



## Honors Program Student Guide – ASU-Beebe

Our mission in the Honors Program at Arkansas State University-Beebe is to provide a vibrant educational environment for innovative teaching and learning within an interdisciplinary curriculum sparked by creative, critical inquiry and respect for a multiplicity of thoughts, experiences, and identities. Educational environment is both stimulating and rewarding to teach.

### Why Enroll in an Honors Course?

Taking an honors course is required every semester for the Honors students receiving Honors scholarships. Ideally, Honors students start their first semester with ASU-Beebe in order to gain all the benefits ASU-Beebe has to offer. By the time of graduation, in order to be considered graduating with Honors, Honors students would have taken at least 4 honors courses during their two-year study at ASU-Beebe.

Honors courses are intended to be more complex, not necessarily more difficult. Faculty who teach Honors courses are highly encouraged to explore their own pedagogical boundaries. Honors students are challenged to think critically in and beyond the classroom. We believe the Honors Program serves as a nurturing ground for pedagogical innovation and exploration that transforms the quality of educational experiences across the university.

1. **Intellectual and creative challenges.** Taking honors courses provides great opportunity for students to “think outside the box”. Beyond their regular course works, honors students are challenged to explore outside of the routine academic demands. Honors students are enthusiastic and ready to explore new ideas and approaches that faculty may have considered, but have not had a chance to implement given practical restrictions of regular class size or academic comprehension level.
2. **Interactive classroom environment.** Smaller, semi seminar-style classes of motivated, well-prepared, and responsible classmates. It is gratifying to develop collaboration between faculty and fellow students to explore new ideas through fresh perspectives together.
3. **Quality, not quantity.** Attempting to meet the rigorous academic demands of honors course does not mean piling up more assignments. Rather, Honors courses should provide students different types of assignment, rather than more assignments. This may imply holding honors students to a higher standard for quality of critical thinking process (e.g. substituting more challenging problems, readings, projects or activities beyond those assigned to non-Honors classes).
4. **Faculty-student mentorship.** Honors students tend to seek out faculty for detailed feedback on their assignments and for more mentoring advice on their academic and career aspirations. Honors faculties are expected to provide timely, constructive and clear feedback on assignments as well as to be accessible to consult with students during office hours.

## Types of Honors Courses

For the most part, Honors classes are Honors sections of regular University courses. They meet the same general education, departmental, and University requirements that their specific non-Honors counterparts do. They occur in two forms:

- **“Free-Standing” Honors sections:** where all students are in the Honors College and enrollment is kept small. Honors students receiving Honors Scholarship are mandatory to take an Honors course per semester. Honors students who are members of Beta Omega Alpha (minimum of 3.50 GPA), a chapter of Phi Theta Kappa honors society are also eligible to enroll. Students with a minimum of 3.00 GPA might be eligible to enroll with the instructor’s discretion.
  - **Fall Rotation of Honors Courses:**
    - ENG 2003H World Literature I (Honors) 3 credits
    - ECON 2313H Principles of Macroeconomics (Honors) 3 credits
  - **Spring Rotation of Honors Courses**
    - POSC 2103H Intro to U.S. Government (Honors) 3 credits
    - BIOL 1014H Principles of Biology (Honors) 4 credits
- **“Add-On” Honors sections:** where students attend class with traditional students in a correlative section but also have the enrichment experiences associated with the instructor and a somewhat different pattern of assignments and expectations.
  - This option is only available for Honors Scholarship recipients to accommodate students to take Honors courses not included in the free-standing honors courses rotation.

## Honors Course Objectives

There is no unified model, pedagogy, or structure for Honors courses. Faculty members are aware of their own unique teaching style that mostly follows the traditional teacher-centered approach. However, the student-centered approach is highly encouraged as the instructors facilitate, coaches and assists students in their learning. This approach highlights student choice and facilitates connections among students.

According to the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), most Honors courses will mostly incorporate the following overarching objectives. These, in turn, may be expressed in different ways through the learning outcomes that we must use in our syllabi at ASU-Beebe. In your honors course design, you should consider how your outcomes will align not only with those suggested by the NCHC but also with our own ASU-Beebe Student Success Outcomes.

### Objectives (as suggested by the National Collegiate Honors Council)

Most Honors courses will have the following five objectives, or some variation:

1. To help students develop effective written communication skills (including the ability to make effective use of the information and ideas they learn);

2. To help students develop effective oral communication skills (while recognizing that not all students are comfortable talking a lot in class);
3. To help students develop their ability to analyze and synthesize a broad range of material;
4. To help students understand how scholars think about problems, formulate hypotheses, research those problems, and draw conclusions about them; and to help students understand how creative artists approach the creative process and produce an original work;
5. To help students become more independent and critical thinkers, demonstrating the ability to use knowledge and logic when discussing an issue or an idea, while considering the consequences of their ideas, for themselves, for others, and for society.

Let us consider each of these briefly.

### **#1 Developing written communication skills**

Discussion and writing are the hallmarks of Honors classes. Students become better writers (Objective 1) by using writing, both in class and out, as a means to express their ideas. Therefore, Honors courses should emphasize papers and essays, not multiple-choice exams, and emphasize ideas and active learning over information and lectures.

How Honors faculty choose to help students develop written communication skills will depend on the discipline and on the instructor's individual views about teaching and learning. Instructors can help students develop written skills through traditional writing assignments or through other methods such as journals, creative writing, reports, critiques, reviews, in-class writing, or the use of writing as a preliminary to discussion of issues. (In fact, the latter works extremely well to stimulate discussion. Students who have written something ahead of time are more willing to share their ideas and are less likely to talk off the top their heads in class.)

### **#2 Developing oral communication skills**

Students become better speakers (Objective 2) by participating in class discussion and, where appropriate, by leading class discussion. Therefore, Honors program courses should be discussion-oriented rather than lectures. Students benefit most from discussion when they are given the topic several days in advance and are asked to prepare their responses in writing ahead of time. The instructor might wish to provide some background to inform the discussion, which can then be used as a springboard to other ideas.

### **#3 & #4 Developing the ability to analyze, to synthesize, and to understand scholarly work**

Students develop the ability to think about a broad range of ideas (Objective 3) and come to understand how scholars and artists work (Objective 4) by reading and responding to primary source material, by exploring issues and problems in depth rather than quickly and superficially, and by being carefully exposed to and guided through the methods of many disciplines. Therefore, Honors courses should try to explore with students the questions and methods common to all intellectual endeavors and those that differentiate the disciplines, to give students real-world, hands-on problems to explore, and to help them understand the place of intellectual pursuit in the greater society.

The use of primary sources allows students to develop their own interpretations instead of relying on someone else's. Cross-disciplinary readings are especially valuable, in that they give students the opportunity to synthesize ideas. But primary sources are not necessarily limited to published texts or original documents. They can, for example, be the students' own experiences, the results of surveys or questionnaires, works of art or music, films, videos, and the like. What is important is that students have an opportunity to be engaged by primary material.

Exploring issues and problems in depth may mean that the course covers less material than conventional courses. In many courses, the amount of material covered is less important than the way the material is handled. Students need to learn to see the broad implications of each issue, as well as learning to analyze and synthesize the material. In this way, students will be able to apply what they have learned to other situations.

## **#5 Helping students become independent and critical thinkers**

Students become independent thinkers and critical thinkers (Objective 5) by working independently, yet under the guidance of responsive teachers. Therefore, an Honors course should give students a great deal of opportunity to think, write, and produce on their own (and in collaboration with their classmates) - as with papers and projects - and should give their work on-going feedback and encouragement. Honors courses should help students learn how to utilize their ideas in a broader social context - by helping them understand the origins, consequences, and principles underlying their ideas.

## **The Honors E-Portfolio**

All Honors Program students are required to submit, prior to graduation, an interdisciplinary portfolio. Separate guidelines to the Honors e-portfolio will be provided.

### **The Honors Program**

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