During the 2014-2015 academic year the University Honors-program Oversight Committee (HOC) met once in fall and once in the spring. The committee’s faculty members are: Erik Cordes (biology), Paul Swann (film & media arts), Claudia Pine Simon (computer & information science), Vallorie Peridier (mechanical engineering) and Lila Corwin Berman (history), who replaced Rebecca Alpert (CLA) in January. The committee also has two at-large members, Therese Dolan (art history) and a second vacated position to be appointed next year.

The University Honors program has experienced remarkable expansion in the last ten years. For example, there were about three hundred matriculated freshmen Honors students in 2004 as compared to the nearly five-hundred fifty in 2014. In this same ten-year period the quality of the matriculated Honors students has also improved, for in 2004 the average combined verbal/quantitative SAT score for incoming Honors-program freshmen was 1300, while in 2014 it was nearly 1400.

It appears that this surge in the quantity and quality of the Honors student cohort can be ascribed to three sequenced mechanisms. First, the adoption of the "Common App" has made Temple a convenient application option for a much larger pool of applicants. Second, Temple’s extraordinary University Merit Scholarship program no doubt parks Temple squarely on the "strongly consider list" of high-achieving applicants. But what seems to seal the deal are the on-campus visits: over 80% of prospective Honors students who participate in the "experience Temple" tours run by the Honors-program staff (and current Honors-program students) eventually matriculate at Temple.

One consequence of this rapid expansion of the Honors-program enrollment is the "good" problem of an immediate need for more Honors courses and classes. Note that Honors-program students must take at least ten Honors courses, with four of these at the 2000 level or higher. However, since Honors courses are capped at twenty students, it has proved a perennial challenge to provide Honors courses within smaller colleges. Colleges with a large number of Honors students (e.g. Fox, CST, CLA) offer a diversity of Honors courses, but the recent transition to RCM appears to have further complicated the difficulties of fielding a varied Honors curriculum, both within the smaller colleges, and in those disciplines with fewer undergraduate majors.

Given the situation described above, it is unsurprising that a preponderance of HOC-meeting discussions address this overriding and vexing question on how to expand the Honors curriculum, particularly within the smaller colleges. However, other topics are considered as well, including the recruitment and advising functions of the Honors program (whose staff is simply outstanding and in receipt of several national advising awards), the possibility of running Honors courses at Temple Japan, and issues connected with the Merit summer-stipend program.

All in all, the University Honors program has proved an effective mechanism for recruiting and retaining the best and brightest undergraduate students. It is a pleasure to deliberate in HOC, interact with the resourceful Honors Program staff, and strategize with the passionate Senior Director of University Honors, Dr. Ruth Ost.

Respectfully submitted,
Vallorie J. Peridier 04/May/2015