

From: James Fowler
To: kurtb@uca.edu
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Subject: Honors Position Paper

Kurt:

First I would like to congratulate you on your speech this afternoon at the general faculty meeting. It addressed a difficult situation in a tactful but frank manner. I look forward to the Senate's prominent role in the renewal phase to come.

Next I would like to note some problems in the Honors College's bid to remove all impediments to building a core tenure-track faculty.

1. It seems that UCA has backed into this development, not pursued it in a deliberate way. If I'm not mistaken, the process of tenuring Honors College faculty began with the conversion of Policy 302 positions (three-year rolling contracts) into tenure-track ones. Policy 302 itself was part of the previous administration's attack on tenure. Basically, this particular conversion, meant to address AAUP principles, opened the door for Honors College tenuring. From what I can gather, the Honors College then took advantage of this loophole to hire two more tenure-track faculty in the 2003-04 and 2004-05 academic years. At this point the Senate stepped in with a sunset clause to prohibit the hiring of more tenure-track faculty unassociated with any department.
2. The Honors College as an administrative unit seems like a quasi-department and a quasi-college at the same time. Its promotion and tenure procedures, in seeking department and college equivalence, actually call for something resembling a college review committee at the department level, and a university review committee at the college level. This situation is hard to avoid when a college consists of a single group of interdisciplinary faculty.
3. The interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary distinction (Att. I, 13) points up a basic discrepancy between synthetic approaches to education in the Honors College and the rest of the university. As far as I'm aware, most doctoral-granting institutes do not confer Ph.D.s in Interdisciplinary Studies, though they may offer discipline-based doctorates with an interdisciplinary component. It appears from the position paper that the tenure-track hires in the Honors College so far have been faculty with degrees in traditional fields. They seem, however, to join a community of polymaths with special skills scarcely possessed by the rest of the UCA faculty. Hence, only select tenured members of that latter group can hope to teach in the Honors College on a regular basis as a "late-career option" (Ex. Sum. 3).
4. Non-Honors faculty have taught just 20-25% of the class sections in the College since 2003 (Att. I, 15). The "inward-turning" (Endnotes 2) tendency of such an institute is only likely to increase if its core faculty grows. In the name of autonomy, a rallying cry for honors programs turned colleges, it will steadily assume an overwhelming role in the promotion and tenuring of its own, as it already does in the hiring process, with little of the discipline-specific expertise upon which such decisions are based in standard academic departments.
5. In arguing that its proposal is "not unique" (Ex. Sum. 2), the Honors College downplays the fact that only six (Ex. Sum. 2) of the ninety honors colleges in the country (Att. I, 4) have such an independent arrangement. Depending on one's perspective, such a measure is either progressive or largely inadvisable.

These are just a few of my thoughts, but perhaps the most relevant.

Best,
James Fowler
English