HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

Birth of the Honors Program
The Honors Program at Chapman University was established in the fall of 1981 with the aid of a $400,000 Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). It began operation in the fall of 1982. During the preliminary planning of the Honors Program, exhaustive research was undertaken to get information about honors programs at other colleges and universities. The Program Director at the time, Thomas Beck, conducted this research and attended a conference of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) to meet directors from across the country. Chapman has since been affiliated with the NCHC.

Proposed components
Four major components comprised the proposal to the NEH:

- Endowment of a fund for an outstanding visiting professor in the humanities
- Endowment of support services for a Humanities Honors College
- Establishment and Endowment of a Humanities Center
- Endowment for a Humanities Lecture Series and Conference Fund

The first two components were envisioned as part of an Honors “College,” which would employ “existing faculty, facilities, and curriculum ... for permanently supporting a distinctive and high-quality academic program in the humanities”. These components were to be part of a $1.2 million proposal, of which $900,000 would be raised from non-NEH sources.

Early design
The program that developed when the final award of $400,000 was granted consisted of a part-time administrator, a part-time program assistant, and classes taught by existing faculty, many from the Philosophy and Religion departments. The curriculum originally consisted of four core classes and several satellite seminars taught by faculty from various departments. New core courses, satellite classes and other curricular enhancements were added over the years, and the general structure of the curriculum remained the same until 2009.

Interdisciplinary foundation
The Honors Program was designed to provide an interdisciplinary general education core of classes that were augmented by satellite courses and culminated with independent study in the student’s individual major. Starting in the late 1990’s, students completing the program were awarded a minor in University Honors.

As part of the original design, the Honors Program reflected favorably on Chapman University’s mission:

- Small class sizes provided a personalized educational setting where students were able to interact with the professor and the other students in order to gain as much as possible from each course they take.
The in-depth and challenging courses offered by the Honors Program encouraged students to think critically, broaden their ethical awareness, and increase their perception of their lives as global citizens.

Curricular structure
The curricular structure was guided by parameters established by the National Endowment for the Humanities:

Humanities courses would be integrated into interdisciplinary sequences of logical progression, thus bringing the humanities disciplines together in a comprehensive way. Requirements for completing the Honors Program would include attendance at the Humanities Lecture Series each year, enrollment in special upper division Honors seminars, and completion of an Honors thesis project.

The act that established the National Endowment for the Humanities gives this definition of the term humanities:

“The term ‘humanities’ includes, but is not limited to, the study of the following: Language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism, and theory of the arts; those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life.” (Fellowships and Stipends Application information – NEH [web page] – 1999-2000, or form OMB no. 3136-0134)

Service learning
In the mid-1990s, the Honors Program had a formal affiliation with the YMCA of Central Orange County, which provided a partnership between Honors students and children being served by the YMCA. Honors students were able to tutor and mentor students in the after-school program and at the YMCA’s H.O.P.E. School for homeless children. The Honors students gained valuable internship or independent study credit for doing so. Many honors students turned their time spent helping children at the YMCA into their senior project/presentation. When leadership changed at the YMCA, the partnership was put on hold.

2009 to present
The University Honors Program underwent major revision in 2009 and a newly designed program was launched for the 2009-10 academic year. The redesign included the drafting and approval of all new courses. Additional professors also were recruited to teach in honors.
The program’s interdisciplinary focus is based on great books and events from cultures around the world, giving Honors students and faculty the opportunity to concentrate on mutually critical exchanges between the classics of human cultures and the contemporary world. The goal of these dialogical exchanges is collaborative and intentional learning in which students and faculty together connect enduring and emerging ideas, drawing on shared texts, lectures, seminar discussions, and cultural experiences.

The heart of the Honors Program is a flexible liberal arts curriculum, with four main areas of study:
- Arts and Letters
- Mathematics, Science, and Technology
- Religious and Philosophical Studies
- Social and Historical Studies

In Honors courses, students encounter cultural classics in interdisciplinary ways and from a diversity of perspectives. Students engage in seminar-based conversations that consider classic texts and paradigm-shifting events in their cultural and intercultural influence, their effects on our contemporary world, and their possible future consequences.

Seminar topics are wide-ranging, taking up such issues as the cross-cultural origins of mathematics, historical ideas of race, the rise and fall of gods, the scientific and social implications of human genome mapping, the city and its future, and visual rhetoric, to mention a few. New seminar topics and classes are introduced each year.

These seminars, innovative and experimental in nature, are unique to the Honors program. The seminars are supplemented by lectures and gatherings with Chapman University’s most outstanding scholar-teachers during the regular academic year and by preceptorials during interterm sessions. Preceptorials are courses designed by students on themes they find interesting and want to study more deeply. The classes represent an opportunity for students to exchange ideas and learn from each other while drawing on the expertise and experience of the faculty preceptor.

Honors students also have an enhanced opportunity to pursue research, study abroad, and engage in community-based learning.

Honors students complete a total of 8 Honors courses, including the senior capstone, with a minimum of one course in each of the Honors Core areas. The required Honors courses satisfy the GE Inter/Multidisciplinary Cluster. Select courses may also satisfy major, minor or other GE and/or elective requirements.
A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

Each student deserves the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. For the leader this means an opportunity to be associated with and participate in campus and community leadership. Continuous growth is a function of active involvement, which is the heart of the Leadership Program.

For the academically talented person this requires being exposed not just to a variety of separate disciplines, but a fully integrated understanding of the knowledge developed by the world’s civilizations. Thus the heart of the Honors Program is the comprehensive introduction to the humanities in the Freshman and Sophomore years, and this forms the basis for the Honors student’s specialized work in any major.

The broad study of the humanities reveals the special miracle of the human mind, its ability to study itself as well as its creations. The humanities focus on the intellect, with the self as the active object of inquiry, as the subject which imbues all others with meaning. Students of the humanities, impelled by their human sympathy with truth, are supported by a three-fold enterprise: understanding of the processes of unfolding knowledge; the study of what is known; and the habit of ever-watchful criticism of both. This habit of inquiry sustains the moral duty to resist dogma in any form. It fosters an appreciation of intellectual diversity but without the loss of principled commitment.

Participation in the Honors Program means reaching out on your own initiative to seize every opportunity to develop your highest personal and intellectual potential. Graduates of Chapman’s Honors program will be able to move out into the world with a solid liberal arts education and an independence of mind, knowing not just how to make a living, but more importantly, how to live.

Meet Kant’s challenge, and dare to know!

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Dr. Thomas Beck
Director of Honors