

WHAT IS AN HONORS COURSE?

Every Honors instructor is different, and every Honors course is different. Still, there do seem to be some characteristics that are common to many, if not most, Honors courses. An Honors course should be a learning experience distinguished from traditional coursework by *qualitatively* different academic expectations, impacting both the faculty member(s) and the students.

HONORS COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Help students develop effective written and oral communication skills
- Help students develop their ability to analyze and synthesize a broad range of material
- Help students understand how scholars think about problems, formulate hypotheses, research those problems, and draw conclusions about them; and help students understand how creative artists approach the creative process and produce an original work
- Help students become more independent and critical thinkers, demonstrating the ability to use logic and knowledge when discussing an issue or an idea

Honors courses are characterized by three elements broadly defined as: *structure, content, and process/responsibility*. Ideally, these elements will be combined with inspired instruction and a collection of superior students to create a dynamic, interactive environment.

STRUCTURE

Honors courses should be small enough (generally <20) to provide a richly interactive environment among the members of the class. The course enrollment should be composed of a majority of Honors students.

CONTENT

- Honors courses should provide students with a robust, engaging and enriching experience where students synthesize, apply, and evaluate material.
- Course should add complexity, not simply difficulty.
- Quality rather than quantity separates Honors from non-Honors. When designing an Honors course, it is important to remember that Honors courses are not meant to have more work for the sake of more work or harder work for the sake of harder work. The amount of work and its difficulty should serve a legitimate pedagogical purpose.
- Honors students should learn the scholarship behind the discipline's core.
- Contemporary primary sources, seminal papers, or discipline-related methods and examples should be introduced and emphasized.
- While the work requirements may involve some larger and harder assignments, the goal is to encourage students to extract intellectual value.

PROCESS/RESPONSIBILITY

- Honors courses should use an active and collaborative learning process with considerable exchange among students and the instructor(s).
- Assignments should stress theory, analysis and synthesis.
- Every Honors course should take advantage of the small numbers of students to use individualized examination techniques, such as open-ended examination questions, oral exams, and/or creative portfolios.
- Honors faculty should seek to include students in an intellectual community beyond the classroom.
- Honors faculty should disclose their pedagogy to Honors students.
- Honors students are expected to take a greater responsibility for the process of learning than in a traditional course. (e.g., actively participate and/or lead class discussion)
- Honors students and faculty should share a commitment to learning over simple consideration of grades.