Honors Online at Marshall

Best Practices for Faculty Teaching Honors-Designated Courses Online

Preface: What This Guide Is and Is Not

This document is designed to orient faculty teaching in honors to Marshall University's expectations for online learning and to highlight where honors education goes *further*.

- It is not a replacement for Marshall's H.O.M.E. standards (Humanistic Online Model for Engagement), which remain the *baseline* required certification and resource for online teaching.
- It is a guide that situates online honors courses in their *larger context*—within honors education nationally, within Marshall's strategic direction, and within the Honors College's mission and student learning outcomes.
- Most importantly, it *clarifies why, where, and how honors expects more*, not by adding new requirements for the sake of formality, but by extending the university's humanistic online framework into the distinctive practices that must define honors education.

1. Why Honors Must Address Online Education

Honors programs have historically *resisted* online learning, often equating "quality" with face-to-face interaction. Yet the landscape has shifted:

- Some institutions (e.g., ASU Barrett) now offer fully online honors pathways.
- Others (e.g., University of Missouri) permit online honors courses but require synchronous engagement.
- Yet, others remain resistant, insisting on in-person only.

The trend line is clear: the question is no longer *whether* honors can be online, **but _how_ to design and deliver online honors courses that maintain rigor, mentoring, and integrative learning**. Online honors is no longer an aberration. It is an evolving field where *expectations matter*.

At Marshall, we will not remain a "holdout." The Honors College's *Plan on a Page* (2024) explicitly calls for offering more online versions of honors courses. The challenge before us is to ensure that when an honors course goes online, it is not diminished but *distinctive*.

2. What We See in the National Landscape

From national research and the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC):

- **Expectations matter.** Online honors thrives when courses _preserve_ the core practices of mentoring, inquiry, and community, often through synchronous design and authentic projects.
- **Innovation is possible.** Virtual "City as Text" (an NCHC initiative), cross-institutional seminars, and authentic inquiry projects have been successfully _adapted_ to online environments.
- **Flexibility supports access.** Online honors _expands_ opportunities for students who are rural, working, or caregiving, aligning with the values of equity and inclusion.

Takeaway for us: Online honors works when _we protect what makes honors distinctive, while embracing flexibility and innovation_.

3. Marshall's Strategic Context for Honors Education

Marshall University has committed itself to _student-first, flexible learning:_

- **Marshall for All, Marshall Forever** emphasizes on-demand delivery and affordability.
- **The MU Strategic Plan** prioritizes access, integrative experiences, and belonging.
- **The Honors College mission** is to cultivate intellectual curiosity and ethical action through creative inquiry, experiential learning, and community engagement.
- **Honors College Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)** call on students to:
    - Make connections across disciplines.
    - Develop original approaches to complex problems.
    - Evaluate their own learning.
    - Communicate effectively.
    - Understand cultural complexity.
    - Lead ethically and collaboratively.
    - Bridge academic knowledge and civic impact.

    These college-level learning outcomes remain non-negotiable, regardless of delivery mode.

4. How Honors Courses Are Offered at Marshall

The Honors College does not grant its own degrees or maintain faculty tenure lines; instead, it collaborates across the university to provide courses for honors students.

Honors courses appear in two forms, ***both* of which are subject to the expectations outlined in this guide.**

HON Courses (Offered by the Honors College)

- **What they are:** Courses with the "HON" prefix, offered directly by the Honors College. These include interdisciplinary seminars such as HON 200 (introductory) and HON 480 (upper-division special topics).
- **How they're created:** Faculty submit proposals that are reviewed by the [Honors Curriculum and Policies Committee](#) (HCCAP) to ensure alignment with our mission, student learning outcomes, and commitment to integrative, discussion-based pedagogy.
    - **HON 480** seminars carry the sharpest expectations for rigor and distinctiveness, as they represent the Honors College's signature curricular contribution. Enrollment is capped to preserve a true seminar environment. Because they are coordinated directly by the Honors College, we can draw the clearest and most enforceable lines of expectation for online delivery here.

H Courses (Honors-Designated Departmental Courses)

- **What they are:** Courses offered by academic departments and developed intentionally as honors sections (e.g., ENG 200H). These are departmental courses that meet our honors standards and serve our students.
- **How they're created:** Departments propose H-designated sections through Marshall's CIM system. The Dean of the Honors College is a required approver, in consultation with HCCAP as needed.
- **Oversight and delivery:** Scheduling and staffing remain with departments, but the Honors College promotes and tracks these courses, including interpreting course evaluations. While enforcement can be more complex than for HON-prefix courses, *the same principles and expectations apply*: active learning, integrative outcomes, and rigorous engagement.

Why this matters for online education

In both cases, our responsibility is to ensure that the ***distinctive** character of honors education—integrative learning, inquiry, mentoring, and community—remains intact* in online delivery.

5. The H.O.M.E. Framework: Our Shared Baseline

The **H.O.M.E. Framework** (Humanistic Online Model for Engagement) is Marshall University's required certification for faculty teaching online. All online instructors must complete this qualification by June 30, 2026. Marshall's H.O.M.E. standards apply to every online course. They established six areas of expectation:

1. Transparent Course Design
2. Outcomes & Assessment
3. Learner Engagement (Regular and Substantive Interaction)
4. Learning Awareness (Reflection & Motivation)
5. Active Learning (Discovery & Problem-Solving)
6. Belonging (Community & Access)

Every faculty member teaching honors courses online must complete H.O.M.E. certification.

Our task as a college is not to add another layer of compliance, but to articulate where honors expects more and always in synergy with H.O.M.E.'s **"How Do I Exceed This Standard?"** guidelines.

6. Where Honors Expects an **Enhanced** Approach

Honors courses have always set a higher bar: smaller classes, more mentoring, integrative projects, and a strong sense of community. Online delivery is no exception. In this section, we outline how honors courses must **exceed** the H.O.M.E. *baseline* standards. What follows should be read as an orientation to the opportunities already identified in the H.O.M.E. framework for exceeding the baseline, with attention to how those opportunities align with the mission and student learning outcomes of the Honors College. Faculty are encouraged to use this guidance as a starting point for exploring the H.O.M.E. resources in greater depth.

Each standard highlights *one underline additional expectation* for honors online courses, as the first item in the list "Honors Exceeds the Baseline" that notes "**GO FURTHER FIRST**." Faculty should begin with this item first as a *minimal* means to exceed the baseline. Other items in the list are a set of additional practices that *could* be used to further enrich the course. Faculty should see the "**Framing Note**" for each standard to better understand the connection expected to honors pedagogical best practices.

Faculty are *not expected to adopt all these practices*, but each online honors course must **go beyond the baseline in clear ways** by holding to the fundamental expectation and

incorporating at least one additional approach that fits the course and the instructor's style.

Part 1: Essential Structure Standards

Standard 1: Transparent Course Design → Integrative Framing

Baseline

Requires a clear "Start Here" module, accessible syllabus, instructor contact info, course policies, navigation consistency, and expectations for synchronous/asynchronous work.

- Emphasis is on clarity, accessibility, and structure so students know how to move through the course.
- Based on the **Transparency in Learning and Teaching** (TILT) framework.

Honors Exceeds the Baseline

Framing Note: Transparency for honors is not just about navigation but about *framing the intellectual journey*. Students need to see from the start how the course is not just "another online class" but *part of a broader honors experience* that develops the habits of mind we promise in our mission and SLOs.

- *GO FURTHER FIRST: Integrative Framing:* Every honors syllabus should explicitly answer:
  - How does this course connect disciplines or perspectives?
  - How does it advance inquiry and creativity in ways distinctive to honors?
- **Narrative Transparency:** An annotated syllabus or course rationale should explain to students not only how to succeed but why the course matters and how assignments develop higher-order skills like synthesis, leadership, or civic engagement. Drawing on TILT Higher Ed, faculty should articulate the *purpose, task, and criteria* for key assignments to make these connections explicit.

  Example: An honors course syllabus might annotate: *"This paper asks you to synthesize insights from at least two disciplines; it's designed to help you develop the integrative thinking outcome central to honors education."*

- **Signature Experience Preview**: In HON-prefix seminars especially (e.g., HON 480), include a preview of the culminating project or experience so students can see early on how the course builds toward integrative, honors-level outcomes.
- **Optional Enrichment**: Consider a short course navigation video or map to help students visualize the intellectual journey and employ backward design so that all activities and assessments clearly scaffold toward *Honors College SLOs*.

Standard 2: Outcomes & Assessment → Authentic Inquiry

Baseline

Requires that course outcomes are clearly identified, assessments are aligned to outcomes, and students are provided opportunities to practice and demonstrate mastery.

- Emphasis is on consistency between what the course promises and how students are evaluated.
- Based on AAC&U best practices according to the **V.A.L.U.E. alignment**.

Honors Exceeds the Baseline

Framing Note: For honors education, outcomes and assessment are not simply about measurement but about *authentic inquiry and integrative growth*. Students should see assessments as opportunities to do real work that matters—to themselves, their disciplines, and their communities—while faculty remain clear about how this work exceeds baseline expectations.

- *GO FURTHER FIRST: Authentic Inquiry: & Assessment:* Every honors course should include at least one authentic project (research, creative, or civic) that requires synthesis across domains and cultivates transferable skills.

    Example: A final project where students design a solution to a local community challenge, combining disciplinary insights and demonstrating the civic dimension of their learning.

- **Alignment with Institutional Outcomes:** Clearly identify how assessments map to Marshall's Baccalaureate Degree Profile (BDP) competencies, which draw on the AACU VALUE rubrics. Honors faculty should not only label these outcomes but articulate how honors assignments take students further into integrative, creative, and ethically grounded work.
- **Explicit Labeling of Authentic Assessments:** Go beyond naming the assignment to explain to students how the project connects course outcomes to real-world skills. For instance, describe how a research project develops both disciplinary expertise and the "durable skills" of communication, problem-solving, and collaboration.
- **Scaffolded Progression:** Provide students with a clear sense of how assessments build on one another and lead toward a culminating experience. Faculty are encouraged to employ backward design, starting from honors SLOs, then mapping assignments step by step.
- **Feedback for Growth:** Include an opportunity for students to provide mid-course review feedback. In honors, this feedback loop models metacognition and partnership, reinforcing that students are co-creators of the learning environment.

Part 2: Essential Experience Standards

Standard 3: Learner Engagement → Mentorship & Intellectual Community

Baseline

Requires regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between instructor and students. Faculty must demonstrate presence, timely feedback, and opportunities for learner-learner interaction.

- Emphasis is on ensuring students do not experience the course as passive or isolating.
- Based on the Based on the **regulatory definitions outlined by the Higher Education Opportunity Act.**

Honors Exceeds the Baseline

Framing Note: Engagement in honors online courses is more than compliance with RSI, it is about cultivating a *mentoring culture and an intellectual community*. Students should feel not only connected to their faculty and peers but also anchored in the larger Honors College identity.

- ***GO FURTHER FIRST: Mentorship through Engagement*:** In honors, engagement is inseparable from mentoring. Faculty should build structured opportunities for check-ins that go beyond course content to address integrative learning goals, student social and emotional learning and growth, and connections to the Honors College mission.

     Example: A 15-minute one-on-one midterm check-in where faculty ask students to reflect on how course material connects with their other studies or civic roles.

- **Active Moderation:** Faculty should actively moderate online discussions, guiding conversations, offering expert input, and helping students sustain inquiry. This models the high-touch seminar ethos that defines honors.
- **Intellectual Community:** Encourage peer-led dialogue and collaboration, fostering the sense that honors students are co-creators of knowledge.

     Example: Student-led discussion groups, where each week a small team frames key questions and leads conversation with peers. While Blackboard does not include a dedicated "student moderator" role, the platform fully supports student-led or student-moderated discussions through its regular discussion board features. Instructors create the discussion forum and then assign individual students or small groups to serve as moderators for

particular weeks or topics. Moderators can post opening prompts, pose follow-up questions, synthesize key points, and help sustain dialogue simply by creating posts and replies within the forum—no special permissions are required. Blackboard's group discussion tools also allow for small-group facilitation, where students lead conversation within their assigned group. Instructors maintain regular presence and guidance, but the structure gives students a meaningful leadership role and mirrors the collaborative, inquiry-driven environment central to honors education.

- **Attention to Social and Emotional Learning:** Consider short formative assessments (reflections, surveys, or journal prompts) that surface how students are experiencing the class socially and emotionally. H.O.M.E. recommends making explicit to students the role of social learning in online environments—honors courses should embrace this by helping students reflect on how intellectual and social belonging intertwine.

Standard 4: Learning Awareness → Integrative Reflection

Baseline

Requires that students have opportunities to reflect on their learning, gain awareness of how course activities connect to outcomes, and develop a sense of progress.

- Emphasis is on encouraging metacognition and helping students monitor growth.
- Based on **UDL guidelines**, **epistemological growth models**, **AAC&U's VALUE rubrics on Critical and Metacognitive Thinking**, and **Bloom's affective taxonomy**.

Honors Exceeds the Baseline

Framing Note: For honors, learning awareness means more than "study skills" or tracking progress. It is about *cultivating reflective practitioners* who can articulate how their academic work shapes them as thinkers, leaders, and citizens. Online honors courses should therefore help students connect what they are doing now with who they are becoming.

- *GO FURTHER FIRST: Structured Integrative Reflection:* Honors courses should include *formal* opportunities for students to reflect on how their learning connects to professional, civic, and personal development.

  Example: Reflective essays asking students to link course learning to their majors, civic roles, or ethical responsibilities.

- **Alignment with NACE Competencies:** Explicitly label goals and outcomes that connect course work to NACE competencies (communication, teamwork,

leadership, problem-solving). This makes it visible how honors courses prepare students with durable, transferable skills.

- **Growth Mindset & Epistemological Awareness:** Faculty are encouraged to collaborate with the Design Center to embed "Belonging/Growth Mindset" activities, such as the "Saying is Believing" intervention, and to design opportunities where students reflect on their own growth as learners.

    Example: Ask students to journal about how their understanding of evidence or inquiry has changed over the semester, making their epistemological growth visible.

- **Making Learning Visible:** Honors courses can deepen metacognition by exposing students to frameworks like Bloom's taxonomy, Maslow's hierarchy, or growth mindset theory, then prompting them to apply these models to their own learning process.
- **Authentic Summative Assessment:** At least one summative assessment should function as an authentic assessment, requiring students to demonstrate both content mastery and integrative reflection.

Standard 5: Active Learning → Student-Led Discovery

Baseline

Requires that students engage actively with course material, applying knowledge in ways that go beyond passive consumption.

- Emphasis is on students participating in learning activities and demonstrating applied understanding.
- Based on **UDL guidelines as outlined by CAST**.

Honors Exceeds the Baseline

Framing Note: In honors, active learning means discovery is not simply assigned, it is *student-driven*. Online courses should empower students to take intellectual risks, collaborate meaningfully, and see themselves as contributors to knowledge and community.

- *GO FURTHER FIRST: Student-Led Inquiry:* Honors requires students not only to participate, but to lead inquiry. Faculty should design activities where students shape discussion, pose questions, or present work to peers.

    Example: Students moderate a week's discussion, design part of an assignment, or present an interdisciplinary project that draws from multiple courses or civic experiences. [See Example in Standard 3 for details]

- **Co-Creation and Shared Ownership:** Following H.O.M.E. guidance, faculty are encouraged to co-create course assessments or classroom policies with students. In honors, this fosters a culture of intellectual ownership and responsibility.
- **Inclusive Discourse and Unheard Voices:** Build active learning experiences that invite diverse perspectives and give space for students who might not always claim the floor in traditional settings.

    Example: Use structured dialogue protocols or small-group forums that ensure each student contributes.

- **Formative Feedback on Course Culture:** Include a mid-semester evaluation or reflection where students can comment on the culture of the course and how it supports (or hinders) their engagement. In honors, this also signals a commitment to collaborative learning and responsiveness.
- **Holistic Engagement and Self-Advocacy:** Connect course content to broader opportunities for student growth, such as university communities, study abroad, or career development resources. Encourage students to practice self-advocacy, including accessing supports for well-being and technology.

Standard 6: Belonging → Honors Community Identity

Baseline

Requires that courses foster a sense of inclusion and access for all students, applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and connecting students to necessary support services.

- Emphasis is on ensuring students feel welcomed, supported, and able to succeed.
- Based on **UDL guidelines**.

Honors Exceeds the Baseline

Framing Note: In honors education at Marshall, belonging is not only about access, but also about *identity and community.* Honors courses should help students see themselves as members of a living Honors College community, intellectually and socially, even when they are not physically on campus.

- ***GO FURTHER FIRST: Connection to Honors Community:*** Beyond inclusion, honors courses must tie students into the larger Honors College community. Students should see themselves as part of a vibrant network of peers, faculty, and alumni that extends beyond the course itself.

  > *Example*: Co-curricular events integrated into the course or cross-cohort projects connecting online and face-to-face honors students.

- **Co-Creation of Culture:** Faculty are encouraged to co-create class policies or norms with students, promoting a culture of equity and shared responsibility.
- **Inclusive Discourse:** Incorporate strategies that invite unheard voices into conversations, ensuring all students experience their perspectives as valued.
- **Responsive Feedback on Belonging:** Use mid-semester evaluations or reflections to gauge how students experience course culture, making visible your commitment to inclusivity and culturally responsive teaching.
- **Holistic Belonging Supports:** Provide access to broader university resources that reinforce well-being and growth, such as academic and career advising, study abroad opportunities, and self-care modules. Encourage students to practice self-advocacy by identifying and using supports (technical, academic, and personal).

  > *Example:* Embedding a short "self-care and resources" module with clear links to university support services, framed as integral to student success.

7. Conclusion: Honors Online as the Gold Standard

By building upon the foundational H.O.M.E. framework, the Honors College ensures online honors courses are not only compliant with Marshall's institutional standards but also ***exemplary***.

- **Faculty gain clarity**: H.O.M.E. provides the baseline; the Honors College identifies where faculty should exceed it in ways that reflect our mission and student learning outcomes.
- **Students gain value**: An online experience that preserves the rigor, mentoring, integrative learning, and sense of community that distinguishes education.
- **Marshall gains leadership**: Honors courses can model for the entire university what it looks like to expect more from online education, not by multiplying requirements, but by showing how to translate the humanistic, inquiry-driven ethos of honors into digital spaces.

At a minimum, every online honors course should hold to the **fundamental expectations** identified for each H.O.M.E. standard; beyond that, faculty must adopt at least one additional practice to enrich their course for the designation of "honors" that it carries. This

balance of consistency and flexibility ensures that honors online courses remain distinctive while accommodating the creativity and expertise of faculty.

In short: *H.O.M.E. sets the foundation.* **The Honors College makes the course a gold standard.**

Works Consulted in H.O.M.E. Framework

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