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Success in a Hurry

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North Carolina A&T State University

HONORS DIRECTOR: MICHAEL K. CUNDALL, JR.

“It is imperative that we offer some of the university’s most academically motivated students additional opportunities for enrichment through enhanced curricula and intellectually stimulating activities.” These words marked the beginning of the North Carolina A&T State University Honors Program in 1998. Soon thereafter a committee started meeting to explore the feasibility and implementation of an honors program. The committee worked strategically to create the necessary curricula and programming content and accepted the first honor students that fall. The program has rapidly evolved, along the lines of honors programs nationally, to implement academically challenging coursework and co-curricular programming to supplement honors students’ traditional studies.

By the program’s seventh year, multiple pathways to earning honors credit for graduation had been developed. Criteria included maintaining a 3.5 cumulative grade point average in addition to attendance at lectures and cultural events as well as performing at least ten hours of community service each semester. At that point, the program numbered five hundred students.

A more rigorous application and selection process was implemented in 2011, when the university adopted a bold strategic plan, A&T Preeminence 2020. With increased enrollment standards and program growth now a priority, the new director and his staff had as a goal the facilitation and encouragement of honors students' applications to graduate programs as well as national fellowships and scholarships. As the director has told students, ambitious applications create pressure to develop a corpus of work or that makes you focus on what you've done, why you did it, and what you've learned in order to present yourselves successfully for future jobs and graduate study.

As the program has grown now to six hundred students, it has also seen its graduates achieve the kind of success the director encouraged. In 2013, Emmanuel Johnson, an honors graduate, used his Fulbright post-graduate award to study at Birmingham University in England. In 2014, honors graduate Destenie Nock became the first student from a historically black college or university to receive a George J. Mitchell Scholarship. Others have been named National Science Foundation fellows; Science, Mathematics & Research for Transformation (SMART) Scholars from the U.S. Department of Defense; and Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholars. "These successes are a testament to the talent and the capabilities of our honors students," said honors director Michael Cundall. "Their achievements have served as motivation for our current students to continue their personal journeys to preeminence."

This fall, the honors program admitted one of the largest classes in program history with more than 160 students. "The size and the academic talents of this class show that we are drawing to A&T more of the world's most high-achieving students, and that is what preeminence is about," Cundall said. Meanwhile, the enriched academic experiences available through the honors program continue to help prepare A&T students for graduate studies as well as the early stages of their respective careers. Over the years, students from this program have been selected as Campus All-Stars for the White House Initiative on HBCUs and have held such campus leadership positions as Student Government Association president, vice president and Miss A&T. Honors students have also participated in such campus activities as university team football, baseball, and bowling.

Although a young program, the North Carolina A&T Honors Program illustrates how quickly and successfully honors can achieve its goals of providing a quality education to its high-achieving students and how these

students can benefit academically and personally from the experiences that honors provides for them.

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