

Honors Contracts 101

Tips/Suggestions for Developing an Honors Contract

What is the purpose of an Honors Contract?

The purpose of an Honors Contract is to enable an Honors student to experience the educational enrichment that typifies Honors courses, and to explore topics in greater depth than is normally possible in a regular undergraduate course. An Honors Contract is possible when a student cannot enroll in an Honors section of a course or there is no Honors section for a course.

NOTE: If there is more than one Honors student enrolled in your course section, it is preferable to have an embedded Honors section rather than multiple Honors Contracts in the same class. Of note, Honors students can only utilize two Honors contracts (without a waiver), and Honors contracts generally require more work for both student and instructor, as well as Honors Advising staff. If the course has already been approved for an Honors section *and* you, as the instructor, are willing to host an embedded Honors section, an embedded Honors section would benefit all involved.

What is an Honors Contract?

In an Honors Contract, an Honors student and an instructor develop a contract that delineates what assessments, activities, and/or readings the student will have that differ from a regular section of a course.

Honors contracts allow Honors students to work individually with faculty members to create specialized Honors opportunities when traditionally approved Honors sections of discipline-specific courses are unavailable. Students simply enroll in a non-Honors course, then work out an agreement with the instructor to make additions or modifications to the course requirements. Honors contracts are usually limited to 3000- and 4000-level courses, but on a limited basis, under special circumstances, contracts can be written for a 1000- or 2000-level course.

What kind of work should be required for an Honors Contract?

There is sometimes a misconception that Honors Contract work should be “more” work, or simply the addition of more requirements onto what is already required in the non-Honors course. That is *not* the intent of an Honors Contract. Honors contract required work should be a deeper dive into standard course work, such as an existing assignment completed at a higher-level expectation or substituting an Honors project for a lower-level expectation. This guidance applies to any type of Honors course, whether an Honors (HON rubric) seminar, a stand-alone Honors section of a discipline-specific course, an embedded Honors section of a discipline-specific course, or an Honors Contract added to a non-Honors course.

An Honors course should be **different, not "more."**

- It should not include more work than a non-Honors course, as there is no additional credit awarded to the Honors student.
- An Honors course should not be designed to be "harder" than a non-Honors course.
- It should be designed to be more engaging and meet the intellectual curiosity of Honors students.

How can I “honorize” a student’s experience of a non-Honors course section through an Honors Contract?

- **Where do I start?** The first thing you want to think about is what you and the Honors student hope to get out of this “honorized” version of the course. Develop some learning objectives that address these goals.

Once you have some learning objectives for the student in the Honors Contract (that supplement the learning outcomes for the overall course), you can then think of the best way(s) to help the student meet those objectives.

- **What options do I have?** There are multiple approaches you can take. Typically, with an Honors Contract, it is easiest to “honorize” the experience through one (or more) of the following:
 - Assessments
 - Activities
 - Readings
 - One-on-one interactions between student and instructor

Work individually with the Honors student to develop and agree upon exactly HOW you will make additions or modifications to the course syllabus and requirements.

- This might be incorporating different assessments -- or one different assessment (e.g., having the student do a presentation or an oral exam instead of a written exam).
 - This could be incorporating a research aspect into the course (e.g., reading literature and/or writing a literature review).
 - This could include assigning more engaging or “deeper dive” readings than the course textbook provides and then incorporating those readings into an assessment.
 - This could also include having the student lead or be responsible for a learning activity (or an aspect of a learning activity) for the class (e.g., teaching a mini-lesson, facilitating an in-class activity, or taking the lead in a group project).
- **How do I help the student stay on track and maximize their “honorized” experience?** We recommend you meet with the student on a regular basis throughout the semester to make sure they understand what you have asked them to do and that they are making progress.

How do I grade an Honors Contract?

At the end of the contract period (semester or summer term), you will submit the grade of P (pass) or NP (no-pass) in iROAR for the HON 4000 section assigned to the contract. You will record the grade for the course under the non-Honors course in iRoar in the same manner as all other registered students.

Tell me more about the different options.

- **Assessments.** Honors courses often afford the opportunity to offer different types of assessments than are found in non-Honors courses. Instead of relying on multiple choice tests and exams (often found in large courses, especially in STEM), instructors are encouraged to **offer**

more authentic forms of assessment whenever possible. In an Honors Contract situation, you may be able to replace a non-Honors assignment with a more interesting, engaging assignment or project.

If it is not possible to eliminate any of the major assignments in the course, then you might be able to reduce the weight of the required assignments and add an Honors assignment or project.

Examples of more authentic forms of assessment include, but are not limited to:

- Essays
 - Interviews
 - Performance tasks
 - Exhibitions, demonstrations, and presentations
 - Portfolios
 - Journals
 - Literature Reviews
- **Activities.** Activities that **involve more active learning and reflection** can help Honors students explore and master material and concepts more deeply. You may be able to integrate some activities for the Honors student to undertake that would benefit all the students in the class (e.g., leading a class discussion, being a small group leader, teaching a mini lesson, developing and facilitating a learning activity for the class).
- **Readings.** Readings that **supplement or even replace a textbook** can provide Honors students with more engaging ways to explore a topic. There are many different types of sources that instructors can use as "readings" or supplemental readings. Some examples include:
- Scholarly journal articles
 - Book chapters
 - Books or eBooks
 - Online reports
 - Podcast episodes
 - TED Talks
 - Short videos
 - Primary sources
 - Open Educational Resources (OER)

What steps do I need to take to help a student get an Honors Contract approved?

1. An Honors student should first reach out to you to discuss the viability of an Honors Contract for your non-Honors course/section. The student is required to meet with you before they can submit an Honors Student Contract Proposal form.
2. As part of the Honors Contract process, you as the instructor must complete an Honors Contract Proposal form. After all your planning and discussion with the student, you will need to address the following on the form:
 - a. The work to be completed under the terms of the contract.
 - b. The learning objectives and expected outcomes of the contract.

- c. Why the terms of this contract justify the awarding of Honors credit. (You will need to describe specifically how this is an Honors experience above and beyond the requirements of the regular undergraduate course.)
3. Once a student submits the proposal form to the Honors College, you will be asked to review and submit the final proposal to the Honors College. (The student should email you to notify you when the contract proposal form has been submitted so you can be on the lookout for an email to review and submit the final proposal.)
4. The student will receive a decision email when the Honors Contract is approved. The student will be registered in the 0-credit hour Honors Contract course, HON 4000, by the Honors College Registration Coordinator, upon contract approval.