Honors Course Guidelines

Honors College Mission and Student Expectations

The mission of the Hicks Honors College is “to foster the enlightenment, empowerment, and ennoblement of Honors students. It does so by facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values that will inspire students to be effective life-long learners and critical thinkers; by giving students confidence to venture forth into and participate actively in communities beyond those with which they are most immediately conversant and comfortable; and finally by encouraging students to serve or contribute to those communities in lasting and tangible ways by putting their knowledge, skill, and values to meaningful use.”

Students are expected to become active scholars and global citizens. Honors courses should, therefore, be constructed and facilitated with the goal of helping students achieve these skills and dispositions, and the ability to make connections across disciplines. They should be seen as enriched courses which develop and hone skills rather than courses with extra work. Honors courses may involve more extensive reading, deeper analysis, and/or greater research (see list below for more types of enrichment), but students should always know why they are being challenged—courses should not simply add work for work’s sake. Likewise, grading should be realistic. Honors students should not be penalized by a much more rigorous grading standard. Faculty can and should expect honors students to perform at a high level, but the grading scale should not be set so stringently that students who would get an A in a regular course get a B or C in an honors section. Grades are not weighted in the Honors College as they are in many high schools, and too high grading standards can result in good students losing scholarships and/or eligibility to stay in Honors.

Please consider offering an Honors course—honors students are usually highly engaged in their education and like to think critically and creatively, so the class experience is often exhilarating for faculty and students alike.

Distinguishing Features of Honors Courses

I. The following should be true of ALL honors courses:

- High degree of student participation and involvement—active learning
- Significant writing and research opportunities
- Significant oral communication—discussion, presentations, etc.
- Significant practice in critical thinking and thinking across disciplinary boundaries
- “Deep learning”—getting students to breakthrough received paradigms and construct new ones
- Encouragement of self-reflection—formative assessments as well as summative assessments (should be a number of assessments across a semester, not just a couple)
II. The following are often characteristics of Honors courses. Most classes should have at least several of these:

- Team-teaching with faculty from different disciplines
- Service-learning component
- Problem-based learning
- Innovative pedagogy and/or unique topic or approach (e.g., simulations like Reacting to the Past)
- Unique and valuable use of technology in the classroom/having students pilot use
- Opportunities for students to pursue topics/projects of individual interest
- Cooperative/collaborative learning/projects
- Involvement of students in leadership of course or development of course content or activities
- Connection of disciplines or topics in unique and distinctive ways
- Course or issues centered on unique themes
- Encouragement of participation in intellectual or cultural events/activities out of the classroom—connect to university initiatives
- Greater reliance on primary sources or original data
- Encouragement of creativity in fulfillment of assignments
- Expectation for students to do an oral defense of research in or outside of class
- Encouragement of students to present on or off campus, at local/regional honors conferences, or other relevant venues

**Developing a Proposal**

A course proposal should have the following:

1. An explanation of how the course meets the guidelines for all Honors Courses (from section I).
2. A listing of the characteristics from section II that will be integrated into the class, with some explanation about each one.
3. A proposed syllabus. If the course has been taught as a non-Honors course, then it would be helpful to have both a copy of the non-Honors syllabus and a copy of the syllabus for the proposed Honors version of the course which clearly shows the Honors characteristics.
4. If a course is being proposed for a general education course, the proposal should include the category and how it fulfills the learning outcomes of that category.