

Best Practices for Honors Course Proposals

These are *suggestions* based on discussions taking place within the Honors Faculty Roundtable and Proposal Review group.

- When designing your proposal application, be sure to overtly mention the four elements of Honors, clearly mentioning how they will be present in your course activities
- Be mindful of workload: though we are asking students to do more complex, advanced academic work in Honors classes, do not simply opt to give them *more* work (an extra paper or extra research requirements). All the work should have a clear connection to the elements of Honors
- There are a variety of workable models for designing an Honors class—see the NCHC’s “Models of Honors Learning” covered in the Honors Foundational documents handout
- Consider experiential learning in your discipline: opportunities for site visits, hands-on projects; Also consider opportunities for professional exposure: conferences and undergraduate publications in your field where students might submit work can be built into the syllabus
- Allow student opportunities to engage with and present class materials & lead discussions on a regular basis
- Allow students to contribute to the design of assessment materials—class-designed rubrics, self-assessment writings, etc.
- Provide a clear framework for research in your discipline: how it is conducted, best sources & methods, evaluating sources in your discipline, how research is used
- Honors courses MUST meet the standard course outcomes & objectives as stipulated in the official course description; however, pedagogical approaches may differ, and Honors courses should feature greater depth & complexity of coverage
- When appropriate, mentor students in upper level academic skills, such as writing abstracts, creating annotated bibliographies, organizing & compiling research for extended projects, etc.
- Help students be aware of elements of time management and planning; do not assume they have already mastered such skills
- Proposal submissions:
 - Activities need not be fully developed assignment sheets, but should provide enough details to demonstrate how they incorporate some of the elements of Honors
 - Assessment example should describe your criteria for assessment of Honors level work and how you will assess a particular activity (rubric or other methodology)
 - Course objectives: refer specifically to incorporation of the 4 elements of Honors
 - Learning Outcomes: within and beyond the skills stipulated in the standard outcomes for the course, what specific outcomes do you expect for Honors students
 - Proposed textbook: may differ from departmental textbook, but should consult Honors program coordinator and Program Head ahead of time to allow for book order
 - Major Learning Activities: list of all main activities/types of activities that will comprise the grade in the course
 - Narrative: explaining how the Honors course builds on/enhances the standard course objectives & outcomes; how the content and pedagogy will differ from the standard course

Best Practices for Honors Contracts

These *suggestions* are based on discussion during the Faculty Roundtable by instructors who have designed and taught contract courses.

- Only Honors Program students can be offered contracts (occasional exceptions for course permission students in designated Honors classes that do not end up making enrollment numbers)
- Students seeking a contract must contact faculty to confirm contract BEFORE the end of the previous semester (no new contracts offered at the beginning of a semester)
- Be sure to go over contract requirements with student at least during the first week of classes, at time of signing the contract. (If you can give students a sense of the contract requirements earlier, that is often helpful!)
- Set a meeting schedule at the beginning of the semester with set dates & times; meeting more than every other week is NOT recommended
- Generally, 30 to 45 minutes appears to be a good time guideline for meetings
- Clearly discuss expectations for Honors grading: provide a rubric, or allow students to contribute to discussion of grading standards when possible
- If at all possible, allow for students to have some input in the content (i.e. choosing their own topics or sources when appropriate, designing mode of presentation or methods of assessment, etc.)
- If you have multiple contract students, arrange for group meeting times not individual meetings
- When possible consider *modifying* the assignments that the rest of the class is doing to include Honors elements (i.e. add requirements for a presentation or use of scholarly sources) instead of adding too many extra assignments
- A research project model should NOT simply be an additional paper: include mentoring at each stage of academic research process (review of literature, proposal, abstract writing, producing a poster or publishable paper, etc.)
- Plan for a mid-semester assessment of the Honors contract with students: are revisions needed in terms of content, assignment type/volume? What is working well? What, if anything, could be adjusted?
- For single students, the discussion-based model does not work as well with only one student to “discuss”—instead try a model that offers extended tutoring/mentoring opportunities (like an extended research project, more in-depth disciplinary content, experiential learning designs, etc.)
- For multiple students, a discussion-based model can work well (reading, responding to, and discussing a shared text or texts over the course of the semester)
- Be mindful of assignment volume: in general, Honors students can handle and seem to expect some extra readings & assignments, but we stress the idea that this is *different* work (i.e. more sophisticated) not just *MORE* work
- Consider making submission of the final project to a journal or conference a goal, with student selecting a venue and creating the required materials (abstract, proposal, etc.)