

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE
FACULTY SENATE

Senate Document Number 3019S

Date of Senate Approval 04/04/19

Statement of Faculty Senate Action:

APC Document 23 (Honors): Introduction of Honors Contracts as a Means of Granting Honors Credit; Elimination of Honors Sections LANG 120

Effective Date: Fall 2019

1. Delete: On page 173, the first paragraph on the page:

Honors courses are open to students formally admitted to the University Honors Program. Designed for talented and motivated students, the Honors curriculum complements both the Liberal Arts Core and the student's major curriculum. Honors sections of many LAC courses such as LANG 120, Humanities and ARTS 310 are regularly offered, and these courses count toward program requirements.

Add: On page 173, in place of the deleted paragraph:

Honors courses are open to students formally admitted to the University Honors Program. Designed for talented and motivated students, Honors credit is available in designated courses throughout the curriculum, and the required Honors Special Topics courses offer opportunities for interdisciplinary scholarship.

2. Add: On page 173, following the paragraph headed "Regular enrollment in Honors courses," with the heading at the "section" level (equivalent to, for example, "Good standing"):

Obtaining Honors credit via Honors contracts

Students may earn Honors credit in course sections not designated as Honors by fulfilling the expectations of an Honors contract. The student will work with the instructor to develop a contract stipulating the additional work the student must complete, above and beyond ordinary course expectations, in order to earn Honors credit. The contract must then be approved by the Honors Director and faculty members of the Honors Program Advisory Committee. The course instructor and Honors Director together will determine whether the student has successfully completed the stipulated work by the semester's end.

Students can receive Honors credit via contract for no more than two courses during their studies at the university. No more than 8 hours of Honors credit earned via contracts can be applied toward the 21 hours required to graduate with Distinction as a University Scholar. Honors students cannot earn credit for Honors Special Topics courses via contracts.

Impact Statement: These changes will likely have a number of impacts, grouped below as to whether they are generally positive or potentially negative. Measures mitigating potentially negative impacts are discussed below as well.

Generally positive impacts:

- 1. Ease of staffing in LANG 120.** The fact that Honors sections of LANG 120 have lower enrollment caps than their non-Honors counterparts has made staffing these programs more difficult and increased the workload of the First-Year Writing Coordinator and the Honors Program Director. Eliminating Honors sections of these courses will ease this staffing difficulty.
- 2. Greater equity and accessibility in the Honors Program.** Historically, students in some majors requiring above-average numbers of credit hours (e.g., Art, Management & Accountancy, and Mechatronics) are underrepresented in the Honors Program, owing to the relatively high amount of time these students must commit to fulfilling their major requirements. The opportunity to earn Honors credit for some major courses will make the Honors Program a more realistic option for students in these majors, improving the disciplinary diversity of the Honors Program through greater retention of students in these majors. Moreover, Honors transfer students (of whom there are increasingly many) in any discipline, who often face similar demands on their time as they focus on completing major coursework, will also benefit from the curricular flexibility the contract program will provide.
- 3. Deeper student engagement in disciplinary courses.** The work students do in fulfilling Honors contracts in disciplinary courses will necessarily require them to engage the content and concepts in these courses more deeply than they would otherwise. Moreover, some of the activities students might be expected to do to earn contracted Honors credit (e.g., leading class discussion or designing interactive class activities) will deepen their peers' engagement as well.
- 4. Benefits of improved diversity of ability in the classroom.** While careful and controlled comparisons of higher-ability sections and mixed-ability sections of courses at the university level are hard to come by, scholarship of teaching and learning on K-12 classrooms clearly suggests that placing students in mixed-ability classes typically benefits lower-ability students without detriment to higher-ability students. Therefore, we should expect that the presence of Honors students in non-Honors classes should benefit non-Honors students without negatively impacting the learning of their peers in Honors.

Potentially negative impacts:

- 1. Increased faculty workload.** Although the effect this program will have on faculty workload is unclear as yet, managing the crafting and completion of Honors contracts will, perforce, lead to extra work for some instructors. However, a number of steps are being taken to mitigate this potential impact:
 - a. The student proposing an Honors contract (and *not* the instructor for the course) is expected to do the bulk of the work of crafting the contract. The instructor is expected to advise the student as needed, but the work of both crafting the contract and seeing that its expectations are met falls upon the student. The Honors contract program is, by design, student-centered. It should be noted that the "checks and balances" provided by the review by the Honors Director and the Honors Program Advisory Committee will ensure the quality of students' proposed work.
 - b. Once a contract proposal is submitted by a student, the Honors Director and the members of the Honors Program Advisory Committee (and *not* the instructor for the course) do the work of reviewing and approving Honors designation for the proposal. Moreover, each of the four members of the Honors Program Advisory Committee will read only roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ of the contracts proposed in a given term.
 - c. Permitting Honors contracts in a given section is the prerogative of the instructor. That is, no faculty member will be compelled to permit students to propose Honors contracts in any given section of any given course. Furthermore, the Honors Director will impose an upper limit (tentatively set at five) on the number of Honors contracts an instructor may permit in any single course section.

- 2. Increased workload for the Honors Director.** The Honors Director will now be required to manage the implementation of the contract program. However, the majority of this work is to be done in the first two or three weeks of the semester, and the establishment of formal procedures for performing this work (e.g., developing digital platforms for submission, review, approval, and archiving of proposed contracts) will make the work manageable.
- 3. Increased workload for the Registrar's Office.** The Honor Director will endeavor to make the formal granting of Honors credit as easy as possible. All requests for granting of Honors credit will be made as simultaneously as possible, accounting for different deadlines for graduating seniors.

In the balance, it is the opinion of the current Honors Director that the positive impacts of the proposed contract system outweigh the potentially negative ones.

Notes on implementation and assessment: with the permission of the Registrar and Associate Registrar, the Honors Director will be implementing the contract program on a pilot basis in Spring 2019. The results of that pilot program will further inform the precise design and delivery of the program in Fall 2019 and beyond. The Director has also consulted with a representative from Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning to design an assessment regime for the contract program.

Both the instructions to be used by students proposing Honors contracts in Spring 2019 and a FAQ sheet to assist them in crafting their proposals are attached as appendices to this document.

Rationale: Many of the reasons for the proposed program are addressed in the impact statement above, including

1. improving ease of staffing in LANG 120,
2. increasing curricular flexibility, thereby
3. permitting greater equity and access to Honors courses,
4. deepening student engagement in non-Honors courses, and
5. increasing ability diversity in the classroom (see "Generally positive impacts (4)," above).

Additionally, it is worth noting that Honors contracts have been offered on an informal basis for several semesters now. Unfortunately, the informality of the process to date has led to inequity, as not all students are equally aware of the opportunity to earn credit in this manner. It has also led to inconsistency of expectations, for to date there have been no formal principles guiding students' and instructors' crafting of Honors contracts. Finally, it has led to a great deal of work on the part of the Honors Director and the Associate Registrar, who have both frequently had to search through their emails to find the ad hoc correspondences between instructor, student, director, and registrar that govern the granting of Honors credit in a particular case. *Therefore, the formalization of Honors contracts is meant to address this inequity, inconsistency, and burdensome workload.*

Appendix 1: Guidelines for Crafting a Contract for Honors Credit in a Non-Honors Course Section

Guidelines for Crafting a Contract for Honors Credit in a Non-Honors Course Section

This document guides students and instructors in developing a contract for receipt of Honors credit in a UNC Asheville course that is not designated as an Honors course. Applicants for credit by contract must follow all of the instructions below carefully; incomplete or improperly crafted contracts will not be considered. All contracts will be reviewed by the course instructor, the Honors Program Director, and at

least one faculty member of the Honors Program Advisory Committee, who will together decide upon approval.

Honors contract proposals must be submitted to the **course instructor** no later than the end of the first week of class and to the **Honors Program Director** no later than the end of the second week of class in order to be reviewed. Notice of approval will be given no later than the end of the third week of class.

- While the student is expected to consult with the instructor of the course in designing a contract, it is the responsibility of the student to craft the contract itself.
- The Honors Program Director and other reviewers will either (a) accept the proposal as is, (b) accept the proposal with amendments, or (c) reject the proposal outright.
- Credit for completing the course (with any letter grade) and Honors credit are independent of one another. That is, a student may earn full credit for completing course requirements without successfully fulfilling the Honors contract. However, the student must pass the course with a grade of B or better in order to earn Honors credit, even if all requirements of the contract are met.
- In order to ensure a reasonable workload for faculty, instructors may enter into **at most five (5)** Honors contracts per course section.

Questions about the instructions below or any other aspect of the Honors contract process can be directed to the Honors Program Director, Patrick Bahls (pbahls@unca.edu).

To the student crafting this contract: please submit honors contracts completed as indicated below to your course instructor, who will then forward it to the Honors Program Director.

Student and Course Information. The student completing the Honors contract must provide the following information:

- Student's name
- Student's ID number
- Student's email
- Student's Honors membership: are you currently a member of the Honors Program? (**Note:** non-Honors students may elect to contract for Honors credit, to be granted retroactively should the student later join the Honors Program.)
- Student's class standing (*e.g.*, first-year, sophomore, *etc.*)
- Course prefix and number
- Course name
- Term in which the course is offered (*e.g.*, "Fall 2018")
- Instructor's name
- Instructor's email and campus phone number

Proposed Work. The student completing the contract must write a brief (200-400 words) narrative description of the work to be completed in order that they earn Honors credit.

Note. The proposed work must supplement and complement the work already required for the course. The work must not simply be "more"; rather, it must be meaningfully integrated with the course content and learning goals and the work the course already requires. Ideally, the proposed work should involve active, student-guided, experiential learning.

As noted, the narrative should make clear how the contracted work meaningfully builds upon required work. Please see the final section of this document for examples of potential work.

Timeline and Structure. The student completing the contract must give a brief timeline of the work, indicating how it will be structured throughout the semester. This timeline should also indicate how the work will be responded to and assessed by the instructor, providing at least two midterm "milestones" at which the student and instructor will meet to discuss the student's progress toward completing contracted work.

End-of-Term Reflection. In order to receive Honors credit via contract, the student must complete an end-of-term reflection on the work they have performed for Honors credit. This reflection must provide more than a summary of the student's work; in particular, it must include a "metacognitive" component, in which the student explains how the contracted work helped them to gain a better understanding of the content the course treats. *The end-of-term reflection is due to the course instructor and the Honors Program Director no later than the last day of class.*

Granting of Honors credit. The student will be notified whether Honors credit is to be granted no later than the date on which final grades are due in a given semester. Please note that students may successfully complete no more than two Honors contracts. In particular, no more than 8 hours of contracted Honors credit can be applied toward the 21 hours required to graduate with Distinction as a University Scholar, and no more than 4 hours of contracted Honors credit can be applied toward the 12 hours required to graduate with Recognition as an Honors Scholar.

Examples of potential Honors contact projects. The examples of Honors contract projects given below are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Honors credit may be granted for any sort of work deemed appropriate by the course's instructor and other reviewers of the contract, including any combination of the work suggested below.

- *Scholarship or creative work (as appropriate).* A student might be asked to perform research about some aspect of the course, above and beyond the expectations of other students. In some courses, it might be appropriate to ask students to complete some sort of creative project not expected of others. As noted above, these projects should not simply be "more"; they should reinforce the learning goals of the course and enrich the experience of the student doing this work.
- *Community engagement (as appropriate).* If the course is one with a natural connection to the community, it might be appropriate to ask the student to engage with the community in some way that helps the student to achieve the course's learning goals. Community-directed service and scholarship offer experiential opportunities that are frequently worthy of bestowing honors credit.
- *Other experiential learning.* Other experiential opportunities may present themselves, depending on the instructor's and student's plans for the semester: internships and other work experiences, travel (even if not organized as formal study abroad or study away); presentation at conferences, symposia, *etc.*, and similar practices can meaningfully enrich the student's learning.
- *Student leadership in and outside of class.* In order to earn honors credit, a student might be called upon to plan and lead (to a greater extent than expected of other students) in-class, extracurricular, or co-curricular activities related to the course and its content.

Appendix 2: Honors Contract FAQs

Honors Contract FAQs

Some of the most common questions about the Honors contract process are given below, along with brief answers. If you have a question not included below, or if you require a fuller answer to any question that is included, please contact the Honors Program Director, Patrick Bahls, at pbahls@unca.edu.

- **Do I have to be in the Honors Program to sign onto an Honors contract?**
No. If you are not currently in the Honors Program, you may sign onto an Honors contract. In this case, if you successfully complete an approved contract's requirements, you will receive Honors credit retroactively if you later join the Honors Program. (Please see the Honors website, honors.unca.edu, for more information about the criteria for Honors Program membership.)

- Can I sign onto an Honors contract in any course?**
 You must get the permission of the course’s instructor in order to sign onto a contract. Instructors are **NOT REQUIRED** to permit Honors contracts and the Honors Program permits them to enter into **at most five (5)** Honors contracts per course section.
- Who is responsible for designing an Honors contract?**
 The student is expected to consult with the course’s instructor in designing the work to be included in a contract. However, it is the responsibility of the student to write the contract itself.
- What kind of work can be required in an Honors contract?**
 Honors contract work must supplement and complement the work already required for the course. The work must not simply be “more”; rather, it must be meaningfully integrated with the course content and learning goals and the work the course already requires. Ideally, this work should encourage active, student-guided, experiential learning. See the Honors contract guidelines provided on the Honors website for examples of potential Honors contract projects.
- The contract instructions ask me to identify “milestones” for my project, where I meet with my instructor. What do those meetings entail?**
 These “milestones” are meant as opportunities to meet with your instructor and ensure that you are making progress on your contracted work. You and your instructor should set clear expectations for those meetings ahead of time, and it is *your* responsibility (and *not* your instructor’s!) to be sure that you come to those meetings prepared and having completed all work expected of you by that time.
- Who decides whether a proposed contract is approved?**
 Once a contract is written, it will be reviewed by the course’s instructor, the Honors Program Director, and at least one faculty member of the Honors Program Advisory Committee. These reviewers will decide on the approval of the contract by consensus. Completed contracts must be submitted no later than the end of the second week of classes in a given semester.
- Who decides whether I’ve successfully completed the requirements of an Honors contract?**
 The course’s instructor and the Honors Program Director will determine whether the student has successfully completed the contract’s requirements.
- Can I pass the class I’ve got an Honors contract for without getting Honors credit?**
 Yes. The student may complete the course with any grade (including an A) without receiving Honors credit, if the requirements of the contract are not met.
- Can I get Honors credit without passing the class?**
 No. The student must complete the course with a grade of B or better in order to receive Honors credit, whether or not they have completed all requirements of the Honors contract.
- I have a friend who wants to do an Honors contract in the same class as me. Can we design one contract for both of us?**
 Not exactly. Multiple students may contract to do collaborative work for Honors credit, but every student must sign onto their own individual contract. The course’s instructor, if willing to consider Honors contracts, will then help the students to design a collaborative experience.
- Is there a limit to the amount of Honors credit I can get by contract?**
 Yes. Students may successfully complete no more than two Honors contracts. At most 8 Honors credit hours may count toward the 21 hours required for graduation with Distinction as a University Scholar, and at most 4 Honors credit hours may count toward the 12 hours required for graduation with Recognition as an Honors Scholar.