



Honors Program at M.U.

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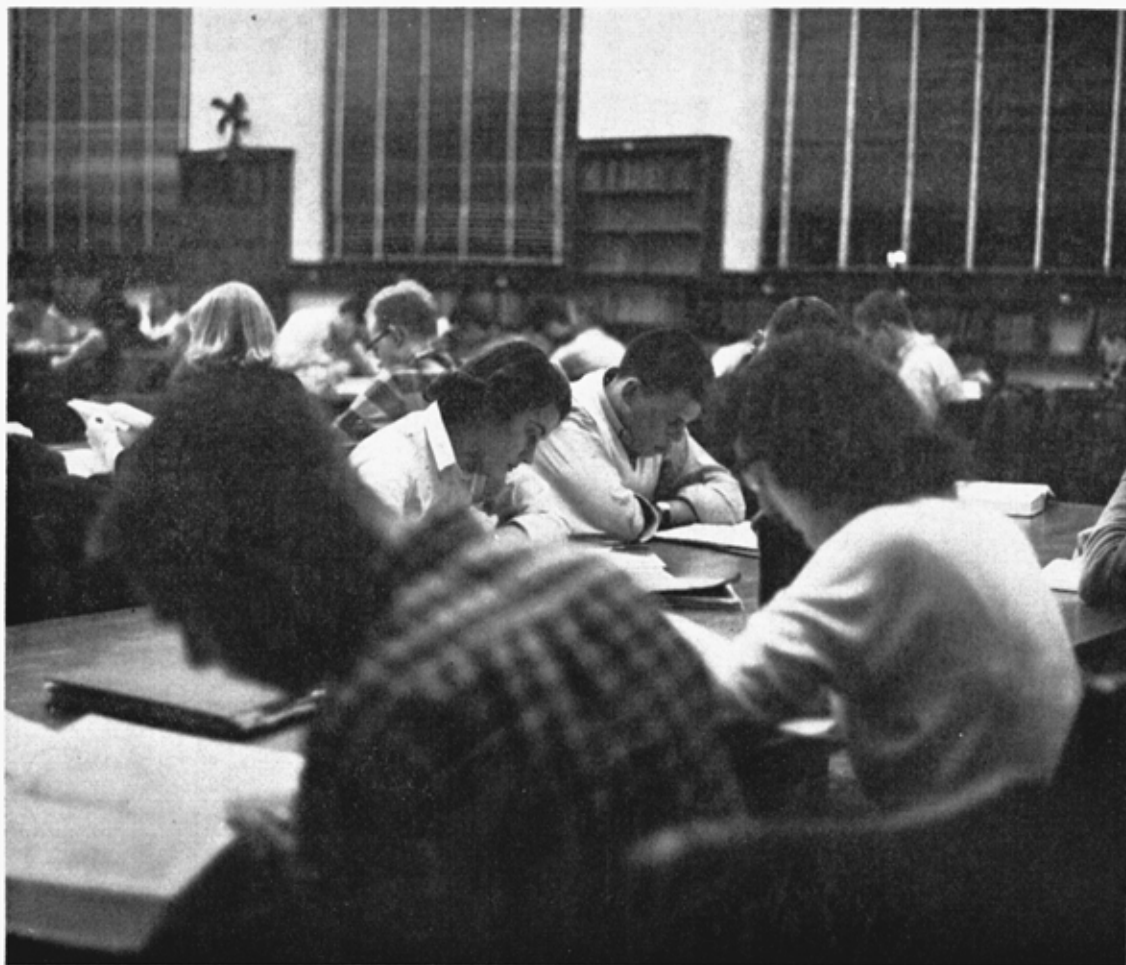
THOSE WHO VISIT THE University of Missouri today are struck by the impressive evidences of physical growth. The University building program has already added several completed structures and more are in preparation, the campus is alive and moving, and the clatter of construction fills the air. Missouri clearly is growing at a rapid rate, and even as the physical plant expands, the student body is growing. Physical evidence of growth, however, is only one index of Missouri's progress, for in the last analysis a school is only as alive as its educational philosophy, only as vital as its intellectual leadership. No university can remain static, for education must move with society's changing needs, and the policies and programs of yesterday must be constantly tested against today's realities and tomorrow's requirements. Contemporary higher education faces a massive double challenge: to meet and accommodate a tidal wave of students, and at the same time to maintain and advance the highest possible intellectual standards. The building program is solid evidence that Missouri is meeting the first issue. The establishment of a formal Honors Program is equally substantial, though less immediately obvious, evidence that Missouri is also grappling with the second challenge.

In the spring of 1959 the faculty of the College of Arts and Science formally approved the establishment of a special program for gifted students. Prior to 1959 the University had taken tentative steps toward such a program, and for many years advanced placement through testing, special sections in underclass survey courses, and departmental distinction programs offered special opportunities to high ability students. These programs, however, lacked integration and at the most provided a beginning point for attacking a crucial problem. Rising enrollments, coupled with increased demands for highly trained college graduates, have forced universities all across the country to recognize the need for high ability student programs to avoid losing gifted students in the new enrollment rush and thus dissipating or misusing important reservoirs of talent. This realization has been driven home by the growing awareness that in our world knowledge, both scientific and humanistic, is a large part of national power, and that a failure in higher education to develop the nation's intellectual resources could well mean a national tragedy. This danger has been aggravated by widespread student apathy and the apparent refusal to attach serious importance to academic work and cultural values. All these were

immediate and pressing reasons for developing a program to provide the special training that special talent deserves and that the nation needs, to reaffirm intellectual and cultural values, to call attention to intellect, and to stimulate enthusiasm for academic performance. And these were the needs which fostered the faculty's decision and provided the impetus for the Honors Program.

Faculty action was preceded by a long period of study and evaluation. The Committee on Education of the Superior Student, formerly the Committee on Distinction and now the Honors Council, began to consider an Honors Program in 1956. Between 1956 and 1959 this Committee not only analyzed and weighed the questions which Missouri's particular situation raised but surveyed programs at other universities which were to deal with the same general problems. The Committee soon discovered that to enunciate an educational principle is relatively simple, but to implement it without destroying it is a difficult and complicated task. Yet it was the latter job that the Committee with the full support of Dean W. Francis English of the College of Arts and Science undertook. Progress was necessarily slow, and each step of the program was subjected to searching criticism. The Committee developed and rejected several plans before the outlines of the present program actually appeared, and when the Committee finally presented its findings to the faculty, further changes were suggested and incorporated. The plan which emerged, which was approved, and which now is being implemented, was hammered out with all due care and with the full realization of the many responsibilities which a university must carry.

THE PLAN OUTLINED BELOW is substantially that which was presented to the faculty in 1959, but there has been one important addition. During 1959-1960 the Ford Foundation declared itself interested in forwarding specialized training for qualified students during their junior and senior years and the first year of graduate study. The Foundation's intent was to meet the growing need for college level instructors by strengthening the traditional Master of Arts program and reviving the Master's degree as a college teaching degree. The Foundation's plan, the so-called Three Year Master's Program, emphasized intensive work in disciplinary specialties, language preparation to meet



present doctoral requirements, and training and experience in teaching. The Foundation and the University discovered a mutual interest, and in the spring of 1960 both the Arts faculty and the Graduate faculty voted to accept the Three Year Master's Program and the financial support with which the Foundation was willing to back it. This program in turn became part of the Honors Program at the University.

The Honors Program as it is presently constituted is a part of the College of Arts and Science and is not a separate institution within the University. It provides work on each level of the four year undergraduate program and extends into the first year of graduate study. The first important phase of the program, however, is administrative rather than curricular. For the Honors Program to be successful, potential Honors candidates must be identified as early in their academic careers as possible, and thus all applicants for freshman admission are closely screened. This screening is a necessary part of the University's total admission and enrollment procedure, but it has a special meaning for the Honors Program. Batteries

of tests determine students' aptitudes, strengths, and weaknesses, and the results of those tests are compared with each student's high school record. Personal interviews add a further dimension to test information and high school records, and on the basis of this whole body of data those who appear to have special ability are identified and declared eligible for admission to the underclass phase of the Honors Program. It should be emphasized that only eligibility is determined at this stage, and as is true throughout the program, entrance into Honors is purely voluntary.

A potential Honors student usually makes his initial registration through the Dean's Office, but during his first semester he is assigned to a special adviser whose primary job is to advise Honors students. The Honors adviser is a key figure in the program, and on his shoulders rests the heavy responsibility of directing the student into the program best suited to his needs. The Honors advisers are carefully chosen for their interest in the Honors Program and for their willingness to work with both underclass and upper-



class advisees, and during the first two years it is they who literally hold the program together.

A student once admitted to Honors must maintain an over-all B average to remain eligible for Honors work, while approximately half of his underclass program should be in designated Honors courses. Honors students are expected to fulfill all the general education requirements for graduation, and as a result the bulk of the Honors work an underclassman does comes in special sections of introductory courses and special Honors courses in the requirement areas. On the surface his program will look much like any other freshman-sophomore program, but this surface impression is misleading. The special sections and special courses are geared to a more sophisticated approach designed to challenge gifted students' intellectual capacity. This is not just a matter of reading two books instead of one, but rather is an effort to introduce more advanced concepts and more searching appraisals. This means further that the success or failure of the underclass program will be directly proportionate to the effectiveness of the instructor, and every

effort is made not only to collect bright, interested students, but to confront them with instructors who are both highly competent and deeply interested. Where this happy combination has been achieved, the results have been immensely gratifying to faculty and student alike.

THE UNDERCLASS HONORS PROGRAM is a general program, but in the second semester of the sophomore year the student elects his area of concentration and moves into the next phase of the program, Departmental Honors. The goal of each Departmental Honors program is to provide intensive training in a particular field which will carry the student beyond the general upperclass level of learning and accomplishment. In the History department, for example, the Departmental Honors program means twelve semester hours of specialized work spread over the junior and senior years. In the junior year the Honors candidate takes the Honors Pro-Seminar for three hours each semester. This is a course designed to introduce

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history as a discipline, to define the assumptions which underlie historical study, to analyze the way in which history has been written through the ages, and to explore the technical aspects of writing history. During his senior year, the Honors candidate will again enroll for three hours each semester, but at this stage the emphasis shifts from the methodological to the substantive. The student decides on a special field of interest, and in the first semester undertakes a course of special readings with the professor of his choice. In the second semester he attacks a research problem in the special field in which he has been reading, produces a research paper, and stands an oral examination on his paper and his work generally in history. Only with the successful completion of this work is he eligible for a Bachelor of Arts with Honors in History. It should be added that the Honors Program in History is taken in conjunction with the usual upper class courses in history and forms only a part of the total history area of concentration.

It is on the departmental level that the Honors Program joins the Three Year Master's Program. Two general approaches have been used to define this relationship. In one instance departments establish separate programs leading to the Bachelor's degree with Honors and the Bachelor's and Master's degrees with Honors. Where two curricula are involved, the student must declare his intent at the opening of the program, and the differences are great enough to make planning changes difficult and inconvenient. The second and more generally used approach is to work the two programs together making the requirements for the Bachelor's degree with Honors synonymous with the requirements for the first two years of the Three Year Master's Program. This method has obvious advantages in flexibility, and in time it may be expected that departmental honors programs will generally be the same as the first two years of the Three Year Master's Program.

The History plan outlined above accommodates both the B.A. with Honors and the Three Year M.A. The latter requires specialized study and writing during both the junior and senior years, and this is provided in the History Pro-Seminar and the individual reading and research projects. In the first year of graduate study a normal M.A. program is taken except that additional seminar work continues the intensive research and writing which the program emphasizes. In those departments requiring an M.A. thesis, the thesis fills the research requirements.

APART FROM THE SPECIALIZED TRAINING built into the undergraduate program, two specific requirements differentiate the Honors M.A. from the normal Master's. The first of these is that the candidate for an M.A. with Honors must pass both foreign language examinations normally required for the Ph.D. This requirement means that a student should begin a second language in the first semester of his sophomore year. Freshmen entering the University are told at the time of their first registration of the opportunities offered by the general Honors Program and the Three Year Master's Program, and are urged to consider their vocational goals early and in the light of those opportunities. The Honors advisers continue to remind the students of these opportunities, and urge strongly that those who are interested take the language work necessary to qualify them for the Three Year Program. Some departments are considering making two languages the requirement for departmental honors so that each student will be prepared to take advantage of the Three Year Master's Program. But whatever the mechanism used, whether advising or formal requirements, the Program strongly emphasizes foreign language, an emphasis which is essential in the world in which we live.

The second major difference between the Honors M.A. and the regular degree is a requirement involving teaching experience. During the first year of graduate study the Honors M.A. candidate must have the opportunity to perform actively in a classroom. This requirement is not merely perfunctory. Candidates will have the opportunity to do section work in underclass survey courses and also to deliver lectures in their fields of specialization. In some instances special "teaching courses" under the direction of the department are being used, and these involve both theoretical work and practical experience.

The advantages attached to the Honors M.A. are enormous, for candidates will be better prepared for college teaching, and they will also have completed a significant portion of the work for the Ph.D. should they decide to continue. In the first instance, the desperate need for college teachers requires immediate measures to maintain high college standards, and strengthening the M.A. program should do exactly that. The well-integrated undergraduate program taken in conjunction with the special teacher training and language work make the Honors M.A. a very strong degree and one which should be extremely

useful in meeting the college challenge. Beyond that, many students in the Honors program will be qualified to undertake the Ph.D. These people will find that the Honors plan should enable them to complete their Ph.D. program from one to three years sooner than has been the norm, and this will provide an immense saving in time, talent, and money. Students going for the Ph.D. have needed on the average more than five years beyond the B.A. and many have taken much longer than that. The Honors M.A. should make it possible for the Ph.D. to be completed within three years of the B.A., four at the most, and this will help further to narrow the gap between the need for college teachers and the supply and at the same time maintain the high standards requisite for the Ph.D.

The Honors M.A. should be viewed, however as only one part of a fully integrated Honors program at Missouri, a program which has something to offer students on each level of their college career. The general honors in the freshman and sophomore years are set up in accordance with the time-honored tradition of the liberal education, and seek to provide experience in depth and breadth for the first two years. General honors are the foundation on which the whole program rests, and the development of this phase marks a direct contribution to general education at the University. Qualified students from all divisions who are taking the general education requirements for undergraduate degrees are able to take these courses, and this means that the benefits are University-wide. Students entering professional schools may never complete an Honors degree as such, but their underclass work will be more in consonance with their abilities, and they will bring sharpened perceptions and deeper penetration to their professional training. Moreover Honors students in their junior and senior years continue to take a heavy proportion of their courses in the regularly constituted upperclass curriculum, where their interests and abilities will help to raise the general standard of class performance. Academics talk a great deal about standards, but a faculty can only go so far in imposing an artificial scale. Through the Honors Program the students themselves will raise the general standard, and the more intensive training offered some will, in the long run, benefit all.

THE GENERAL HONORS THEME is projected on the upperclass level as well, and here one of the most exciting curricular innovations connected with the program comes into play. In addition to departmental honors, the Council is developing senior college interdisciplinary colloquia which will bring faculty and students from several disciplines together to their mutual advantage. For example, even the good student in the social sciences has at the most only an introduction to the sciences, while those emphasizing science find themselves drawn farther and farther from the study of humanity. A colloquium in the history and philosophy of science emphasizing methods and ideas would provide a stimulating challenge and

a much needed meeting ground between disciplines which at most have only a nodding acquaintance with each other. The Honors Council hopes to follow this general pattern, not only between the sciences and the humanities, but between the humanities and the social sciences, and indeed wherever there appears to be a real possibility for bringing several disciplines together. One major failure in modern academic development has been a continued, and perhaps necessary, compartmentalization, but this has gone so far that we have forgotten the ultimate unity of knowledge. The Honors Council hopes through the interdisciplinary colloquia to broaden the students' educational experience, and at the same time to reaffirm the essential interdependence of the University's different branches and the disciplines those branches represent.

The student response to the Honors Program has been excellent. In purely statistical terms, the University has, during the past two years, identified and begun training more than four hundred students who have qualified as freshmen. The attrition rate is high, and during the first two years more than fifty per cent fail to make the necessary B average to remain in the program. Yet this has done nothing to dampen student enthusiasm. When the Honors M.A. was announced last year both the Dean's office and individual advisers were literally deluged with requests for information, and those people who have been able to enter it have been extremely enthusiastic. In student conferences it has become abundantly clear that students who are capable want to be challenged, and the response in terms of re-activated intellectual interest has already showed itself. The Honors Program is re-emphasizing intellectual values, is putting a premium on such values, and the evidence is that students are excited about it. Beyond the career possibilities which all of them see, they feel that their college work is becoming more meaningful, that the challenge and stimulation are available, and that the development of intellect has come into its own. Since these students not only take courses in the Honors Program but also in the regular curriculum, their enthusiasm spills over into the non-Honors and upper division courses and provides a further stimulus. The Honors Program is bringing some of that intellectual yeastiness about which we all talk, but which we do not seem to know how to attain, and as it does so, the whole University benefits.

Many problems remain to be solved, and the program which has been outlined is still in its formative stages. Even so, its establishment is real evidence that Missouri is moving with the challenge of our times, that it is an institution which is advancing, and that it is meeting its primary responsibility of offering the best possible training for the minds under its care.

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