



Creation of the Honors College and Dissolution of the University College

Division of Academic Affairs

I. A statement of the circumstances or events that prompted the recommendations.

Creation of the Honors College

The Honors Program is currently housed in the University College at Austin Peay State University. The Honors Program has reached an exciting inflection point, shaped by decades of purposeful growth, deep faculty commitment, and a steadily expanding record of academic distinction. Since its origins in the early 1980s and its official establishment in 1982—making it one of Tennessee’s oldest honors programs—APSU’s Honors Program has built a culture that has consistently raised expectations for what an exceptional undergraduate experience can be. From the beginning, a dedicated group of faculty and administrators envisioned an enriched, challenging environment that cultivates critical thinking, creativity, and interdisciplinary learning – values that continue to define our honors identity today.

Over time, the Honors Program has evolved into a comprehensive academic community that offers distinctive coursework and high-impact opportunities—small classes, close faculty mentorship, research experiences, and a strong sense of belonging—designed to attract and retain high-achieving students. The tremendous enrollment growth **over the past 7 years (611% Increase)** and maturation reflect not only the strength of the program’s design, but also the enduring legacy of visionary leaders such as Dr. Edward Irwin, whose pioneering efforts helped establish the program and whose influence remains visible in the Honors Commons today. As the program has continued to broaden its courses, seminars, and extracurricular offerings, it has become an increasingly integral expression of APSU’s commitment to academic excellence and the development of future leaders.

These circumstances—our long-standing foundation, sustained evolution, and the momentum of an Honors Program that is clearly thriving—prompt the recommendation to take the next step: positioning APSU’s Honors Program as an Honors College. Doing so will allow Austin Peay to more powerfully attract and retain competitive students, elevate the visibility and coherence of honors experiences, and signal to campus leadership and prospective students alike that APSU’s honors community is ready to lead at an even higher level.

Dissolution of the University College

With the creation of the Honors College, we have another great opportunity to optimize our existing student success and academic support units within the University College. Therefore, Austin Peay State University has reached a moment where our organizational structure must match our aspirations for students. The term *University College* carries negative connotations and is too often perceived as “the place for students who can’t get into a real major.” It has become associated with a legacy model, built around exploratory or underperforming students and functions as a “catch-all” or remedial unit for housing students rather than intentionally engineering their success. That is not who we are, and it is not where higher education is going.

Contemporary higher education has shifted toward guided student pathways, proactive academic advising, holistic student success/case management, and data-informed interventions. “University College” does not signal any of these strategies; instead, it often comes across as vague, internally focused, and legacy-oriented. In contrast, many institutions have intentionally evolved away from the University College model and toward units explicitly centered on student success.

For these reasons, Austin Peay should dissolve the University College and reframe and strengthen its most essential functions within a more focused and intentional structure: ***Student Success & Academic Excellence***. This unit will be purpose-built to engineer success at APSU, organizing our work around the practices that best support students’ progress and completion. Housing these efforts in a single, clearly defined unit, with three aligned departments—*Student Success, Academic Advising, and First-year Experience and Retention Programs*—will sharpen our student success mission, clarify our commitment to our students, and better communicate to students and campus stakeholders what we stand for. This shift is not simply a rebrand; it is a strategic commitment to intentional, proactive, and modern student success practices that help every student thrive at Austin Peay.

II. Objectives to be accomplished by the recommendations

The creation of an Honors College at Austin Peay State University will achieve a clear set of strategic objectives that elevate the institution’s academic profile and expand opportunities for students. First, it will formally elevate the current Honors Program into a distinguished academic unit, signaling a bold and visible commitment to academic excellence, student achievement, and regional impact. Through the Honors College, APSU will offer a premier educational experience designed to attract, retain, and graduate some of the most talented students in Tennessee and beyond thereby strengthening both enrollment quality and degree completion among high-achieving learners. Second, the Honors College will enhance student outcomes by expanding APSU’s capacity to embed high-impact practices—including undergraduate research, service learning, community engagement, and study abroad/away—into the fabric of the undergraduate experience, aligned with national best practices. These opportunities will cultivate graduates who are not only academically exceptional, but also prepared to lead, serve, and innovate in their professions and communities. Third, the Honors College will expand APSU’s regional and national reputation by positioning the university as a recognized leader in honors education. The structure and visibility of a college-level unit will strengthen partnerships, elevate competitiveness, and reinforce APSU’s role as a destination for ambitious students seeking rigorous academics and transformative learning. Finally, the Honors College will create a lasting legacy through the establishment of endowed positions, scholarships, and the potential naming of the College, ensuring long-term sustainability and meaningful donor investment in student success. In sum, the Honors College will be a transformative step forward for APSU: a strategic, mission-driven

advancement that strengthens academic excellence, accelerates student achievement, and elevates the university's impact for generations to come.

Dissolving the University College and optimizing its essential functions into a focused, intentional Student Success & Academic Excellence unit will achieve a clear, measurable objective: improving student success outcomes at scale. By aligning Student Success, Academic Advising, and First-Year Experience & Retention Programs into one coherent structure with a unified mission, APSU will be better positioned through an engineered success model to proactively support students from entry through completion.

The primary objectives of this reorganization include:

- **Create a single point of accountability for student success**, reducing fragmentation and ensuring consistent goals, messaging, and performance tracking across advising, first-year programming, and student success initiatives.
- **Enable data-informed interventions at the right time**, by coordinating how early alerts, progress monitoring, and targeted outreach are used through our existing CRM tool (AP Navigate) and data visualization dashboards.
- **Reduce confusion for students and families** by replacing a vague or legacy identity with a clearly named unit whose purpose is immediately understood.
- **Strengthen the student experience and sense of belonging**, by placing more emphasis on the first-year experience through intentional programming, consistent touchpoints, and coordinated collaborative work with the Division of Student Affairs that helps students connect early to their academics, their purpose, and the Austin Peay community.
- **Reinforce APSU's institutional narrative and competitiveness**, communicating to prospective students that Austin Peay is organized around modern best practices: guided pathways, proactive advising, and holistic student support that leads to timely graduation.

Achieving these objectives will allow us to strengthen the following outcomes:

- Increase first-year (freshman) retention by delivering a coordinated, proactive first-year experience that identifies risk early, provides timely support, and ensures every new student has clear academic direction and consistent advising engagement.
- Improve term-to-term and year-to-year persistence rates through integrated advising and student success strategies that reduce stop-outs, close equity gaps in continuation, and provide case-management support for students who need wraparound assistance.
- Increase the four-year graduation rate by building guided momentum: clearer academic pathways, stronger course planning, fewer excess credits, and earlier interventions when

students fall off their academic plan, thereby reducing time-to-degree and increasing the timely completion of their degree.

In short, creation of the Student Success & Academic Excellence unit will allow for optimization of **existing departments, programs, initiatives and activities** while providing the opportunity for this unit to scale up to help Austin Peay State University achieve higher retention, stronger persistence, and increased four-year graduation rates. Moreover, Student Success & Academic Excellence will be better supported by clearer accountability, better coordination, and an improved student-centered infrastructure created to help every student thrive and complete their degree in a timely manner

III. Anticipated costs associated with the recommendations and possible funding sources.

With the creation of the Honors College, the following **NEW** positions will be created to support this college. Each of the NEW positions are listed along with the associated cost and the funding sources. Please note that each of the Associate Dean and Director positions below will be filled by current Austin Peay State University faculty through our common model where we provide stipends and course release time to existing faculty.

<i>Position</i>	<i>Associated Costs</i>	<i>Funding Source</i>
Dean, Honors College	\$150,000 Salary	Reallocation of existing E&G funds currently allocated in Academic Affairs; Private philanthropic funding; no new funds will be needed
Associate Dean, Honors College	11-month stipend at \$8,000; 6 hrs course release per term	Existing E&G funds currently allocated within Academic Affairs; no new funds or new allocation of existing funds will be needed
Three (3) Faculty Director Positions	Course release ranging from 3 – 12 hrs per term and stipends ranging between \$5,000 - \$17,000 per year depending on duties assigned	Existing E&G funds currently allocated within Academic Affairs; no new funds or new allocation of existing funds will be needed

There are no anticipated costs associated with dissolving the University College. Existing resources that are in place will be used to continue to support the efforts of the Student Success & Academic Excellence unit.

IV. Impact on degree programs in the current academic inventory.

There will be no impact on current degree programs in the current academic inventory. With the dissolution of the University College, the three (3) degree programs will be moved to the other existing academic colleges.

V. Timeline of Proposed Organizational Changes

With deep appreciation for the collaborative spirit that has guided this work, Austin Peay State University is moving forward with these organizational changes in a thoughtful, well-supported, and student-centered way. The concept of transitioning the Honors Program to an Honors College has been strongly supported by our Academic Deans, Senior Leadership Team, and the current leadership of both University College and the Honors Program. Moreover, this has been discussed extensively with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and has been shared with the Faculty Senate at-large. Collectively, this feedback and comments received have been invaluable and instrumental in shaping this proposal that reflects our shared commitment to academic excellence and student success.

We anticipate launching the Honors College in August 2026, in advance of the start of the Fall 2026 term. Concurrently, the optimization of existing departments, programs, initiatives, and activities within the University College to form the new Student Success & Academic Excellence unit will commence following approvals, with the intent for them to be in place before the start of the Fall 2026 term. Following the required approvals from the APSU Board of Trustees and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), the University will begin developing job descriptions for new positions associated with the Honors College. Open and competitive search processes will be used to fill the Director positions prior to the start of Fall 2026 term, ensuring strong leadership is in place from day one. In addition, APSU will conduct a national search for the Dean of the Honors College, beginning in September 2026, with an anticipated start date of July 1, 2027. An Interim Dean will be appointed and will provide leadership to the Honors College during the 2026-2027 academic year.

Taken together, this timeline reflects a shared desire to begin serving students through these strengthened structures as soon as possible, while also ensuring the right approvals, planning, and leadership are in place to launch successfully and sustainably.