NAME: THE HONORS COLLEGE AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Date Established: 1963 as honors program; 2007 as Honors College

Location: Bowling Green, Kentucky

University Full-time Undergraduate Enrollment: 13,868

Honors Enrollment: 1,301 (mean size of 50 national university programs is 1,714).

Admissions: The average (mean) scores of enrolled students are ACT 30.24, SAT 1350; the average high school GPA is 3.94 (unweighted).

The minimum requirements are 27 ACT, 1210 SAT composite, or a 3.8 unweighted high school GPA, or a ranking in the top 15 percent of the high school class. “Students must have one of the three of these criteria to be eligible to apply,” according to the Executive Director of the program. “Included in the application are essays, a résumé of activities, a leadership portfolio, service and honors, as well as letters of recommendation. Additionally, there are ‘bonus points’ that are available based upon Honors College priorities: ethnic diversity, regional diversity (i.e., out of state/international students), first generation, students with passport or international experience, studying a critical language, etc.”

Administrative Staff: The Honors College has an administrative staff of 11 and 6 honors academic faculty. We estimate that the full-time equivalent staff is 14.

Priority Registration: Yes. “Priority Registration is not restricted to honors courses; it is available for all of the scholars’ courses. Additionally, scholars have Priority Registration as long as they remain in the College in good standing.”

Curriculum Requirements: “Honors scholars admitted to the Honors College as first-year scholars must earn at least 33 hours of honors credit by taking unique honors courses in general education, upper-division courses in their major, special Honors Colloquia, and electives. These scholars have the option of completing their undergraduate experience through a six-hour Honors Capstone Experience/Thesis…or by earning six additional Honors hours in their major.” The honors completion requirement represents a very substantial 27.5% of the total hours required for university graduation.

Thesis Option--Students must complete the 3-credit Honors 251, Citizen and Self; 9 credits in honors lower-division courses (earned in at least three separate academic colleges other than the Honors College); 6 credits in honors upper-division electives; 6 credits in honors upper-division in the major field; and 6 credits in honors thesis or capstone project.

Non-Thesis Option--The same total requirement of 33 credits, but instead of a 6-credit thesis/capstone, students complete 6 additional credits of honors coursework, based upon original research or creative endeavors.
**Honors in the Major:** Total of 18 credit hours of courses including a three-credit hour Capstone Experience/Thesis (CE/T) Project. “Honors in the Major” is designed for community college transfers and current WKU students with at least 45 hours completed. The 18 credit hours can come from any combination of Honors College Seminars, honors contract, honors study abroad, or honors departmental courses. However, at least three of the credit hours must be CE/T research credits.

**AP credits** cannot be used to replace required honors courses.

**Range and Type of Honors Courses:** The Executive Director provided this excellent summary:

“Honors courses are offered by departments in all academic colleges on the lower and upper-division levels, ensuring that Honors scholars can complete the honors curriculum regardless of their major...The Honors College gets to have a strong influence in faculty selection, because the College buys out faculty time to teach select stand-alone honors courses to ensure that the most appropriate faculty are offering the honors courses that our scholars need most.”

Editor’s Note: We counted **69 stand-alone sections offered in Spring 2014**, not including individual research and directed study sections. Eight of these were Citizen and Self classes, and another five were honors seminars. There were nine honors English stand-alone classes; four in computer science; and an extremely impressive 10 in mathematics (calculus I, II, and Advanced Problem Solving). It is also commendable that political science and psychology offered three honors-only sections each--many programs do not have that many, even counting “embedded” or mixed sections.

**(Citizen and Self)** challenges first-year honors students to conduct independent research projects that focus on their community, along with emphasizing writing intensive-assignments, and spirited class debates. “The course helps teach honors scholars skills and academic ‘habits of mind’ that they will use in the rest of their honors courses.”

“**Honors Enriched Embedded Courses:** To increase curricular flexibility, departments offer Honors Enriched Embedded Courses (HEECs) for select upper-division courses. In a HEEC, two sections (honors and non-honors) meet together with the same professor; however, the ‘embedded’ honors section has additional opportunities and responsibilities to provide honors scholars an enriched honors experience. Many of these HEEC sections have additional meeting time with the faculty or involve independent research….The average number of scholars in a HEEC is less than eight scholars.” Note: We found about **59 “embedded” sections in Spring 2014.**

One significant measure of the Honors College embedded courses is that, unlike most honors programs with embedded (add-on, mixed, stacked) sections, the average size of the College’s mixed sections, including both honors and non-honors students, is not all that large. Indeed, many have fewer than 35 students, some as few as 15-20. The largest mixed sections are, unsurprisingly, in chemistry and biology, but even these are not really large: one biology section had 53 total students, 23 of them honors; one chemistry section had 49 total students, of whom 24 were honors. The honors organic chemistry II class did have 57 total students (33 honors), but by most measures these are actually small for science sections. Biology also had several smaller sections, including at least two stand-alone of 30 students or less.

“**Honors Self-Designed Major/Minor:** Scholars within the College have the opportunity to design their own major. **If WKU does not offer the major or minor the scholar seeks, then they can work with a**
small committee of faculty and design the major or minor suited for their unique educational and/or professional goals.” The Self-Designed Major requires a 6-credit thesis or capstone project.”

“Masters of Philosophy Degree (Starting Fall 2015): The Honors College will be able to even better prepare its scholars for advanced graduate and professional study through offering the Masters of Philosophy Degree (M.Phil.). The M.Phil. will be a 30-hour JUMP (Joint Undergraduate Master’s Program), allowing undergraduate Honors College scholars to use up to twelve hours of graduate credit within an approved concentration toward both undergraduate and graduate degrees, thus both strengthening the baccalaureate degree and accelerating their time to earning the M.Phil. degree. Honors scholars who complete the M.Phil. program will earn two degrees from WKU in four years--their core undergraduate degree (e.g., BA, BS, BFA, BNS, etc.) from an academic college and the M.Phil. degree from the Honors College.”

“Chinese Flagship Program: The Chinese Flagship Program at WKU is one of only eleven such programs in the nation and the only Chinese Flagship Program (CFP) embedded in an Honors College. Therefore, all of the Chinese Flagship scholars are members of the Honors College. The goal of the CFP is to develop the scholars’ Chinese language skills to the superior level of fluency in 4-5 years. On average, our scholars study abroad in China 3-4 times during their undergraduate careers, and thanks to generous funding from The Language Flagship, the Honors College at WKU and nationally competitive scholarships, the majority of these experiences have been funded from external sources.”

Average Class Size: Our estimate is that the average honors class size, even if the total enrollment of mixed sections is counted, is still an outstanding **16.6 students per section**; the overall average class size for the 50 national university colleges and programs under review in this edition is 21.2 students.

Honors Graduation Rate: The six-year graduation rate of students at the Honors College at WKU who graduated from the university, whether or not the students completed the honors program (“honors completers”), is **75%**. The university-wide rate is **50%**. The average six-year honors graduation rate for the 50 national universities under review is **89%**.

Ratio of Staff to Honors Students: The HSC has 1 staff member for every **92.9** students. (Mean ratio for all 50 national university programs that we rated is 1 staff member for every 159.8 students.)

Honors Residence Halls: About 360 first-year honors students live in **Minton Hall**, which has traditional double rooms and shared hall baths. Rooms are coed by floor. Minton is air conditioned with an on-site laundry and kitchen, and convenient dining at the Downing Student Union is only about 40 meters away.

Just over **130 upperclassmen live in Bates-Runner Hall**, housed in suite-style rooms with shared baths. Rooms are coed by floor. The residence is air conditioned with laundry and kitchen facilities and, like Minton Hall, is located only 40 meters away from the Downing Student Union.

Another 106 honors students reside in **McLean Hall**, configured in the same way as Bates-Runner Hall. The Downing Student Union is still a short walk away—80 meters or so.

Prestigious Awards: “Since 2008, WKU students and recent alumni have earned over $3 million in national scholarship competitions.” **WKU students have won a total of 16 Goldwater Scholarships for**
outstanding students in the STEM fields, and what is most impressive is that 8 of those have been won in the last three years. Few national universities, public or private, have a better record during the period. WKU students also have a strong record of winning Gilman Scholarships for study abroad, Fulbright Student Scholarships (16), and Boren Scholarships for extended work and study abroad.

One reason for WKU’s success in winning Goldwater Scholarships is the **Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science**, a state-supported residential high school “for students interested in pursuing advanced careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Instead of spending their junior and senior years in traditional schools, 121 students take all their coursework through Western Kentucky University with regularly enrolled college students.” Gatton has been ranked the number 1 public high school by Newsweek/The Daily Beast. WKU is the number 1 destination of Gatton graduates, who become members of the Honors College if they choose WKU.

**Continuation Requirements:** 3.20 GPA

**Academic Strengths:** WKU has an outstanding journalism and broadcasting program, ranked in the top 8 nationally for 17 consecutive years. WKU students do extremely well in national forensics (debate) competitions, and the Honors College offers several sections in forensics. Other popular majors are education, biology, management, agriculture, and engineering.

**Undergraduate Research:** Again, the Executive Director has provided excellent information:

“WKU funds 100 Faculty Undergraduate Student Engagement (FUSE) Grants (and international version known as iFUSE grants) annually. FUSE grants are substantial ($5,000 per award) and designed to support undergraduate students’ intellectual development by fostering active engagement in the areas of research, creative and scholarly activities, and/or artistic performances. Although all undergraduate students in good academic standing who will reach at least sophomore status at the time of award may apply, honors scholars earn a majority of the awards. FUSE grants are intended for sophomore and junior level undergraduates. The timing of these grants fits perfectly with most students [thesis and capstone] timelines.

“Another source of funding, albeit available only to Honors College scholars, is the Honors Development Grants (HDG). The HDG is designed to support honors scholars’ intellectual development by providing awards up to $500 to offset costs for traveling to professional conferences, presenting academic papers, conducting research, or acquiring tangible items to support intellectual and creative endeavors. Additionally, Capstone Experience/Thesis Excellence Grants offer up to $1,500 to scholars to enrich their Capstone Experience/Thesis projects in preparation for submission to publication or other national recognition.”

**Study Abroad:** The Executive Director presents a strong argument that WKU, and the Honors College, rank with the best when it comes to the percentage of students studying abroad. He writes that he has “compared the Honors College to the top private liberal arts colleges in the United States over the past five years. Based on [the Institute for International Education] Open Doors data and definitions, the Honors College at WKU has a higher ‘undergraduate participation rate’ than any private liberal arts college over the past five years.”
“Regarding semester or full-year study abroad participation… nearly half of all the WKU students who studied abroad for a full semester or longer were enrolled in the Honors College. Additionally… nearly half of all Honors College scholars who studied abroad in 2012-13 did so for at least a full semester.”

“WKU has begun construction on a new $22 million, 67,000 square foot Honors College and International Center. We expect to move into our new building August 2015. The combination of international programs (e.g., Study Abroad and Global Learning, Kentucky Institute for International Studies, Cooperative Center for Study Abroad, International Student Office) and units with the Honors College (e.g., Office of Scholar Development, Chinese Flagship Program) is conscious and shows the importance of continuing the internationalization of the College in terms of both study abroad and international diversity within the College.”

Financial Aid: “All WKU students who are awarded the university’s top two scholarships--‘Henry H Cherry Presidential Scholarships (tuition, room, board, and book stipend) and the “1906 Founders Scholarships” (tuition, room, and book stipend)--are required to be in the Honors College. On average, the 300 Honors College first year students are awarded [a total of] approximately $2.5 million in renewable scholarships for WKU. On average, nearly 70% of our incoming 300 first year scholars are awarded at least a renewable tuition scholarship.”

Degree of Difference (Honors students/non-honors students): The average ACT for the top quarter of Honors College students is 25; the average ACT for honors students is 30.24.