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UMass Lowell to boost honors program

Move meant to lure top students

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE STAFF FEBRUARY 26, 2014

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University of Massachusetts Lowell trustees are expected to give final approval on Wednesday to a proposal that will elevate the status of the school's honors program to what is known as an honors college.

"This is an effort on our part to attract the very best students, the most talented academically, not only from Massachusetts, but from across the country," said Martin T. Meehan, chancellor of the 17,000-student campus, the state's second-largest public higher education institution, behind the flagship in

Amherst.

“I think it allows us to compete with private institutions in a much more significant way,” he added by phone Tuesday.

Although not actually a separate college or institution, the new upgraded status will allow the honors college to bring numerous benefits to the university, officials said.

Those benefits include creating new courses and more opportunities for students to study abroad, engage them in creative projects with faculty, and get students real-world experience through co-ops and service-learning.

The proposal also calls for launching a program that would assign a librarian to each honors junior and senior student who can help them find information to complete their thesis or other projects.

UMass Lowell said it has implemented measures over the past few years to prepare for converting the program into a college.

The school recently created housing and living-learning communities for honors students and is scheduled to open a \$95 million student center in the fall featuring a designated area for the program and its activities.

Administrators said enrollment in the honors program has soared in recent years as the school has attracted better students while taking steps to improve the program.

Over the past several years, UMass Lowell also expanded the honors program’s course and credit requirements and established new research and service-learning co-ops, an honors thesis workshop, and upper-division, interdisciplinary courses.

The university developed a first-year honors seminar and curriculum allowing qualified students to join the program after their first year without harming their progress toward graduation.



Honors-related events have increased, student advising staff has been added, and an oversight council of faculty and students was created.

Honors program enrollment surged from 124 students in 2005 to 733 this year. A record 270 first-year students joined the program this past fall. Campus officials expect total honors enrollment to top 1,000 next year.

Meanwhile, the university’s overall undergraduate enrollment and selectivity have increased.

Since 2007, universitywide enrollment has climbed by 45 percent, SAT scores are up 63 points, and the average high school grade-point average has risen from 3.18 to 3.36.

Other UMass campuses recently upgraded their honors offerings.

Earlier this month, UMass Boston converted its honors programs into an honors college. This past fall, UMass Amherst opened the first physical home for its honors college, a seven-building, \$192 million complex.

Madeline Koufogazos, 21, of Dracut, said a key reason she decided to study at UMass Lowell instead of other schools was because its honors program “seemed a lot stronger.”

A junior English major, she said the program has challenged her academically and helped her build connections with professors, staff, and fellow students.

“I think that as the program becomes a college that will help it to grow and establish even more of a reputation, and I’m sure that will help me when I start looking for jobs,” said Koufogazos.

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