Honors Program Proposal

Graduation requirements.

1. Student participants would complete 32 units of honors-standing work. Honors-level work would include any combination of honors sections, in-course honors, and major honors.

2. To facilitate steady progress and a common core experience among honors students, participants would need honors credit for at least 12 of their Common Contexts units. (A more optimal number might prove to be different – perhaps 16.)

3. A minimum of eight of the 32 units would be in upper-division courses.

Eligibility.

4. A two-tier eligibility process would ensure a relatively stable number of participants. Students invited to compete for the Monroe scholarship would be guaranteed eligibility, and other Presidential scholars would be encouraged to petition for eligibility. We would restrict or expand the population of granted petitions depending on how many Monroe candidates enroll at Westmont so as to have 30 honors program participants within each year’s freshmen class. This would increase the dependability of registration numbers for honors sections.

5. Students would have to maintain a qualifying GPA (3.5) in order to enroll in honors courses without having to petition.

6. Other honors requirements still apply: For instance, students must earn a B or higher in an in-course honors course to earn honors credit.

Curriculum development -- Immediate.

7. The Common Contexts requirement requires consistent availability of in-course honors options or honors sections so that honors students can depend on them. Westmont can ensure this through a combination of offering at least one honors section per year for each Common Contexts requirement (through adjunct faculty teaching those courses or others in the department, or voluntary overloads for permanent faculty if necessary) or consistently offering in-course honors options. Departments could thus offer honors units regularly without making unattractive or unacceptable sacrifices to department curricula, upper-division courses, or class sizes. (Existing honors units in English and Chemistry would be vital to honors students as well.)

8. Honors offerings in other areas of the GE and in upper-division major cores would be most welcome if they could be offered with no additional costs.
Curriculum development – Future possibilities

9. Faculty from across disciplines could develop upper-division team-taught interdisciplinary seminars for honors students that might meet a GE requirement – perhaps Integrating the Major Discipline. The Provost office could commit to covering the cost of one such seminar per year.

10. We could draw up a list of off-campus programs that would count as honors units – for instance, the Oxford study program. As the program expanded in future years, we would explore an honors-program Mayterm abroad (perhaps in conjunction with some other school’s honors-caliber students). This would easily incorporate the interdisciplinary seminar mentioned above.

11. The Westmont Internship Program could develop criteria for internships that would contribute to the honors unit requirement.

12. For program continuity, those who regularly teach honors sections or consistently offer in-course honors would meet occasionally (once or twice per year).

13. To develop camaraderie and cast Westmont’s vision for honors students from the very beginning of our students’ experiences, we could recruit participants for an honors section of Inoculum which would provide 2 honors units. We could even encourage honors students to return to Inoculum at least once as juniors or seniors to reflect on the Westmont education they have been receiving and to mentor incoming honors students.

Extracurricular participation.

14. Participants would report annually on their experiences at extracurricular events such as the Phi Kappa Phi lectures, Erasmus lectures, CAMA concerts, research presentations of candidates for faculty openings, etc. Reports would encourage their participation in these events and serve as an assessment instrument.

15. Participants would make themselves available for admissions recruiting – for instance, in the Monroe Scholars weekend.

Recognition.

16. Honors program graduates would be recognized at the awards chapel and graduation and their standing formally designated on their diplomas.
Features and benefits.

This program is intended to do the following:
- Operate at relatively low cost to the college.
- Attract prospective students who are high academic achievers without alienating prospective students who cannot or do not wish to participate.
- Feature a core in which honors program students interact, gain a sense of camaraderie, and engage the GE curriculum, their majors, and their whole Westmont life.
- Keep honors students together enough for them to form academic and personal bonds that last through college, while also keeping them integrated with other students so that all students benefit.
- Allow students to enter (in their first year), continue, or drop the program on their own initiative insofar as they are qualified.
- Integrate with major honors programs and off-campus programs without requiring departments to develop these.
- Encourage but not mandate participation in extracurricular events on and off campus.
- Provide a fundraising opportunity for College Advancement and a way to leverage Westmont’s strengths in ways appealing to prospective students, alumni, and donors.