



# NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

To: NOVA Task Force on Honors and Academic Challenge

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From: John T. Dever

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Subject: NOVA Task Force on Honors and Academic Challenge

On behalf of President Templin and the Administrative Council, I write to appoint you to serve on the NOVA Task Force on Honors and Academic Challenge.

The task force is asked to propose a plan for realizing the college's strategic goal for Academic and Student Excellence:

Provide NOVA's best and brightest students with a coherent set of challenging educational experiences, such as honors, that stretches their intellectual abilities and invites them to set academic and personal development goals on par with America's best college students.

The goal is deliberately aspirational, focusing on the quality of students' *experiences* at NOVA and the way in which their interaction with the college motivates them to pursue excellence in both their immediate and long-term educational, career, and personal ambitions. Academic challenge demands that rigor be matched with vibrancy and that that strong structure be complemented with palpable excitement, akin to what Coleridge calls "the union of deep feeling with profound thought." To realize such a goal requires vision and commitment that is framed with clear purpose and coherent organization.

For the 2009-2010 year, the college has set the specific outcome that "A comprehensive proposal for an enhanced and high profile honors program, providing academic challenge and exceptional growth opportunity for capable NOVA students, will be developed through the work of a college-wide task force." While much good work has been done on various campuses through individual honors courses and the Honors Core Curriculum, carried out under the purview of the Honors Committee, the current structure does not suffice for honors to become a signature mark of the college, in alignment with NOVA's stated

aspiration to “be regarded as one of the top five institutions of higher education in Virginia” and “one of the nation’s top three community colleges.”

The proposal for an enhanced and high profile honors program should be grounded in the distinctive circumstances of NOVA and the remarkable region and diverse communities that it serves. The program should build on the dedicated efforts that have been made by many outstanding faculty over the years to provide academically proficient students with enhanced and challenging opportunities for learning. It should be designed to serve as a lead resource in recruiting superior students to the college as well as providing an opportunity for students already here to be identified or to come forward as candidates for excellence. It should provide opportunities for selected students to experience the special peer and faculty connections established through intensive learning communities that have cohort status over several semesters. It should provide a significant pool from which the college can draw in realizing its goal to “be regarded as a ‘preferred provider’ of college transfer students by Virginia’s and the National Capital region’s most selective universities.” It should draw on the extensive cultural, economic, and governmental resources of the Washington metropolitan area. Overall, the honors program needs to have a clear identity characterized by strong consistency, coordination, and cooperation in implementation across the five comprehensive campuses, while still giving individual campuses the latitude to add special enhancements as fit their circumstances.

Operationally, the program needs to have the understanding, support, and commitment from the general college faculty, deans, and provosts who will be key players in the decision-making and day-to-day implementation that will make honors a distinguishing component of campus life. It is recognized that sustainable college resources will be required that can be augmented over a period of years as the program demonstrates its value and effectiveness. Although the proposal should be developed with a view to launching in the 2010-2011 academic year, it should be conceived as proceeding in realistic stages for its growth along multiple dimensions, such as size, programming, support structure, and budget. Please provide a set of specific outcomes to be realized in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, as well as a broader statement of where the program is envisioned to be by 2015, in alignment with the college’s strategic plan.

It should be noted that the enhancement of honors is associated with overall efforts to promote outstanding achievement and high aspirations among a broad array of NOVA students, not just those who are directly associated with the program. Other such efforts include various symposia sponsored by campuses and divisions, international experiences, the Jack Kent Cooke Transfer Scholarship program, and various PTK recognitions and awards. It is anticipated that a subsequent group will be asked to develop a further proposal for enhanced structures and activities for academic challenge that build around the core of excellence represented by a high profile honors program.

In developing the proposal, the task force is asked to draw ideas from such sources as past successful activities and pilots, model programs at other community colleges, and the resources of the National Collegiate Honors Council. Also, please consult widely within and beyond the institution. To ensure that the proposal can be considered in relation to the college’s budgetary processes for 2010-2011, the task force is asked to submit its proposal by February 26, 2010.