal with more students has also happily exceeded my expectations. We have added classes to the utmost, and we have been hiring excellent advisors, who have effectively guided students toward meeting our requirements.

Still, as the overall student population has also grown, some units have struggled to ration their teaching capacity among graduate students, majors, Core requirements, and Honors courses. Rather than compel chairs and directors to decide the relative importance and viable size of Honors courses, we need a process that assures Honors courses are seen by units as “mission-critical,” and that provides the units ample resources to provide the teaching quantity and quality we need.

For the coming Fall, if the projection holds, we have a fairly clear idea of the seats and the courses that we will need. In terms of seats, we are getting close to an adequate number, but in terms of courses, we appear to need at least 8 to 10 more courses in some

key fields (STEM and Business). We have only begun to talk with unit leaders about the best strategies in their particular situations, with some encouraging responses. Beyond this Fall, we need to realize that we cannot stand still, much less tolerate any deterioration of our curriculum. To maintain our position as one of the top honors colleges, we need to commit to the goal of maximum class sizes of 18 by Fall 2017. To do that, we project that an additional 51 Honors classes will be needed. Although this may seem to be a daunting number, this goal is actually very achievable: We have, after all, already increased the number of our courses from 419 in 2011 to 534 in 2015.

ii) Plans: a) Working with unit leaders in key areas, establish agreements regarding curricular needs and responsibilities, as well as resources needed to meet those needs. b) Working with unit leaders, identify which strategies for increasing teaching capacity in needed courses will be most feasible and effective in that unit. c) Identify and create resources within the Honors College that can be shifted to the units, and secure additional resources as needed.

Goal Two: *Expand and refine the Faculty Fellows Program.*

i) Progress: The Faculty Fellows Program has proved to be extremely valuable in mentoring students, in recruiting prospective students, in teaching courses and soliciting others to teach courses, in communicating with departments, in directing theses and lining up others to direct, and much more. By focusing their activities, we will reduce the salary supplement and expand the program from 15 to 25 Fellows. Because we transfer funds for courses to the units, and we work primarily with faculty who are already involved with the Honors College, or who will take over existing courses, this expansion will not drain away any resources from the units.

ii) Plans: The current Fellows have participated in creating the process and the terms for the second group of Fellows, which we plan, with the provost's approval, to name before the end of the semester. We will be seeking the cooperation and collaboration of the various units involved.

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

i) Progress: Every parameter depends upon the Honors College's basic functions: we must be able to control our curriculum and advise and register students effectively, for instance. We have made considerable progress in some areas, including the creation of an advising procedure for incoming students compatible with the new orientation. As part of the University's focus on improving advising, 100% of our advisors have certified as freshmen advisors, and we are improving advising in multiple ways, and will continue to focus on this crucial activity. We have created work-arounds for some problems, especially those related to Banner. We have a digital record-keeping system. We have hired new staff. We are making progress.

ii) Plans: In the coming months, we will be reorganizing the staff, clarifying and assessing what we are doing. We are continuing to solve or work out ways to live with our logistical problems, one by one. Our goal is to provide students with superb multi-faceted advising.

Goal Four: *Continue to improve and expand activities to increase diversity, support students, cultivate potential award applicants with OFSP, build community, and enrich students' educational experiences, both within and beyond the classroom.*

i) Progress: 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. We have had some success increasing the diversity of our staff and our student population. Our most recent demographics indicate that at least 24.5% of our students are non-white (61 African American, 16 American Indian, 141 Asian, 4 Hawaiian, 75 Hispanic, 134 two or more races, and 30 “no race identified”).

We have also continued to make considerable progress building community, adding many events and activities. We may be at a saturation point in fact with community-building activities, and in the future we will analyze with Housing how we might collaborate more effectively.

Almost all of our students engage in an internship, service learning activity, directed research, or study abroad. Our study abroad participation has been increasing (now over 70%), and our internship program is thriving. Our students participate in some amazing research. And the number of students who connect with OFSP is increasing.

ii) Plans: We will continue to seek a more diverse student body, recruiting students, both incoming and transfers, with special events and communications. We will continue to emphasize our experiential learning opportunities. We have an effective referral process in place for potential award applicants, we have specific plans to draw more attention to these opportunities. Kim Simmons will serve as our Associate Dean for Diversity, Inclusion, and Recruitment, and she will continue to focus on the challenge of recruiting those students who invariably have other very appealing options.

Goal Five: *Focus on student outcomes, expanding internships and career advising.*

i) Progress: Contributing to service and sustainability, we continue work on knowing with more clarity what our students do when they graduate, although we have made progress. Our new alumni director will be focusing on that analysis. We are instituting a checklist (a kind of performance review and prospectus) that students fill out and bring to their advising sessions. This information will make sure that students are thinking about their options after graduation, and that they have a clear understanding of what is involved in pursuing these options. (If one wants to go to graduate school, for instance, taking the GRE and lining up recommendations are crucial steps.) Our internship program in particular has been much enriched, and we anticipate that Ben Rex's Liberty Fellows project will contribute to further expansion.

ii) Plans: We will refine the data we have captured already, and with this spring's graduating class, we should have a much better idea of student outcomes. We have

previously planned to involve alumni in creating a career network, and to establish an alumni speaker series, and we should be able to make progress on these projects in the coming year.

Five-Year Goals

Goal One: *Further expand and improve the Honors curriculum, adding science classes especially for non-science majors, and reducing class sizes 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).
- Deliver superb advising and mentoring.
- Import the interactive pedagogy of Harkness teaching by training selected faculty.

Goal Two: *Continue to increase the number, diversity, quality, and retention of students, while at the same time delivering the nation's strongest, most comprehensive student experience.*

- **Size:** With sufficient resources and management, the SCHC can continue to grow and deliver a diverse and challenging curriculum. The incoming Honors class, we believe, should not exceed the capacity of Honors housing, and should arguably remain under 10% of the overall incoming UG population. If we continue to attract larger classes without any drop in quality, then we should consider creating a separate track for the BARSC/MD and other accelerated and BARSC degrees: a BARSC college, in other words, somewhat like Plan II at UT Austin. To deliver a viable curriculum, growth must be anticipated and controlled: once the Fall schedule has been made, it is very difficult to expand the number of classes to accommodate more students, and simply increasing the class sizes to handle more students is obviously undesirable.
- **Diversity:** Maintain and if possible increase our diversity; consider other kinds of diversity in admission criteria. Expand our international student population.
- **Quality:** maintain or increase the average SAT/ACT and/or middle 50% range.
- **Retention:** maintain our current stellar freshmen to sophomore retention, and our graduation “with honors” rate. These numbers will be very difficult to move upward—which doesn’t mean that we won’t be trying.

Goal Three: *Multiply the impact of the Faculty Fellows, 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:** Up to 30 faculty selected by 2018; fields representative of the curriculum.
- Involve more faculty in mentoring and advising (career and research).

Goal Four: *Development: Expand and intensify the focus on raising funds for scholarships, construction, and faculty; increase parental and alumni involvement and giving; nurture a commitment among students before graduation. Expand the Stamps Scholars Program. Secure a naming-gift.*

- Scholarships: Enhanced and more numerous scholarships will help us to attract the best students.
- Space: More dorm, office, and classroom space will be needed.
- Faculty: Create endowed chairs as part of the Faculty Fellows.
- Alumni and Friends: Formalize networking opportunities; create biographical profiles for each class; expand the advisory board in number and activity.

Goal Five: *Increase the value of an SCHC education.*

- Build corporate and academic partnerships.
- Expand awareness of the Honors College and the quality of students' experience.
- Focus on student outcomes.

IV. Appendices

Appendix A: Resources Needed:

1. Student Housing: We need to add the HRH wing, expanding the number of beds to 700, adding offices, a common room, and classrooms. Our facilities were very good five years ago but now lag behind a growing number of honors colleges. We also need to enhance the honors community at 650 Lincoln.
2. STEM classes: We have been losing non-major science seats steadily since at least Fall 2013, when we had 284 non-major seats. In Fall 2015 we had only 166. In the next ranking, honors science and engineering courses will earn bonus points, as the editor desires to recognize both their importance and the difficulty of scheduling them. The minimal solution (assuming the units do not have the capacity to solve this problem): Hire Instructors in Chemistry and Biology to open up teaching capacity. The optimal solution: Hire faculty to serve as Honors Faculty, increasing the unit's teaching capacity for honors courses by assigning their teaching to the SCHC (other faculty could fill in, and the designation would rotate). We increased the student participation fee, which is generating additional resources to acquire courses. We should also recover the tuition funds from Washington Semester (no funds were transferred when SCHC took on this program, which generates tuition from USC and non-USC students. As a long-term strategy, hiring faculty who occupy Honors-designated teaching slots, which could be assigned to other faculty, will eventually alter the funding model of the Honors College, making providing Honors classes an essential mission for units.
3. Engineering and Business classes: Too many of our courses in these fields are hybrids, which were discounted in the last ranking and could cause problems for us in any future ranking. I do not see any options other than those described above to solve this problem. Same as for #2 above.
4. Smaller Classes: The SCHC will be able to contribute some funds toward the goal of a maximum class size of 18 by 2017. If faculty hires are used to staff honors classes, then the need for additional resources will be reduced. The amount needed to add 51 classes will depend on the configuration of strategies used, which could include the following: In addition to hiring faculty, and hiring instructors, we could also develop a teaching award and mentoring program for outstanding graduate students, allowing them to teach an honors class (and be mentored while doing it). We could allow faculty to teach an additional class for pay: This was a common practice under a previous dean, and faculty who were given this opportunity demonstrated that they were able to maintain their productivity (some even claimed to be more productive). We could hire carefully selected and monitored retired faculty to teach for us. We could allow faculty to bank classes (a temporary move, to be sure, but useful in the transition to greater teaching capacity), which does have scholarly benefits for the faculty member. We could hire teaching faculty with renewable contracts. We could hire faculty in science education—biologists, for instance, who would not need the start-up costs of a research lab given

their research area.

5 Advising staff: Our goal is to deliver the best advising and the best student experience in the nation. To keep advisors at about 150 advisees, we will need to hire at least two more advisors depending upon growth. The funding for these hires will be available in our budget as we reorganize.

Appendix B: Benchmarking Information

Top Ten, Peers: The second edition of the *Review of Fifty Public University Honors Programs* (2014), as you know, abandoned numerical rankings in favor of categories. In the previous rankings (2012), we were #1 when honors colleges were compared to other honors colleges (#11 when honors colleges were considered in the context of their universities). In the current ranking, our placement in the top category is especially remarkable. We are in the top group with Arizona State; Kansas; Michigan (the LSA Honors Program); Penn State; UT Austin, Plan II Honors Program; and University of Virginia's Echols Scholars Program. There will be a third edition published this coming October.

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, implementing the Faculty Fellows program, 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 works in progress, with increasing emphasis on “progress”: diversity, course compensation, and alumni relations. Briefly: To increase diversity, we will continue to work with Admissions to 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 will also need to shift resources into departmental budgets, and we will need for leaders at various levels to support the core value of the Honors College. We must foster the widespread 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 continue to focus on increasing contact and events. Strong alumni relations begin during the undergraduate years, and a major effort going forward will be toward enhancing the undergraduate experience, providing landmark events for each class year and more frequent and better organized social and educational events.

We also need to raise additional funds for targeted scholarships: as I've often said, it is an increasingly fierce competition for the best students. We are actively cultivating potential new donors.

Our most critical weakness now is the need for stand-alone courses, especially in the sciences, but also in Engineering and Business.

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

At the time of writing this blueprint, I did not find any data for the Honors College listed on the “kudzu” web site.

Steven Lynn
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