

Honors Program—A New Class and New Stature

BY JEFF DUGAN
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Just off the busy *Boulevard des Invalides* in Paris, inside the quiet *Musee Rodin*, a bronze male figure sits in silent contemplation.

He is perched on a chiseled, nondescript rock, the sinews of his muscular body broadly defined, yet relaxed. His chin rests atop his hand. He is Dante, *Le Penseur*—whom we know better as *The Thinker*.

Ask anyone associated with the UNLV Honors Program: Dr. Len Zane, the Director, Assistant Director Carol Jensen, members of the Honors Council, or participating professors and students. They would probably say, "Yes, *Monsieur Penseur* represents the HP rather well."

From its modest beginnings, HP has grown steadily from an inaugural group of 38 students in the fall of 1985 to approximately 300 participants today.

This fall, HP welcomed its 10th, and largest, freshman class of 87 "thinkers."

It all began with a faculty committee appointed in 1984 and a chance stroll that Zane, then com-

mittee chair, took to the Moyer Student Union.

"I was walking across campus, and John Unrue took me aside and asked me to participate in starting the (Honors) program," Zane recalled. "Since I was the chair of the committee, there was really no one else, and so I came to head the program."

Even though the faculty committee designed the framework of the HP, Zane was responsible for everything else. He soon found that not much in the way of how-to manuals existed.

"I went to the library and found they had only two books on honors programs," Zane said. "I took those two books out and we started from there."

One of the first tasks at hand was to find a place HP could call home. Zane noted the needs of HP students, looked around campus, and pried space away from the Dickinson Library. "There's a tendency of students to be migrants. I wanted a place where they could meet and study... and a place I could meet with and talk to students," he said.

Today, HP facilities are on the third floor of library Building 2, including a discussion room, a



PHOTO BY LESLIE LITCHFIELD

Carol Jensen (l.), and Len Zane are encouraged by this year's Honor's Program progress.

study room equipped with computers, and an administrative office.

Zane already has his eye on an HP location in the new library. "The appropriateness of the new library [continuing] to house HP is perfect, and we're planning to be with them," he said. "I've met with Matt Simon (Dean of Libraries), and we worked out a plan designed for the needs of the program."

Zane's recruiting efforts have not only included students, but faculty as well. He understood that a primary attraction of the program for students and faculty alike was small classes and focused discussion. Matching resources to demands has in-

involved difficult decisions for both HP and administrators.

"I promised faculty and students small classes and I want to ensure that," Zane said. "It's a fact that we're faculty-driven. This year, we turned away qualified students because we lacked faculty staffing. I planned for the typical 80 or so (freshman HP students), but it soon looked like 100."

Zane isn't criticizing faculty support, though. He pointed out that budget constraints reduced the number of faculty available for HP courses, a pinch felt by other UNLV programs.

Looking back, Zane is grateful to the faculty. "The level of support we've enjoyed over the past

ten years has been extraordinary."

Carol Jensen, past HP instructor also, acknowledged the university-wide academic support and said maintaining cordial relations with departments was key to continued faculty support. "The appreciation for our efforts has been extraordinary, and we feel we have a wonderful working relationship with the departments," she said.

Zane concentrates his recruiting efforts on Clark County students by visiting every high school in the district at least once during the academic year. But he doesn't overlook the nationwide reach UNLV's name has: "One of our charges is to attract top-flight students, wherever they are (living)," Zane said.

Databases and mailing lists are no less important to HP recruitment than high school visits. Zane described a new arrangement whereby the Reno Computer Center pulls out high-scoring SAT and ACT students who have expressed an interest in UNLV.

There is no "typical" HP student, even though the overwhelming majority hail from Clark County. Of the 87 freshmen enrolled this fall, 21 graduated from out-of-state schools. California, with seven students, is the best represented.

The average student in this year's freshman class graduated in the top seven percent of their high school class, with a 3.75 GPA, an ACT composite of 28, and a combined SAT score of 1158.

Seventy nine percent of the entering freshmen met one of three criteria: top five percent of their graduating class, ACT composite of 28, or a combined SAT score of at least 1200.

HP also reaches beyond the UNLV campus through its memberships in the National Collegiate Honors Council and the Western Regional Honors Council. Both organizations are dedicated to establishing new honors programs, maintaining honors program standards, and encouraging experimentation and innovation in existing programs.

As UNLV's HP program has grown, so has its stature. Zane, vice-president of the NCHC this year, will assume the president's post in 1995. He anticipates a new, higher level of recognition for the program to follow.

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