

Designing and Teaching an Integrative Honors Seminar *

At the Honors College at Marshall University, our mission is to foster innovative teaching and learning through an integrative curriculum rooted in creative, critical inquiry and a respect for multiple perspectives, lived experiences, and identities. We work in collaboration with university and public partners to cultivate inclusive academic excellence within a diverse and supportive community of scholars—students and faculty alike—committed to social responsibility, ethical leadership, and lifelong learning in service of the greater good.

To fulfill our promise of demonstrably enhanced learning experiences, we invite faculty who teach honors-designated courses to challenge themselves as educators and mentors. We encourage the development of **original, personally meaningful pedagogical approaches** that inspire, question assumptions, and offer students new ways of seeing and engaging with the world. While our aim is to provide exceptional opportunities for our students, we are equally committed to supporting the **professional growth of faculty** whose work enriches the Honors College. Teaching honors can deepen not only your impact as an educator but also the experience of students across all your courses. We see the Honors College as an **incubator for pedagogical exploration and innovation** by serving as a collaborative space for shared purpose, mutual growth, and bold thinking in pursuit of academic distinction.

Why Teach Honors?

The Honors College does not have a dedicated faculty of its own. Instead, we rely on meaningful partnerships with departments and faculty across the university to offer the courses that constitute the Honors Curriculum—courses students must complete to graduate with **University Honors**. Far from a limitation, this model inspires the **collaboration and innovation** across disciplines that are central to our mission.

Teaching in the Honors College is not required of faculty, but it is recognized as a meaningful contribution to the university's mission—one that supports teaching excellence and can strengthen a faculty member's portfolio for **tenure and promotion**. Honors courses are also a service to the institution, and they offer distinctive rewards:

1. **Freedom to innovate.** Teaching in honors offers faculty the opportunity to explore ideas and approaches that might not easily fit within departmental structures or large class formats. Our enrollment-limited seminars encourage creativity and experimentation, allowing instructors to step beyond the routine demands of traditional teaching loads.
2. **A community of inquiry.** Honors courses bring together motivated, thoughtful, and responsible students who thrive in collaborative, discussion-based learning. These students are ready to stretch intellectually, and their engagement enables faculty to push boundaries without needing to hold back for fear students won't "keep up." The

relationship becomes a genuine partnership in learning—often among the most fulfilling experiences of a teaching career.

Still deciding whether it's for you? We encourage you to explore the reflections offered in "[On the Benefits of Teaching Honors](#)," which captures many of the reasons faculty across the country choose to make honors teaching part of their academic lives.

Syllabi Basics

Syllabi should meet minimum requirements set by MU Board of Governors Policy. To assure compliance with policy, you should use the current template/s provided by the [Office of Assessment and Quality Initiatives](#) at MU. Briefly stated, your syllabus does not need to have the same format as the template, but it must contain the same *information* that the template would provide. This is the minimum starting point for all syllabi at Marshall University.

Honors Course Design

At the Honors College, we ask faculty to think of their courses not merely as content delivery, but as transformative learning experiences where students engage with the world, take intellectual risks, and practice making meaning across complex social, disciplinary, and civic contexts. Our courses are incubators for **integrative learning**, creative inquiry, and personal growth.

We align with the [National Collegiate Honors Council \(NCHC\)](#), which frames honors teaching as student-centered, inclusive, and transformative—emphasizing “measurable student learning outcomes,” “engaged pedagogy,” and “development of the whole student.”

Honors courses should strive to be rigorous but inviting, innovative but accessible, personally meaningful, and socially relevant.

Foundational Objectives from NCHC & Marshall

NCHC outlines several overarching goals for honors courses. These are broad enough to invite diverse instructional approaches, but specific enough to guide course design. They align with the competencies identified in Marshall University's **Baccalaureate Degree Profile**, which articulates expectations for all graduates.

When designing an Honors course, consider how you will help students:

1. Develop **effective written communication** that demonstrates engagement with complex ideas
2. Strengthen **oral communication** and the ability to participate meaningfully in collaborative dialogue

3. Analyze and synthesize a **broad range of interdisciplinary material**
4. Understand **how scholars and artists work**, including methods, creative processes, and knowledge production
5. Think **independently and critically**, applying logic and ethical reasoning to personal, professional, and civic decisions

You can read more about how the NCHC thinks about each of their stated objectives on the webpage “Honors Course Design” listed in the Recommended Readings and Resources below.

You may like to review the NCHC’s [“Definition of Honors Education.”](#)

Developing Learning Outcomes

At Marshall, we distinguish between **course goals** and **learning outcomes**. Goals reflect your instructional intent; outcomes are measurable indicators of student achievement.

We require a clear alignment between:

- Each learning outcome
- How students will **practice** the associated skill or knowledge
- How it will be **assessed** in the course

Refer to [Bloom’s Taxonomy of Measurable Verbs](#) when drafting outcomes. All syllabi should include a table showing these alignments, as modeled in the university’s [Basic Syllabus Template](#). Importantly, honors students should not be given “more” work, but rather more **complex, layered, and authentic** opportunities to demonstrate advanced learning.

Pedagogical Expectations in Honors

We expect honors courses to foster:

- **Critical engagement with primary texts or data**
- A shift from lecture toward **facilitated inquiry and student agency**
- Regular opportunities for **peer learning, collaboration, and reflection**
- Clear structures for **timely feedback and opportunities for revision**, especially in writing or project work

Teaching in Honors means empowering students as **co-creators of knowledge**, not passive recipients.

Access, Depth, and Disciplinary Diversity

Honors students represent a wide array of majors, identities, and experiences. While they share high motivation and intellectual curiosity, they are not all disciplinary specialists. Seminars should be **deeply rooted** in the instructor's disciplinary perspective but **accessible to non-specialists**. We encourage use of multiple lenses and interwoven disciplinary frameworks. Prerequisites are not possible in an honors seminar; **accessibility** is essential.

Experiential Learning and Professional Development

We encourage instructors to integrate at least some **hands-on, real-world learning** wherever possible. Examples include:

- Independent or group research projects
- Conference presentations or undergraduate publications
- Fieldwork, site visits, or civic engagement
- Creative or performance-based work

These experiences provide students with transferable skills and often lead to **public-facing artifacts** that extend their impact beyond the classroom.

Authentic Assessment & Civic Relevance

Honors students should be asked to perform tasks that simulate or replicate the challenges they will face as **informed citizens and professionals**. This includes:

- Projects that address real-world problems
- Opportunities to **engage with public audiences**
- Assignments that require **ethical, cultural, and social analysis**

Assessment should reflect authentic, performance-based criteria. We aren't measuring memorization in an honors seminar as they aren't content driven; we're supporting transformation in ways of seeing and knowing.

Fostering Leadership, Autonomy, and Risk-Taking

Leadership in honors means more than holding a title—it means cultivating the ability to act, to listen, to discern, and to reflect.

Your course should allow for:

- Student input and design opportunities
- Creative choice in assignments

- Flexibility and trust in how students demonstrate learning

You're encouraged to guide students through **real choices**, **real consequences**, and **real growth**. That's how leadership is practiced—not just theorized.

Learning Outcomes of the Honors College

Guided by its mission, the Honors College has the following learning outcomes, which we expect that students completing the required Honors Curriculum will have achieved. *Honors seminars should incorporate at least **three** of these outcomes among the faculty designated outcomes for their seminar.*

- 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.

Recommended Resources & Readings

This guide is designed to help faculty prepare for submitting the [Honors Seminar Proposal Form](#)—a visual aid here for the required online submission—but it is by no means a comprehensive manual for teaching in honors. Instead, it offers a starting point: an invitation to explore, reflect, and connect with us as you develop your seminar course and your broader engagement with the Honors College.

Below, we've gathered a few recommended readings and resources—some cited earlier in the guide, some added here to help you think beyond the “how-to.” These materials are meant to cultivate a sense of what we might call the “**culture of honors**”—the values, sensibilities, and educational commitments that distinguish honors education. They won't give you a formula. But they may help you imagine what it means to teach in a space that's experimental, integrative, and committed to the public good.

Thinking about the cultural fabric of honors education—how it’s woven, how it expresses itself through pedagogy, relationships, and civic engagement—is a strong place to begin. But of course, I am an *anthropologist* by training, so it stands to reason that I would think that. What do you think?

- Baccalaureate Degree Profile: Marshall University Core Domains of Critical Thinking. (n.d.). <http://www.marshall.edu/assessment/baccalaureate-degree-profile/>. Marshall University.
- Honors Course Design. (n.d.). <https://nchc.site-ym.com/page/coursedesign?> National Collegiate Honors Council.
- [Definition of Honors Education](#). (n.d.) National Collegiate Honors Council.
- Ladenheim, M., Kuhns, K., & Brockington, M. (2011). [Ethnogenesis: The Construction and Dynamics of the Honors Classroom Culture](#). *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, (Spring/Summer), 129-140
- Mueller, J. (2016). What is Authentic Assessment? <http://jfmuellet.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/whatisit.htm>.
- Slavin, C. (2008). [Defining Honors Culture](#). *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, (Spring/Summer), 5-8.
- Werth, Alexander, "[On The Benefits of Teaching Honors](#)" (2005). *Honors in Practice -- Online Archive*. 19.

Ready to Submit a Seminar Proposal?

Once you've had a chance to develop your course ideas—and especially if you’re feeling inspired after reviewing this guide—you’re ready to submit your proposal for an Honors Seminar (HON 480). These upper-level seminars are the centerpiece of our curriculum: interdisciplinary in spirit, capped at 15 students, and designed to cultivate deep, integrative learning.

All proposals are reviewed by the **Honors College Curriculum and Policy Committee (HCCAP)** at least one semester prior to when the course would be offered. You’ll find full instructions, links to the online submission forms, and proposal support materials on our website at [Teaching in the Honors College](#).

We welcome three kinds of HON 480 submissions:

- **New Seminar Proposal** – For courses never taught in the Honors College. A full application.
- **Repeat Seminar Application** – For returning seminars that are still current (i.e., not yet "timed out"). A simple form.
- **Updated Seminar Proposal** – For courses that have been taught three times or more than three years ago, or that are being significantly reworked.

If you're submitting without an assigned semester in mind, that's perfectly fine. We can review your proposal and work with you and your department to determine future opportunities. Just select "Yes" under "Applying to be considered in the future" on the submission form.

Feel free to contact us. We look forward to working with you.

The Honors College

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* **A Note on Scope and Use:** This guide has been developed to support faculty designing and proposing **HON 480: SpTp Honors Seminars**, the core course in the Honors College curriculum. Because these seminars are fully housed within the Honors College, we are able to define expectations for course design, pedagogical approach, and learning outcomes in detail.

That said, the principles and practices of honors education discussed here—student-centered learning, integrative inquiry, authentic assessment, and civic engagement—are **broadly applicable to any honors-designated course**. We warmly encourage faculty teaching departmental "H" sections (e.g., ENG 201H, PSY 101H) to consider the ideas in this guide as a resource, even though they are not required to follow its full framework.

Honors-designated courses offered through academic departments must follow the [university's honors course proposal process](#) for new or revised courses. That process includes the incorporation of the **Honors College Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)** and minimal expectations that align with nationally recognized best practices.

Ultimately, our shared goal is to ensure that students across all honors-designated courses benefit from high-impact, inclusive, and transformative learning experiences—whether those are hosted within the Honors College or by our valued partners across the university.