

Faculty Guidelines and Suggestions for Honors Contracts

What Is An Honors Contract?

The honors contract allows a student, through the completion of supplemental work, to obtain Honors credit for a course that is not designated as an Honors course.

The goal of the honors contract is to provide motivated and capable students in the University Honors Program (UHP) with an opportunity to enrich their education.

Honors contracts are only established through the mutual agreement of both the instructor and the student. *Faculty are never obligated to enter into an Honors contract.*

In addition, honors contracts should be reserved for courses for which the student has a strong interest and real intellectual curiosity.

How Is An Honors Contract Constructed?

There are two distinct options for creating honors contracts:

1. Establish an individualized contract with a student.

This should be initiated by the student. The instructor talks with the student about his/her specific interests in the course. The two parties mutually agree upon an enrichment or series of enrichments. The student then writes up the proposed contract (currently available to the student as a Qualtrics form in Canvas) and submits it electronically. The instructor will then be prompted to approve it.

The UHP will check in again with the instructor at the end of the semester to confirm successful completion of the contract.

2. Create a pre-established contract that any Honors student could agree to undertake (presuming that they enroll for the course).

Pre-established contracts are initiated by the instructor. The instructor simply fills out the template found at this address:

https://www.k-state.edu/ksuhonors/courses/documents/Pre-Established_Contract_Form_Faculty.docx

The questions are the same as those that the student completes in an individualized contract. The instructor, then, simply sends the completed form to ksuhonors@ksu.edu.

The UHP will review the contract and, assuming no questions or concerns, add it to our list of pre-established contract options that we share with students.

The UHP will provide a list of students who have signed up for the contract near the beginning of the semester and then check in with the instructor again at the end of the semester to confirm successful completion of the contract.

What Should an Honors Contract Entail?

This can vary considerably. We trust that the faculty to generate many good possibilities. *We do not encourage simply making a course harder for the sake of making it harder.* Frame the contract in terms of “What can I ask an academically strong student to do that will deepen or add another dimension to their learning?”

Here are several general (and potentially overlapping) suggestions.

1. The contract should require some form of intellectual product or measurable result.
 - a. If the course does not have a significant writing component, asking the student to add a written component is always an option.
 - b. If the course already has a strong writing component, you might consider asking the student to further develop their presentational skills in some way.
 - c. If you add to existing written or presentational requirements, or to the design/production requirements of a studio/workshop/laboratory course:
 - i. Have an objective for enrichment. “More for the sake of more” is not satisfying for the instructor or the student.
 - ii. Consider asking the student to expand or supplement the scope of inquiry.
 - iii. Consider asking the student to bring an interdisciplinary perspective or additional analytical focus into play.
2. You might consider asking the student to develop or hone an academically or professionally useful skill that is beyond the scope of the regular syllabus but still relevant to the content of the course.
3. If multiple students within a course will pursue UHP credit, asking them to undertake a supplemental group assignment to build their collaborative skills could be possible.
4. Requiring some additional readings or guided research is a common (but certainly not exclusive) form of enrichment.
 - a. The UHP values the development of an interdisciplinary mindset. Assignments that encourage interdisciplinary connections are certainly welcome.
 - b. Courses often only have time to touch briefly on certain topics. You might ask the student to undertake additional exploration regarding one of these topics for purpose of deepening their expertise.
 - c. The academic or career goals of the student often offer useful directions for potential enrichment.
5. If the instructor establishes a general contract, he/she might consider outlining several options for completion in order to give students some flexibility while still maintaining adequate control over the direction of the work.
6. We would hope that some aspect of the contract promises to produce quality interaction between the student and the instructor.

How Much Work?

This is a good question that resists an easy answer due to the great variation in course structure and content across the university. Here is a simple but non-prescriptive rubric:

- Will the student improve their skills and learn something additional and meaningful through completing the Honors contract?
- Will the student still have adequate time and capacity to complete the regular assignments of the course at a high level?
- If the student has an interview in the future (with a scholarship panel, professional school or potential employer) could they proudly discuss the honors contract in that setting?
- Would the student be happy to undertake a similar contract again?

We would like to think that an *appropriately* demanding Honors contract would permit both the student and instructor to answer “Yes” to all four questions.

Additional Thoughts

1. If the student is willing to do the work and do it well, we do not think that undertaking an honors contract should make it inherently more difficult to earn a high grade in a course.
2. Our faculty partners hold differing opinions regarding whether an honors supplement should be graded as part of their overall grade for the course or whether satisfactory completion of the honors supplement is simply considered on a Yes/No basis.

We only ask that the instructor establish, as part of the initial contract, clear expectations for what should be done and how it will be evaluated, including whether or not (and how) the evaluation will factor into their course grade.

3. We are open to questions and collaboration. We appreciate your help and are eager to help you come up with possibilities or address any concerns that you might have.