

Blueprint for Academic Excellence

South Carolina Honors College

University of South Carolina

AY 2022-2023 Accomplishments and AY 2023-2024 Plans

College Mission Statement

We will recruit a diverse group of outstanding students and provide them with (1) an extraordinary education that includes a rich curriculum with small classes and strong teachers; (2) insightful advising leading to academic success, on-time graduation, and meaningful lives after college; and (3) life-enhancing beyond-the-classroom experiences, including guidance in competing for national fellowships, study abroad, internships, service learning, undergraduate research, and the senior thesis.

College Vision Statement

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

Introduction

Our honors college, one of the oldest in the country, beginning in the 1960s and becoming a college in 1978, has been driven by a simple yet audacious objective: create an undergraduate experience that competes successfully for the most outstanding students, both in-state and out. In the first assessment of honors colleges in 2012, by Inside Honors, based on comprehensive, quantitative data, the SCHC earned the top ranking, and we have held that position in every subsequent rating (2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020). What makes our honors college most excellent—curriculum, staff, beyond-the-classroom activities, living communities, advising and mentoring, and more—is the result of remarkable and sustained collaboration and support, from the upper administration, deans, chairs, directors, faculty, and staff. The college has grown dramatically from 1430 students in 2011, to 2191 in 2023, while continuing to attract superlative students and offer them an exceptional education.

AY 2022-2023 Highlights

The Honors College maintained and even improved upon its remarkable curriculum, offering **596** Honors classes last year, a **3% increase** from AY22, with nearly **500** of them “stand-alone” Honors classes. Remarkably, we have increased the number of “signature” SCHC courses by **15%** over the past three years (a total of **118** SCHC courses in AY23). We reduced our average class size from **19.6** in AY22 to **18.4** in AY23 (the national average for the top 40 honors colleges is 18.6), while keeping the overall number of H10 meets-with courses low (**99**). We increased course options in programs where Honors students are enrolling in greater numbers, and developed **41** new and innovative “signature” SCHC courses, acting on our promise to offer students a diverse and comprehensive honors education. Working with Admissions, we enrolled another stellar class of **564** students, landing very near our target of 575. The SAT/ACT midrange scores for this class were **1410-1520/32-34**, class rank ranged in the top 1-5%, and average high school GPA was 4.77. Honors College applications from underrepresented minorities increased significantly (60% Black and 26% Latinx), although our yield increased only slightly. We also transferred **20** students into the Honors College, enhancing the student body. Our National Fellowship winners increased by **5%**, meeting that annual target. Finally, we continued to recruit, hire, and train

excellent staff to replace a significant number of departures. Hiring new staff has included redefining some roles. Searches have been time- and energy-consuming, but they are crucial, and in the past year we have conducted a record number of searches (24!) resulting in 18 new staff.

Annual Year 2022-2023 Accomplishments

Goal 1: Maintain and Enhance Honors Courses

Our curriculum, the most important factor in the ratings of honors colleges, continued in the past year to distinguish the SCHC, providing our students with exceptional academic opportunities, fulfilling our promise to offer students a diverse and comprehensive honors education. Specific accomplishments included:

- Offering **596** Honors classes and reducing the average class size from **19.6** in AY21-22 to **18.4** in AY22-23.
- Partnering with CAS to grow honors course offerings within key majors experiencing significant growth, with an increase in Biology (from **25** classes in AY22 to **31** in AY23), Chemistry (from **32** in AY22 to **45** in AY23), and Carolina Core course options (from **156** in AY22 to **166** in AY23). New CHEM offerings were added to accommodate students pursuing the new Neuroscience major.
- Developing **41** new signature SCHC courses--innovative, often interdisciplinary, life-changing courses.
- Offering **34** courses related to service learning, social justice, and community building, providing students with meaningful opportunities to reflect on their world and engage in its preservation and evolution.
- Continuing to develop and offer an inventive slate of Honors study-abroad courses.
- Utilizing our new Schedule and Curriculum Coordinator role to develop regular assessment practices. One major curriculum assessment project is being executed each year in addition to regular semester assessments of course distribution, enrollment, and course evaluations. In AY22-23 assessment results were used to develop new policies and training sessions to support faculty and students in hybrid (H10) courses, which are used when a stand-alone (H01) course is not feasible.

Goal 2: Cultivate Faculty Involvement and Engagement

Our honors college has the good fortune to draw upon faculty from every discipline. Faculty not only teach Honors classes, but they direct senior theses, guide student research, support national fellowship applications, mentor and encourage students, participate in recruitment, and much more. Specific accomplishments over the past year included:

- Continuing to evolve and enlarge the Pearce Faculty Fellows Program, using the \$1.5m gift to add an additional **5 Fellows**, bringing the total to **24**. These faculty are involved in teaching, recruiting, mentoring, directing, career guidance, policy, and more. As faculty have rotated off this year (the usual term is two years), a new cohort of Fellows has been appointed, increasing diversity and expanding the college's relationships across campus. Every college at the university, except

Pharmacy and Music, is represented in the Faculty Fellows Program. (We plan to recruit faculty from Music in AY23-24).

- Developing pedagogy workshops so that all Honors faculty and instructional staff can participate in honors education training. Aimed particularly at those who are teaching for the first time in Honors, all faculty and instructional staff are encouraged to participate in these sessions.
- Assessing and clarifying Fellows' responsibilities to the college and their opportunities to serve and participate in the college's key areas (instruction, national fellowships, recruitment, senior thesis, mentoring, research, and governance). Comprehensive programming was developed to involve the Fellows regularly and intentionally in college planning and assessments, with regular meetings each academic year.
- Working with faculty and students to maximize success and satisfaction.

Goal 3: Provide Excellent Academic Advising and Support

Honors students have an advisor in the SCHC, as well as an advisor in their majors. With appointments of at least 30 minutes each term, Honors advisors focus especially on meeting Honors College requirements, taking advantage of opportunities, well-being, and planning for life after college. Honors College staff also support students in service learning, internships, research, study away, senior thesis, career planning, and more. Our efforts to provide superlative advising and support this year included the following accomplishments:

- Advising individually all continuing Honors students and assessing the results. Student satisfaction with advising was quite high, as evidenced by the Fall semester survey (response rate of 30%): **90%** of the respondents rated their Honors advising experience as either **Good or Excellent**, which is slightly higher (2.6%) than last year. Over the past 5-year survey period, in fact, most students have said their satisfaction rate was "excellent," ranging from 62 to 71% in this top category.
- Implementing workshops for first- and second-year students to help prepare them for advising. The Director of Advising and the SCHC Student Ambassadors offered guidance on using Degree Works and Banner especially.
- Identifying and engaging those students most at risk of failing to graduate "with honors." By analyzing data from entering classes since 2017, we determined the first-year students coming in with more than 40 credit hours (from dual enrollment and/or AP/IB) have been more likely to graduate early, thus not completing their Honors requirements (45 honors credits, at least one Beyond-the-Classroom activity, and a senior thesis). Advising meetings with these students included options for accelerated programs and meeting Honors requirements.
- Training seven new advisors, which involved creating competency in EAB Navigate, Degree Works, and Banner, as well as an understanding of the various pathways to fulfill degree and Honors requirements. Advisors also develop and maintain contact and collaboration with academic departments.

Goal 4: Support and Advance National Fellowship Advisement

As part of the Honors College, National Fellowships staff aim to identify, encourage, and prepare students to compete for national and international awards. Historically about half of all students who apply for such awards have been Honors students. Although winning is always the intention, National Fellowships stresses the benefits of the process of applying, regardless of the outcome. To provide the

most recent data on a complete year of fellowship results, accomplishments from AY21-22 and AY22-23 are included here:

- In AY 21-22, **285 applications** were submitted, with 112 advancing in competitions, and 87 winning a fellowship, garnering a total of **over \$2.2 million**. Thus we met the target goal for this year, which was to increase applications 5% above the 5-year average, which was 284.
- AY21-22 also saw a **36% increase** in one-on-one student appointments, with a 5% increase in student contacts overall. Notably, graduate student applications increased threefold, with over 15% of graduate student applicants having an SCHC affiliation.
- Over 120 faculty and staff served as fellowship advisors or committee members, Fulbright campus committee members, or workshop presenters in AY21-22.
- For AY22-23, we are on track to have more than 300 applicants, again surpassing our ongoing goal of a **5% increase** over the 5-year average. As of February 24, 2023, 56 applicants have advanced, and 22 winners have been announced. Student appointments are already over one hundred more than this time last year.
- Fellowship Peer Mentors and Ambassadors, and our Freshman Fellowship Foundation series all became BTCM-eligible this year.

Goal 5: Maintain and Enrich Student Engagement

The Honors College is committed to developing and improving activities and programming that help to build community and engage our students in the University and surrounding campus. Accomplishments this year included:

- Revamping the Deans Council into a committee for students who want to plan SCHC events such as the annual Gala. The Student Engagement Coordinator attended the regional National Campus Activities conference, and that meeting provided resources that will be used to create a student programming board.
- Hosting the second annual **student leadership** recognition brunch, celebrating over 50 students involved in leadership positions in the Honors College. SCHC deans also attended the Resident Mentor banquet to show our appreciation for students who work in the Honors living-learning communities.
- Recruiting **first-generation** students for a peer mentoring program; 15 students were selected to be peer mentors. This effort was a collaboration between the SCHC Student Engagement Coordinator and the Coordinator for First-Gen Students. There were also several events for first generation students, including a session with Faculty Fellows, and a newsletter.

Goal 6: Cultivate Top Scholar Engagement

Those students who have won the University's most prestigious scholarships, the Top Scholars, are provided with a variety of high-impact activities, facilitating the development of their full potential and helping them to distinguish themselves on campus and beyond. Accomplishments by this program over the past year included:

- Planning and implementing advising and programming for 185 current Top Scholars, starting August 17 and ending April 25, with 29 fall programs/advising campaigns, and 21 this spring. Evaluations of

advising and programs are done continually, with four completed for the fall semester, and another five this spring. **Over 50 faculty** are involved in supporting these students as mentors or lecturers.

- Involving Scholars in high-impact activities--service learning, internships, research, leadership, study abroad and meaningful work. This data is self-reported each fall by sophomores, juniors, and seniors: **87% participated** in at least one high-impact activity.
- Collaborating with Admissions to recruit our next group of Top Scholars, which included new monthly meetings and four significant changes to the Top Scholar weekends. Also, twice yearly meetings with Financial Aid started this year to ensure accurate billing for scholarships.
- Reporting annually to both the McNair Foundation and the Stamps Scholars Program (the Strive Foundation). The Stamps report was followed by a phone discussion with the Foundation. Notes on the call were taken and shared back with NFSP, Honors College, and Admissions. The McNair Foundation reporting happens in fall and spring on a schedule communicated to us by the Foundation. All updates were completed on time.
- Facilitating enrichment funding. Three of the five Top Scholar awards receive additional funding to cover study abroad, research, internships, and more. Forty-two (42) scholars spent **\$196,937** on enrichment activities. Two sets of scholars have group travel as part of their award, and 18 McNair Scholar sophomores spent spring break in Houston, TX, while 27 Stamps Scholars attended their national convention in Atlanta at the end of March.

Goal 7: Promote a Diverse and Inclusive Academic Community

The educational experience of our students is enriched, and they are better prepared to thrive in the world, when they inhabit an academic community that is diverse. We aim to help our students embrace diversity of age, race, color, sex, gender, gender orientation, religion, national origin, genetics, veterans' status, and disability status. Achievements over the past year included:

- Collaborating with the Top Scholar Diversity team. We hosted a **diversity potluck dialogue** that was facilitated by the SCHC Diversity Officer and SCHC staff.
- Sponsoring our first college-wide Pride event for students. It was well-received and well-attended, with **over 100 students** participating.
- Hosting our second fall event for prospective minority students and minority alumni, which was a great success in terms of attendance and feedback. We will continue to offer and expand this event.
- Developing community and connection among our staff. Our Diversity Officer facilitated three sessions for SCHC staff and divided the 45 staff members into eight community pods. The pods were created to discuss ways we can foster a more inclusive community.
- Creating a website focusing on SCHC Diversity. The site includes a mission statement, goals and initiatives for the college, and connects individuals to campus and community resources.

Goal 8: Maintain and Upgrade Facilities

The honors colleges and elite institutions we compete with for students have been making strong investments in facilities. We are working to improve our Honors offices and housing, as well as access to classroom space. Accomplishments this year included:

- Approval by the Board of Trustees in fall 2022 to use the \$5 million state allocation for G&E in the renovation of Harper College. Harper, an 1840 building, has critical HVAC issues, and sorely needs cosmetic renovation.

- Updating of Harper 320. This space was transferred to the Honors College this year and has been dramatically improved with the installation of two large (and handsome) display screens, a podium, and microphones, substantially enhancing our information sessions and meetings.
- Removing distressed and outdated displays in Harper 320. Historical documents were returned to the university collections.
- Identifying issues with the bathrooms in DeSaussure College, which were determined not to be ADA compliant. Renovation will be planned.

Annual Year 2023-2024 Plans

Goal 1: Curriculum

Maintain and grow existing required major and Carolina Core courses in key academic units while expanding our signature (SCHC) and stand-alone (H01) courses across academic units. Continue to expand Beyond the Classroom Honors experiences including service-learning courses and study away to provide enriching honors opportunities for students. To accomplish this goal, we plan to:

- Increase stand-alone Honors courses and decrease H10 "meets with" courses so that students can receive a true honors experience in their courses.
- Explore new and continued academic partnerships and opportunities by meeting with department chairs and associate deans in all academic units.
- Engage in campus-wide outreach to communicate with and educate faculty, staff, and administrators about the SCHC mission through workshops, collaboration with the Center for Teaching Excellence, and the creation of a faculty resource website.
- Facilitate campus-wide outreach to better communicate with and educate faculty, staff, and administrators about the SCHC mission through workshops, meet and greets, and other events.
- Develop innovative courses and programs focused on experiential learning, service, research, and study away.
- Develop and implement assessment measures and tools to better inform decision-making regarding Honors courses, programs, and faculty.

Goal 2: Faculty Engagement

Increase faculty involvement and engagement with the SCHC. To accomplish this, we plan to:

- Expand communication and education about the SCHC mission, vision and opportunities to USC faculty and staff in an effort to recruit new partners to participate in key areas -- teaching courses, mentorship, NFSP involvement, and the Pearce Faculty Fellows program.
- Increase engagement with the Pearce Faculty Fellows to expand our reach in academic units regarding education and communication with faculty.
- Continue to diversify our Honors faculty and create new course offerings on diverse topics.
- Develop an Honors faculty resource website to make honors education information easily accessible.
- Assess and streamline the course enrichment process (the process for faculty to apply for funding for their courses) to make it more efficient and develop clearer guidelines and policies.

Goal 3: Academic Advising

Assist students in developing their academic plans to evaluate various pathways to fulfill degree and Honors requirements. Advisors will maintain contact with academic departments to provide support to their advisees to fulfill degree and Honors requirements. Advisors will utilize campus technology (EAB Navigate, Degree Works, Banner) in academic advising and course registration. To accomplish this goal, we plan to:

- Implement a required senior check meeting. With the increase of our student body between 2018 – 2020, our persistence rate is approximately 75%. By implementing a required senior check meeting to discuss post-USC plans and providing support to complete the senior thesis, we hope to increase student persistence to 80%. These meetings will be a part of our senior experience initiative.
- Increase students responding to our advising survey. Approximately 94% of Honors students are advised each semester. However, less than 25% submit feedback on the Honors advising experience, with the majority of respondents being first year students. We seek to increase the number of respondents to 60%, focusing on our feedback from our third- and fourth-year students.
- Facilitate academic network groups for majors in the SCHC with fewer than 50 students to provide support and resources for students to persist to graduate “with honors.”

Goal 4: National Fellowship Advisement

Provide an integrated learning experience for national fellowship applicants leading to national award winners. To accomplish this goal, we will:

- Meet a student application metric of a 5% increase over the 5-year average (target: 282) via programming, outreach, and one-on-one appointments, while increasing SCHC applicants by 10% over the previous 5-year average (target: 167).
- Increase the diversity of applicants, with the goal of mirroring university diversity, via more outreach and direct engagement with campus partners in OSP, OMSA, BHC, as well as utilizing Fellowship Peer Mentors to do outreach in their own student spaces.
- Support continued growth of graduate student fellowship advising by hiring a graduate student assistant for national fellowships to work in the GradHub.
- Expand and diversify the faculty engaged with supporting national fellowships via new committee members and advisors, and the growth of the Fulbright applicant pool, thus requiring more campus faculty evaluation committees.

Goal 5: Student Engagement

Improve and develop programming that helps build community and engage our students in the University and surrounding campus. To accomplish this goal, we aim to:

- Increase the number of students graduating “with honors” from 75% to 80%. We will form a senior experience committee to focus on the honors experience, utilizing focus groups and a senior survey for student reflection on the impact of an honors education.
- Engage students outside of the classroom and create a sense of belonging and community in the Honors College after the first year. Create a student programming board with student representation from each class that creates, plans, and executes several events each semester for Honors students.

- Facilitate semester meetings with SCHC student organizations to create community and sustainability for student leaders.

Goal 6: Top Scholar Engagement

Engage Top Scholars to build community and participate in high- impact activities to facilitate the development of their full potential and distinguish themselves on campus and beyond. To do so, we will do the following:

- Increase Top Scholar engagement in Scholar Programs and Scholars United programs by 5% for programs occurring between August 14, 2023 and May 3, 2024.
- Continue improvement in alumni engagement by creating more touch points with alumni outside of the two newsletters annually. Similar to the touch-base program we implement with scholars, staff will informally check-in with alumni by email, handwritten notes, calls, and social media. Plan three different touch-bases per semester.
- Increase engagement in new junior class programming. This past year, Scholar Programs launched a new advising campaign and interview-practice event for Top Scholar juniors with 55% of the class participating in advisement and 20% in the event. For next year, increase advisement by 5% and event participation by 20%. The event includes Top Scholar alumni participation, so also increasing alumni participation from 10 to 15 will ensure the program is well managed.

Goal 7: Diversity and Inclusion

Help our students embrace diversity of age, race, color, sex, gender, gender orientation, religion, national origin, genetics, veteran status, and disability status. Recruit and nurture a student body whose diversity enriches the educational experience for everyone. To accomplish this, we will:

- Host a Diversity Dialogue event once a semester for SCHC students and staff on diversity, equity and inclusion topics.
- Provide training on diversity, equity and inclusion to SCHC student organizations and student leaders, encouraging collaboration on diversity initiatives.
- Make the SCHC Pride event an annual occurrence.

Goal 8: Facilities

Address deferred maintenance in Harper and DeSaussure Colleges (200+ year-old buildings), so these facilities can stand tall for another 200 years. We also need to improve our access to classroom space. To accomplish this goal, we will:

- Work with the university architect to begin renovation of Harper College. Most important: replace the broken and leaking HVAC system, repair damaged walls and flooring, and redesign and redecorate the first-floor entrance and Harper 320.
- Work with university architect to begin renovation of non-ADA compliant bathrooms in DeSaussure College. Cosmetic renovation of this building. Complete by the end of the calendar year.
- Increase our classroom space to accommodate our growing number of in-person classes.