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Interdisciplinary Honors Module and Sequence: Honors Seminar in Women's Health

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APPENDIX

Pilot Module Proposal #1 (Draft)

Interdisciplinary Honors Module and Sequence: Honors Seminar in Women's Health

As part of the VCU's Grace E. Harris Leadership Program, our project group is proposing the development of interdisciplinary honors modules that would:

- Increase preparation for and retention of honors students into VCU and other prestigious graduate and professional degree programs.
- Increase enrollment and retention of out of state and other 'underrepresented' group students (e.g., women, ethnic group) in our honors program.

To this end, we are proposing the development of a pilot involving a sequence of two honors modules (each one-and-a-half credit hours) in the Department of Psychology. Other disciplines involved would include psychiatry, sociology, women's studies, and women's health. During the first module, scheduled during the first half of the semester, the course would be seminar in format on alternating course days with independent experiential work and assignments with chosen faculty on interim class days. Students would write a paper on their experiences and work during the course. The responsibility for coordination of the independent study course would rest with a graduate student (or faculty member) in the home department. Resources for the funding of this pilot seminar and module would be framed within the current structure for the funding of Honors modules. Any additional resources would be requested from the Dean, Provost's and President's offices. Costs for the course would include support for the graduate student coordination of the module and a small research fund to support the activities of each honors student. This pilot would be an opportunity to develop a model for interdisciplinary honors module development. Additional funding opportunities for expansion of this strategy would be identified with Samantha Marrs in VCU's Office of Corporate and Foundation Giving. In addition, this strategy could inform undergraduate course and academic program development within VCU's Social Science Initiative and funding could be sought in coordination with that effort.

Interested faculty and a graduate student they designate would agree to mentor one to two students during the semester and to present one seminar presentation on their research or practice. Faculty or the graduate student would also be asked to discuss related issues in professional development within their specific discipline as part of their seminar presentations. We would also request that faculty attend and participate in at least one other seminar and discussions over the course of the semester. If the student and faculty were interested, the one credit module could be followed in the subsequent half of the semester by a one-and-a-half credit independent study with the faculty mentor working on a research project in the faculty's area of research or practice.

Several faculty who might be involved in the pilot course (both in the conduct of seminars and as mentors) have been proposed. These include:

- Faye Belgrave (middle school prevention, early sex education, sexual assault)
- Ellen Brock (International perspectives in women's health service delivery)
- Leslie Stratton (Economics of Women's Health Care)
- Kathy Ingram (counseling, psychology of women, social support)
- Liz Frieze (Massey Cancer center)
- Njeri Jackson (International Perspectives on Women's Health)
- Suzanne Mazzeo (eating disorders)
- Diana Scully (Sexual Violence, Sociology of Women, Family)
- Janet Winston (Women and Literature, Lesbian and Gay Studies)
- Susan Kornstein (Depression in women)
- Dace Svikis (substance abuse in women)
- Evelyn Spear or Michele Andrews (teen pregnancy).

We might also utilize the Virginia Treatment Center for Children and the Virginia League for Planned Parenthood as experiential learning sites.

Honors students participating in the seminars would have the opportunity to better understand unique disciplinary perspectives on women's health care and the interdisciplinary linkages between various fields in this common area. For example, students could have the opportunity to consider and integrate economic, political and pharmacological issues that emerge in the development and distribution of medications for women in the United States and internationally. In addition, they would develop a better understanding of each discipline's perspective and contribution to these health and social issues, as well as an introduction to the professional training required for each of these fields. Students will also have the opportunity to develop relationships with faculty and graduate students and to explore further opportunities for research and practical experience in their emerging disciplines of interest. These opportunities can be central in the student's future success in entering graduate or professional training.

Faculty, graduate students and honors students would evaluate the effectiveness of the seminar.

The draft proposal was reviewed by Anne Chandler, Associate Director of the VCU Honors Program, Sandy Gramling (Psychology Department Honors Faculty Advisor) and Ev Worthington, Chair of Psychology.

Should the pilot be implemented and evaluated as effective, additional resources to further develop an expanded implementation, including resource development and the publication and distribution of outreach and marketing materials for undergraduate recruitment and enhanced admissions outreach would be proposed.

The current pilot has been developed using a 'top-down' model, with the departments and programs selected based on relationships and knowledge contained in our project development

group. We propose the development of a more ‘bottom-up’ strategy for the future development of interdisciplinary modules, with departments and faculty invited to an annual interdisciplinary module development forum in which interested faculty or departments can present and network with other units to connect and develop future interdisciplinary honors modules. Potential modules proposals would be submitted, reviewed, and selected for funding and implementation. Continued funding would be based on evaluation over a three-year period.