

K-State Honors Program Task Force Report

Summary

K-State currently has as strong college-based honors programs as are possible, given the absence of financial resources. The goal of the task force has been to draw on the programs' current strengths to create an even better university-wide program. The task force believes that a university-wide program administered through the Provost's office will lead to a range of positive outcomes.

A university-wide honors program will:

- *Consolidate the best practices and efforts of all colleges.*
- *Offer K-State students a more comprehensive and better overall honors program experience through centralized administration, more extensive curriculum offerings, better advising, more out-of-class honors opportunities, and more opportunities for community-building among our best students.*
- *Give us excellent opportunities to measure our top students' learning, which will help meet our university-wide assessment goals, as well as give our honors program students the kind of self-reflective education that best prepares them for post-graduate work and study.*
- *Make our honors program more consistent with those of our geographic peers, while also allowing us to draw on the current best practices of those other university honors programs.*
- *Ultimately make us more competitive in our desire to attract the region's most academically talented students and in doing so will also complement—even improve—our current scholarship program that helps our students win Rhodes, Marshalls, Trumans, etc.*

The task force recommends that a university-wide program be constructed based on a combination of 1) a core curriculum taken by all honors students in conjunction with 2) college-specific requirements that draw on structures and curricula in college programs.

The basic structure of the university-wide program consists of three facets that will be explained in detail in the "curriculum" section. The first part, the core curriculum, will introduce students to the honors program through common university requirements. The second part will allow students to continue their honors coursework in their respective colleges. The third part will allow them to conclude the program through respective individualized scholarship-based honors projects and the completion of an individualized learning portfolio.

Vision Statement

KSU honors program graduates will possess an understanding of contemporary concepts of common and diverse intellectual traditions, as well as discipline-specific knowledge and abilities. This community of scholars will demonstrate global awareness and competence in dealing with an increasing diverse world, having had educational experiences that emphasize scholarship, critical thinking, and intellectual curiosity. They will possess superior written and oral communication skills and have the ability to become active participants in the lively discourse of today's world.

Intellectual Agenda for Honors Program Students

In seeking to provide an enhanced educational experience for Kansas State's most academically talented students, the honors program proposes the following goals for students.

- *A rich understanding of defining humanistic and/or scientific ideas and issues gained via an enhanced curriculum that includes a common liberal arts core and a range of honors courses and honors out-of-classroom experiences.*
- *A full and critical awareness of K-State's principles of community and diversity, which state that the university embraces a multicultural philosophy and envisions a future grounded in the widest possible participation of all sectors of our society.*
- *Connections with fellow honors students and honors faculty.*
- *Comprehension of the role of scholarship and/or creative activity both in the university and as a part of a university education.*
- *The completion of an independent honors project, normally accomplished in the student's major or area of concentration.*

Admission Requirements

Our peers base entrance requirements for their honors programs on high school GPA and/or test scores. We recommend doing the same thing, but adding an additional admission opportunity that allows discretionary entrance for exemplary students that don't fit traditional high-ACT profiles.

Relying on test scores and GPA for admission brings up three issues. First, it does not take into account K-State transfer students and students who want to enter the honors program after their freshman year. Second, such a formula would disproportionately admit students from the College of Engineering and under-admit students from some other key colleges. Third, it fails to factor in cultural biases of standard testing.

To address these issues, the task force proposes to admit students based multiple criteria. In the following list, numbers one, two and three are the main admittance criteria. Numbers four, five and six can be used when appropriate:

1. A high school GPA of 3.75 or above
2. An ACT of 28 or above
3. A short entrance essay (that can be submitted on-line)
4. Petition to the program based on notable extracurricular experience or leadership activities
5. Two full-time semesters at K-State with a 3.5 GPA or above
6. Admission at the director's discretion, with periodic review of such admittance decisions by the honors program committee

In addition, we recommend reserving a minimum number of entry spots in the honors program for non-freshmen and transfers. (The task force found this to be a hard-to-fix number that could best be determined by examining demand over the first few years of the program.)

We also recommend that each participating college be guaranteed a minimum number of entry spots for students into the honors program, based on a formula that takes overall honors enrollment into account, even in cases where the ACT/GPA formula needs to be altered.

Curriculum

Recommending an honors program curriculum appropriate to the academic culture of K-State has been, perhaps, the task force's greatest challenge. The task force has not reached a consensus regarding the overall number of hours and honors experiences that should be required in the program.

The task force solicited faculty and student input to address this key issue. It has been noted that some colleges, especially the College of Architecture, Planning and Design and the College of Technology and Aviation, have very little discretionary class time for their students so that an honors program that required "extra" hours would be prohibitive for these students unless they were willing to take more than a minimum number of hours to graduate. It is also the case that students in the Colleges of Education and Engineering have little flexibility in, especially, their junior and senior years.

That said, the majority of the task force believes that a strong honors program needs to offer a challenging and stimulating curricula. The following curriculum model has emerged from the task force's discussion.

1. Honors program retreat (optional)

Honors students will have the option of participating in an annual retreat to be held in August before the start of the fall semester.

2. Introduction to honors program (3 hours¹)

This course introduces students to scholarship at the university and to honors program expectations, including the independent honors project. Here students make cross disciplinary

¹ The number of credit hours could be changed after the syllabus and course outline have been developed.

connections with peers and K-State College Honors Program Coordinators. If an honors program portfolio is required, it would be introduced in this course.

3. Two general honors courses (3 hours each for a total of 6 hours)

These courses emphasize great ideas/traditions across several disciplines. They are writing intensive and would also count as university general education (UGE) credit². A significant benefit of these courses would be cross-disciplinary interaction with faculty and fellow honors students. Honors students would select at least one of these courses at the 300-level or above.

4. Three college-based honors courses and experiences (7 to 9 hours)

Students can select course options and co-curricular experiences from within and/or outside their home College. Students should consult with the Director of the University Honors Program in the selection of the college-based honors courses and experiences, and to ensure consistency across the university, all honors requirements fulfilled within a college must be approved by the Director of the University Honors Program.

Students must have two college-based courses³, which could include:

- Honors sections of regular courses
- Honors seminars and colloquia (e.g., Visiting Scholar-type program, Conducting Honors Research seminar)
- Honors Independent Study courses
- Enriched opportunities in regular courses
- Higher-level (e.g., 500-level) courses not required in the curriculum that can be substituted for required courses in the curriculum

In addition to the two required course options, co-curricular experiences that apply to the required college-based credits could include:

- Study abroad that has been approved for honors credit
- Service Learning in Research or Collegiate Teaching
- Honors Internship
- Undergraduate Research Project
- Leadership Studies Project

5. Independent honors project (2 to 5 hours)

Students will complete an independent honors project with a faculty mentor.

The following are examples of ways to increase the visibility of the independent honors project and the motivation of undergraduate students:

² If university general education (UGE) changes in the future, these two general honors courses would also need to change.

³ At this point, the number of credits required from these two courses remains flexible.

- Insitute university undergraduate research/scholarship fellowships;
- Provide university funds to support student research of scholarship projects;
- Publish students' indepedent honors projects in an annual university publication;
- Create an online directory of faculty mentors' research expertise;
- Sponsor cross-discipline forums where students share and receive feedback on their honors projects; and
- Promote cross-discipline honors projects that encourage students to move beyond traditional discipline boundaries and that would be tailored to meet their career goals.

Typical Honors Sequence

Below is a summary of a typical honors sequence:

Credit Hours	Course or Experience
3	Introduction to Honors Program
6	Two General Honors Courses (one at the 300-level or above)
7-9	College-based Honors Courses or Experiences
2-5	Independent Honors Project
18-23	Total Program Credit Hours

Students entering the Honors Program after their Freshman year

Qualified transfer students may join the Honors Program at K-State. Students whose K-State GPA meets the program requirements may also join the Honors Program up through the first semester of the junior year. For students who join after their freshman year, accomodations and flexibility in program requirements may be necessary.. The Director of the University Honors Program will be charged with implementing a system that accommodates students who want to join the Honors Program after their freshman year. Possible accomodations for these students might include:

- Allowing students to take a challenge-out exam over course content
- Accepting comparable community college honors courses

Flexibility in the College-based Honors Courses and Experiences

When Honors students transfer from other universities to K-State or from one K-State college to another, relevant completed coursework should be allowed to be transferred at the discretion of the Director and according to the Honors Program guidelines. Some of the independent honors project credit (2 to 5 hours) could be substituted for the college-based honors courses and experiences (7 to 9 hours).
