The Undergraduate Council (UGC) has reviewed and thoroughly deliberated the following documents: the Schuman report, feedback from the General Education Council (GECo), response from the Capital Scholars Honors Program Committee and the response from your office. The UGC also met with the Director of the Capital Scholars Honors Program, Dr. Karen Kirkendall, to gather her perspectives about the Director position and the state of the Honors Program.

Dr. Schuman’s report addressed UIS’s lower division General Education offerings and the condition of the Capital Scholars Honors Program. The UGC notes that the Schuman report leans significantly towards the Honors Program and at first glance appears to be a critique of only that program. Upon closer examination though, it is clear that given Dr. Schuman’s background, he is more comfortable with providing a more detailed external perspective for the Honors Program than for the General Education offerings as a whole. The UGC judges that the following are areas of concern regarding the Capital Scholars Honors Program:

- **Administrative oversight of the Capital Scholars Honors Program**: The Honors Program is currently situated in the Provost’s Office. Previously the program was cost centered in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and was viewed by many as a CLAS-based initiative. This administrative transition from CLAS to the Provost’s Office should serve the program well by ensuring that the faculty at UIS view it as a campus-wide program. This could directly impact faculty participation in the Honors Program. The UGC agrees with Dr. Schuman in retaining the Honors Program in the Provost’s Office.

- **Director of the Capital Scholars Honors Program**: The UGC concurs with Dr. Schuman that the status of this position should be changed from an Academic Professional position (as is currently the case) to a faculty position with a term limit. The faculty member selected for this position should have an initial term of appointment followed by an option to renew. Working closely with the Provost’s Office, the Director can guide the program with the assistance of an Associate or an Assistant Director. The duties and responsibilities of the Director and Assistant/Associate Director should be clearly delineated so that the Director provides the vision and leadership for the Honors Program while the Assistant/Associate Director would manage daily tasks. The Provost’s Office should also develop an evaluation
process for the Director position which should include a formalized consultation with faculty who are teaching in the Honors Program at that time.

- **Number of students enrolled in the Capital Scholars Honors Program**: The number of students enrolled has fluctuated significantly over the existence of the program, from 78 to 137. The UGC acknowledges that the completion, graduation, and retention rates of these students are vital to UIS’s rankings in the prestigious *US News and World Report*. While this has been beneficial to UIS, the UGC is concerned about the demands these variable enrollments have put on the campus. A careful target number needs to be set and managed efficiently. This could serve to ensure a high standard for participating students and relieve some of the stresses associated with courses. Such a limit could possibly make the program more competitive and attractive to students and help with retention and completion rates by bringing in more highly qualified and academically engaged students. This limit could also help the non-honors population at UIS; housing and staffing concerns might benefit from a carefully selected target number for Honors.

- **The Capital Scholars Honors Curriculum**: The Honors Program curriculum is based on interdisciplinarity, which is in line with best practices. A majority of the core courses are also team-taught. While interdisciplinarity is certainly attractive to students, it could be limiting to faculty who are interested in teaching in the Honors Program. The Provost’s Office should carefully examine efficiencies associated with the team-teaching approach. This could mitigate some of the reticence shown by departments towards participating in the Honors curriculum. The Honors Program should follow university guidelines for curricular review and take a closer look at the order in which the core courses are offered. The current curricular structure does not encompass the full four years. It may be worth exploring a format where the curriculum is offered over a span of four years. This approach could provide the possibility of a second entry point for students in to the Honors Program.

- **Faculty participation in the Capital Scholars Honors curriculum**: According to the Director of the Honors Program, delivering the Honors curriculum has been problematic due to lack of campus-wide participation from faculty. This is a contentious point at various levels. It seems obvious that Honors Program courses would be very attractive to faculty given the high caliber of students in these courses. In reality, it is difficult to attract faculty to teach in the Honors Program. This could be attributed to factors such as the nature of the courses, scheduling, and departmental needs overshadowing participation in Honors teaching. Decisions regarding the curriculum and the number of students enrolled in the program will play important roles in tackling this problem.

While interdisciplinarity and team teaching have positive aspects, decisions about what elements of the curriculum should be interdisciplinary and offered through team teaching should be guided by program goals and objectives. The extent to which interdisciplinarity
and team teaching are used should be determined based on information obtained from the results of the assessment of student learning in the program.

Faculty and administrators have suggested that UIS should develop an incentive-based program to attract faculty to the program. While this approach may be attractive to individual faculty, it may prove to be a short-term solution. The other two approaches as suggested by Dr. Schuman involve either “grant the request to add (or, more controversially, convert) continuing lines for core honors faculty.” While controversial given the current fiscal climate, pursuing one of these options could help alleviate the lack of faculty participation, provide stability, and help move the Honors Program forward.

The Provost’s Office should develop a systematic approach to recruit faculty to teach in the Honor Program. The Provost’s Office should also explore means to include departmental participation in General Education and Honors into the current Instructional Resource Metrics.

The UGC concurs with the General Education Council’s recommendation regarding providing increased opportunities for Study Abroad. Dr. Schuman indicates that “50 hours of general education out of 120 total credit hours is within the normal range at contemporary American colleges and universities, but at the high end of that range.” The issue of the number of General Education hours students have to complete should be periodically re-evaluated.

The UGC commends the Provost’s Office for this external evaluation but recommends that future evaluations of the lower division be more balanced. The General Education curriculum and the Honors curriculum deserve equal emphasis.