Course Contracting

Introduction

Honors course contracting is a means to help Honors students who have difficulty finding upper-division Honors courses within the parameters of their degree. Contracting allows an Honors student to receive Honors credit for a non-Honors course by completing work that is above and beyond what is normally required of students in the course. Honors contracting is one of five ways students may receive Honors credit outside upper-division Honors courses. The other methods are:

- Honors Courses,
- Honors Directed Independent Study,
- Honors Internship, and
- Honors Applied Experience.

Deadlines

For the Fall and Spring semesters, the deadline is two weeks from the first day of classes. For summer sessions, the deadline is the third class day. Time is measured from the first day of a semester’s/session’s classes, not from the first day the particular class meets. Contact applications are submitted to the director.

Requirements

- Honors contracts are available only to students who are participants in the University Honors Program and therefore have met all appropriate admissions criteria.
- Only 3000 and 4000-level courses that meet face to face are eligible to be contracted.
- Independent study or research hours may only be contracted in certain circumstances.
- Students may only contract courses taught by full time faculty. Rare exceptions may be made and are on case by case basis.
- A student may enter into no more than 4 honors contracts and no more than 2 each long semester.
- Contracts must define how the supplemental activities will meet the required outcomes of honors courses.
- Contracts must involve scheduled contact between students and faculty member in a significant mentoring relationship.
- The Honors Program provides the template of the contract and has final authority to approve contracts, determine Honors standards, and grant Honors credit.
- Outcomes must be assessable and generate products that will be kept on file in the Honors office. Send an electronic copy of the final product to the director by the last day of the semester/session.
- The student will create and present a brief overview of their research/findings/experience at the semesterly Honors Symposium. The sponsoring faculty member is strongly encouraged to attend in order to determine if the student fully grasped the material and is able to communicate it to others. Details will be provided by the Director.

To the Honors Student

You have the responsibility of initiating the Honors contract option by expressing your interest to the
director, making an application to a professor, and developing a course of study for the contract. Your goals will be:

- To learn the course material at a more sophisticated level;
- To explore innovative and nontraditional approaches in the field of study;
- To establish a professional relationship with a tenure-track or tenured faculty member; and
- To develop a professional interest leading to your senior Project of Excellence.

Once you and your professor sign the contract, you are expected to honor this agreement. Failure to accomplish the contract obligations does not affect your status in the regularly scheduled course or the grade earned in the course. If you find it necessary to rescind your contract, you must notify and explain to the professor and the Director your reasons in writing.

**To the Professor**

Contracts bring additional responsibilities to the instructor. Although it is very much appreciated, no member of the faculty is ever obligated to enter into an Honors contract. If you agree to direct a contract, you are expected to honor this agreement. You have a right, and perhaps an obligation, to limit the number of contracts to which you agree. Limitations on the number undertaken will enable you to serve each student in the best possible way. If the student fails to meet his or her agreed-upon obligations or does not perform at the appropriate academic level, you may rescind the contract at any time after informing the students and the Honors director in writing.

Honors contracts share some of the characteristics of guided independent study, except that contract elements should relate closely to the subject matter, concepts, and methods of the course in which they are undertaken. After the beginning of the term, reasonable modifications in the contracts can be made by mutual agreement of the student and the instructor. Modifications need to be communicated to the director, preferably via email.

Contract elements may include:

- Additional readings chosen to enhance and deepen the student's understanding of regular course material;
- Guided research involving specialized library resources, field projects, or laboratory work resulting in a substantial end product for the student;
- Additional written work designed to encourage the development of critical skills and independent thinking. This work will be kept on file in the Honors Program office.

**Contracting Guidelines**

Those faculty wishing to offer Honors-by-contract must be sure that the following elements are taken into account when writing a contract.

1. What distinguishes Honors work from that done in regular coursework is enrichment. The student attempting Honors credit should gain a more profound appreciation of the subject, greater breadth and depth of knowledge, than is typical in the regular classroom. Honors contracts should not simply mark course acceleration; neither should they require only more of the same kind of work for the student.

2. An important component of enrichment is critical thinking. The students’ learning outcomes should demonstrate that they have had to analyze a problem and synthesize a conclusion. It is also expected that there be some quantifiable learning outcomes as a result of the Honors
experience, and that those outcomes will be as varied as the students themselves and reflect their personal interests.

3. The most important way of fostering enrichment is the mentor relationship between the students and the faculty member. Mentors contribute to the spirit of inquiry into a given subject, idea, or philosophy and promote extensive student contributions to class sections.

4. Student enrichment is made possible by sharing this learning outcome with others through oral presentation and written publication. This presentation / publication will take place at an Honors symposium held near the end of the semester. Honors symposia help students develop a sense of community with other Honors students and create a conference-like setting wherein research and new knowledge is shared with a wider circle of scholars.

5. Honors students should be clear regarding what they must accomplish in order to earn Honors credit and how they will be evaluated in relation to the other students in the class. This information should be in writing and should be signed by both the mentor and the student as part of the contract.

6. The faculty member should provide mid-semester and end-of-semester evaluation of the student’s progress in completing components of the Honors contract. The Director will solicit feedback mid-semester from both the professor and student to see how the contract is progressing. It is expected that the student and professor will be proactive in addressing any issues related to the completion of the project.

### Contract Grade

The student must fulfill all regular course assignments as well as complete the Honors elements specified in the contract. The grade will be based on both these regular course assignments and the honors assignments according to a grading formula the professor specifies. Thus, the contract is for Honors designation in the course and in no way relieves you of regular course responsibilities. Note that a final grade of ‘B’ or better is required for the course to count for honors credit.

It is recommended that the student be required to obtain a certain grade on the Honors assignment(s) in order to obtain Honors credit. If the student meets or exceeds that grade, the student gets Honors credit. Using this method, a different grading scale for the student would not be required.

Upon completion of the contract and general course requirements, the professor will submit the student’s grade as an XH, where X represents the grade the student received in the course. The H will ensure that the student receives Honors credit on their transcript for the course.

### The Honors Contract

The contract will detail what activities, research, assignments, or extra-curricular activities the student must fulfill in order to earn Honors credit for the course. Of special importance will be:

- Enriching assignments that advance critical / analytic skills and involve a research component that results in a final written product;
- Final oral presentation and publication of results;
- A clearly-defined mentor relationship including specific times / occasions for conferences throughout the semester; and
- Assessable outcomes.

Please note that a copy of the course syllabus must accompany the contract for Honors Council review.

The student must complete all assignments as detailed in the course information sheet, attend class in
a responsible way, and participate in class discussions so that he or she is a role model for others enrolled in that section.

**Role of the Honors Council**

Once the contract is received by the Director, a copy will be forwarded to the Headmaster and Honors Council Curriculum Committee for review. The proposal will be reviewed to ensure consistent quality and rigor among all Honors contracts and classes. Approval is not automatic or immediate and may take up to two weeks. Once the contract application is reviewed, the student and professor will be notified of its standing. It is possible that the Honors Council will request that the proposal be revised and resubmitted.

**Source URL:** http://honors.tamucc.edu/students/contracting#comment-0

**Links**