



Guidelines for Honors Courses

The Honors program encourages submission of course proposals for team-taught sequences, stand-alone courses, and Honors Junior Seminars. Course proposals should be submitted to the director of the Meijer Honors College. They will be reviewed by the Honors Curriculum and Development Committee. If the committee has questions about the proposal, a representative will contact you and/or invite you to come to a committee meeting to discuss your proposal. Courses are scheduled based on the needs of the Honors College for the upcoming academic year. Ordinarily, courses will run first as a 280 or 380. Those approved to run regularly after that will need to be approved through the university curriculum process.

Meijer Honors College Mission and Student Expectations

The Mission of the Meijer Honors College is to inspire and empower motivated students to be intellectually-curious lifelong learners who contribute to a body of knowledge, and serve as capable leaders and active global citizens.

Students are expected to become “self-authors” (i.e., active scholars) and “global citizens” (aware of and concerned about the world around them). 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. Honors courses 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.

Distinguishing Features of Honors Courses

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

- Smaller sections (25 or less; seminars 16 or less), which create a more personal learning dynamic
- Greater degree of student participation and involvement—active learning
- More writing and research opportunities (most Honors courses fulfill SWS, so the approach and syllabus should demonstrate fulfillment of SWS guidelines)
- More oral communication—discussion, presentations, etc.
- Significant practice in critical thinking and thinking across disciplinary boundaries
- “Deep learning”—getting students to break through 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
- 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 (topics courses—especially in Junior Seminars)
- Encouragement of participation in intellectual or cultural events/activities out of the classroom—connect to university initiatives (Sustainability, Community Reading, etc.)
- 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 at Student Scholars Day or local/regional honors conferences, or other relevant venues
- Greater use of technology in the classroom (e.g., use of the LearnLab)
- Innovative pedagogy and/or unique topic or approach

Developing a Proposal

A course proposal should have the following:

- A. An explanation of how the course meets the guidelines for all Honors Courses (from section I).
- B. A listing of the characteristics from section II that will be integrated into the class, with some explanation about each one.
- C. 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.
- D. If a course is being proposed for an Honors Junior Seminar, it should be a topics-type seminar with no prerequisites (other than successful completion of Honors general education courses and junior standing), should be interdisciplinary, should allow students to make connections with their major, and should require a substantial scholarly and/or creative endeavor. All Junior Seminars fulfill both General Education Issues course requirements (collaboration, problem solving, and integration) and Supplemental Writing Skills. Once approved by the Honors Curriculum and Development Committee, proposals must be sent to the SWS committee for approval (see <http://www.gvsu.edu/sws> for information about how to fulfill SWS requirements and craft a syllabus/proposal). Junior seminars may also fulfill a culture requirement—either U.S. Diversity or World Perspectives. If you wish to have your course count in one of these categories, please specify how the General Education knowledge outcomes will be met.