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NU INTRODUCES NEW HONORS PROGRAM



Dr. Meeks in the new Honors Lounge in Rice Hall. Photo by Holly Hollopetter

By Alexis Savary

Northwest University announced it will be offering an Honors Program to the current programs and opportunities effective next semester.

Dr. Joshua Meeks, the director of the Honors Program, said that the program will start with at most 24 students. However, he and the program's committee are more concerned with the qualifications of the incoming participants than the size of the program as a whole.

"We are pretty set on not filling it out just so we can have numbers but rather really being honest and earnest in the assessment of 'is this a good honors student' are they a good fit for the program?" Meeks said.

Some of the qualifications that the committee will look for include a high school GPA of at least 3.75, high test scores, the student's statement of intent, an essay component, and a willingness to grow as an individual.

Reflecting on his own experiences in a college honors program, Dr. Joshua Ziefe shared his perspective on some of the benefits of participating in an honors program. One of the biggest benefits of the program is the smaller class sizes, which will hopefully encourage deeper discussions and support the students' desires to learn.

"This is an opportunity for high-achieving students to be in certain settings with other high-achieving students who are passionate about academic excellence and learning to really spark some really interesting conversations that they might not have the opportunity for in a larger class or amongst a class with a diverse population who might have interests in a lot of different areas," Ziefe said.

The Honors Program is primarily formatted for incoming students, and differences in majors will have little impact on the ability for students to participate due to the types of classes offered within the program. The program is scheduled to include a course curriculum of eight core classes, which have been redesigned into NU's first set of honors classes. These classes include Composition II, Christian Thought, Fundamentals of Speech and Communication, and other typical prerequisite classes that will conclude with a trip to Washington, D.C.

"One of the reasons why Northwest University is launching an Honors Program is that we have been in the 15% of Conference on Christian Colleges and Universities that do not yet have one," Dr. Clint Bryan, a member of the Honors Program committee, said.

Dr. Renee Bourdeaux, who will be teaching the Honors Fundamentals of Speech and Communication course, explained that teachers who design the curriculum for honors classes tend to gravitate toward materials that they feel will allow students to change their

perspective on a topic.

"When you design a curriculum for an honors program, what you want to be able to do is allow the students to wrestle with the material in a way that allows them to really critically think about it," Bourdeaux said.

While some may think that the courses are primarily an excuse for professors to assign more work, the "honors" label is not a license to assign a heavier workload. The goal of an honors course is to provide students with the chance to really delve deeper into different topics and themes.

"An honors course is not necessarily more classwork. It rather provides an opportunity to think and process information in deeper ways," Dr. Sarah Drivdahl, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, said.

For example, Professor Joseph McQueen, who will also be teaching an honors course, explained his desire for students to think about the material from multiple angles. He said he wants his students, who will be looking at everyday rhetoric and persuasion, to look not only at the reading material but also at ads in the mall to see how the human senses influence one's subconscious desires.

"For me, it's not just 'I'm going to assign some more reading'—it's also asking for higher level thought," McQueen said.

The Honors Program will have three main pillars: scholars, citizens, and servants. In addition to the increased academic expectations, students in the program will have the opportunity to engage with people in the community and to serve the NU campus. The program is designed to teach its participants how to be a leader, but more importantly, how to serve one's peers.

"The Honors Program is in part about academics, but it's also about being a leader—a servant leader—within the campus and within the community," Meeks said.

Some of the anticipated changes that will take place on campus include more academically focused events and conferences, an amplified desire to learn, and a deeper understanding of how to pursue one's calling.

"You're going to feel the impact of it all over campus, and I think that's something that few Honors Programs truly achieve: that actual impacting a campus culture," Meeks said.

The conclusion of the two-year Honors Program will include an honors thesis, which will allow students within the program to work directly with their instructors. This thesis will function as a final project, allowing participating students to graduate with honors in addition to their B.A. degree.

Faculty and professors look forward to the opportunity to try different teaching styles, to interact with students actively striving to learn more about the world God created, and to fulfill their calling to implant knowledge on younger generations. Despite its emergence as a new program, the Honors Program is highly anticipated to be a dramatic change to NU culture.

"I am most looking forward to hearing what Honors graduates are doing for the Kingdom around the world down the road as they invest their world-class education into various fields of endeavor," Bryan said.

Most importantly, the Honors Program will emphasize the privilege that students have to spend a period of life learning about the world they live in and the Creator of it all. To view college education as simply a means to a degree cannot compare to the memories, friendships, and knowledge that are gained in the process.

"This is an amazing experience—our culture does not let people stop for many years of their lives, read books, and talk about ideas with some other people who've spent their whole lives reading books and talking about them...and that's an amazing privilege. My hope for the Honors Program is that that sense of the privilege that it is just starts to penetrate the campus," McQueen said.