

State of the Honors Forum 2014: Honors Forum Survey Results

In February 2014, the Honors Forum, in consultation with Lisa Christenson (Assessment Facilitator for the Office of Institutional Research), designed and conducted a survey to assess our program. The survey of 16 questions included 13 free response questions. The response rate was 38%. We offer the following narrative to summarize the results.

Overview: The 86 participants ranged from first year students to seniors. The reasons for joining the Forum were evenly distributed among the following: automatically invited by Admissions, academic challenge and enrichment, desire for community, and recognition on the resume. Beginning Fall 2012, all students now elect to apply to Honors Forum, so with the graduation of the class of 2015, the first reason will disappear. In addition, 12.8% of students listed resume recognition as what they liked most about HF (question 12).

To characterize the survey, we asked students how HF courses complement their major or minor, what HF can add or change to improve HF, what HF should sustain, what kinds of events HF might offer, whether students considered taking part in leadership (e.g. Exec Co and Citizenship Committee), what students like most and least about being an HF member, and whether HF lived up to members' expectations. These overlapping questions offered members a chance to respond to similar ideas via different angles. Although we discovered what some students like most about HF others want to change, several themes emerged: an appreciation of community and a desire for more community, a request for more HF designated classes (courses and Add-ons) in a wide range of disciplines, and an appreciation of the Citizenship requirement.

Community: 27% of those who responded to question 14 ("What would you like to change about the Honors Forum?") noted they would prefer a more active community. Moreover, 24% of those who answered question 12 ("What do you like most about being a member of the Honors Forum?") said that community was what they liked best about HF. Members are looking for an inclusive, non-elitist community--one that is appreciated by the larger community for its commitment to academic excellence and good citizenship.

HF would now like to ascertain what students mean by community (academic support, social networking, etc.). We will explore ways to build community as well determine how to diminish the gap between what students want in an HF community and what they perceive is either vital or lacking. We suspect that the desire for a more active community accounts at least in part for our findings in question 16 ("Did Honors Forum live up to your expectations?"): of concern, 43% said HF did not live up to their expectations, 26% said it did meet their expectations,

9% had mixed feelings, and 22% said it was too early to tell. Moreover, we wonder if greater participation in HF will lead students to feel a greater sense of investment and build community. To this end, we plan to offer more ways for students to get involved in HF activities large and small, real and virtual (e.g. becoming an officer or committee member versus creating one monthly newsletter, helping to plan a party, or taking charge of the HF Facebook page).

The survey also reveals that many HF students are very busy individuals, which impacts upon community building efforts. Question #6 specifically asked students: "If you attended none or only one Honors Forum event, why do you think that was the case?" Of note, 54% said they were not interested in the events, but 56.3% of students indicated a lack of time and 52.1% noted a conflict as reasons for not attending. Students also expressed that they did not have enough time to join HF committees while others were not aware of leadership opportunities, so we plan to make these opportunities more visible to members. We also hope to encourage more students to attend events cited as valuable--about 25% or more attended the HF Induction and Living the Liberal Arts event, the end of year dinner, the Holiday Party, the Ramsey Lecture, and Academic Festival. The fall trip to New York City was another favorite event. Finally, we will work on making our wide-ranging and inclusive events more visible to the larger College community to garner greater awareness and appreciation of Honors Forum.

Courses: Honors courses and Add-ons were what students most wanted HF to increase. 60% of respondents wanted more courses--in specific disciplines (e.g. the sciences, Studio Art, in particular), with more challenge (a dominant theme), with a leadership focus, etc. Plans are underway to encourage more faculty members to create HF courses and Add-ons or turn their challenging courses into Honors courses, particularly in disciplines where there is high student interest. New courses in Religion and Anthropology as well as the Science Literacy Initiative Add-ons strengthen our offerings.

Citizenship: Citizenship emerged as an area of importance. Ironically, the External Review that HF received in the Fall of 2011 suggested that we discontinue the Citizenship requirement because many students were dropping out of the Forum for failing to complete it. Instead, in 2012, we encouraged students to undertake the project earlier in their academic careers. We were delighted to see that the top response (18%) to question 15 ("What elements of Honors Forum would you like to see continued?") was Citizenship. For question #12 ("What do you like most about being a member of Honors Forum?"), 13% noted Citizenship. Responses in some cases described the Citizenship project as a life changing opportunity.

Summation: Overall, the results confirm that good work is underway in Honors Forum. Moreover, we have identified ways to improve HF to make it more responsive to students' desire for community, academic challenge, and Citizenship.