

UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

DESIRABLE FEATURES OF AN HONORS SEMINAR THE PEDAGOGY AND CURRICULUM

- **Prefer assignments that encourage analysis, application, inquiry, comparison, synthesis and research over objective (multiple choice, true-false) tests that foster rote memorization.** Honors seminars also typically offer students the opportunity to write regularly (in class and out of class) and to undergo the entire process of writing (from brainstorming to outlining, drafting, revising and editing) at least once during the semester. Assignments push students to do more than summarize or repeat other's ideas.
- **Prefer primary source readings over textbooks.** Rather than have students read only derivative sources of information in your field, students should have the opportunity to engage the most important thinkers in your field in their own words. Honors faculty take the time to help students ferret through the difficult syntax, vocabulary, and structure and to come up with their own interpretations and questions.
- **Prefer active learning approaches over lectures.** Honors instructors provide students with plenty of opportunities to engage actively with the course material through lively, well-planned discussions, debates, simulations, small group work, hands-on experiments, case studies, etc.
- **Set clear learning expectations for the course as a whole and for individual assignments.** Each Honors instructor articulates clearly in writing and orally what they intend for students to do and learn.
- **Incorporate opportunities for independent, outside research.** When possible, Honors seminars provide the chance to students to gain the essential library research skills of the discipline addressed in the course (introduction to key reference materials, sources and methods, documentation system, discussion of ways to select appropriate sources).

- **Sequence assignments** so that on each assignment, students apply previous knowledge to new ideas and thus become increasingly sophisticated learners and knowers. Discussions and assignments in Honors seminars typically prompt students to relate their past experiences with course content, to integrate the new information with previous knowledge, and to overturn their earlier assumptions and viewpoints.
- **Focus on enduring and emerging issues and problems in your field.** Rather than emphasize the acquisition of knowledge outside the context in which it will be used, students in Honors seminars are often asked to complete assignments designed around real-world issues and problems. In this way, they experience the compelling challenges typically faced by professionals in their discipline. Emphasis is more on inquiry than on learning the correct answers.
- **Help students to understand the characteristics of excellent work in your discipline.** Honors instructors often help students to understand the assumptions, methods, types of evidence, means of organizing information, appropriate language, and purposes of the work done in your field. They invite students to consider how these conventions differ from those in other fields.

THE STUDENTS AND PROFESSOR

- **Students are actively involved in the seminar.** Honors students are constantly encouraged to actively seek new information, integrate it with what they already know, organize it in meaningful ways, and have the chance to explain it to others. They explore, research, make choices and explain, and this helps them develop an understanding of the discipline that matches that of experts in the field.
- **Students take responsibility for their own and others' learning.** Honors faculty help to ensure this by setting aside some time in class to discuss the roles and responsibilities that both students and the professor should assume in the course. They encourage students to engage one another in discussions and to hold each other accountable for participating actively and constructively in class activities and discussions.

- **The professor serves as coach or facilitator, rather than the sole authority or expert.** Rather than being the sole information giver and evaluator, Honors instructors share these two roles with students. They often allow students to help set the pace and direction of the learning done in the course; and they guide them to come up with their own questions and answers and to provide feedback to other students.
- **Professors reveal that they are learners, writers and thinkers.** Honors faculty find ways to reveal to students that they are continually learning more about their discipline, that they struggle with the process of learning and research just as students do, and that they need students' help in order to make the course a successful community of learning. This helps students to see their professor as a partner in learning and as a lifelong learner.
- **Professors provide regular opportunities for feedback and assessment.** They offer continuous feedback to students so that students make steady improvements in performance. Feedback to students is often provided through discussion with peers and the professor, through the use of criteria describing excellent work, or through summaries of student responses to in-class surveys. In addition to faculty providing feedback to students, Honors instructors also incorporate into the course opportunities for students to offer them feedback on the course during and/or at the end of the semester (through questionnaires, letters or emails, discussion, mid-term evaluations and ICES).
- **The professor and students respect and value one another.** Honors faculty enhance mutual respect between themselves and students by treating them like adults, allowing them to take risks, meeting with them individually, and involving them in making certain decisions regarding class direction.

