The University Honors College (UHC) is at the center of the university’s mission to bring the most outstanding students in the state and beyond to Oregon State and provide them with high-impact, transformative educational experiences. The UHC is committed to leading in the development of innovative, accessible, and creative undergraduate opportunities in research, in classrooms, in service, and in global engagement, leveraging the university’s programmatic strengths. UHC students are leaders on campus, and UHC graduates are prepared to be leaders in Oregon and around the world.

2014–2015 Achievements and Outcomes

1. Provide a transformative educational experience for all learners

   Offering outstanding students of all backgrounds transformative learning experiences is at the heart of the University Honors College’s mission. We are committed to creating these experiences both inside and outside the classroom, incorporating research, global service, and co-curricular activities. This year, the UHC undertook a number of initiatives designed to improve access to the full honors experience for all learners and support the creation of innovative experiential learning opportunities.

   - Internal assessment has indicated that the honors thesis presents, for many students, the most significant barrier to fulfilling the UHC degree requirements. Historically, about half of all students who begin in the UHC have left the program. In an effort to address the most significant source of attrition, UHC staff undertook a major overhaul of our thesis support structure. The goal of this was to enhance the learning environment to raise and equalize student success for learners from all disciplines and improve clarity, transparency, and accessibility of support materials and information to students and faculty mentors. Specific changes included:
     - Creation of a “Thesis Success in Stages” guide in the fall of 2014 that translates the thesis process into a series of steps and tasks, each supported by specific resources.
     - Development of an individualized “Thesis Map” for each student with specific goals to accomplish the Thesis Success in Stages components.
     - Creation of progress-tracking within the college’s Salesforce student data management system. This supports advising, but also allows for the creation of regular, automated communications that update students and mentors on progress through milestones outlined on the Thesis Map.
     - Establishment of a new course-based system that offers classes or required workshops that support each of the thesis stages.

   Early assessment of the revised Thesis Success in Stages system has indicated positive outcomes. In previous years, about 50% of first-year UHC students
engaged with the thesis in a meaningful way; in 2014–2015, 91% did so, in line with goals.

- The UHC collaborates with units from across the university to offer a rich and diverse set of courses that make high-impact learning a hallmark of undergraduate education in the college. In 2014–15, the honors curriculum included 222 distinct honors sections. Honors course offerings are refreshed annually to encourage innovative topics and approaches; 46 of the honors sections from last year were new offerings in the honors format, including classes in business, chemical engineering, German, and queer studies.

- As a part of our ongoing efforts to advance learning through course design, assessment, and faculty development, the UHC developed and offered a new Professional Learning Community during the spring term focusing on honors pedagogy and the incorporation of high-impact learning practices such as service learning, cognitive approaches to learning, working with primary sources, and use of new technologies. Over a dozen faculty from six different colleges met regularly throughout spring term to discuss the latest scholarship on teaching and learning, share ideas, and develop or revise their own honors courses.

- The UHC also supports innovative course design and the exploration of new pedagogical models by offering course development grants on a competitive basis to faculty who are designing and implementing experiential learning opportunities in UHC courses. Awardees from the first year of the program taught their courses in 2014–15 (HC 407 Commodities to Cafes; HC 407 History of Rock and Roll at the Experience Music Project; and SOC 444H Inside-Out: Prisons, Communities, and Prevention); this year’s awardees will offer their courses in 2015–16 (HC 299 The History Games and HC 407 Experimental Fluid Mechanics in Nature).

- The college worked to enhance the university’s comprehensive Healthy Campus Initiative through a series of student events in the UHC residence, West Hall, devoted to health issues, including the effects of alcohol, stress and anxiety awareness and management, and sexual health. These programs reached over 100 students. In addition, the full UHC faculty and staff completed CAPS Gatekeeper training to identify the signs and symptoms of depression, distress, and suicide risk.

- In 2015, the UHC led the successful search for a Prestigious Scholarships Advisor (LeAnn Adam). This new position, though housed in the UHC, serves the university as a whole by coordinating campus-wide publicity and recruiting and mentoring students as they prepare and apply for national and international prestigious scholarships. Support for prestigious scholarship applications advances student success and is essential to the expansion of strategies to recruit diverse and high-achieving students.
2. Demonstrate leadership in research, scholarship, and creativity while enhancing preeminence in the three signature areas of distinction

While the UHC does not have its own faculty or research enterprises, it is committed to providing faculty with unique opportunities to develop and implement innovative pedagogy and form mentorship and research relationships with outstanding undergraduate students. Honors students often become valuable members of research teams throughout campus, contributing significantly to publishable research, which allows faculty members to maximize campus resources.

- The opportunity to develop and teach courses in the UHC can be a key factor in attracting and retaining high-quality faculty. In 2014–2015, 126 faculty members from 40 different units taught in the UHC. Thirty were teaching their first honors course at Oregon State. To help the college ensure a diverse set of courses that provide teaching opportunities to a breadth of faculty members, the UHC has memoranda of understanding or agreements with the College of Engineering; the College of Science; the College of Business; the Department of Mathematics; the School of History, Philosophy, and Religion; the School of Writing, Literature, and Film; and the School of Language, Culture, and Society. These arrangements outline the number and type of honors courses offered in each program during the year.

The college recognizes the contribution of faculty to honors students and education through a donor-funded eminent professor program. In 2015, Dr. Jon Lewis from the School of Writing, Literature, and Film and Dr. Robert Paasch of the School of Mechanical, Industrial, and Manufacturing Engineering were recognized as UHC Eminent Professors. A bequest to the college will allow for an expansion of this program in future years.

- Transdisciplinary research and course offerings are distinguishing features of the UHC experience. This past academic year, the UHC offered 67 colloquia exploring topics such as “Ebola, Ethics, and Epidemics;” “Applied Inventing;” “Exploring History through Graphic Novels;” “The Evolution of Airplanes;” “Leadership and Positive Psychology;” and “From Zombies to Preppers: America’s Obsession with Apocalypse.” Courses such as these – which approach compelling topics from multiple disciplinary perspectives and include students with a range of academic backgrounds and interests – were rated in a new end-of-year survey of honors students as the most transformative element of the honors experience in support of the two UHC-specific learning outcomes, scholarly inquiry and engaged inquiry.

The flexibility of the honors thesis encourages undergraduates to participate directly in transdisciplinary research. The 2015 UHC Outstanding Thesis award, for instance, recognized Claire Ostertag-Hill's “Differentiation of BHV-1 Isolates from Vaccine Virus by High-Resolution Melting Analysis and An
Examination of the Interface between Culture and the Global Prevalence of HSV-2,” which integrated medical and anthropological approaches and led to a first-author publication in a peer-reviewed journal. The UHC’s research matching reception program, which brings together honors students and faculty members with research opportunities, exposes students to the full breadth of research at the university.

- The UHC has worked to expand and increase programs in the arts and humanities by introducing undergraduates to art programs early in their time at Oregon State, in partnership with University Housing and Dining Services. These experiential opportunities have combined attendance at live performances with contextualization by university faculty members. Students were able to attend a live performance by the Eugene Opera with an introduction led by Richard Poppino, see live improv at Curious Comedy Theater in Portland with comedy analysis by Eric Hill; and go to a performance of the Corvallis-OSU Symphony Orchestra set up by Sean Mills. The college also expanded its student-faculty book club program by offering a summer read for incoming UHC students. Eighty-three students participated in eight different faculty-led groups.

In partnership with Oregon State Libraries, the UHC created a new work opportunity designed to expose students from diverse backgrounds to archival research in the Special Collections and Archives Research Center. A new student archivist position was launched in the fall of 2014 and will be expanding to two positions in the fall of 2015.

3. Strengthen impact and reach throughout Oregon and beyond
The University Honors College creates unique opportunities and programs designed to attract the very best students in our region and beyond to Oregon State University and produce graduates prepared to assume leadership roles in their fields and communities. This is the most significant impact of the college on Oregon, keeping outstanding students in the state and attracting those from out of the state to the university and the Pacific Northwest.

- The UHC is committed to the continuing development of undergraduate programs that produce graduates who drive economic development and advance impact in other ways. For instance, the college’s partnership with the OSU Advantage Accelerator offers students experience in translating innovations at the university into the market. Five student interns participated in this program in 2015. Dr. John Turner, co-director of the Advantage Accelerator, augmented this opportunity through a two-credit honors course that explored the issues facing new start-up companies.

- In 2014–2015, the UHC worked to increase study abroad by providing scholarship resources, unique opportunities, and honors credit for study abroad experiences. Eight UHC graduates earned degrees in international
studies, and 40 students are currently working toward an international degree. Thirty-six UHC students studied abroad in 2014-2015.

The college also planned and offered coursework related to an honors international service learning experience in Debre Birhan, Ethiopia, scheduled for September, 2015. Eleven UHC students will work with the Community Project: Ethiopia to build the foundation for a school.

- The UHC engaged alumni and other external partners in a number of new ways during the 2014-2015 year. Working with the OSU Foundation, the college created a Parent Leadership Circle, piloting an engagement and fundraising strategy designed for the parents and family members of current students. In its inaugural year, the parents of six students participated in circle activities, which included two lunches with UHC and Oregon State leadership. The UHC expanded work with its Alumni Leadership Circle – formed in the spring of 2014 – to launch a fundraising campaign for Honors College alumni without precedent in the UHC’s history. A separate group of college alumni were brought together to assist in the planning for a celebratory event marking the 20th anniversary of the UHC in 2015. This event is scheduled for this fall.

A number of UHC alumni and partners were also brought to campus for mentorship lunches with current honors students, many during a new “alumni week” event in the fall of 2014. In part because of this engagement, the college added one participating alumnus to its development advisory board, the UHC Board of Regents, bringing the total number of regents to nine, its highest level in five years.

- In May, 2015, the UHC hosted the second biennial Honors Education at Research Universities (HERU) conference, a significant step in advancing impact and reach for the college and the university. Over 170 faculty and administrators from honors programs and colleges across the United States, as well as in Canada and Europe, gathered in Corvallis to share best practices and discuss the opportunities and challenges for honors education in the twenty-first-century research university.

4. Commitment to three essential features of OSU

The UHC is committed to enrolling a diverse student body and creating opportunities that maximize opportunity and success for all learners. As interest and enrollment in the college has grown, UHC staff and leadership have worked to develop admissions processes that encourage a diverse set of applicants with wide-ranging interests and backgrounds. In addition, in order to expand the opportunities and programs we can offer our students, the college has increased its focus on fund development and the creation of new efficiencies in its operations.
• As part of our efforts to reach out to a diversity of students, the UHC expanded its student ambassador positions, incorporating a number of new voices and perspectives to speak with prospective students and better reflect the college’s student population. Emphasis was placed on selecting a diverse group of students.

• Gifts and pledge payments to the UHC totaled $414,259.82 in the 2015 fiscal year according to the OSU Foundation, a significant increase from previous years (over 300%). There were also $129,320 in new pledges to the college. In order to build fundraising partnerships and success, Dean Toni Doolen went on 36 visits during the fiscal year, to 33 different prospective or current college supporters.

• The UHC continued work with the Office of the Registrar and the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships to clarify processes for the assessment of the UHC differential tuition and the accurate coding of honors students.

• The UHC continued to expand the functionality of its Salesforce operational database and management system. Developments in 2014-2015 include tracking of academic advising appointments, student co-curricular involvement (employment, study abroad, internships, research, UHC signature events), and receipt of college scholarships, and the expansion of the database to include tracking of engagement efforts with alumni and other friends and donors. New automation in tracking and guiding student thesis progress and admissions processes both improved efficiency within the college and added important elements to support UHC students.

5. Performance on college-level metrics

• Fall enrollment in the UHC grew for the fifth consecutive year, approaching 1000 students, with a comparable percentage growth in scheduled credit hours. Growth in the Honors College undergraduate population exceeded overall university enrollment growth by 7%, in keeping with the college’s goal to raise the percentage of university students in the UHC. Over four percent of Oregon State undergraduates were enrolled in the Honors College in fall, 2014, representing a one percent increase since 2010-2011.

• First-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates remain high at 96.5% and 83.9% respectively. These are in-line with five-year average percentages of 97% and 85.84%, and the positive differences of 12.7% and 20.8% between UHC retention and graduation rates and overall university rates also remain consistent with five-year averages (13.92% and 24.62%).

• The percentage of US minority students in the UHC of 25.2% slightly outpaces the percentage of minority students at the university as a whole and reflects significant growth in the past two years, indicative of the college’s emphasis on recruiting and retaining a diverse student body. However, the number of international students in the UHC remains low, which may reflect the strong emphasis on writing in the college admission process.
- After a period of growth in application numbers that, by 2013-2014, exceeded the college’s ability to manage admissions and maintain reasonable acceptance rates, efforts to encourage only the most committed and dedicated students to apply – particularly through the development of a more rigorous essay question and scoring process – resulted in a 19% decrease in total applicants for the 2014-2015 year. This allowed the admission rate to raise by 16% to 45.7%. Nearly 45% of admitted students chose to attend the UHC. This is comparable to last year (46%), but the increase in application numbers in the past two years has correlated with a small decline in student acceptance rates from previous years; in the five years preceding the most significant growth, the average acceptance rate of student offers was 54.9%. Student-acceptance rates of the applicants who score highest in the UHC admissions system have traditionally been lower, and the growth in overall applicant numbers has included growth in the number of high-scorers (growth has been equivalent across all scoring blocks), and as more of them make up the admitted classes, it is not surprising that overall student-acceptance rates would decline slightly.

- The UHC had 174 graduates in 2014-2015, a small increase (6.7%) from last year. This is slightly less than overall growth in the student population (9%); however, that growth has primarily been reflected in the population of first and second-year students. As indicated above, the six-year OSU graduation rate has been consistent over the past five years, with the exception of one outlier in 2013-2014.