UCC Program Review Committee summary of review

Program – Cutler Scholars

This program has no degrees, minors, or certificates.

Recommendation

This program is found to be viable, see report for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

Date of last review – This is the first review

Date of this review – AY 2017

This review has been sent to program director and the dean. Their comments are attached.
Cutler Scholars Program
Program Review
March 22-23, 2017

Review Committee

- External Reviewer
  - Robyn S. Hadley, Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs & Dean of the Ervin Scholars Program, Washington University in St. Louis

- Internal Reviewers
  - Geoffrey D. Dabelko, Professor & Director of Environmental Studies, Ohio University
  - Zaki Kuruppalil, Assistant Chair & Associate Professor, Engineering Technology and Management, Ohio University
  - Fuh-Cherng Jeng, Associate Professor, School of Rehabilitation and Communication Sciences, Ohio University

Program Viability

This program is found to be viable. See the report for commendations, challenges, and recommendations.

Date of last review: Not applicable
Date of this review: March 22-23, 2017
**Introduction and Process Overview**

The Cutler Scholars Program in the Honors Tutorial College at Ohio University underwent an academic program review in March, 2017. The Academic Program Review Committee was comprised of one external reviewer, Robyn S. Hadley, Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs & Dean of the Ervin Scholars Program at Washington University in St. Louis and three internal reviewers, Dr. Geoffrey Dabelko (Voinovich School), Dr. Zaki Kuruppalil (Engineering Technology and Management) and Dr. Fuh-Cherng Jeng (Communication Sciences and Disorders).

Over the course of two days (3/22 and 3/23/2017), the Review Committee met with the Chief of Staff from the Provost's Office, the Dean and Associate Dean of the Honors Tutorial College, the Business Manager of the Honors Tutorial College, the Executive Director of Development Scholarships & Special Projects, the Program Director and Associate Director, the Administrative Services Associate, members of the Advisory Board, previous program directors and program founders, members of the Program Steering Committee, and very importantly the Cutler Scholars.

This report is divided into three sections. The first section is the Introduction and Process Overview section that provides an introduction and overview of the review process. The second section (i.e., the Commendations section) highlights some of the strengths of the Cutler Scholars Program including dedicated faculty and staff, talented students, long-term generous benefactors, and the transformative outcomes of student successes. The third section (i.e., the Challenges and Recommendations section) identifies the major challenges of the Program, together with programmatic recommendations made by the Review Committee. The Challenges and Recommendations section is further divided into six subsections: Vision, Staff, Budget, Space, Curriculum, and Outreach.

**Commendations**

The Cutler Scholars Program is a valuable program for the talented students it supports and for Ohio University as a whole. The founders and benefactors' original vision to identify students of high academic achievement with strong leadership potential and support them with generous merit-based scholarships is as sound today as it was when the program was founded in 1994. These core organizing principles around leadership, for students from particular locations and in particular topical areas, constitute a sturdy foundation for the program that many have called transformational on an individual level.

The level of commitment to the Cutlers Scholars Program is very high among students, program staff, affiliated faculty, administrators, alumni, and benefactors. The large number of benefactors who have consistently supported a growing number of Cutler Scholars with increasing resources is a notable strength of the program as it evolves and charts its future. The high level of commitment of program faculty and staff, from founding leadership through the new program team, is similarly impressive. This commitment helps explain past successes and should give confidence in future successes.
The current and past Cutler Scholars are impressive individually and as a group. The identification of high academically achieving students with a recognized potential for leadership brings together a distinguished group of students at Ohio University. The full ride in some cases and nearly full ride in others makes the Cutler Scholars Program a premier scholarship at Ohio University and in the state of Ohio. This high level of funding for individual scholarships is a key component of the program that should be maintained. The combination of thought-provoking colloquia every semester and significant resources for summer enrichment experiences in service, interning, and studying abroad, guarantee that the scholar experience is far more than a generous financial package. The geographic and disciplinary diversity also is a critical component of peer to peer learning opportunities and strong interdisciplinary networks for the Cutler Scholars. These outstanding students are making positive contributions in the classrooms, departments, clubs, and community.

The Cutler Scholars Program is a flagship recruitment mechanism for Ohio University and Ohio more broadly. According to multiple student interviews, the generous and high impact scholarship has been key to changing initial perceptions of Ohio University held by academically-focused students and parents in Ohio. The Cutler Scholars Program is regularly credited with not only retaining those high talent Ohio students in Ohio but also changing a wider set of perceptions at their home high schools among students who do not receive the Cutler support. The Cutler Scholars appear to be valuable voices for recruiting high achieving students to Ohio University and contributing to wider efforts to challenge party school perceptions of the university among prospective students and their parents.

The Cutler Scholars Program has recently made significant changes in its governance structure and institutional placement at Ohio University. The move of the Program from the President's Office to the Honors Tutorial College and a new governance and oversight structure is a logical next step in the evolution of the Program. The combination of changes formalizes the considerable academic and curricular contributions and sets the stage for further developing needed learning outcome and evaluation processes associated with academic programs. The need to adopt more formal curricular, recruitment, and assessment mechanisms is already well underway and is widely supported by leadership. The closer connections of the Cutler Scholars with other scholar programs at Ohio University holds significant potential for positive synergies and collaborations.

Challenges of the Program and Recommendations Made by the Review Committee

1. Vision
   a. Formalizing the structure of the Program: Identifying preferred outcomes, competencies, and assessments. Distinguishing the values added to the student experience by participating in the Cutler Program versus participating in other programs.

   Recommendation: In order to ensure the sustainability and quality of the Cutler Scholars Program, Ohio University leadership should evaluate some of the codified specifics of the transition document (aka “The Restructured Manasseh Cutler...
Scholars Program” identified as Appendix A in the self study). The current detailed specifications in that document may not afford the flexibility needed for Cutler Scholar staff, university administrators, and various advisory bodies to innovate and adapt the program over time. For example, the codified target number of Cutler Scholars, the set amounts of stipends not controlling for inflation or tuition increases, Scholar selection processes, and the specifically defined roles of advisors are likely to hinder efforts to capture opportunities and respond to threats over time. The ability to alter the number of Scholars and the amount of the scholarships may prove critical to adapt to changing budgetary environments for the university and prospective students for example. Decision-makers, in consultation with all relevant constituencies, need greater latitude to lead the Program sustainably into the future given inherent uncertainties and changes. We recommend a review and benchmarking of other merit-based scholarships at OHIO and similarly situated programs and institutions to assess the "value-added" by the Cutler Program student experience. Also, should there be a Strategic Plan developed, which could prove beneficial and insightful, we encourage the engagement of current Cutler Scholars and young alumni regarding the components of a "nationally recognized program." It appears that being such a program is an important goal and that suggestions and concerns about size and possible dilution of the scholar experience can be addressed upfront and throughout the strategic planning process with undergraduates and young alumni.

b. Messaging the vision to students and conveying the vision to potential scholars, friends, partners, supporters, and OHIO faculty and staff.

Recommendation: It could be helpful to review with campus partners such as the Office of Admissions, the Office of Multi-Cultural Affairs, Academic Departments and the Alumni Association, in particular, how the Cutler Scholar Program is promoted and marketed to potential applicants. Such a review might include disaggregated data about applications, acceptances and enrollments from selected high schools, as well as ideas to make the scholarship and program more appealing to historically underrepresented students. It is our understanding that the program has had only four (4) students of color as scholars in its history and an increase in this number can only enhance the richness of the Cutler Scholar experience for all students, as well as the OHIO community.

It could also be helpful to identify 2-3 high school faculty or staff—who may or may not be OHIO alumni—at each eligible high school so that there is more than one person beyond the high school counselor, who is knowledgeable about the Cutler Scholars Program and OHIO. These persons can be on the lookout for potential applicants and would have direct access to the Cutler Program Director and/or Assistant Director. This wider awareness of the Cutler Scholars Program might also minimize any bias in the high school endorsement process some students or families may feel about having to be aligned or allied with one particular high school faculty or staff person in order to be supported for the Cutler Scholar application. Most important, with the schedule of scholarships now in place there is a date or time certain that each high school will know when their students are eligible for the scholarships. Hopefully it will be easier for Cutler Program staff to establish these
relationships with additional faculty and staff at each high school above and beyond the high school counselor(s) since the process is more transparent and funding for scholarships in a given year known earlier.

Our meetings with students provided ideas about how some of this outreach to high schools could be done with a special focus on the academic and intellectual richness of the OHIO university experience such as the tutorial program. For example, it should be more broadly publicized that "...60% of Cutler Scholars become graduate or professional students." The current Cutler Scholars expressed great enthusiasm and interest in being “Ambassadors” for the program by using social media and visiting high schools. Some of these recruiting visits appeared to be happening but could be scaled up. We would also suggest some consideration of a social media strategy which would use video testimonials, for example, from current scholars, alumni, staff, faculty and other friends of the program. This social media strategy should align with the accepted standards and parameters of the University's and Provost's office public affairs strategy since it was noted that "integration into the fuller institution" is one of the goals of the new leadership transition and organizational strategy.

Finally, it is not uncommon for university admissions offices and merit-based scholarship programs to develop relationships with local, regional and national college access programs and pre-college programs to market and promote scholarships to high performing students, including but not limited to: first generation college students, students from low income families and minorities. Some program examples include: GEAR UP, Upward Bound, A Better Chance, KIPP Schools, the Ron Brown Scholars Program, LEDA, Prep for Prep, Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, etc.

2. Staff

a. New and much needed initiatives have been added to the staff’s workload. The plan to further increase the number of Cutler Scholars guarantees this heavier workload will increase further. For example, the advising for the summer enrichment placements is highly individualized and very time consuming. Even with this advising students do considerable amounts of the placement identification and arranging experiences independently. The additional needs of more formal learning outcome and evaluation processes, as the Cutler Scholars Program is now part of an academic unit, will also contribute to this increased workload. To accommodate the increasing demand of advising for growing number of scholars, the program staff will have to spend more time and effort in developing a well-defined timeline for student advising and administrative tasks.

Recommendation: The program staff’s workload can be alleviated by hiring recent graduates from the CS Program to assist in student advising and mentorship, allowing student(s) to work at the CS office as their summer enrichment experience, and increasing the number of work study students in the CS office. These measurements will allow staff to have more time for other tasks that are central to the program's
mission and the additional workload. Synergies within the new HTC home may also present opportunities. If additional advising capacity is not possible, it may be part of a reason for revisiting larger questions such as the overall number of Cutler Scholars.

b. The transitions in staff leadership and changes in the way the program is executed with new processes have inevitably led to a new and evolving division of labor among the program staff. These changing processes and roles are not always clear to key constituencies and in particular students. This lack of clarity in transition is to be expected yet remains a source of frustration for some.

Recommendation: Development of an organizational chart for Cutler Scholars Program would help clarify the responsibilities of the Program Director, Associate Director, Administrative Associate, the Program Advisory Board, and the Program Steering Committee. Such a document would be intended to provide practical guidance to end-users, particularly students, as they navigate changes.

3. Budget

a. Administrative and Operational Expenses

The plan to expand the number of Cutler Scholars should have an equivalent plan to address projected and unforeseen operational needs for the short term and long term. Considerations for additional supervisory and advising staff, as well as finance/accounting and administrative support should be considered. Throughout the visit it was evident that reaching the number of 69+ Cutler Scholars enrolled at OHIO per year is a key goal for the founder, Cutler Scholars Advisory Board, university administrators, staff and many current scholars. However, some scholars have concerns about if/how growing the number of Cutler Scholars selected per year may weaken the feeling and benefits of "community" and decrease availability of advising staff, resources, respectively.

Recommendation: It will be very important to identify current strengths and weaknesses of the program staff related to current job descriptions, tasks currently executed and tasks and responsibilities which may/will increase with a larger number of scholars. Tasks and responsibilities such as: Cutler Scholar alumni and family engagement, scholar programming, outreach to potential applicants, and streamlining and evaluation of appropriate summer enrichment experiences, for example, would increase. However, collaborating with the Office of Admissions, the Alumni Association, the Study Abroad office and the Career Center to execute some of these tasks might offset some of these expenses. The new leaderships team is taking systematic and needed steps to integration and institutionalize the Cutler Scholars Program and these additional and needed efforts do represent additional workload when paired with growing the number of Scholars.

b. Scholarship Projections

The plan to expand the number of scholars should have an equivalent plan to achieve the necessary increases in endowment income.
Recommendation: Significant research and discussions will be necessary to explore the financial projections and scenarios that will generate the income needed to achieve 69+ Cutler Scholars enrolled at OHIO each year. It is evident that the founder, Cutler Scholars Advisory Board, university administrators and Director, in particular, are aware of this necessity. In addition to inflation it will be important to factor in projected tuition increases and projected stipend increases for summer enrichment experiences. We also recommend that strong consideration should be given to the positive peer to peer learning impact of out of state (non-Ohio resident) Cutler Scholars on the program and OHIO given the recent decision to fund only in-state scholars (with the exception of the New York and New Jersey geographic scholarships). For many merit-based programs, such as the three upon which the Cutler Scholars were envisioned (Rhodes, UNC's Morehead-Cain and UVA's Jefferson Scholars), the consistent inclusion of out of state and international students has added richness and diversity to the scholar program experience and the impact upon the university community.

4. Space

a. The dedicated space of Trisolini House was repeatedly mentioned as a key component of developing the deep sense of family among Cutler Scholars and the Program staff. Trisolini is viewed by the students as a safe, welcoming, and highly-utilized space or “home” where they can work and socialize together with 24/7 access to the student lounge area. They consider a dedicated space with 24/7 access as critical to formal and informal learning within the program. By all accounts and the program reviewers visit, the physical infrastructure of Trisolini House is sorely lacking. The anticipated near term move out of Trisolini to temporary or new permanent space is a considerable source of anxiety for students who see the dedicated space as critical to the Cutler experience.

The RCM process, dictating that units cover space restoration and building costs, appears to pose a significant threat to a unit like Cutler Scholars that faces considerable costs in this category. The discretionary Ping endowment was cited as a potential source for these funds given that the unit does not have traditional college level means of generating discretionary income. To use a meaningful portion of these current discretionary resources for capital costs rather than programmatic costs would pose a tangible threat to the ability to deliver the Scholars Program in its current form.

Recommendation: The strongly held priority for maintaining the place-based component of the Cutler Scholars Program should be a paramount consideration in the long-term planning process for any future location of offices and student dedicated space. Students should have representation and input in the discussion, selection, and transition to the new office space.

5. Curriculum
a. Clearly defined program objectives and outcomes should be developed with evidence-based, measurable competencies that could assess alignment with program vision.

*Recommendation:* General outcomes shall be established for the program that provide a framework for the development of specific measurable competencies. Assessment measures shall exist for each of the measurable competencies. For example, if being an effective leader is one of the program outcomes which has one of the measurable competencies identified as public speaking skills, how will that be assessed? Validation of the general outcomes and competencies could be accomplished through a combination of external experts (similar program officials), the advisory committee and follow up studies of graduated Cutler Scholars.

b. Students expressed concerns on the lack of cross-class interaction with the introduction of the new colloquium format for 2016-17. For example, the declining interactions between freshmen and seniors.

*Recommendation:* Interacting with current Cutler Scholars especially with students who had gone through the old and new programs, the committee understands that peer to peer and as well as interaction between scholars at different academic levels are important in terms of mentoring, collaboration and student success. At the same time the committee realizes the challenges of scholars groups being bigger. Therefore, it will be important when thinking about smaller sized colloquium groups that scholars of different class levels and academic interests are grouped with intentionality which may require upperclass (wo)men scholars advising underclass(wo)men scholars to promote interaction. Steps to promote interaction across the classes would be welcomed by the students for practical peer to peer learning reasons.

c. Clear criteria for what is an acceptable and unacceptable enrichment experience so that proposed placements are more likely to be accepted by program staff. This clarity should come with the needed transition from previous enrichment experiences (such as no longer using third party service providers) but it is important for these criteria to be clearly understood by all students.

*Recommendation:* Objectives for the valuable summer enrichment process shall be established and validated. Specific guidelines that help the students identify and plan an enrichment process that would meet these objectives should be developed. These guidelines could include details such as expected nature of assignment, required mentorship at internship site, assessment and evaluation, compensation requirement, required feedback by both student and employer at the end of the term, liability matters, duration, and timing. It may be helpful for the Program Director and Steering Committee to develop protocols with the relevant Deans and Departmental heads to come to a mutual agreement that designated internships or enrichment experiences would meet the dual requirements of the Cutler Scholar Program and the relevant department (i.e., Engineering) related to a student's completion of specific academic major or minor requirements for graduation.
6. Outreach

a. Marketing and awareness about the Cutler Scholars Program is a priority. Despite the excellence of the program, many candidate students and high schools (both inside and outside of the state of Ohio) are unaware of the presence of the program. For many current Cutler scholars, prior to their arrival to OHIO, there were concerns about the academic and intellectual rigor of OHIO. However, after their arrival, students' experiences within the Cutler Scholars Program, the Honors Tutorial College, OHIO professors and research experiences revealed to them that OHIO was definitely rigorous, challenging, and transformational. Current Cutler Scholars have been sharing their experiences in Cutler (either on campus or abroad) through social media: Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram or similar. Current Cutler Scholars expressed remarkable satisfaction with their enrichment experiences and the program overall. They also welcomed the opportunities to speak to students in their hometowns and other places, and to be ambassadors for the program and for OHIO.

Recommendation: Raising the awareness of the program to diverse candidates and under-represented communities is critical. There should be more outreach by the program and the university to give prospective candidates and schools information about the benefits and impact of the Cutler Scholars Program. Support should be provided for the program to continue and expand effective marketing channels, such as student ambassadors' visit back to their hometowns and social media broadcasting of students' experiences and successes. Continued engagement and partnership with Office of Admissions at OHIO is also important. These effective marketing venues and dissemination channels should be fully supported to increase the visibility of the Cutler Scholars Program and to enhance a positive image of OHIO as a whole. Consideration should also be given to securing confidential, in-depth feedback from students who were offered a Cutler Scholarship, but declined it. Feedback from these high-achieving students, their parents and counselors—sometimes secured via third parties—could shed valuable light on perceptions of the Cutler Scholar program and the university, as well as highlight important features of competing scholar programs and institutions. Students who applied for the Cutler Scholars Program but were not accepted also represent a promising cohort for concerted recruitment to Ohio University.

b. It is surprising that the Cutler Scholars Program is not well recognized by many OHIO faculty. While OHIO faculty may know the name of the Cutler Scholars Program, many OHIO faculty are either unaware or do not know much about the program's mission or impact. The Cutler Scholar Program Steering Committee has been working hard trying to engage more faculty with the program. One major challenge is to find ways to get faculty aware of, passionate about and involved with the Cutler Scholars Program.

Recommendation: Initiatives should be made to increase faculty involvement with appropriate compensation, recognition, and a possible affiliation with the Cutler Scholars Program. We believe that, building on the oft-stated interest of faculty fellows, faculty affiliation will allow the program to get more faculty involved in the
development of the program, the review and interview selection process of potential Cutler Scholars, the organization and speaker presentations of the Cutler colloquia, and any other activities that are important for the Cutler Scholars Program and OHIO.
Dear David,

Dean Webster and I are satisfied with the findings and recommendations offered in the review committee’s report. We are particularly pleased with the committee’s assessment of the Cutler Scholars Program as "a flagship recruitment mechanism for Ohio University" with strong potential for continued success given the commitment of the program’s staff, alumni, benefactors, and faculty network. The strengths, weaknesses, and challenges identified in the report are consistent with those we describe in our self-study, and the committee’s comments have enhanced my thinking about areas for improvement. Likewise, the committee’s recommendations generally align with changes we are planning to make or are already in the process of implementing. I would like to comment briefly on the program’s current initiatives and future plans in these areas.

Concerning the program vision, Dean Webster and I agree completely with the committee’s recommendation that the Cutler Scholars Program Guidelines should be reevaluated to ensure the program has the flexibility to pivot and evolve in the future. Flexibility is essential to elevating the Cutler Scholars program’s reputation and maintaining its ability to recruit high-achieving students to Ohio University. Dean Webster and I have already identified a few key sections we hope to revise, such as the rigid requirements outlined for the selection process.

In line with the committee’s recommendations regarding outreach, last fall we began collaborating with Admissions and various academic units on strategic communications and recruitment efforts. Both the quantity and quality of applications we received this year indicate the initial success of these partnerships. This fall, we also made initial changes to mitigate potential bias in our application and selection process, and observed increased racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity in the cohort selected using the revised process. This summer, I am meeting with OMSAR and Upward Bound to develop a recruitment and yield strategy to appeal to historically underrepresented students.

To strengthen our high school partnerships, the program recently hosted the first of what will be an annual reception and informational meeting for guidance counselors from regional high schools. The reception is one initiative in a multivalent plan to make more students aware of the Cutler Scholars program earlier in high school. The review committee’s suggestion that we cultivate relationships with additional faculty
and staff at our partner schools and use alumni and students as strategic ambassadors will be an excellent addition to our messaging efforts.

The report notes that the recent change in program leadership and the administrative reorganization of the program have given rise to some transitional confusion around workflows and individual roles and responsibilities. We plan to clarify job responsibilities, strengthen team culture, and establish a rhythm of operations through two Cutler staff retreats this summer. As we refine roles and responsibilities, program staff will address the committee’s recommendation that we assess our team strengths and weaknesses and consider potential staffing needs in the future.

Concerning budget and space, I agree with the reviewers' strong suggestion that we run additional financial projections accounting for inflation, tuition increases, and rising enrichment costs as the number of scholars increases, and, if necessary, consider adjusting the target of 69 scholars or rate of growth in order to maintain the value and marketability of the Cutler scholarships. As currently configured, the scholarships awarded to each cohort decrease in value relative to the increasing cost of attendance, slowly making the Cutler Scholars program less competitive in recruiting high-achieving students to Ohio University. The report also emphasizes that dedicated Cutler Scholars space plays a significant role in cultivating the community experience at the heart of the Cutler Scholars program. However, the committee contends, and we agree, that devoting most or all of the program’s unrestricted endowment funds to operations and capital costs would pose a real threat to the continued quality of the Cutler Scholars program, and its value as a recruitment tool for Ohio University.

Finally, concerning curriculum, I agree with the committee’s call for defined outcomes, a plan for consistent and documented assessment, and clearly stated curricular expectations and standards for students. This summer, I plan to work with Institutional Research and our program’s internal steering committee to develop a comprehensive assessment plan, ideally ready to pilot in the fall semester. The Associate Director and I are in the process of writing, revising, and organizing enrichment and colloquium policies. These and other guidelines and policies will be collected in a student handbook distributed to all future Cutler Scholars.

Sincerely,

Margaux Cowden, PhD
Director, Cutler Scholars Program

Jeremy Webster, PhD
Dean, Honors Tutorial College