



Faculty Guide to Creating and Teaching Honors Courses

Why Teach an Honors Class?

It is the mission of the Texas Tech University Honors College to provide a vibrant educational environment for the intellectually curious and scholastically capable student. It is also our mandate to serve as a catalyst for innovative growth and change in the University community. As such, we provide an educational environment in which it is both stimulating and rewarding to teach. Students in the Honors College typically have better academic abilities and higher motivation than the average student. In addition to these qualities, the Honors College also attempts to select those students who seek a challenging and broad-based education. In order to deliver an enhanced learning experience to superior students, faculty who teach Honors classes are actively encouraged to explore their own pedagogical boundaries. We are looking for professors who marry excellence in teaching with research, and who will offer ingenious and original approaches to teaching. We, in turn, provide the teacher with a classroom full of students eager to learn.

What Kinds of Classes do Honors Students Need?

Honors students are required to take twenty-four hours of Honors credit in order to graduate in Honors Studies. Of these, at least twelve hours must be upper division courses, and six of those hours are special Honors seminars. The Honors College offers courses that fulfill both core curriculum and major and minor requirements. We are always seeking new courses, but we especially encourage faculty members to develop upper-division courses in their departmental curriculum. We also provide a wide range of seminars, and welcome new seminars in order to meet the very diverse interests of our students. The seminar courses are reading- and writing-intensive, and are typically an interdisciplinary approach to learning. We believe our seminars give faculty members a perfect environment in which to explore innovative curricula.

How Do I Create an Honors Class?

1. Consult with your chairperson to discuss departmental needs for the course.
2. Contact Honors College Associate Dean, Dr. Aliza Wong, to propose your course. aliza.wong@ttu.edu
3. Send Dr. Wong a copy of the proposed class syllabus and a brief narrative of how your section of the course will differ from a non-Honors section of the same course if a non-Honors section exists. aliza.wong@ttu.edu

Characteristics of Honors Courses

LIMITED CLASS SIZE

Honors classes are smaller than their non-Honors counterparts; Honors classes are generally limited to 25-30 students.

RESTRICTED ENROLLMENT

All Honors students have successfully completed the Honors College application process, which includes a series of essays, letters of reference, and a transcript evaluation. Honors classes are available to Honors students first, but after they have enrolled, the courses are then open to all current TTU students with a 3.0 cumulative GPA or higher.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Honors classes often involve much more student-faculty interaction than a typical non-honors class. While the format of the class is left to the discretion of the instructor, student participation is generally greater in an Honors classroom. Students are encouraged to “discover” knowledge through discussion, critical reading, writing, laboratory experience, and research. The model, especially in the Honors seminars, can be similar to a graduate seminar format. But while Honors students have generally superior scholastic abilities, the instructor should not require them to perform at graduate levels.

ENRICHMENT

Honors classes should not involve substantial extra work when compared with a non-Honors class. The emphasis in Honors classes should be on exploring the subject matter a little more thoroughly. *The goal of an Honors education is greater breadth and more enrichment.*

GRADING

Honors students should be graded on mastery of the subject and should be held to the same standards as students in other classes, not graded on a curve. That is to say, students should not receive a lower letter grade in an Honors class than they would for the same work in a regular class. Since Honors students receive no extra credit on their GPA for Honors courses, doing so would make taking an Honors class a punitive experience rather than an enriching one.

COMMUNICATION

Oral and written expression are major components of the Honors experience. This may take the form of lively class discussions, journals, papers, laboratory reports, and a variety of other techniques.

INVOLVEMENT

The small class format permits professors to get to know the students better and to interact with them more closely. Honors students often have a closer relationship with their Honors instructors than with other professors, and they look to them as role models and mentors. Honors faculty often find themselves being asked to serve in supervising independent research or in the Undergraduate Research Fellows Program, in which selected students are paid for their research with a faculty member. The small class size also allows for unusual class instruction, like field trips and student projects.

INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK

The Honors College embraces the concept of the broadly educated student. As such, we encourage our instructors to draw from a wide range of disciplines while presenting material within the professor’s own area of competency. We believe the Honors College is an important vehicle on campus for launching courses that cross disciplinary lines for the purpose of giving students a fully integrated perspective on human knowledge.

Examples of Recent Seminar Classes

The American Experience in Vietnam
Children, Society, and the Law
Geography and the Age of Exploration
Paris: A Biography of a City
Political Campaign Communications
The Renaissance: Crucible of Modernity
Rural Health and Health Policy
Science and Society: A Study of
Contemporary Genetics
Science Fiction as Literature
Sociology of China and Japan
Understanding Music: From Bach to Rock
Perspectives on the Present

Examples of Recent Core Curriculum Classes

Physical Anthropology
Art History Survey I & II
Biology I & II
Principles of Chemistry I & II
Public Speaking
Fundamentals of Computer Science
Computing and Information Technology
Principles of Economics
Fiction
History of the United States I & II
Introduction to Humanities I & II
Calculus I, II & III
Principles of Physics I & II
American Government, Organization
General Psychology
Introduction to Theatre