



Guideline for Honors Contracts in Existing Courses

Honors students may contract with a faculty member to earn Honors credit in courses that are offered as part of the regular curriculum. Such contracts are appropriate for both general education and upper-level courses. They present an opportunity and a challenge for instructors and students alike. The Honors component should ideally afford a perspective on the course that is qualitatively different from that offered by the standard requirements. The instructor and the student should work together to design a satisfactory Honors component; the Honors Committee offers the following guidelines to help with that task.

An Honors component may well involve more effort on the student's part than the standard requirement would do. But that effort should be the natural result of a *qualitative* difference in the assignment, not merely more of the same sort of work; instructors should keep in mind that the contract does not increase the student's credit hours. So that it does not punish, but rather challenges the student, whenever possible it is a good idea to let the honors component substitute for one of the regular course assignments instead of adding it on.

Appropriate Honors components may invite the student to look at course material from new perspectives, perhaps cross-disciplinary ones; to synthesize material, to form hypotheses and draw independent conclusions. They may send her out of the classroom and into the community; they may develop creative projects; they may invite her to share her discoveries with other members of the class. Both students and faculty members have most consistently praised honors contracts in which students have some say in structuring the project, ones that have clear relevance to course work or professional goals, and ones that have some tangible result – whether it be a presentation to the rest of the class or a portfolio to use after graduation.

The following framework may suggest some useful approaches to designing an Honors component. In addition, colleagues are welcome to look at descriptions of past projects on file in the office of the Honors director and to ask any member of the Honors Committee for feedback on a planned contract.

CONTENT:

- Seek variety – methods, ideas, and content areas not included in the regular curriculum
- Encourage students to examine principles, to challenge received wisdom, and to consider abstractions rather than just accumulate new data
- Have students use scholarly methods and professional practices beyond those normally used in the classroom

PROCESS:

- Offer some freedom of choice
- Encourage higher-order thinking: have students apply principles to new situations, use inductive reasoning, etc.
- Look for open-ended projects that invite further thinking and investigation

PRODUCT:

- Address problems with applications beyond the classroom or even beyond the campus
- Arrange for students to present the results to audiences beyond the instructor
- Solicit original ideas, not just summaries of newly acquired information
- Have the student's work evaluated by herself and her peers as well as by the instructor

(This chart was adapted from the Framework for Academically Gifted Children developed by North Carolina's Exceptional Children's Services)

Honors Contracts in Past Courses:

Descriptions of past Honors contracts are on file in the Honors Office, and students and faculty are welcome to consult them. Please, in addition, share your experiences by contributing to the file a brief description of projects you have done. Here are a few examples of projects that have offered students experiences beyond those they would have encountered in the regular syllabus:

- An Honors science lab asks students to formulate hypotheses before running experiments and to evaluate the hypotheses in the light of their results.
- A science student prepared a handout for other students on the principles and procedures of a new EKG machine; she then tested subjects and conducted research to explain anomalous results.
- Students in a course on twentieth-century history taught mini-units on selected topics ranging from Picasso's *Guernica* to the concerns of Russian women to the attitudes, values, and concerns addressed in songs by the Beatles. They prepared assignments and study questions, made brief presentations, and administered quizzes to their classmates.
- Students in an advanced writing course revised each of their assignments, most of which were practical rather than purely academic, and prepared a portfolio suitable for later use in seeking jobs.
- Students in a computer course tested and evaluated new computer software.

Administrative information:

1. Permission is entirely dependent on the student's interest and the professor's willingness to structure the honors component.
2. Registration should take place during pre-registration, in no case later than the end of Drop/Add. Be sure to designate Honors grading on the pre-registration card and/or Drop/Add form.
3. Notification: After the student and the instructor have agreed upon a strategy for adding an Honors component to a course, the student should complete the Contracting for Honors Form (available on the Honors website: <http://www.meredith.edu/honors/requirements.htm>, and reprinted below).
4. Grading: Honors credit will be granted only upon satisfactory completion of the Honors component. "Satisfactory" will normally be understood to mean an A or B, which will then be included in the course average. If the Honors component is not completed satisfactorily, the student receives normal course credit. The faculty member then chooses how to handle the grade on the extra project.
5. Reporting of grades: If the student correctly registered for the course as Honors by the end of drop/add, WebAdvisor will show a separate Honors section of the course on your grade report. Fill in the grades as usual. If, however, the student did not satisfactorily complete the Honors component of the course (but did complete all other requirements for course credit), notify the Registrar. The Registrar will reenter the student in the regular section of the course so that you may supply the grade.