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History of Recognizing Academic Honors at UTEP

UTEP Heritage Commission

Willie Quinn

The University of Texas at El Paso
UTEP Heritage Commission -- Research Committee
June 30, 2020

History of Recognizing Academic Honors at UTEP

Over the years of recognizing academic achievement at UTEP, there have been two primary approaches, events and courses/programs, through which academic excellence has been recognized on the UTEP campus. Recently UTEP's Dr. P. J. Vierra, Ph.D, Asst. Dir., Institutional Advancement, published a Backgrounder on the "Honors at UTEP," in which Dr. Vierra discusses UTEP Honors Lists, Organizations, Events, and Programs, from the beginnings up through the founding of the University Honors Program in 1981. Dr. Vierra's prepublication manuscript is included as Appendix VIII.

Ever since the founding of UTEP in 1913 by the Texas legislature, as the State School of Mines and Metallurgy, our outstanding students have been honored for their academic and/or athletic achievements. Very often these recognitions have been issued to individuals without due recognition being announced to the student body and/or the general public. Certainly there were no formalized programs published. These honor recognitions were publicized in the *Flowsheet* yearbooks, *The Prospector* newspapers, other school publications, et al.; however, they were soon to be forgotten, except by the recipients.

It was not until 1953 that these honors recognitions were celebrated with formal programs at campus-wide events. The first formal program was held on May 11, 1953, as the "Honors Day First Annual" event, held in Magoffin Auditorium with Dr. Wilson Elkins, President, TWC, as the Program Speaker.

The Honors Days events continued on an annual basis through May 5, 1962, when the name of the events was changed to Honors Nights and Honors Convocation Nights through May 8, 1969. Starting on May 8, 1970, the name of the event was changed to Honors Banquets and continued as such through 1979.

After an absence of 11 years without holding a formal convocation ceremony, when Dr. Haskell Monroe became President of UTEP in 1980, a convocation was held on September 12, 1980, known as the Fall Convocation. Then on February 19, 1981, Dr. Monroe welcomed El Paso and UTEP to the "Four Centuries '81 Convocation" with four speakers to celebrate 400 years of El Paso history. None of the above convocations were specifically called for the purpose of honoring UTEP students' achievements.

On May 3, 1981, the "First Honors Convocation" was called by Dr. Monroe to recognize outstanding high school and university students and faculty at an event held in Magoffin Auditorium. Ever since, UTEP generally has celebrated two Convocations every year, one the Fall Convocation and the other an Honors Convocation in the Spring.

The University Honors Program was established in 1981. Dr. Diana Natalicio is credited with establishing the program while she was Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and she provided the administrative support for the program. Dr. Haskell Monroe may have had some influence in its formation due to his numerous recognitions of student honors in a variety of ways including formal events.

In the past, several UTEP Colleges, specifically Liberal Arts and Engineering, held their own college and department honors programs, but it was not until 1981 that a campus-wide University Honors Program was created. See [Appendix I](#) for the purposes and administration for these various honors programs as outlined for the first time in the 1983-85 Class Catalog. For the subtle changes that took place in the purposes over the years, please consult the current Class Catalog and/or the individual program directors. A review of these Catalogs show that going back to the 1960s we presented academic honors at graduations; in the 1970s honors classes were held in several disciplines; and also in the 1970s Honors Programs existed in the Colleges of Engineering and Liberal Arts. The current Liberal Arts Honors Program which was reorganized in 2012 was distinct from the University Honors Program and from the earlier Liberal Arts Honors Program. Even though counsel was sought from individuals involved in the original Liberal Arts Honors Program from the 1980s, there was no connection between the two entities.

The First Director of the University Honors Program was Professor Kathleen (Kathy) Staudt. Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Political Science (in 1981). The subsequent Directors and their terms served are shown in [Appendix II](#), Roster of Program Directors and Terms.

The “bottom line” of all this research resulted in the identification that in the year 2021, the University Honors Program will celebrate its 40th Anniversary of promoting recognition of the outstanding students from all the Colleges within UTEP.

The Heritage Commission would like to thank all the Contributors to this History of the University Honors Program, who are listed in Appendix III and specifically in Appendices IV, V, VI, and VII. Without the input from these individuals this project could not have been completed. For copies of any or all associated correspondence, please contact the Chair of the UTEP Heritage Commission to arrange for copies or for the review of the Heritage House files on the UTEP campus.

Contents facilitated by:
Willie Quinn
Member, UTEP Heritage Commission
Chair, HC Research Committee
June 30, 2020

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Appendix I 1983-83 Class Catalog

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UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

University Honors Program students will enroll in selected honors courses and in special honors sections of regular courses. Courses may be experimental, team-taught, or interdisciplinary and most will be small in size to permit more discussion and interaction with the instructor and other students than is possible in larger classes. The courses emphasize writing, theory, critical thinking and oral expression. Depending upon the student's major, special independent readings courses and a Senior Honors Project are also available.

University Honors students have a variety of enrichment opportunities available to them. Most honors classes are located in Miners' Hall, home of the Honors Program and Honors Student Lounge. Honors students edit a monthly newsletter which provides a regular communication and writing vehicle. Each month, an Honors Forum is held with guest speakers on career, research, or other university issues. The Honors office will also facilitate mentoring between interested faculty and students. The annual Honors Banquet recognizes Honors students' academic performance.

To graduate from the Honors Program, students must complete at least 18 hours of honors courses, at least 6 of which are upper-division, and must maintain a 3.5 grade point average. All honors courses completed will be designated as such on the student's academic record. Students who graduate from the program will also have that fact noted on the academic record and on the diploma, and will receive a special Certificate of Completion.

Students wishing to enroll in the Program are invited to discuss their plans with the Honors Director, Miners' Hall 309; (915) 747-5858.

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS PROGRAM

Departmental Honors students will complete a senior thesis, senior project or other special requirement, depending on the department. A departmental faculty member will direct the project or thesis. The director, along with a departmental honors committee, will judge the student's work and outside referees may be consulted if deemed appropriate. Students may include departmental honors credits with university honors credits upon consultation with the University Honors Advisory Committee.

Continued

Appendix I 1983-83 Class Catalog

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Honors

The College of Liberal Arts, in an effort to promote excellence among its students, has a tradition of offering a wide range of honors courses each semester. Honor classes are small, emphasizing close interaction between students and faculty. The courses emphasize writing, discussion and theory, and they provide a special challenge to the brightest and ablest of our students. Students who successfully complete honors courses receive appropriate recognition on their academic records. If students complete 18 credit hours of honors, at least 6 of which are at the upper division level, they will receive recognition at graduation on their diplomas along with a special certificate for completing University Honors Program requirements. This special recognition, on academic records and the diploma, adds a special distinction to a student's university career, and it enhances one's application to graduate and/or professional schools. Most importantly, though, participation in honors will provide students with the satisfaction of having stretched their intellectual capacities to the fullest.

Each semester, the College of Liberal Arts offers honors sections of required and elective courses. Individualized learning experiences are also available for honors students, such as an independent study in special topics and an Honors contract to meet special course requirements in certain fields such as the Fine Arts. In the past, honors experiences have been offered in the departments of Criminal Justice, Drama and Speech, English, History, Linguistics, Music, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Religion, and Sociology/Anthropology. Some of the courses are interdisciplinary and team-taught.

Besides the intellectual stimulation that honors courses provide, students join a community of scholars in the University Honors Program. Honors students use the Honors Lounge for study and conversation, they produce a newsletter, and each month they may attend the Honors Forum.

Students seeking admission into honors should contact the University Honors Program, Miners Hall 309, (915) 747-5858. Eligibility for honors involves the achievement of a score of 1000+ on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, (or 25+ on the ACT), graduation in the upper 15% of their high school class, and successful completion of a writing sample. Students already enrolled in the University will be admitted with a 3.5 grade point average.

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Appendix II **Roster of Program Directors and Term Served**

The First Director of the University was Professor Kathleen (Kathy) Staudt, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Political Science in 1981. The subsequent Directors and their terms served are shown below:

1981-1983	Kathleen (Kathy) Staudt , Ph.D. (Political Science)
1983-1985	Willard P. Gingerich , Ph.D. (English)
1985-1987	Cheryl Martin , Ph.D. (History)
1987-1991	Feroza F. Jussawalla , Ph.D. (English)
1992-2003	Lillian Mayberry-Bristol , Ph.D. (Biology)
2003-	Gary Edens (Vice President for Student Affairs)

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Appendix III List of Contributors (listed in order of contacts)

Dr. P.J. Vierra, Ph.D., Asst. Dir. for Advancement Communications, Institutional Advanc.

Mr. Frank Montes de Oca III, Asst. Dir., University Relations (Convocation Programs)

Ms. Briane Carter, Chair, UTEP Heritage Commission

Mr. Gary Edens, Vice President for Student Affairs

Dr. Lillian Mayberry-Bristol, Ph.D., Adjunct Faculty, Biological Sciences

Prof. Norman Love, Ph.D., College of Engineering, Assoc. Dean for Academic Affairs &
Undergraduate Studies and Provost Fellow (Honors Program)

Prof. Emerita Kathleen (Kathy) Staudt, Ph.D., Political Science (Retired 2017)

Prof. Emerita Cheryl Martin, Ph.D., Department of History (Retired)

President Emerita Diana Natalicio, Ph.D. (Retired)

Ms. Abbie Weiser, Assistant Head, Special Collections, UTEP Library

Dr. Andrew Fleck, Director, Liberal Arts Honors Program (2019-), Department of English

Dr. Michael M. Topp, Associate Professor, Department of History

Mr. William F. "Willie" Quinn, Facilitator, History of University Honors Program, and
Member, UTEP Heritage Commission

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Appendix IV **E-mails from Lillian Mayberry-Bristol**

E-mail from Lillian Mayberry, May 29, 2020

I took over as Honors Director in January 1992 and stepped down in May of 2003. Honors was one of the many programs he [Gary Edens] supervised and I think he assumed the role when I stepped down. Ferozza was Director just before me.

Lil

E-mail from Lillian Mayberry, May 27, 2020

I don't recall Haskell [Monroe] taking an active role in the founding of the honors Program although under Haskell there were recognitions of honors in a variety of ways. It was Diana [Natalicio] as **Dean of Liberal Arts** [1980-1984] and later as President who provided the administrative support for establishing the program per se.

Lil

E-mail from Lillian Mayberry, May 25, 2020

I have a little more data. The college of Liberal Arts Honors Program was established [in the 1970s per Catalog]. Later it became the University Honors Program [1981] so students from all disciplines could be members if they could qualify . From what I can pin down it was established in/around 1980. Dr. Kathy Staudt was the first Honors Director and was followed by Cheryl Martin, ...Ferozza Jusswalla, and then me in 1991. I know Gary Edens was appointed as an overseer when I left office but I don't have information on years after I left the office.

Hope this helps your history. What you are putting is valuable information so thank you!

Lil

[Note: The [bracketed] text represents edits from more recent information.]

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Appendix V **E-mail from Kathleen (Kathy) Staudt**

E-mail from Kathy Staudt, May 25, 2020

(UTEP hired 1977; Retired 2017)

Good questions, but alas I don't have many answers. You could contact Cheryl Martin (I cc'd her) about her term. As for Feroza Jussawalla, she left UTEP for UNM and then another university. And then, Lil Bristol from Biology became the director, the first professor from outside the College of Liberal Arts. I don't know who managed to lead the program from the College of Liberal Arts to a University-wide effort. I do know that a professional staff person headed the honors program for a while. It was laborious for a faculty member to administer the program while teaching nearly a full load of classes and little by way of budgetary resources and staff.

Eventually, UTEP leadership saw the value of the program; it moved to the Honors House off Hawthorne with an administrative assistant who may have carried a lot of the labor. Speculation here: perhaps both the entry standards and the ability of students do "honors contracts" with some extra work in what became a huge program led to some watering down of the honors-like expectations.

You might also contact Michael Topp who started the current Liberal Arts Honors Program—separate from the university-wide program. I think his term ended about a year ago. He was VERY selective in who was permitted to enter the program, and even though they were 'integrated' into regular classes, he was very careful about which classes were eligible. I had several of his students in my classes and they were genuine superstars! Other students learned from them because they elevated overall discussions.

Many departments had a de facto honors experience with an honors senior thesis course. As I recall, polisci had such a course a while ago, but few students took advantage of the opportunity (and faculty members who agreed to be a thesis chair generally accepted this responsibility as a course overload). As you see, I love to provide interpretive analysis! One needs to understand the incentives systems in which people as the famous political scientist James Q. Wilson wrote about in his various books.

A bit more on interpretive history than dates.... Mind you, there is tension between some who view honors classes and programs as evidence of elitist "tracking systems" in lieu of raising standards for ALL students and allowing them to learn from one another as well as the teachers (a debate in pre-university education, as well).

Good luck in your attempts to reconstruct these internal UTEP histories.

Kathy
Kathleen Staudt
Professor Emerita

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Appendix VI

E-mail from Cheryl Martin

E-mail from Cheryl Martin, May 26, 2020

Here's my input. I can provide a bunch of dates--after all, I am a historian. I was Honors Director from 1985-1987. Willard Gingerich of the English Department preceded me--he would have served 1983-1985. I know Feroza Jussawalla came after me, but I think maybe Dick Ford of Lang & Ling also served for a while; he may have succeeded me. As you can see, there was quite a bit of turnover in the position. Kathy is right about it being difficult for faculty to juggle their regular work loads in their departments with administrative duties.

I seem to recall that the program was to some extent university-wide by the time of my tenure. There was some kind of faculty advisory board that included people from outside Liberal Arts; in particular I remember Walt Fisher from Engineering serving on this. I remember sitting in on a Physics Honors thesis in my capacity as director. I remember at least one Honors section of math being taught during most semesters of my tenure; I'm not sure if this was just for Liberal Arts majors. But most courses were in Liberal Arts departments (History, Poli Sci, English); this might have been why we had faculty advisory board members from other colleges--so that students from other colleges could take their required general education courses in Honors sections. Due to concerns about credit hour production, chairs were not always happy to release faculty to teach 20 students in an Honors section rather than 100 or more in a large lecture section

There was an Honors program newsletter before my time, I think going back to Kathy's time--I wonder if the Library would have copies? (Perhaps Claudia Rivers or Abbie Weiser in Special Collections could help?) There also was some kind of Honors journal published at least once during Gingerich's tenure; it featured writings by students in the program. Marcia Daudistel, then a student, was involved in that. Gingerich also planned a University Honors Semester, that brought about 20 Honors students from around the country to UTEP to learn about the Border region in the spring of 1986; Gingerich left abruptly in August 1985 and I was drafted to take over. The Honors Semester was in many ways a success but it was an administrative challenge, as Gingerich left many loose ends in the planning. At that point the Honors Program was under the direct supervision of the Assistant VPAA. That was Mike Eastman, during the first couple of days (yes, days) of my tenure; he then abruptly left for another university and was replaced by Jack Bristol, husband of Lillian Mayberry-Bristol. Jack and I struggled to bring off the Honors Semester but we managed. Diana Natalicio became VPAA in the fall of 1984, so Jack worked under her; before that she was Dean of Liberal Arts, so she may have been involved in setting up the program under Liberal Arts auspices; she became dean around 1980.

There was another Honors Semester in the spring of 1994. The courses in these semesters were exclusively for students in the Honors Semester. I tried to argue for inclusion of some UTEP students in these sections, but policies of the National Collegiate Honors Council, which sponsored the semester, dictated otherwise. I taught a course in each Honors semester. Kathy Staudt taught in at least one of them. I also taught Honors sections of the required US history courses a couple of times.

Vicki Fisher (married to Walt Fisher, mentioned above), was the administrative assistant for the Honors program, at least during some of Gingerich's tenure and throughout mine; she stayed in that job until 1989, when she took a position as administrative secretary in the History Department.

As for honors thesis options in individual departments, my recollection is similar to Kathy's-- that few students took advantage of this option. I think I remember supervising one such thesis in the History Department in the early 1990s, but again it was an overload for faculty. It's important to remember that during the 1980s and 1990s there was increasing pressure for faculty to do research and publish--initial steps toward the eventual achievement of Tier 1 status.

OK, I think that's all I can remember for now.

Best,
Cheryl

Cheryl E. Martin
Professor Emerita of History
University of Texas at El Paso
El Paso, TX 79968-0532
E-mail: cmartin@utep.edu

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Appendix VII E-mails from Andrew Fleck and Michael Topp

E-mail from Andrew Fleck, June 9, 2020

As for the history of the formal LAHP and its relationship to (and possibly the basis for) the present UHP, I'm sorry to say I can't really contribute anything. The program was founded (or refounded?) by Dr. Michael Topp in 2012, I believe. A few years ago, Dr. Yolanda Leyva had the leadership role. I became the director in 2019. It appears that Willie has been in touch with Dr. Topp about that history. I'm not sure whether Dr. Leyva might have more information about the program - her specialty is Oral History, so she might have gathered some of the memories of those who have been involved.

Good luck with this! I'd love to see the final product -- and to update our website to reflect the history you all unearth.

Andy Fleck

E-mail from Michael Topp, June 9, 2020

Briefly, a liberal arts honors program, distinct from the university honors program and from an earlier liberal arts honors program, was founded in 2012 and is still in existence. I spoke with people involved in the original liberal arts honors program from the 1980s, and sought out their advice when I established the current LAHP. Otherwise there was no connection between the two entities.

Best, Michael

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Appendix VIII Honors at UTEP

by Dr. P. J. Vierra, Ph.D.

[Note: As of June 30, 2020, this is a prepublication manuscript subject to change.]

Backgrounder:

Honors at UTEP

Prepared by PJ Vierra, PhD

June 15, 2020

“Honors,” with the plural-s, originated as a unique academic term to recognize student achievement in the early nineteenth century. By the mid-twentieth century, the term had evolved into four distinct contexts: (1) honors list; (2) honors organization; (3) honors event; and (4) honors program.

Honors List

An *honors list* is a permanent record of exceptional student achievement that appears on the student’s transcript. According to Benjamin Hall’s *Collection of College Words and Customs* (1850), the first such recognition went to students selected as valedictorian and salutatorian speakers at the commencements of Harvard and Yale, which in turn were traditions dating back to the late eighteenth century. Over time, universities and colleges added several new lists, including honor rolls and commencement honors, such as cum laude (“with honor”) designations. UT Austin first awarded degrees with honors distinctions in 1925.

The first such honors list at UTEP appeared in the 1940 catalog as the Honor Roll. Maintained by the registrar, it was renamed Honor List in 1951 and Honors List in 1975. While the term “Dean’s List” was often used interchangeably with Honors List, the university would not formally adopt this term until its 1985 catalog.

Commencement honors, also known as Honors at Graduation, first appeared with the 1963 catalog. Honors, High Honors, and Highest Honors were replaced in the catalog with cum laude, magna cum laude, and summa cum laude respectively sometime after 1995.

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Honors Organization

An honors organization is a membership society that limits membership to students maintaining a specified academic standing, usually verified by the registrar or dean of students. The oldest recognized academic honors organization is Phi Beta Kappa Society, founded in 1776 at the College of William and Mary.

In the spring of 1937, the national honorary Spanish society, Sigma Delta Pi (National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society or La Sociedad Nacional Honoraria Hispánica, founded 1919 at UC Berkeley), became the first recognized honors organization at UTEP, then known as the College of Mines. It was followed in the fall of 1937 by Alpha Chi, a national scholastic fraternity for juniors and seniors, founded in 1922 at UT Austin.

Honors Event

An honors event is a convocation or other gathering convened to recognize student achievement. The first honors convocation took place at the University of Michigan in 1921. Texas Western College, under President Wilson H. Elkins, held their first honors convocation in 1953. Elkin's convocations remained an annual event through the 1960s, when they ceased following the resignation of Joseph Ray as president. During this interregnum period, the student government carried on the tradition with annual banquets. Formal honors convocations resumed in 1981 under the presidency of Haskell Monroe.

Honors Program

An honors program is a course of study that promotes exceptional undergraduate scholarship. The history of the honors program movement in the United States can be broken into three phases: (1) Beginnings, 1920-1940; (2) World War II, 1941-1956; and (2) Sputnik, 1957-present.

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Beginnings, 1920-1940

In the 1920s Frank Aydelotte, president of Swarthmore College, advocated for the adoption of an honors system for American universities and colleges comparable to those used by Oxford and Cambridge. Exceptional students, he argued, should be encouraged to take rigorous courses that led to a distinction superior to the honors lists in use at the time (Aydelotte 1925). The honors program movement sought to create a distinction between honors courses and honors lists, which members of the movement felt relied too heavily on “ordinary courses.” This included either on additional special work, such as a senior thesis, or the creation of special courses that superseded the regular curriculum. (Kellogg 1925, 3-4).

The University of Michigan developed what was considered an early model program for public universities in 1939, and which it revised in 1957 with funding from the Carnegie Foundation of New York. Under the University of Michigan model, honors work sought to “encourage maximum endeavor, and to develop initiative, independence, originality, and self-reliance” (Marsh 1940).

World War II, 1941-1956

In early January 1942, less than a month following the entry of the United States into World War II, Dossie Wiggins, president of the College of Mines, traveled to Baltimore to attend a special conference for higher education leaders. Of the nearly 1,000 colleges and universities represented, over 700 of them, including the College of Mines, implemented accelerated programs (Marsh 1943, 1-2). UTEP’s program reduced the degree completion time from four years to two and one-half years by expanding the summer term into the equivalent of a long semester.

Though open to all students, accelerated programs proved popular with gifted and talented students. Harvard University took this interest one step further, creating a new honors

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program that allowed students studying engineering to go from freshman to master's degree in less than four years (Harvard 1942, 8).

Studies conducted after the war on the accelerated programs concluded that they were a natural fit for honors programs (Pressey 1948, 102). Faculties, however, were less than enthused with the new academic calendar. Participating universities overwhelmingly returned to a two long semesters calendar, including UTEP, in 1945. Harvard and other select universities, however, retained the accelerated fast-track honors programs, primarily within their colleges of engineering.

Sputnik, 1957-present

The launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957 spurred added public university interest in honors programs, as well as the increased federal funding for them that followed. These new programs followed one of two paths, the first being the traditional Swarthmore honors programs, with its focus on rigorous courses. The second path followed the accelerated engineering honors program introduced by Harvard University during World War II.

In 1962, Harry H. Ransom, chancellor of the University of Texas, as the UT System was then known, proposed the first honors program for Texas Western College, which subsequently became part of UTEP's first strategic plan, Mission '73. The School of Engineering launched UTEP's first honors program in 1966, which consisted of a dedicated core curriculum. That same year, the Department of History, part of the School of Arts and Sciences, introduced honors courses as part of UTEP's first departmental honors program. During the early 1970s, several more departments followed suit in creating their own honors programs, including Psychology, Chemistry, and Geology.

The 1981 fall semester saw the inauguration of the Liberal Arts Honors Program. Like the College of Engineering Honors Program, the College of Liberal Arts offered a structured

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more departments followed suit in creating their own honors programs, including Psychology, Chemistry, and Geology.

The 1981 fall semester saw the inauguration of the Liberal Arts Honors Program. Like the College of Engineering Honors Program, the College of Liberal Arts offered a structured curriculum consisting of twelve courses. In its first semester, the program accepted 151 students. The program was replaced in 1982 by the University Honors Program, which was open to all colleges. Located in Miners Hall, students in the University Honors Program received special distinction in their transcripts and on their diploma. The program offered other benefits, including access to an exclusive honors lounge and monthly forums.

The same year the University Honors Program launched, the College of Engineering revised its program, creating a new five-year fast-track freshman to master's degree that emulated much of the 1940 Harvard honors program model. Today, UTEP offers numerous fast-track degree programs, though they no longer refer to them as honors programs, despite their selective admissions.

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