



# ACU: HONORS COLLEGE

*Strategic Plan 2023-28*



ABILENE  
CHRISTIAN  
UNIVERSITY

# ACU Honors stands at a critical moment of unprecedented opportunity.

Since its inception, the cornerstone of the Honors College has been the many rich academic opportunities we provide. Through Honors courses, colloquia, mentored research, and other programs such as internships, travel grants and major scholarships, we provide our students with a deep, enriching academic experience.

As we continue to strive to give our talented students access to the best academic resources and experiences possible, we now look to the future and seek to expand opportunities for them to engage in more high impact practices that encourage academic growth, connection, spiritual formation, and vocational development. Generally, we believe that we can accomplish these ends by focusing on:

- Building a more connected Honors Community
- Growing the Freshman Honors class
- Recruiting more ethnically and racially diverse students
- Increasing Awareness about the ACU Honors college (externally and internally)
- Providing more high impact experiential learning opportunities
- Developing relationships and communication channels with faculty and alumni

Specifically, our focus over the next five years will center on the following six initiatives:

1

Grow freshman enrollment in the ACU Honors College to over **200 Students** and focus on recruiting **more racially and ethnically diverse students.**

2

Host the incoming Honors Freshman class in an **elite Living and Learning Community** experience in Wessel Hall.

3

Recruit and support students as they apply for major scholarships, assisting up to **20 students per year** with anticipation of **5 major scholarship winners.**

4

Develop new **high-impact experiential learning opportunities** for our students.

5

Elevate the **Honors College's Academic Brand** to become the premier Christian higher education academic experience.

6

**Expand funds** through increased enrollment and donor support.



**A confluence of new initiatives currently stands before us promising a brighter future for our students.**

As a result of the unprecedented support from the university’s administration, Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff, as well as from our generous donors and alumni around the globe, we are now staring at one of the biggest opportunities in many years to re-envision, expand, and transform the Honors college at ACU.

Specifically, the following five initiatives present enormous unrealized potential for us to continue to develop the personal, academic, and spiritual growth of our students:

- The new Freshman Honors Living Learning Community in Wessel Hall
- New expectations and support for expanding our major scholarships recipients
- New incentives and resources to pursue and recruit more high achieving students
- Expanding academic, study abroad and internship opportunities for our students, including our new Oxford Great Books Semester and Leipzig Volunteer Scholars Program.
- Development of a new, more individualized Honors Track Designation program.



# 1

## Grow freshman enrollment in the ACU Honors College to over 200 Students and focus on recruiting more racially and ethnically diverse students.

Currently, Honors admits around 130 students each year. Over the next five years, we plan to incrementally increase freshman enrollment in the Honors College through strategic recruiting carried out by a dedicated Honors Recruiter in partnership with Admissions.

Likewise, we believe it is important to promote an internal culture that celebrates every individual as having been created uniquely in God's image. Thus, we also hope to recruit more ethnically and racially diverse students to the Honors College.

The advantages of this recruiting will be felt immediately, benefiting not just our college but the entire university. Moreover, through this strategy, as we attract more high achieving students, we believe the results it produces will lead to **virtuous cycle**. Historically, Honors students continue to retain at higher rates throughout all four years of college, while also contributing to the university in many other unquantifiable ways.

### University Strategic Plan Connections

- a. 1.1.a. Secure formal status as a "national university" and achieve a U.S. News & World Report (USNWR) top 200 national ranking.
- b. 2.3.a - Abilene campus goal: Grow enrollment by 11% to 3,800.
- c. 2.3.c - Achieve 85% freshman-to-sophomore retention rate (five-year trend is 79%).
- d. 2.3.d - Achieve a 70% five-year graduation rate (currently 66%).
- e. 3.1.c - Achieve formal recognition as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).
- f. 3.1.d - Maintain a student body that is 40% ethnically and racially diverse and improve diverse student retention by 5%; increase Black student retention from 65% to 70%; and increase Latin student retention from 72% to 77%.
- g. 3.1.e - Improve diverse student graduation rates by 5%, increasing Black student graduation from 50% to 55% and increasing Latin student graduation from 49% to 54%.

### Immediate Resources Needed

- a. Dedicated Honors Recruiter
- b. Additional funds for creating marketing materials specifically targeting ethnically diverse students and families.

### Projected Resource Needs

- a. Additional budget for new class sections and operations as program grows
- b. Funding for grants or scholarships specifically for underrepresented groups of Honors students to be able to participate in research, study abroad, internships, and other Honors opportunities.
- c. Recruit more diverse faculty to teach Honors Cornerstone, freshman Bible, colloquia, and other Honors classes.
- d. Additional funds to recruit more diverse Peer Mentors and RAs for Honors first-year students.



# 2

## Host the incoming Honors freshman class in an elite residential and learning experience in Wessel Hall.

Beginning in 2023, ACU will begin to host our Freshman Honors students in our first Living Learning Community. As a leader in Learning Communities (currently ranked #9 nationally), we want to not only do this well, but make our Honors Living Learning Community a preeminent experience nationally and a flagship for future Living Learning Communities across campus.

Research shows that Living Learning Communities (LLCs) thrive when they meet at the intersection of curricular and co-curricular experiences between students, staff, and faculty. The university has already invested heavily in the space for both our student residents and our Faculty in Residence (FIR). Likewise, we already have in place curricular experiences within our freshman cohort through common Honors Cornerstone and Bible courses.

However, in order to create a thriving LLC, we need a Living Learning Community program director with a budget to coordinate the experience for our students and provide programming throughout the school year. This person would provide leadership in establishing community values, casting a vision, founding traditions, coordinating collective learning experiences, organizing and overseeing student leadership, and recruiting students into the LLC.

### Strategic Plan Connection

- a. 1.1.b. Maintain and improve our top 25 national status in USNWR student success rankings (currently ranked #7 in First-Year Experience, #9 in Learning Communities, and #9 in Service Learning).
- b. 6.1.a. Develop ACU's campuses through enhancements that will support our strategic objectives, facilitate growth, foster Christian community and provide long-term stewardship of physical assets.

### Resources Needed to Succeed

- a. Living Learning Community Program Director
- b. Living Learning Community Programming Budget





# 3

## Recruit and support students as they apply for major scholarships.

With the direct call from our Board of Trustees to increase the number of students receiving major scholarship awards at the university, we recognize the importance of identifying and advising qualified students to complete the application process for different Major Scholarships. Thus, we have set our goal at **assisting 20 students per year** with their applications with anticipation of **5 major scholarship winners per year**. Likewise, we will recruit and support 2 students per year to apply for a **Rhodes Scholarship** with the goal of one student receiving the award within the next five years.

### Strategic Plan Connection

- a. 1.1.c . Achieve recognition as a top producer of Fulbright scholarships and double the number of students receiving major scholarship awards (new target of five).

### Resources Needed

- a. Dedicated Honors Recruiter

# 4

## Develop new high-impact experiential learning opportunities.

As we seek to deepen and enrich the opportunities of our students at ACU, we recognize that experiential learning provides many of the most significant and high impact learning outcomes for our students. In order to become the premier leader in Christian higher education, we need to provide our students with a wide spectrum of challenging and life-changing learning opportunities that allow them to take their education to a deeper level. To address this, we recognize that some of these programs may be exclusive, select experiences available to only a few students (such as Study Abroad and internship opportunities). Thus, we are also seeking to provide new offerings that would be accessible to every Honors student, such as an expansion of our program through individualized track designations.

### Strategic Plan Connection

- a. SPI 1.0.0 Elevate ACU's academic brand to that of a world-class, faith-based national university.

### Universal Initiatives

#### a. Track Designations

In response to growing demand for a more individualized Honors experience, we are currently developing a program that will allow students desiring to pursue the Honors designation the opportunity to choose from one of four different customized experiences. Tracks under development include: Design Thinking and Innovation, Global Service and Leadership, and Social and Environmental Justice, and Research and Scholarship (see Appendixes A and B).

### Select Initiatives

#### a. Oxford Great Books Study Abroad

We are in the process of creating a signature study abroad experience with linked curricular readings of great books and assignments to significant historical and cultural ideas, texts, and sites that will take place in Oxford among Honors Students each fall.

#### b. Leipzig and International Corporate Internships

Through this program, we seek to help students make connections between their academic and professional preparation through participation in an international summer service-based internship.

#### c. Summer Scholars Program (High School)

As the university seeks to expand its offering of summer opportunities for High School students, the Honors College is currently developing opportunities for students to study locally and abroad.

### Resources Needed

- a. Funds to hire Program Track Directors
- b. Support funds for the Oxford Study Abroad program
- c. Funds to support students engaging in the International Internship program.



## ZELLNER HALL

North Elevation



Honors College  
Ivy and Banner Proposal  
9/1/22



### **Elevate Honors College’s academic brand to become the premier Christian academic experience.**

To realize its vision, ACU Honors must establish its brand as a top-tier experience both externally and internally.

Externally, we seek to reposition our stance as the premier option for students interested in Christian Higher Education. Colloquially, we would like to develop a reputation among our recruits, alumni, and colleagues at sister universities as the place to get a “Christian Ivy” experience.

Internally, we aim to build our reputation among faculty, staff, and students as a place that provides our most academically talented students from all areas of study across campus with opportunities to participate in dynamic opportunities to dive deeper into their studies. This will come about through cultivating relationships, especially with faculty, that encourage partnerships and more high impact opportunities for our students

#### **Strategic Plan Connection**

- a. SPI 1.0.0 Elevate ACU’s academic brand to that of a world-class, faith-based national university.

#### **Resources Needed**

- a. Approval to put ivy and banners on Zellner Hall (see rendering above).
- b. Funds to support the redesign and reprinting of old collateral, as well as the design and printing of new marketing materials.

# 6

## Expand funds through increased enrollment and donor support.

To support the projected growth we expect to see over the next five years, we will need to adequately resource our College so that we may serve the larger student demand. In essence, our resources must be reflective of our growth. To have more students will require more sections of Honors courses, as well as additional colloquia, contracts, advising hours, and faculty and staff to oversee those demands.

Currently, our College has only one full-time employee: our office manager. Our other three positions (Dean, Associate Dean, and Advisor) are half-time. While this staffing arrangement is suitable for us to maintain current demand, in order to support our growth we will need to be sufficiently resourced.

We plan to actively work with ACU's development office to build relationships with donors interested in connecting with Honors developments at ACU, and will develop a plan to seek funding for an endowed full-time Dean's position through naming the college.

### Strategic Plan Connection

- a. 5.1.1. Increase the total value of the endowment of the university to \$1 billion and ensure spending distributions are sufficient to fund 25% of the annual operating budget (as of FY 2021 endowment is \$654.5 million).

### Resources Needed

- a. Additional funds to support growth in programs.



**A**s we start to embark on this new journey, we recognize the necessity to sufficiently support our objectives. At our current staffing and budget levels, we are equipped to maintain the status quo. However, if we seek growth, both in terms of expanding the department and in enriching and deepening the experience of our students, we will need additional funds and personnel. Below is an inventory of the resources identified in this document, in order from most to least important needed to help us accomplish our goals.

### **Living Learning Community Program Director**

Currently, we do not have any designated person to coordinate the curricular, co-curricular, spiritual formation, and community development programming for students living in the Honors Living Learning Community in Wessel Hall. With this person in place, we can create a robust, thriving community for our students. Without this person, we believe we do not have a Living Learning Community; we only have a preferred housing arrangement for our students.

### **Dedicated Honors Recruiter**

With the creation of the Living Learning Community in Wessel hall and the expansion of our high-impact curricular and co-curricular offerings, we now have momentum that may help us attract more high achieving, high performing students. Currently, however, there is no dedicated Honors recruiter. We believe it is imperative that we staff a recruiter who is knowledgeable of the Honors program and is dedicated specifically to attracting the attention of higher achieving students.

### **Additional Honors Budget to Support Expansion and Growth**

As the Honors College grows, this will inevitably increase strain on our existing infrastructure, requiring us to provide more sections of classes, manage additional research projects and contracts, advise a growing body of students and grow operations.

### **Honors Track Program Director Stipends**

In order to support this new initiative, we need to provide stipends to faculty who will oversee the program. These stipends will pay faculty to develop curriculum, orchestrate colloquia with colleagues, and mentor and advise students in their program.

### **Living Learning Community Programming Budget**

Best practices suggest that for a Living Learning Community to thrive, funds are necessary to schedule events, plan activities and fund student-driven initiatives. In practically every Living Learning Community in the nation, a marginal fee (typically \$25 to \$50 per student) is collected to support this budget which is only spent on students in the Living Learning Community.

### **Branding Funds**

As the department engages in its brand audit and begins to reassess the deliverable marketing materials used to recruit students and elevate awareness of the College, we will need funding to support the redesign of our website, update our flyers and mailers and re-imagine the facade of Zellner Hall by adding ivy and banners to increase our prominence on campus.

### **Oxford Great Books Study Abroad Experience Funds**

As we transition to making the Fall Oxford Study Abroad semester an Honors Great Books experience, we will need funding to support faculty who will travel to the Oxford campus and teach Honors courses.

### **International Internship**

As we explore the opportunity before us to provide an Honors internship with one of our International partners abroad, we need to be able to fund the student's travel and housing expenses for the experience.

# Impact on the Student Experience

**O**ur objectives are only effective if they improve the experiences of our students. At the core of who we are, the Honors College is a collection of programs and offerings created to serve our amazing student body. Below we have outlined our initiatives both new and existing and highlighted how these programs impact the learning experience and outcomes of our students.

## New Initiatives

### Living Learning Community

Freshman Honors students will enjoy priority housing placement and participation in our Honors Living Learning Community in our campus' newest residence hall, Wessel Hall.

### Honors Track Designations

This program allows all students to opt into a more customized Honors experience by choosing from one of our four Honors scholarship tracks: Design Thinking & Innovation, Global Service & Leadership, Social & Environmental Justice, and Scholarship & Research.

### Oxford Great Books Study Abroad Program

Through this program, students will receive priority registration to travel to Oxford, England and take Great Books courses in Global Studies, Old Testament, Philosophy, Art, and the Writings of C.S. Lewis.

### International Internships

We are now offering an international summer internship program to help place students in service-based organizations at ACU's hub Study Abroad site in Leipzig, Germany.

## Existing Initiatives

### Major Scholarships

The Honors College houses the Office of Major Scholarships (Fulbright, Truman, etc.), which provides information, counsel and support for students who wish to apply for nationally competitive major scholarships and fellowships.

### Travel Grants

Honors students travel across the world each year to intern, study abroad or engage in mission and service work. Honors grants are often available to assist with travel costs.

### Honors Courses

Our courses, with outstanding professors and smaller class sizes, provide rich environments in which students have the opportunity to go deeper and broader than typical college courses.

### Priority Registration

Priority Registration allows students in the Honors College to have first pick of their classes, meeting times, and professors.

# Appendix A: Proposed Track Designations

## *Four Tracks, Endless Possibilities*

**W**e believe that the one-size-fits-all approach to an Honors College is not only reductive, it is also inadequate for our diverse population. In response to this challenge, we must strive to create an Honors College that offers a greater variety of options and experiences that cater to the wide range of needs and interests of our students. Therefore, we've developed a new track designation system that will give our students four different pathways from which to choose.

### **Track 1: Design Thinking and Innovation**

In this track, students will gain the tools and knowledge they need to become innovative problem solvers by learning the principles of Design Thinking. Design Thinking is a non-linear, iterative process that employs collaborative teamwork to redefine problems and develop user-centered creative solutions to a wide range of challenges. As such, it is a skill set that is applicable to every major on campus.

### **Track 2: Global Service and Leadership**

We believe that our students are better equipped to grow as Christian servant leaders when they have opportunities to see the world and face its challenges from an international perspective. Through this track, which may be chosen by any student, in any major, Honors students will have the opportunity to study the theoretical principles of Christian servant leadership and use them to address practical challenges posed in our world today.

### **Track 3: Social and Environmental Justice**

We want our students to imagine a more just society. By leveraging the skills, knowledge, and experience they bring from their diverse backgrounds and fields of study, we hope to see them enact social change and sustainable environmental solutions through creative problem solving and intellectual discourse. Through this track, we hope to equip our students to be agents of Christian justice and virtue as they partner with God to bring about a more just world.

### **Track 4: Scholarship and Research**

College is a place for learning. An Honors College, in its best version, is a place where students are equipped to delve more deeply into research, regardless of what that looks like in their respective discipline, and gain new insights, develop new perspectives, and make new discoveries. Through this track, students will be guided in research to enrich their education and contribute to their scholarly community.

Through the development of these four tracks, each unique and applicable to every major, we believe that we can move toward a more customized experience that better harbors the interests, talents, and strengths of each of our students.

# Appendix B: Proposed Track Integration



## ACU Honors Graduate Distinction

**1 APPLICATION**  
To the Honors College

**2 ADMISSION**  
To the Honors College

**A**  
**HONORS**  
Course Credits  
6 Courses

**B**  
**HONORS**  
Colloquia  
2 Colloquia

**C**  
**HONORS**  
Activity Credits  
3 Activity Credits

**PROGRAM**  
Track Credits

### HONORS GRADUATE Three Requirements

*Honors Graduate is the most basic and common Honors distinction. To receive the Honors graduate distinction, students must complete all three requirements. Honors graduates receive notation on their transcript.*

#### HONORS COURSE CREDITS

*Fulfilled through Honors Sections of General Education Courses, Philosophy Courses, or Honors Contracts.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

#### HONORS COLLOQUIA

*All students must take two colloquia to graduate with Honors. These single credit hour courses cover a wide range of topics.*

- 1
- 2

#### HONORS ACTIVITY CREDITS

*Activity credits recognize students for work they do in research, assistant teaching, grant applications, fellowships and more.*

- 1
- 2
- 3

#### PROGRAM CREDITS

*To participate in program offerings, students participate in individualized offerings within their program.*

**Track Distinction Options**  
Design Thinking & Innovation  
Environmental & Social Justice  
Global Service & Leadership  
Research & Scholarship

**HONORS  
GRADUATE**



# ACU Honors Scholar

## Scholar Distinction

**1 APPLICATION**  
To the Honors College

**2 ADMISSION**  
To the Honors College

### **HONORS** Course Credits

6 Courses

### **HONORS** Colloquia

2 Colloquia

### **HONORS** Activity Credits

4 Activity Credits

### **HONORS** Thesis Project

Project Thesis

### **PROGRAM** Track Credits

## HONORS SCHOLAR Four Requirements

*Honors Scholar is the highest distinction in the Honors College. Honors Scholars receive special recognition in the commencement program and the Honors Scholar notation on their transcript.*

#### HONORS COURSE CREDITS

*Fulfilled through Honors Sections of General Education Courses, Philosophy Courses, or Honors Contracts.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

#### HONORS COLLOQUIA

*All students must take two colloquia to graduate with Honors. These one credit hour courses cover a wide range of topics.*

- 1
- 2

#### HONORS ACTIVITY CREDITS

*Activity credits recognize students for work they do in research, assistant teaching, grant applications, fellowships and more.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

#### PROJECT THESIS & SEMINAR

*Students take a zero-credit project thesis seminar. Then complete a major project thesis in their junior or senior year.*

- 1
- THESIS PROJECT**

#### PROGRAM CREDITS

*To participate in program offerings, students participate in individualized offerings within their program.*

#### Track Distinction Options

Design Thinking & Innovation  
Environmental & Social Justice  
Global Service & Leadership  
Research & Scholarship



**HONORS  
SCHOLAR**



**ACU HONORS COLLEGE**

ACU Box 29142 | Abilene, Texas 79699-9142

325-674-2728