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.)