

Western Carolina University

# The Honors College

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Above: Honors College students studying together in the lobby of Reynolds Residence Hall.

## Introduction to the College

The Honors College at Western Carolina University, founded in 1977, has proven to be a great success. Currently comprised of more than 1,200 undergraduate student members, the school offers high-achieving scholars the opportunity to achieve an even higher level of education while completing their undergraduate coursework. Although obtaining the prestigious Honors College degree is the main goal of honors students, being a member of the college involves much more than just education: the college also hosts many exciting activities throughout the academic year, and also encompasses a close-knit student community. Also boasting a knowledgeable and friendly staff, the Honors College is a superior place to gain various extraordinary opportunities within the university. For example, Honors College students are often given a special priority

in relation to specific things, such as distance education and the opportunity register for classes before any other students. Many scholarships are also offered; in fact, all Honors College students receive at least a small scholarship, in the amount of at least \$1000. Many students receive much more, including the possibility for a full scholarship (in such an instance, a student will complete their undergraduate education at Western Carolina University at no charge to them).

To be considered for the Honors College, incoming freshmen must have had at least a 3.75 GPA, gotten a 1200 on their SATs (old standard), or been in the top 10% of their graduating high school class. Continuing students are eligible for enrollment in the honors college if they obtain a 3.5 GPA or greater.

## Honors College Activities

Many exciting activities have already been offered by the Honors College this year. Beginning with the Welcome Home Cookout, each event proves to be jam-packed with entertaining games and friendly fellow students. Movie nights have also already been held, along with various stimulating study sessions involving many common core liberal studies courses. A Halloween party is also currently being planned, complete with delightfully frightening movies, loads of food and candy, and a costume contest. A holiday party will also take place before the close of the semester: the details of it are currently being worked out. According to the dean of the college, Dr. Brian Evan Railsback, a special bonfire is

also being planned: it will take place later within the year and will involve roasting marshmallows, s'mores, and a generally wonderful time. Recently, the Honors College has also sponsored tailgating get-togethers, an event called "Chocolate and Checkers," and pizza parties.

It is a priority of the honors college staff to include each and every student member of the Honors College in its activities and events. For this reason, the get-togethers are always well-advertised, and everyone is always encouraged to participate. It is obvious that the Honors College is dedicated to involving everyone in their pleasurable jamborees.

Below: Students enjoying an Honors College-sponsored pizza party



## Changes Within the College

The Honors College is currently undergoing many changes. One of the faculty's current main priorities is to encourage more involvement and participation among the honors college students. In the past, many student members of the college did not graduate with honors degrees; they were instead interested in only reaping the benefits of early registration and superior housing (in Reynolds Residence Hall). The staff of the college is very concerned with changing this however, and it is very possible that student members will be seriously penalized for not attempting to complete honors credit hours. The faculty is currently strongly encouraging all honors students to progress towards earning their honors degrees, and this support is making a huge difference: according to Dean Railsback, the number of students graduating from the college is trending upwards each semester. Mrs. Susan Smith adds that over 60 students graduated from the honors college last year, and that approximately 100 are expected to successfully complete the requirements this year.

Below: A standard diploma from the Honors College at Western Carolina University



## The Pledge Ride and Other Scholarship Fundraisers



Above: Mountain biking for the pledge ride. This event raises an enormous amount of scholarship money for the honors students.

The Honors College offers many scholarships to its students. The money for these scholarships is raised in an unusual and exciting way: since Dean Railsback is passionate about biking, he annually volunteers himself for a pledge ride. He rides alone for an unbelievable distance: he travels from Reynolds Residence Hall's parking lot, all the way to the top of Mount Mitchell. The pledge ride requires much training, and it clearly shows Dean Railsback's commitment to the Honors College, and also the importance he places in rewarding students with well-deserved scholarships. This event typically takes place towards the end of the fall semester each year, and the students eagerly encourage Dean Railsback by organizing a celebration bash after the ride is completed. In addition to various community members and alums offering pledges for this exciting ride, some alumni simply send donations, usually allocated for specific scholarship purposes within the college. The majority of the money is earned through the pledge ride, however: last year alone, over \$18,000 was raised from the ride.

## The Honors College Float: A Homecoming Parade Winner

Just last week, the Honors College won an exciting award for having one of the best floats at the Homecoming Parade for the year of 2007. The students were extremely proud of this great accomplishment, since many of them spent long hours designing and creating the float. Even Dean Railsback became involved in the building of the float: he also worked extra hours to help in any way that he might be needed. A mini pizza party was held for all students who were involved, and they stayed late into the night to put the finishing touches on their creation. More students actually participated in this event than could fit on the float, so many walked on the street during the parade: they were simply eager to show their pride in being part of the Honors College. Obviously then, the Honors College was well-represented at this major event.

The winnings for the Honors College included both special recognition and a cash prize of \$100. Dean Railsback sent out a mass e-mail to all Honors College students, congratulating the float designers on their winnings and explaining that the money will be used for a special event that will take place later within the academic school year. He is currently taking suggestions for any type of event that the students may think of, since this is certainly a proud moment, and it is also one of great accomplishment and recognition for the college.

Students are already beginning to think of the float that will be built next year—many ideas are already being brought up and discussed. A goal for the students is to win the same award again next year. Certainly, if they start now, the results will be fantastic.

# Reynolds Residence: the Honors Dorm

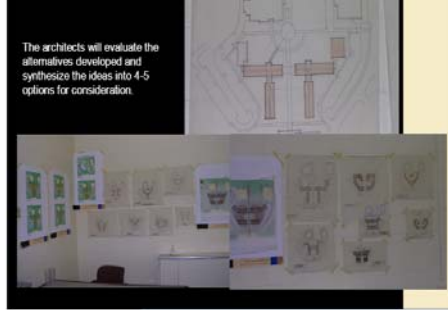
Members of the Honors College are encouraged to reside in Reynolds Residence Hall, which is the official residence hall of the Honors College. All Honors College offices are located within the building, and most events sponsored and held by the Honors College take place here. Since only Honors College students can live here, it is an honor and a privilege to be eligible to reside in this building. Featuring large rooms, suite-style bathrooms, air conditioning, and many study rooms, Reynolds Residence Hall is the perfect place to both meet friends and foster a superior education

The residence hall is three stories high, and it includes a 24-hour quiet hall and a non-smoking floor. In addition, the furniture is nearly brand-new and includes lofted beds and individual desks and dressers. All students agree that the atmosphere is cozy and welcoming, yet fun-filled and exciting.

Below: Reynolds Residence Hall from the outside and inside a dorm room

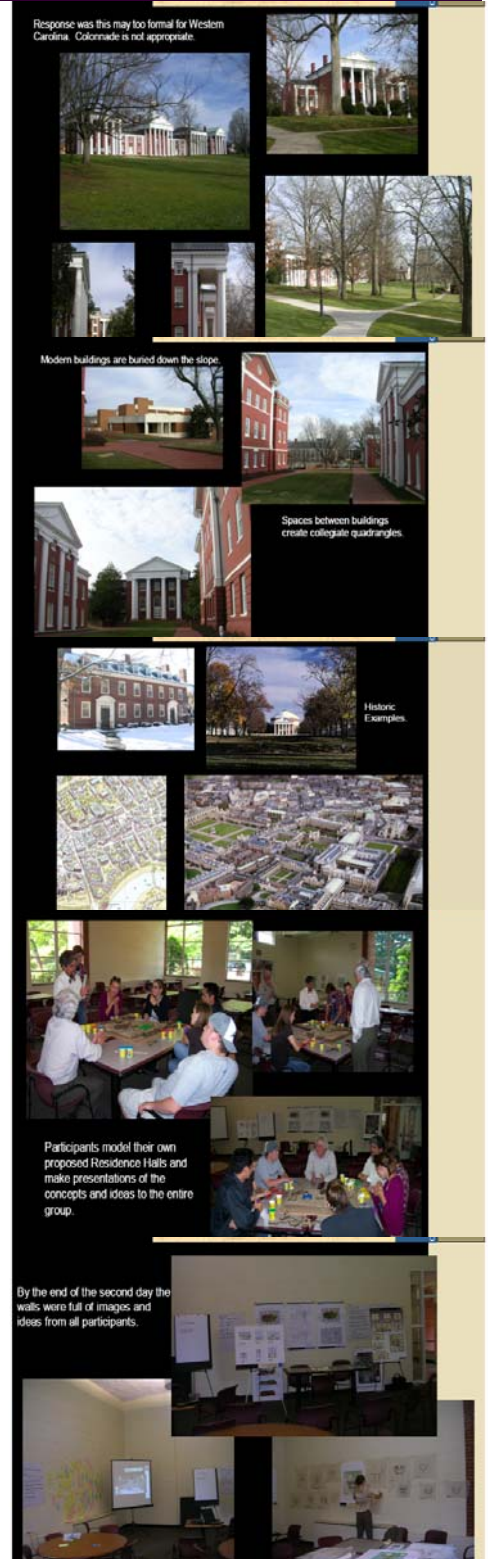


# Future Plans for the College



Above: possible floor plans for the future honors dormitory

The Honors College is actually planning to move to a new location in 2008. The new building will be located at the center of campus, which will help to ensure that honors college students stay involved within the university as a whole. Plans for the new dorm have already been created: some ideas include a four-story dorm building (as opposed to the current three-story dormitory), the use of economical building principles, a traditional image with arch, and covered smoking areas away from the building door. In addition, fireplaces may be added to community spaces, and classrooms will likely also be constructed within the dormitory building. Both double and single rooms will be available, and community kitchens, complete with appliances, will also be provided. Other suggestions are also being considered, such as the possibility for a special projects design studio, and even various study rooms with different types of lighting (for students who learn better in different environments). All honors college faculty and students are very excited about these plans, and look forward to the day when they can eagerly move into their brand new dormitory.



Above: various plans for the new dormitories, including those for the new honors residential building

## Honors College Faculty



Above: Dean of the Honors College, Dr. Brian Evan Railsback

The staff of the Honors College is exceptionally friendly and willing to help students in any way possible. The Dean of the college, Dr. Brian Evan Railsback, is hilarious, laidback, and easy to talk to. Mrs. Susan Smith (who prefers to be called Susan by her students) is a wonderful, knowledgeable, and humorous advisor, and students can always count on for help with any problems involving registration, or the program in general. Unfortunately, Mrs. Smith is retiring soon, and she will be missed greatly. As a special surprise, her students are currently creating a scrapbook for her, complete with letters and pictures. The letters will explain her special place in her students' hearts. Everyone is hoping that she will return for many future visits and possibly to work part-time, since she is an irreplaceable, fun friend who will never be forgotten.

## The Masterminds Behind the Fun

Who organizes all of the exciting activities that the honors college hosts? The answer is the Honors College Board. A committee of both faculty members and upper-level students, the board plays a major part in all events that are hosted by the Honors College. They arrange everything, and they even plan the budgets and decide which investments are the best. The board meets every week: they are determined to hold as many exciting events as possible. In addition, they always make sure to create contingency plans for the possibility that a problem may arise. For example, the last cook-out was rained out; it was nevertheless still able to be held. The tables were simply set up inside Reynolds Residence Hall. This way, only the board members and others who were involved in the grilling of the hot dogs and hamburgers were required to stand outside in the rain. When asked about why they still did it, however, they explained that besides for the benefit of the students, they were also having fun, even in the rain! This instance shows that the Honors College Board is seriously committed to its students, even when the unexpected happens.



Above: A board-sponsored volleyball tournament.

## Graduation and Beyond

Students who successfully complete their honors credits and graduate from the Honors College are rewarded in many ways. First, a special party is held in Reynolds to honor all seniors who are graduating from the college. Then, the

students are the first to walk across the stage at the ceremony, which is obviously an exciting privilege. They also receive a special diploma, which is different from and larger than the standard university diploma. This is especially interesting, since Western Carolina University is one of the only universities in the country to offer a special diploma to their honors students (by contrast, most honors students at other universities only receive a special seal on their diploma). A new reward that all Honors College students receive is a medallion. According to Mrs. Susan Smith, besides the honors students, only the chancellor wears a medallion at the graduation ceremony. The medallion is described by her as both large and beautiful. Students can also choose to have their medallions inscribed.

According to both Dr. Railsback and Mrs. Smith, graduating from the Honors College is very helpful to all students in terms of both future employment and acceptance to graduate schools. They explain that graduation from the Honors College proves that a student has met a higher standard, and also that they took their undergraduate education further than the necessary to simply "get by," which of course shows that a student is ambitious and determined to succeed. Since the accomplishment of graduating from the Honors College is stated directly at the top of each honors student's resume, it is brought to the attention of both future employers and graduate school recruiters virtually immediately. Clearly then, this is an extremely helpful and special accomplishment, of which honors students reap the benefits of throughout the entire lives of their future careers.



Above: Proud students graduating from the Honors College.