Benefits of Commonwealth Honors College

Commonwealth Honors College plays a role in preparing Honors students to be the thinkers, leaders, and entrepreneurs of tomorrow. CHC believes it is essential for students to be exposed to as broad a range of academic, social, and cultural experiences as possible. Being immersed in an environment rich in diversity prepares students for the challenges they will meet in a complex and changing world.

Large University, Small Feel

Commonwealth Honors College students benefit from the enormous opportunities of a large and vibrant research university with more than 70 majors, plus a community of highly-motivated peers from across disciplines. Honors students experience the liberal arts atmosphere of a smaller college that is committed to fostering an environment of inclusive excellence.

Small Classes

Commonwealth Honors College offers an enriched curriculum that provides breadth and depth beyond the standard curriculum. Honors General Education classes are small. These thought-provoking seminars allow students to fulfill the University’s General Education requirements that would otherwise be met through large lecture courses.

All Honors students take the signature Honors General Education course “Ideas that Change the World” and have a wide range of other Gen Ed course options.

Honors Thesis

Honors students complete advanced work in their majors, culminating in a thesis. Many alumni report that the honors thesis was one of their most meaningful undergraduate experiences, and that the accomplishment of conducting extensive research and completing a thesis opened doors for them in employment and graduate school. Through their thesis work, past honors students have engineered a pedal-powered wheelchair, created an original jazz score, and contributed to infectious disease control. The honors thesis helps students develop advanced problem-solving skills that serve them well in any profession.

The Honors Community

Regardless of where they live, Honors students have access to the many benefits and
services offered by Commonwealth Honors College, including Honors advising, evening lectures and films, and special programs such as the International Scholars Program. The Honors College routinely hosts special events that foster students' understanding of diverse perspectives on current global and domestic concerns.

The Commonwealth Honors College Residential Community opened in 2013. The modern LEED-certified facility sits in the heart of the campus and includes residential spaces, classrooms, faculty-in-residence, a café, and a large events hall. Honors housing is available to CHC students in all class years, either in the CHC Residential Community or in designated honors housing elsewhere on campus. Honors students may also choose among other on- and off-campus housing options.

Many Honors first-year students participate in Honors Residential Academic Programs (RAPs). In these Honors RAPS, students live on the same floor and take one or two classes together, often with related themes.

Each year, aspiring Honors students are selected to participate in the Emerging Scholars Program, a signature Residential Academic Program (RAP) for academically-talented, underrepresented, underserved and first-generation college students. The year-long program prepares students to become Honors scholars.

Financial Support

Honors grants and fellowships support CHC students' participation in research, most often related to their thesis work. In addition, Commonwealth Honors College offers a range of donor-supported scholarships, many of which recognize students' academic accomplishments, community involvement, leadership capacity, or participation in research.

The Office of National Scholarship Advisement (ONSA) assists students in pursuing nationally-competitive undergraduate and post-graduate scholarships and fellowships, such as the Rhodes, Marshall, Fulbright, Churchill, and Gates Cambridge. ONSA is located in the Commonwealth Honors College administrative building.

Honors students often qualify for need and merit-based scholarships offered by the University.

How to Join

Students may be invited to join CHC when admitted to UMass Amherst or may apply for entry after a semester as a UMass Amherst student. Visit our admissions section for more information about joining Commonwealth Honors College.

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