

Audrey DeVore

The interplay among the region, the planned city, and the University of California all influence this Campuswide Honors Program. The university's honors program encourages students to develop their leadership skills and provides a supportive academic community within a growing research university in a growing urban environment.

Honors within the Booming Environment of Southern California

Honors at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) serves a diverse population of intelligent and highly motivated students within the rapidly growing, and increasingly urban environment of Southern California. Reflecting the changing demographics of the State of California, more than half of UCI's honors students are foreign born and more than half have learned English as a second language. While most of these students immigrated with their parents, others came specifically for their education.

Honors students at UCI tend to be a lively group whose different backgrounds, attitudes, assumptions, and interests give the honors program (called the Campuswide Honors Program or the CHP) a spirit of adventure and excitement. CHP students seek leadership positions, pursue research or creative pursuits in their majors, volunteer in the community, and take internships and jobs while completing rigorous courses of honors academic work. Although UCI is largely a commuter campus with only about 35 percent of its students living in campus housing, nearly 50 percent of the CHP students live on campus, 40 percent of them living together in honors housing. Their active pursuit of education leads more than ninety percent of them to continue into graduate or professional school.

A Brief History of the University

The University of California, Irvine (UCI) grew up in the planned city of Irvine in the middle of the

boom-town expansion of the Orange County communities of Southern California. Within a generation, new cities appeared on the rolling hills and valleys of former ranch land. A web of ever-growing freeways expanded to serve the hundreds of thousands of people arriving in the area. In the midst of this rapid metropolitan development, UCI became the ninth campus of the University of California in 1965. The placement of the campus in this emerging urban area reflected the goal of the University of California to locate its schools to serve population areas efficiently. Twenty years later, UCI faculty founded the Campuswide Honors Program to strengthen the curriculum offered to the university's most academically talented students.

After WWII, Orange County evolved from an agricultural and suburban area into a complex metropolitan region that is home to two and a half million people. The county's economy is large: If California were a country, it would have the seventh-largest economy in the world; within California, Orange County has one of the largest county economies. The southern part of the county, where Irvine is located, continues to boom, and there is no reason to believe that the pace of development will subside for at least another generation.

A few miles from the university, the "Irvine Spectrum," a diverse 3,600-acre complex accommodating more than 2,000 companies, is expected to more than double in capacity very soon. Computing, software, biotechnology, biomedical technology, electronics, and other high-tech industries employ more than forty-one percent of the Spectrum's workforce. Even at the nadir of California's recent recession, the Irvine spectrum experienced nearly a fifteen-percent annual job growth. The Irvine area is also affected by the strength of the Los Angeles and San Diego communities, including the huge entertainment industry and the developing Pacific Rim financial and trade industries.

Orange County has no one urban center but rather several centers. Its cities are part of a massive, growing urban area that offers employment, education, and entertainment extending to neighboring counties. The multicounty region of Southern California is one metropolitan area with a population base of eighteen million people. The boundaries of the Pacific Ocean, Mexico, the desert, and the mountains provide further important influences on the university.

In the 1960s, Irvine company leaders offered the University of California one thousand acres for a new university in order to stimulate the intellectual, cultural, and economic development of the new city and of Orange County. Leaders of the University of California, who had been visiting various sites throughout the state in search of land for a new campus, accepted the offer because of the potential of the location at the heart of a dynamic and rapidly growing economic region.

An important feature of the community development that shaped the university is that of the "planned entity." The city of Irvine was planned from its inception, as an overall concept of a living environment complete with parks, shopping, and other establishments, according to a master plan. Not only was the utilization of land designated in advance, but also the architectural style and the colors of the housing structures. As a new institution when the city architects were drawing their blueprints, UCI

did not evolve over time as much as it was also master-planned. The school opened in 1965 with 1,500 students, six years before the incorporation of Irvine. Today, it enrolls almost 18,000 students.

As did Irvine, UCI developed rapidly. To many, UCI stands for “under construction indefinitely.” Today the university offers baccalaureate degree programs in fifty majors, the Ph.D. in thirty-six, and professional programs in medicine, engineering, business management, and education. In recent years, UCI has attained national and international distinction, the highlights of which were Nobel Prizes in chemistry and in physics in 1995. In 1996, UCI became a member of the Association of American Universities (AAU), and is now part of this organization of sixty of the most respected research universities in the country.

The Mission of the University

While several of the nine campuses of the University of California are located in metropolitan areas, the University of California does not have a primary metropolitan mission. According to the California Master Plan for Higher Education of 1960, the University of California is responsible for educating the top 12.5% of the state’s undergraduates and for providing doctoral, professional, and research programs. The University of California is the land grant institution for the state, and is named as the fourth branch of government, the branch responsible for research, in the California State Constitution.

At UCI, a plaque on a pedestrian bridge connecting the campus with a marketplace located across the street illustrates the mission of the university held by its top leadership. The design is a circle divided into three segments, representing university, community, and industry. The plaque demonstrates that UCI cultivates ties with the community, with many industries, and with the national and international educational, research, and service arenas. This collaboration, along with UCI’s anticipation of the future, has influenced students in its development of curriculum and its provision of opportunities for students in research, internships, volunteer work in hospitals, schools, and throughout the community, as well as in professional employment.

Rationale and Structure of the Campuswide Honors Program

The Campuswide Honors Program, which is offered to academically talented students in all majors from the freshman through senior years, was founded in 1986 from two major initiatives. In the first, the faculty Academic Senate voted to form an honors program, primarily to attract and retain a greater number of students from the top tier of those eligible for admission to the University of California. This was the second time that the faculty had decided to launch such an honors program, but the first initiative—approved approximately ten years previously—was not followed up with adequate funding. While seeking the Senate’s approval the second time, UCI faculty also responded to a funding call from the Ford Foundation with a proposal for a major grant that would establish a “campus-wide honors program.” As the proposal stated, the program was designed to “enrich the undergraduate curriculum, increase

faculty involvement in teaching and curricular planning and increase the number of undergraduates interested in faculty careers." With funding assured, the campuswide honors program was launched in the fall of 1988 with the first class of honors freshmen consisting of 100 students. This inaugural class came from a wide variety of majors and interests and became known as the "First Centurions" because they provided student leadership for the development of the program. These first students encouraged the evolution of a sense of community among themselves and with the faculty, first by initiating a tradition of socials that brought faculty and honors students together, and by attending a weekly coffee hour, an ongoing social period during which honors students and faculty could get together. They formed a student council within the first months of the program, which provided the leadership that led to, among other things, raising the graduation requirements for CHP students and securing honors housing. These first students, after graduating, also developed the CHP alumni chapter that has become an official chapter of the UCI Alumni Association. They continue to lend their support to the honors program by hosting alumni events throughout California, by encouraging current undergraduates in their pursuits, and by contributing financially to the CHP.

The CHP was founded because of several complex issues underlying educational concerns. The immediate goals were the university's desire to attract more of the state's most talented high school graduates and to offer them a substantial and exciting undergraduate experience that would prepare them well for professional or graduate study. Specifically, the faculty wished to increase enrollment from the top four percent of the state's youth, because these academically talented and prepared students could provide a base for strengthening the curriculum that the university was prepared to develop, a goal that stemmed directly from the overall mission of the University of California to educate the top students of California. By forming a solid, rigorous core curriculum that included both interdisciplinary courses that fulfilled general education requirements and research in the major leading to a senior honors thesis project, the faculty intended to make UCI's commitment to providing the top level of education visible to the state's best students. As one faculty member commented during the initial deliberations of the Academic Senate, "superb students usually have very good taste and there should be assurance that whatever is offered [in the CHP] would be of outstanding academic quality." The commitment to excellence is also expressed in the program's charter, which stipulates that teaching resources "not be skimmed on," and that lower-division honors general education courses be taught by ladder faculty.

Some of the university's most exciting faculty have taught in the honors courses from the beginning of the program, including established scholars, scientists, and writers, as well as deans and department chairs committed to the honors classroom. These faculty accepted the invitation to teach honors students even at the lower division level, and their departments released them because of their interest in teaching the nation's top students.

The faculty who founded the CHP wanted to create an educational environment without the classical boundaries of the classroom. As the program charter states, "the

central goal of the Honors Program is to provide excellent students with the sort of broad experiences that might be attained at smaller liberal arts colleges.” The vision of a small liberal arts college experience on the campus of a large research university was developed because it was felt that the personalized attention expected from a small liberal arts college was a wonderful complement to the range of experiences available from a research university. While a high degree of personal attention is necessary for complex endeavors such as a senior honors thesis experience, the breadth of opportunities available at a large research university allows for students to experience different kinds of learning environments. This combination image of small college/large university has guided the CHP in forming honors-level curricula, student advising, and extra-curricular programming.

At the same time as the creation of the CHP, the faculty founded an elected Academic Senate committee (the Honors Program Council) to set policy and oversee the program. Consisting of one faculty member from each of the schools and departments that offer undergraduate degrees, the council has the important functions of determining admission to the CHP, certifying graduation from the program, and developing policies relating to graduation. It also approves courses in the program curriculum and advises the program director about academic advising, recruitment, extracurricular opportunities, and academic prerequisites for CHP students. Periodic program reviews were stipulated to maintain the academic quality of the program.

Based on the advice of the dean of undergraduate education, under whose administration the CHP was founded, the program became affiliated with the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) early in its development. The development of the program owes much to the UCI deans and faculty who teach the honors classes and who support the program’s goals and objectives, to the honors students who have given the university much reason for pride, and to the NCHC for the goals and concepts that it has developed for honors programs throughout the country.

Honors Curriculum

The research and public service mission of the University of California and the employment opportunities of the expanding metropolitan community of Southern California have influenced the honors program curriculum. Reflective of the dynamic high-tech industry within the region, more than sixty percent of the CHP students have majors in the biological and physical sciences, engineering, or computer science. Although many students enter UCI hoping for careers as physicians, quite a few decide to pursue research careers after immersing themselves in undergraduate research. Many also gain valuable clinical and hospital experience in local medical facilities. Encouraged by these experiences, some go on to pursue research as undergraduates in medical research laboratories at other universities and at the National Institutes of Health. Others enter internships in the region’s technical industries. Those who have chosen majors in the arts, humanities, and social sciences also benefit from internship and employment opportunities that stem from the community.

From the beginning, CHP offered a strong honors curriculum to UCI's academically talented students and served as a catalyst for the development of major-specific upper division honors programs and courses on the campus. Many more undergraduate students became involved in research and creative pursuits at the honors level because of the influence of the CHP. Not only did the CHP require that each student complete an honors research thesis project in order to graduate from the program, but it also founded and directed a campuswide undergraduate research symposium for three years. This focus on research and creative activity for undergraduate students has become a very important aspect of education at UCI, especially for more qualified students, for two important reasons. Students who complete an independent project at the honors level have the major advantage of a tangible example of their own accomplishments that can be used in developing their next professional career step. In addition, the process of working under faculty supervision to conceptualize, develop, and complete a research or creative project is an excellent way for students to acquire sophisticated skills and knowledge beyond what is usually possible in the more traditional college learning methods.

Most CHP students work on their research projects for one year. Most of them complete one-third of their course work in honors classes. Since these classes satisfy general education and major requirements, they do not increase the class units required for students to graduate. Many CHP students also join the upper division discipline-based honors programs offered through the academic units, where they benefit from the teaching, mentoring and research experience offered in their majors and where they prepare for their honors senior thesis project. In addition to the 430 CHP students, approximately 100 major-specific honors students who are not in the CHP are enrolled in these school-based programs.

The honors curriculum was and continues to be designed by committees that include faculty from a variety of disciplines. This process has the advantage of involving faculty from the different schools of the campus and helps develop and maintain support among the faculty from different departments of the campus. The curriculum model chosen was of year-long interdisciplinary core courses that satisfy several of the general education requirements of the university in an honors-framework (requiring a higher level of conversation and performance). These courses are designed to teach very bright students to think across disciplinary boundaries, with the goal of preparing them for futures in emerging fields or in those that require complex problem solving. Course requirements make it mandatory that each student develop proficiency in areas outside the majors. While science and engineering majors study writing, humanities, and social sciences in honors classes, humanities, arts, and social science majors receive an honors-level foundation in scientific concepts.

Of the four year-long sequences that comprise the CHP curriculum, two, the humanities core course and a new arts core course, are offered to the general student population, although CHP students take special honors sections. Of these, the humanities core course has been offered very successfully at UCI for more than twenty-five years. Two other courses, "Critical Issues in the Social Sciences" and "The Idiom and

Practice of Science,” were developed and are offered specifically for CHP students, although other students may petition to take these courses. All four sequences are interdisciplinary, are taught by outstanding faculty, and satisfy basic general education requirements. Faculty have included a Nobel Laureate, academic deans, best-selling authors, and leading scholars and scientists. Most honors students complete required courses in the first three years of their college experience. They usually begin their research in the junior year and have spent two or more years developing the background needed for their senior honors research thesis project.

Within the past three years, honors courses have been developed for the fundamental first-year sequences offered in chemistry and computer science to students who qualify through the university’s placement testing program. All CHP students who take the first-year fundamentals of chemistry course are required to take its honors course sequence.

Honors-level advising by faculty members, professional staff, and peers is a major feature of the CHP. The program assists students in planning their course of study, arranging for research and other creative experiences, and applying for scholarships, internships, education abroad programs, and professional/graduate school.

How Students Shape their Honors Program

Who They Are

More than half of the CHP students are foreign born and over half use English as a second language, indicative of the overall immigrant nature of the population of Southern California. Although many of these students are from a range of Asian countries, others have come from the Middle East, Mexico, and South America, and Europe, as well as Africa, Canada, and Australia. Many intend to live permanently in the United States, but others plan to return to their home countries.

In these demographic characteristics, the CHP reflects the overall undergraduate population of UCI and is a result of a large global migration of peoples. Both UCI and Southern California have become home to large populations from diverse countries who hope for a cooperative heterogeneous future.

There is no need for the honors program to provide any special accommodations for its students at all, as they excel in their work. Moreover, through the diversity they bring in backgrounds, attitudes, assumptions, and interests, they give the CHP a spirit of excitement and adventure. The fact that CHP students are very well qualified for honors-level college work is indicated by their SAT and high school GPA scores, which rank among the best in the country. The 1998 freshman class has an average SAT total of 1400, and an average high school GPA of 4.3 (honors courses in California high schools are given extra weight). The great majority of students who graduate with Latin Honors at UCI are from the small group of students in the CHP.

An aura of optimism and energy pervades the Honors Center, houses, and residence halls. Some of this vitality stems from the university, which is still expanding in size and opportunity. Some comes from the region—from the opportunities available

in the booming metropolitan area of Orange County and from the forward-looking attitude of the Pacific Rim. Some undoubtedly also originates in the sunny and warm weather of the region, and some is due to the physical beauty and diversity of landscape of Southern California. But most comes from the students themselves, who believe in their futures and remain hopeful and positive.

Student Leadership in Honors

The CHP attempts to build upon these positive attitudes by offering experiences that will expand the students' knowledge and help them develop into well-balanced and useful citizens. A concerted effort is made to involve them in experiences beyond the classroom environment. CHP students are encouraged to develop leadership, communication, and organizational skills. A major strength of the program is the large extent to which the students have become involved in the CHP itself. The biweekly Honors Program Student Council meetings draw about twenty students, who work together on social, cultural, and service projects. The CHP also sponsors a club in which students help each other apply for scholarships, internships, and other awards, and it co-sponsors UCI's chapter of the Golden Key National Honor Society. CHP students publish a free-form creative writing journal that contains essays, editorials, short stories, cartoons, poems, and artwork. CHP students also founded UCI's Literary Guild Club and are active in all aspects of university activities. Although the program does not have a mandatory service requirement, service to the university and community are strongly encouraged and most CHP students participate in these pursuits.

A volunteer spirit among the honors students emerged in the early years of the program. Each year, more than twenty percent of the students give their time freely at recruitment events, while others volunteer to monitor the CHP student lounge for study hours. More than thirty students have volunteered for the Honors Ambassadors, an organization formed specifically to train, encourage, and recognize honors student volunteers. The CHP has been able to accomplish much more than could be expected because of the generous and capable service offered by its students.

This spirit of volunteerism among CHP students has led to a sense of community among the students. Additional opportunities to create this connectedness among the students include the weekly CHP coffee hours, where for two hours each Friday, CHP students and faculty are invited to a lounge offering free coffee, tea, juice, doughnuts, and bagels. Volunteers facilitate the social time and students contribute money for the refreshments. This sort of format is especially important at UCI, since about 65 percent of the overall UCI student body (50 percent of CHP students) commutes. This simple activity has done much to foster friendships and to facilitate communication among the students and with faculty.

Another opportunity to build a sense of community is provided through on-campus housing offered to CHP students. When the plans to build a new campus housing complex were announced eight years ago, a group of CHP students guided the drafting

of a proposal for two of these new houses. The proposal was submitted to university authorities a full year before any other proposal, and at the insistence of the honors students, both the director and associate director of the CHP volunteered to be on the campus committees that formed the policies that developed and now govern the complex. This housing option has been so popular that it has been expanded several times; approximately forty percent of the CHP students now live together in honors housing. Activities planned by students in honors housing include get-togethers with faculty, staff, and students; movie nights; sporting events; an international potluck; an off-campus retreat in the mountains; study breaks; and other events such as workshops and guest speakers. Honors housing students also co-sponsor events with other academic theme houses, and the result has been some dynamic and informative programs featuring literary, political, and business leaders from the community and the campus.

CHP students are offered the opportunity to participate in various CHP-sponsored social and cultural activities. They are routinely invited to lectures given by noted intellectuals and authors. One of the most important events is the annual Honors Retreat, which, because of the location of the campus, can be held in beautiful state and private parks that are only two to three hours' drive from the campus. These activities tend to enrich students' lives and provide out-of-classroom opportunities to get to know each other and faculty. The feeling of community that is emphasized through these activities demonstrates to students that their place in an intellectual community is also one of friendship. By breaking down barriers placed between the learner and the learned, the CHP is attempting to bring the students into a professional mindset through which they will grow as students, future professionals, and as human beings.

Who They Become

Ninety percent of the students who graduate from the CHP enter graduate or professional school within two years of obtaining the baccalaureate degree. Although they are enrolling in many of the most competitive graduate schools in the nation, many have chosen careers that are in great demand in the dynamic economic region of Southern California. Many enter graduate programs in computer science and engineering; others pursue graduate degrees in management, public policy, or law. Some seek entry into entertainment industry professions. Still others prepare for careers in academe or in education at the elementary or secondary levels. A new trend among CHP graduates is a growing interest in environmental science and public policy. As is typical of intelligent and ambitious people everywhere, CHP students have a wide range of ambitions, interests, and dreams and consequently are entering many diverse career areas. Because the eldest are only about twenty-eight years of age, they are early in their career development and may change direction later on. But for now, their career choices are influenced deeply by opportunities stemming from the growing economy of Southern California.

The ties developed among CHP students extend beyond their campus years. The positive experiences many of them enjoyed at UCI led to their forming an alumni chapter, which is now officially recognized by the UCI Alumni Association. Last fall, CHP alumni in the San Francisco Bay Area held their first annual social, and another is planned for next fall. Almost two dozen alumni are in the Bay Area attending graduate school in universities there, and others have taken jobs in the area. Large numbers of CHPers are also located in Boston and New York City, and there has been some interest among them to keep in touch.

Lessons Learned

UCI's Campuswide Honors Program has learned much in its first ten years. Our first lesson is one of leadership. In large research universities, change is sometimes hard to accomplish, but major changes can be made with strong leadership. The fact that the honors program was established and has continued to be supported even through the economic recession of the 1990s is due to the leadership of a number of influential faculty and administrators through the years. A second important point about leadership is its consistency. Early in the history of the CHP, colleagues from established programs throughout the country encouraged the CHP to maintain a consistency in leadership until it was firmly established on the campus. This message was heeded, and the founding director continues in that role. A professor of physics, he was chosen not only because of his management skills, but also because he was from the sciences, where faculty perceived that there would be a lack of support for the honors program. To help balance the program leadership, the position of associate director was given to an individual with a doctorate in history, who continues in that role. Many of the faculty who taught in the program during its first years are still teaching or lending their encouragement to the program as other faculty are brought into the honors classrooms and into advising honors students in research and graduate/professional school preparation. It has been essential that all of the deans and the chancellor have supported the program across the board.

The director of the CHP chose a strategy of guiding the new honors program through its early years by insinuation rather than pushing it into leadership groups. Therefore, rather than demanding good will, cooperation, and commitment from faculty and administrators, he let this level of support develop in a quieter way. This seems to have worked very well at UCI, which is a campus with an administrative structure that is one of nearly autonomous discipline-based schools. Although this structure has many benefits, it does not lend itself automatically to forming academic programs that include students from all academic units.

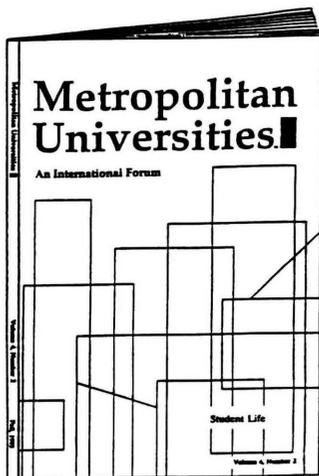
Another very important lesson learned near the beginning of the CHP is that an honors program must offer services to a larger number than the program can enroll in order to receive the level of support needed. It would be difficult to argue that the 430 students in the CHP should receive the level of support that they get on a campus of nearly 14,000 other non-CHP undergraduate students without benefits flowing to the

larger student population. At UCI, this meant that the CHP extended its reach to students who were not in the program but who qualified for specific sorts of honors-level guidance or encouragement. Almost from the beginning, the CHP sponsored the Scholarship Opportunities Program to encourage and assist undergraduate students who wished to apply for prestigious scholarships and fellowships. The CHP also developed and offered a Campuswide Undergraduate Research Symposium for three years, which encourages broader student research participation and senior thesis work; this has since been taken over by another program, the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program. More recently, the CHP assumed the responsibility for advising the University Program for High School Scholars, a group of local high school seniors who take courses at UCI. The CHP also has worked to further non-CHP upper division honors program students to create a vital, broader UCI honors community.

New Challenges

As UCI continues to grow in size, opportunities and challenges face the CHP. The honors program has not grown in proportion to the campus population. In order to do so, the size of the faculty must increase, and obtaining the monetary resources to add faculty may well be the biggest hurdle that the CHP faces at this time. This challenge is especially important when it is considered that if the program becomes even smaller than it is now (enrolling three percent of the undergraduates), it would have increased difficulty maintaining the visibility needed to assure continuing funding. A second important challenge facing the program is the need to develop a strongly supportive alumni group. As the first CHP alumni now begin to graduate from their various medical, law, and graduate school programs and establish their professional careers, our challenge is to encourage a sense of belonging among them for the CHP alumni chapter. This group is seen as a source of future support and encouragement. A third challenge facing the CHP is keeping and even accelerating its ability to develop opportunities that will help honors students to extend their abilities as much as they are capable. As the CHP continues to mature, it will need to demonstrate its ongoing sense of commitment and creativity to provide an outstanding education for honors students at UCI.

In conclusion, the dynamic, booming region of Southern California, the planned community of Irvine, and the still expanding University of California, Irvine have contributed to the development of the very positive environment that is the Campuswide Honors Program. Although the future is unknown, the present holds much promise for the honors students, for their education, and for their own futures.



Metropolitan Universities

*The Quarterly Journal of
The Coalition of Urban
and Metropolitan Universities*

"Academic institutions are in a state of transition throughout the world. This is a time of change, of stress and opportunity. The education of those who will lead the world in the twenty-first century is in our hands.

*"If you share our deep concern about the future of higher education in the U.S. and other countries, you'll want to subscribe to **Metropolitan Universities**. We need not only your interest, but also your input on important issues.*

...

*"**Metropolitan Universities** aims to be provocative, to challenge readers to examine traditional approaches and propose innovative solutions. **Metropolitan Universities** also aims to be useful. We're on the ground floor of the Ivory Tower. We want to express vision, but also to document what works.*

—Founding Executive Editor Ernest A. Lynton

Each issue focuses on an important theme in higher education today. We would be pleased to send you a free examination copy!

Published for the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities
by Towson University

Office of the Publisher: 7800 York Road, Suite 301, Towson MD 21252-0001

Phone: (410) 830-3468 Fax: (410) 830-3456