

The Honors Option Contract – Information/Overview



By incorporating elements of honors education—including course-specific application of the Honors College learning outcomes—the honors option (**h-option**) allows an Honors College student in [good standing](#) to earn honors credits in a non-honors course that can be applied toward completion of the required [Honors Curriculum](#). The h-option must provide a learning experience that is as close to an Honors course as possible without the instructor having to, in effect, conduct the equivalent of an independent study in addition to their regular course. That is to say, h-options should be logical extensions of the learning outcomes of the course that provide strong “value-added” benefits for the Honors student. A student pursuing the h-option enters into a **contract** with their course instructor. This contract establishes a defined relationship and details how a student will work with this Faculty Mentor to develop their own academic interests, knowledge, and skills through an individualized research-based or creative project—as appropriate for the major disciplinary home of the course—that enhances the h-option student’s experience of the course while meeting stated expectations for honors credit as provided by the Honors College. The student and his/her mentor must agree on the particulars of this work, a schedule of individual meetings/contact with the mentor, and a means for the student to provide service by using his/her work to benefit others (as described below). These contracts are also a means to develop leadership through independent learning by expecting the h-option student to take responsibility for designing and conducting honors-level work while responding to regular feedback from their Faculty Mentor by improving their performance under the terms of the contract. This constitutes personalized academic and professional development through which students can gain confidence to complete more fully independent work such as found in many departmental Capstone projects.

The Honors Option Contract Proposal must be submitted online. The online submission link (and a copy of the form for off-line review prior to working on and submitting it online) is available here on the Honors College website here: <https://www.marshall.edu/honors/forms/>.

The following are required **substantive content** elements of the contract.

1. **Details of the Project:** This element consists of a DETAILED description of the anticipated “product(s)” of the work completed in the h-option as well as the process, described in terms of steps that you anticipate as necessary to complete your project. The h-option mentor is expected to have elevated expectations for the student under terms of the h-option contract that are in line with those of honors education at Marshall University, generally. This fundamentally entails added depth and/or breadth of inquiry. This work may contribute directly to a larger project—such as a focused literature review to support a future Capstone—as well as generally build essential research or creative skills (as appropriate to the course and the student's major/s). Such linkages are advantageous.
 - **Key Question:** Tell us what you will produce (the kind of project you will do) under the terms of the contract and how you will conduct the necessary work.
2. **Relationship of the Work to Learning Outcomes and Evaluation of Work:** Faculty Mentors should help students understand this element in the context of their course. The contract should clearly state *how the h-option project is an extension of learning outcomes for the course (as provided in the syllabus) and a (partial) fulfillment of those for the Honors College.* The College’s learning outcomes mandate that students pursuing completion of the Honors Curriculum have a variety of opportunities in their honors-designated coursework as a whole to:

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- make connections while adapting and applying skills and learning among varied disciplines, domains of thinking, experiences, and situations.
- outline divergent solutions to a problem, develop and explore potentially controversial proposals, and synthesize ideas or expertise to generate original plans and approaches.
- evaluate the effectiveness of their own work, reflect on strengths and weakness of their knowledge and skills in defined areas, and devise ways to make improvements.
- produce cohesive oral, written, and visual communications capable of connecting effectively with specific audiences.
- appraise how cultural beliefs and practices affect inter-group communication, how specific approaches to global issues may affect communities differently, and how varying economic, religious, social, or geographical interests can result in conflict.
- demonstrate principles of ethical citizenship and socially responsible leadership through collaborative partnerships.
- evaluate how academic theories and public policy inform one another to support civic well-being.

Key Questions:

- *How will the h-option project serve as a meaningful extension of stated learning outcomes for the course as provided in the course syllabus?*
- *How will the project contribute to (partial) fulfillment of the stated learning outcomes for the Honors College [as seen in the list above]?*
- *How will the Faculty Mentor evaluate/assess the quality of h-option contract work before deciding whether or not this work is deserving of Honors credit.*

3. **Mentorship Schedule:** The contract must include information regarding how meetings/contacts are scheduled between the Honors student and the Faculty Mentor throughout the semester. Such contact is essential for discussing progress of student work and providing feedback and guidance to which the student can respond and improve as they increase their knowledge, understanding, and skills. Frequency and duration will depend on the nature of contracted work but it should be ongoing—not an add-on at the semester’s end. This mentorship is an essential part of Honors education. It is also an opportunity for the Mentor to benefit from working more closely with a well-prepared, intellectually curious, ambitious, and dedicated student. In addition to face-to-face meetings, contact could include, for example, formal progress reports and review of student project journals. Ideally, opportunities for meeting and feedback should occur no less than bi-weekly

- Key Question:** *How and on what schedule will the requirement for regular contact/communication between the Honors student and the Faculty Mentor be fulfilled?*

4. **Service/Collaborative Partnership Element:** In keeping with expectations of the Honors College that—in return for enhanced learning and other opportunities—Honors students contribute meaningfully to the betterment of varied communities, the h-option student is expected to **design an element of their project that entails what might be characterized as “service.”** This could involve enhancing the learning of fellow students by, for example, sharing what was learned through a report/presentation to their peers, by tutoring other students, or designing/implementing an extra-curricular opportunity. Sharing the Honors student’s learning in some way that, for example, enriches the experience of fellow students and assists the instructor in achieving his/her goals for the course, builds leadership and encourages values that are important for productive civic engagement. *Depending on the contract’s terms, this element could be the larger part of required work.*

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□ **Key Questions:**

- *How and when will you "give back" by sharing with others what you have produced/learned in the proposed h-option work?*
- *How will this service component provide a means of evaluation/assessment of your honors-level service work by the Faculty Mentor?*

The following are **administrative** requirements:

- It is the *responsibility of the student* to submit a completed/signed form to the Honors College by the contract submission due date and to meet other due dates as noted in the timeline below.
- Students who do not complete the contract without changing their status [see Timeline, Week 10] may be required to wait one semester before attempting another h-option.
- Students may not complete more than 1 h-option per semester and no more than 2 with the same professor.
- Not more than 9-hours of h-options will be counted toward completion of the 24-credits required of the Honors Curriculum.
- Online and summer school courses are not eligible for the h-option.

Honors Option Timeline [for Instructors and Students]

- **Week 01:** Ideally finalizing plans started prior to the semester, the student meets with their course instructor to discuss and complete the terms of the h-option contract.
- **Week 02:** Because the honors enrichment experience should run *throughout the semester*, completed Honors Option Contracts must be submitted via the Online Form by 5:00 p.m. on the ***second Friday of the semester***.
- **Week 03:** Students with contracts requiring additional details/clarification will be contacted by the Associate Dean. *Revisions will generally be due no later than 5:00 p.m. Friday at the end of Week 03.*
- **Week 05:** Substantive changes in the original terms of the contract should be conveyed to the Associate Dean before week six for review.
- **Week 10:** The course may revert to "non-honors" status by the end of Week 10 with the Faculty Mentor's permission and notification of the Honors College Advisor.
- **End of the Semester:** The Faculty Mentor named in the contract coversheet will receive an e-mail from the Honors College Advisor with a copy of the Contract Cover Page and a request to confirm whether the student has satisfactorily fulfilled the approved terms of the h-option contract. At this time, the mentor has the opportunity to provide detailed comments, which become an important part of the student's record in the Honors College. The Faculty Mentor's reply is due by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday of the same week as the Registrar's final grade deadline for the semester.
- **After the Semester:** After the Honors College has been informed that a student has successfully completed their h-option and thus earned their Honors credits, *it can take several weeks for the "H" designation to appear on a student's record* as this is added manually by the Office of the Registrar.

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For Students

Members of the faculty are not obligated to provide an h-option. Faculty participation is always a voluntary commitment. As an instructor might decline an h-option request for various reasons, students should not “count” on a particular course providing these credits—especially when they are nearing graduation. Whenever possible, it is recommended that students speak with a course instructor well in advance of registering for a given semester to discuss your intentions. **It is not a faculty member’s responsibility to design h-option content for students or to provide responses to the prompts required on the contract—though you may need help from your mentor to consider learning outcomes (the second element in the substantive content list above).** Bring your ideas to your instructor along with a number of suggestions for what could add honors value to your experience of the class. For example, past students have engaged in various course-based, disciplinary-related or interdisciplinary projects, experiments, case studies, in-class or public presentations, collaborative research and writing, and peer tutoring. When you and your Faculty Mentor reach a verbal agreement on the terms of your contract, write them up narratively in thoughtful consideration of the information and requirements provided here and present this along with the contract coversheet for the mentor’s signature, make a copy of the full contract for yourself and your mentor, and then bring another copy to the Honors College before the deadline. Keep in mind that, overall, there are three goals for h-options, which are to create expanded and enriched course experiences, an enhanced professional relationship with a faculty member, and to provide a means to share these benefits with others. Please remember that simply doing more of the same kind of work already provided in the course syllabus for which you are already responsible as an enrolled student (e.g., longer papers with more sources) does not generally constitute sufficient enhancement to qualify as honors-level work and may not be accepted.

For Instructors Serving as the H-Option Faculty Mentor

Thank you for considering an h-option for an Honors student in your class. For many of our students, h-options are an important means to fulfilling their curricular requirements in the Honors College. Faculty who offer h-options are performing a valuable service to our students and the College. We intend that spending additional time with an especially motivated and talented student will benefit you as well. While your guidance is welcome, the greater burden of planning the h-option must rest with the student as this work is an essential element of the College’s expectations for an h-option—though students will likely need your attention on learning outcomes. Work completed for the h-option is in addition to assignments that a student is expected to complete as described in the syllabus for all students and should not be used in calculations of a student's grade for the course. H-option contracts should describe how honors-level activities will be evaluated *as a means of deciding whether or not a student will be awarded Honors credit.*

NOTE: When the student completes their Honors Option Contract Proposal online, they will be prompted to submit documentation of approval from their Faculty Mentor. This can be an electronic printout of an email or a scanned signed letter from you. They also have the option of uploading a copy of the course syllabus as a supplement.

Contact Information: Associate Dean: Dr. Brian A. Hoey, hoey@marshall.edu