Dear Provost Harbor,

We write to provide you with an overview of our process, discoveries, and recommendations related to the mission, vision, values, and future direction of the Davidson Honors College (DHC). We also address possible opportunities and challenges the future dean will face. Overall, our Task Force (TF) affirmed the DHC’s current direction and offered slight modifications to the guiding Mission, Vision, Values (MVV) document.

The TF used the following to inform its work:

- Your charge to our group: to deliver recommendations to either confirm the DHC’s current direction and mission or modify it;
- Personal perspectives from the viewpoints of the TF, which included faculty, administrators, donors, alumni, and students;
- Overview of current DHC activities and general information about honors education and trends at the national level;
- Existing DHC resources such as its 2014-20 Strategic Plan;
- Results of a survey of current students conducted by student TF members;
- Perspectives of stakeholders, including students, alumni, and donors, as well as faculty and external advisory boards; and
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) analysis conducted by TF members.

The main outcome of our work is the revised MVV operating document, which Dean Tessman and the DHC’s External Advisory Board developed in 2015. We provide one version with tracked changes and one “clean” version so you can see the changes the TF made to this document.

Feedback from the community and stakeholders was particularly enlightening as it provided an objective perspective on the DHC. The SWOC analysis, from which select pieces are highlighted below, may serve as a helpful starting point for the next dean.

- Strengths include: reputation on campus and across the state; small class sizes; the Career Development Program; support for undergraduate research through faculty and post-doctoral fellow support; strong support through external funding; and role as recruiter for students interested in the Presidential Leadership Scholarship.
- Weaknesses and challenges include: student interest in more upper division courses; the need to keep students academically connected to the DHC in their junior and senior years; budgetary constraints related to offering honors courses in many colleges (including the College of Business, which houses many DHC students); and improving data collection and use.

Prior to and over the course of the three meetings, the DHC administrative team made progress on several of the items discussed by the Task Force and highlighted in the SWOC analysis. One example includes working with the Registrar to include the DHC University Scholar Requirements in DegreeWorks so students can better monitor their own progress through the eight required honors experiences. Additionally, in working with the data office, we received updated information on our UM
retention rate for students admitted to the DHC, which is more than twenty percent higher than the campus retention rate. We discussed many of the possible contributing factors to this and identified that several elements may be outside DHC control (such as student backgrounds, penchant for success, test score or GPA related retention, etc.), but concluded the DHC is likely a factor in retaining these students at the University. This spring the DHC will have data for its first six-year cohort graduation rate (current cohort codes began in 2013).

Some of the DHC’s challenges mirror institutional challenges that the University of Montana, as a whole, faces. For example, the next DHC dean will want to dive deeper into questions related to retention, such as why students stay in the Honors College, why they go, where they go, and what we can do to help them persist and graduate from the DHC and University of Montana. Along with UM, the DHC will need to utilize best practices for recruitment and resource utilization to bring students to UM and the DHC.

The TF was mindful of, and referenced, the DHC Strategic Plan (covering 2014-20), which was developed under Dean McKusick in collaboration with the DHC’s Faculty Advisory Board. The Strategic Plan addresses specific, measurable goals in key areas, including development, student retention, and recruiting for a diverse student body. To better align the two documents, the TF added to the MVV elements of the Strategic Plan that were relevant to and missing from the document, such as diversity, global learning, and access. Development and capital campaign goals are not addressed in the MVV. The TF endorsed this new direction and document as most relevant to current DHC operations, noting, in particular, the value of clear learning outcomes, which are highlighted in the MVV.

We edited the MVV, but did not review in detail the Strategic Plan. The TF suggests that the next DHC dean use our work as a starting point for the self-study required for next year’s program review (AY 19-20) and make the development of new strategic plan a goal for the corresponding time period. The new strategic plan should include the same levels of specificity and clarity of the previous document, as appropriate.

In conclusion, the state of the DHC is strong. The TF reaffirmed that we value access and diversity. We want the DHC to be a model for honors public education and maintain and improve upon an already strong reputation as the oldest honors college in the state. The next dean will inherit a healthy unit that benefits from internal and institutional cohesion around the mission and future direction of the Davidson Honors College. The DHC remains a jewel in the crown of the University of Montana.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

The Davidson Honors College Task Force

Appendix –

- Meeting notes
- MVV with tracked changes
- Strategic Plan
- Stakeholder feedback
- Student surveys
- Media resources
- Member list
DAVIDSON HONORS COLLEGE

MISSION

The mission of the Davidson Honors College is to attract the best students from around our state, country, and world to the University of Montana. We develop engaged global citizens and professionals who excel in critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem solving, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement. We also serve as a hub of intellectual, service, and social activity for students, staff, and faculty across the University of Montana campus.

VISION

Our vision is to be a national model for honors public higher education. We are committed to being an inclusive community grounded in our passion for access, academic innovation, career development, and experiential learning.

VALUES

The students, staff, and faculty of the Davidson Honors College value:

- Demonstrated initiative, intellectual risk-taking, and a desire to learn from diverse perspectives.
- Hands-on, collaborative, cross-disciplinary learning, research, and creative scholarship as effective methods for expanding our ways of knowing and our understanding of the world.
- Fostering connections with partners on campus, in Missoula, and beyond.
- Creating opportunity – listening for possibility, seeking solutions, and gathering information to make informed decisions.

ESSENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Davidson Honors College experience is distinguished by our dual commitment to hands-on learning and thoughtful reflection. Davidson Honors College graduates will be able to:

- **Think critically.** Identify, evaluate, and integrate available information and arguments; develop logical and reasonable positions across a wide range of issues.
- **Communicate.** Express ideas and arguments through oral and written strategies; develop strong listening skills.
- **Collaborate.** Contribute to, and lead where necessary, a diverse team in pursuit of a shared goal.
- **Solve problems.** Employ rigorous quantitative and/or qualitative analysis to identify informed solutions to complex challenges.
- **Design and execute an original project.** Present original research or creative scholarship in a public arena.
- **Act ethically.** Make decisions rooted in principles of truth, honesty, and responsibility with awareness of their impact on others.
- **Engage as a citizen.** Strengthen commitment to meaningful service and community.