

April 1, 2016



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Dear Dr. Birberick:

It has been my privilege to serve as acting director of the University Honors Program since July, 2015. I have truly enjoyed working with some of NIU's most talented and ambitious young scholars. With this letter, I would like to indicate my strong interest in continuing this work as the permanent Director of University Honors. I am confident that I have the skills, experience, energy and vision to maintain the strengths of the program and make it stronger still.

Through its nearly 50 year history, Honors has promoted its values of strong academics, public service, civic engagement, a spirit of giving back, and sustained alumni connections to NIU. Excellence begins with deep learning and is enriched by curricular and co-curricular high-impact practices, such as research, study abroad, engaged learning, and internships. Honors has a good record of being accessible to all qualified students. Still, there's work to be done. My vision for Honors is to maintain programmatic excellence and enhance accessibility to all qualified students.

I am currently in my 26<sup>th</sup> year at NIU. During most of this time, I have devoted myself to being a complete faculty member, dedicated to university service, teaching and scholarship. The following is a brief overview of each of these areas.

**University Service.** I have considerable experience working with colleagues from across the campus. I was a member of the PLUS Task Force for two years, and continue to contribute to implementation of PLUS. I have served on the Undergraduate Coordinating Council and nearly all of its subcommittees (Honors, CIUE, CUAE, and APASC). By attending Faculty Senate and University Council meetings, I learned first-hand about the intricacies of shared governance. My work with the CLAS Curriculum Committee highlighted the integrated nature of the university's curriculum. In 2014, I was part of a small group selected to participate in CLAS's week-long Design Workshop, which was tasked with analyzing every aspect of how the college runs. I am currently chair of the Radiation Safety Committee and the Institutional Biosafety Committee, and I previously served on the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. Through my work in Honors, I now chair the Scholarship Committee and am part of the Enrollment Management Committee and the Institutional Aid Task Force. It was illuminating to participate in recent searches for deans of CVPA, CEDU and CBUS, as it allowed me to learn how these candidates perceived the value of an Honors education.

**Teaching.** I truly enjoy undergraduate teaching, which is reflected in my consistently excellent student evaluations. “Enthusiastic” is a very common way in which students describe me and my teaching. I routinely teach Fundamentals of Cell Biology (BIOS 208) and Biology of Land Plants (BIOS 305). I’ve recently taught an Honors seminar and the biology portion of a Themed Learning Community for pre-medical/pre-professional health students. Through work with the CUAE, I helped to revise the UNIV 101 curriculum, and in fall 2015 I co-taught an Honors section of this course. A statement of my teaching philosophy can be found at the end of my curriculum vitae.

**Scholarship.** I have conducted a successful research program since arriving at NIU in 1990. My current work is aimed at understanding how specific proteins regulate protein synthesis, a fundamental process that occurs in all cells. I was the sole P.I. on two research grants awarded by the National Institutes of Health. A sabbatical leave in 2011 reinvigorated my research program. I recently have collaborated with Profs. Timothy Hagen and James Horn from the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry to develop novel herbicides. So far, this work has been supported by a total of \$40,000 from the NIU Venture Capital program, and two NSF proposals have been submitted.

I have a long standing commitment to Honors education at NIU. Prior to beginning my current position, I served on the Honors Committee and participated in Taft retreats. I have taught mini-sections, in-course contracts and seminars. I have directed several Capstone projects. This involvement with Honors and my other university experiences prepared me to assume the duties of acting director of Honors. My fulltime commitment to Honors since July has given me a solid understanding of national norms of an Honors education and detailed insights into NIU’s current program. This knowledge will guide my leadership of Honors, especially in these times of intense fiscal challenges.

My goals and priorities include the following. I would be glad to elaborate on these and other topics during the interview process.

- 1) Provide a high quality academic experience that emphasizes small, Honors-only classes and seminars.
- 2) Be welcoming and assure accessibility to all qualified students.
- 3) Provide opportunities and support for engaging, high-impact activities such as mentored research, study abroad, internships and externships.
- 4) Offer co-curricular programming with the goals of building character, developing leadership, and promoting a personal ethos that stresses volunteerism and civic engagement.
- 5) Recruit talented, high-achieving students from the ranks of regional high schools, new freshmen, matriculated NIU students, and community college transfers.
- 6) Strive to retain all students who join the program, and assure that they graduate with an Honors distinction (Lower Division, Upper Division or University Honors).
- 7) Inculcate students with a strong sense of an “Honors Identity.”



- 8) Encourage students to interact with each other in order to build a stronger Honors Community. Students profit greatly from reciprocal relationships – being mentored and providing mentoring to their peers.
- 9) Communicate clearly and frequently with all interested parties and stakeholders.
- 10) Maintain strong relationships with academic deans, chairs and faculty.
- 11) Maintain strong relationships with key administrative departments, including OSEEL, Scholarships, Admissions, Housing & Dining, and Career Services.
- 12) Document and assess student progress and success, while at NIU and after graduation.
- 13) Work with the NIU Foundation and Alumni Association to foster goodwill and raise funds for scholarships and programming.
- 14) Build the Honors reputation and “brand.”
- 15) Plant a seed in the minds of each Honors student, beginning from their first experience at a Taft retreat: You will receive much from your education at NIU; begin thinking now about how you might give back.

NIU administration has publically expressed an interest in building our Honors Program into an Honors College. This is a worthy and appropriate ambition, which would likely enhance the reputation of the institution as a whole, aid in recruitment and promote giving. Getting to this point will require vision, planning and resources. I would be honored to be a part of this process.

Finally, I'd like to highlight some personal qualities and skills that will allow me to maintain and improve an already strong Honors Program. I am detail oriented and self-motivated. In making decisions, I use data, seek input from multiple points of view and try to build consensus. I am committed to diversity and want the Honors Program to be a reflection of our whole campus community. I have a strong appreciation for disparate academic disciplines, peoples and cultures, which will allow me to work effectively with constituencies from across the campus. I am persistent: if given a hard but realistic challenge, I'll get the job done. And I believe in doing the right thing, even if it's hard or unpopular.

I look forward to meeting with you and the screening committee to discuss how we can keep the Honors Program moving forward.

Sincerely,



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**References.** Each of these individuals is willing to comment on my qualifications to be director of the University Honors Program.

**Dr. David Ballantine**, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. I previously worked with Dr. Ballantine on the CLAS Curriculum Committee and more recently we've worked together on several Honors-associated committees and projects. 753-7969 [dballant@niu.edu](mailto:dballant@niu.edu)

**Ms. Anne Hardy**, Director, NIU Scholarship Office. As chair of the University Scholarship committee, I have worked closely with Ms. Hardy in selecting NIU's Lincoln Laureate and Presidential Scholars. She is co-chair of the newly formed Institutional Aid Task Force, of which I am a member. 753-0143 [ahardy@niu.edu](mailto:ahardy@niu.edu)

**Dr. Edward Klonoski**, Acting Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs. I worked closely with Dr. Klonoski for two years on the PLUS Task Force and continue to work with him on related projects. 753-7037 [eklonoski@niu.edu](mailto:eklonoski@niu.edu)