



EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

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Memorandum

TO: Faculty Senate Task Force on Priority Registration
Council on Academic Affairs
Faculty Senate
Provost's Council

FROM: Dr. Linda Frost, Director of the Honors Program with Dr. Lisa Kay, Associate Director,
and Mr. Mustapha Jourdini, Honors Advisor

SUBJECT: Priority Registration for Honors Students at EKU

DATE: 21 October 2008

Not long after my arrival at Eastern Kentucky University as the university's new Director of the Honors Program, I was made aware of the drafted policy brought forward by the University Athletics Committee, the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, and the Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities regarding early or priority registration for student athletes, members of "spirit groups," and students with disabilities. The EKU policy is an attempt to further enable our students to complete their degrees in a timely fashion, and to increase retention and improve graduation rates, all of which are crucial concerns. Priority registration is indeed common practice at many if not most institutions of higher education including our benchmark institutions where 16 out of 19 universities allow designated groups to register prior to the general student population. While the EKU draft policy initially included honors students as members of one of the groups to be granted priority registration, they were apparently removed at the suggestion of EKU administrators. We in honors, however, feel it is crucial for honors students to be included in this policy for the following reasons.

- Honors students must complete a clearly defined roster of courses to fulfill their honors requirements, courses that are offered in very few sections at a necessarily limited range of times. It is much more difficult to arrange a schedule when a student must first register for one of 3 sections of a 6 credit-hour, 5-day a week HON 102 Rhetoric course than it is to arrange a schedule that provides the student with their pick of one of 68 sections of a 2- or 3-day-a-week ENG 101 or even one of 38 sections of ENG 102. As a result in part of scheduling difficulties like these, many of our students cannot complete their honors requirements and their major requirements in four or even five years—and it is important to keep in mind that honors students are also often more likely to pursue double majors. Priority registration would enable these students to progress in their degrees in a more timely fashion while also encouraging rather than discouraging them from completing an honors curriculum.
- A growing number of courses designated as honors are in fact cross-listed with other departments therefore offering even fewer seats to honors students in the courses they must take to complete their honors curriculum. Priority registration would ensure that honors students could indeed get the classes they need to remain in good standing with the EKU Honors Program.

- Honors students often take on greater leadership roles across the university and have additional research and service obligations. In fact, honors students tend to be more widely involved across campus than their peers in the general population. These activities add to the difficulty they often have scheduling their courses in a reasonable way.
- Priority registration has become a common benefit that honors administrators use to recruit new students. As a benefit with essentially no cost to the university, priority registration provides something to honors students that they understand to be invaluable to the successful completion of their degrees.
- Priority registration has in fact become so typical a policy for honors programs at universities across the country that the National Collegiate Honors Council has added priority registration to its list of “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program,” benchmarks for honors programs nationwide. To omit honors students from ECU’s policy is to put ECU’s nationally recognized program behind our nationally equivalent institutions as well as to put us at a tremendous competitive disadvantage in the region. (According to this list, available at www.nchchonors.org/basicchhonorprogramcharacteristics.aspx, “A fully developed program will provide priority enrollment for honors students who are active in the program in recognition of their unique class scheduling needs.”) Robert Spurrier, Director of the Honors College at Oklahoma State University argues that, “the unique scheduling needs of honors students are recognized even at institutions with large numbers of honors courses because even under the best of circumstances honors students must juggle their honors courses around requirements in their academic majors. Honors students frequently pursue double (or triple) majors, multiple minors, study abroad options, and internships—all of which make it imperative that they be able to implement sometimes extremely complex plans of study in order to graduate on time. The newest Characteristic quite properly recognizes these unique scheduling needs” [“The Newest ‘Basic Characteristic’ of a Fully Developed Honors Program” in *Honors in Practice* (2008) 4: 191.]

Of the 7 Kentucky institutions considered by our task force (University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, Murray State University, Morehead State University, Western Kentucky University, Northern Kentucky University, and the University of Louisville), only 2 (Morehead and Murray) have no such policy; of the 5 that do, all include honors as one of the groups receiving priority registration. Of the 19 benchmark institutions we surveyed, only 3 had no formal priority registration policy. Of the 16 that did, 13 included honors as one of the groups receiving priority registration.

We therefore request that ECU honors students in good standing with the program (actively taking honors courses and maintaining the relevant GPA per hours of coursework completed) be included in whatever priority registration policy the university adopts.