



KENNESAW STATE
UNIVERSITY

KSU JOURNEY HONORS COLLEGE

TEACHING HONORS: AN OVERVIEW

This document provides an overview of honors opportunities and the philosophy of honors teaching to support current and prospective faculty teaching in honors. The mission of the Keeping Sights Upward Journey Honors College is to recruit and retain diverse, highly motivated, and academically talented students, offering them opportunities to participate in intellectual challenges; enhanced academic experiences; and community engagement, leadership, and global activities to support their development as individuals and contributing members of their various communities. Faculty participation is vital to fulfill this mission and advance honors education at Kennesaw State University. We invite faculty from all disciplines to join us in creating opportunities to engage students through collaborative, creative, innovative, experiential, or interdisciplinary work.

Faculty may teach honors students in the following settings:

- Honors sections of general education courses
- Honors sections of lower- or upper-level courses in the major
- Honors contracts in non-honors classes
- HON 1100 The First-Year Honors Colloquium: An Introduction to Honors
- HON 2400 Honors Discovery (0 credit hours)
- HON 3000 Honors Colloquium (1 credit hour)
- HON 3301 Honors Interdisciplinary Seminar (3 credit hours)
- HON 4400 Honors Directed Study (1-3 credit hours)
- HON 4490 Honors Special Topics (3 credit hours)

Faculty may also mentor honors students through HON 3002 Honors Research (0-3 credit hours), or HON 3203 Honors Teaching Assistance (0-3 credit hours), and the Honors Capstone sequence, HON 4497 (0–1 credit hours) and HON 4499 (0–3 credit hours). These and other HON courses are coordinated and taught by regular honors faculty and may be assigned to other faculty on special cases.

Information on honors contracts is available [here](#).

Currently, the KSU Journey Honors College is seeking instructors for Honors Discovery

courses. As described in KSU's course catalog, "Honors Discoveries are short-term, not-for-credit learning experiences focused on topics outside the usual college curriculum. They often integrate disciplines, current events, or popular culture. Honors Discoveries involve small groups of honors students learning through seminar discussion and experiential learning under the guidance of a KSU faculty member." Honors Discoveries are 0-credit hour, pass/fail courses that meet five times in two-hour sessions, typically in five consecutive weeks or alternating weeks for 10 weeks. Faculty who teach an Honors Discovery receive \$500 in faculty development funds from the Honors College through their home department.

To propose an HON 2400 Honors Discovery course, please see https://kennesawstateuniversity-vbzux.formstack.com/forms/honors_discovery_proposal.

Considerations for establishing an honors course:

Typically, prospective honors faculty have established track records of effective teaching and are suggested by their department chairs. The Honors College may request that prospective honors faculty provide teaching evaluations or other documentation of innovative and effective teaching, or a proposal describing a proposed honors course. We also welcome faculty interested in teaching Honors courses to contact the Honors College directly.

Honors College approval is needed for proposals for new special topics seminars and colloquia. The Honors College coordinates scheduling of honors courses in conjunction with department schedulers and will accommodate instructors' preferences whenever possible. Honors faculty participate on a volunteer basis, and through arrangement with the faculty member's department chair. Honors courses and sections are generally taught "in load." Honors faculty do not receive course reassigned time or additional remuneration (with the exception of \$500 in faculty development funds for Honors Discoveries as described above). Honors faculty enjoy smaller class sizes, the opportunity to build special topics seminars and colloquia around their intellectual passions, and bright, highly motivated and engaged students. Through honors teaching, faculty may also identify students who would be assets as research assistants, supplemental instruction leaders, or tutors.

What distinguishes an honors class?

The goal of honors education is to "provide students with a balance of challenge and the support they require to be able to respond to [the] challenge," according to Linda West in the introduction to *Teaching and Learning in Honors* (2). Honors education should challenge the students' "previous world views" and ask students to "consider multiple points of view, to scrutinize evidence and to make meaning in a deliberate and responsible way" (2).

There is no single model, pedagogy, or structure for teaching an honors class. The characteristics of good teaching transcend both honors and non-honors classes. However, at the heart of a successful honors curriculum are the teacher-student and student-student interactions that take place in the classroom. By the nature of their smaller class size and highly motivated students, honors courses give faculty opportunities to try techniques, activities and assignments that would not be feasible in larger, non-honors courses. The

Honors College expects the following to characterize all honors classes:

- **Intellectual challenge.** Honors classes should emphasize content and activities that stimulate students to think about topics in new ways, explore subject matter in greater depth or breadth, or gain first-hand exposure to issues through experiential learning. Coursework should foster creative and/or critical thinking skills. Creative thinking focuses on “exploring ideas, generating possibilities, looking for many right answers rather than just one,” according to Robert Harris, the author of the webpage *Virtual Salt*. He contrasts creative thinking with critical thinking, which “emphasizes the skills of analysis--teaching students how to understand claims, follow or create a logical argument, figure out the answer, eliminate the incorrect paths and focus on the correct one.”
- **Quality over quantity.** Providing intellectual challenge does not mean loading on more assignments (the approach students often experience in high school honors and advanced placement classes). Generally, honors courses should provide different, rather than more, work. This may mean holding students to a higher standard for quality of thought, or substituting more challenging readings, problems, projects or activities than those assigned to non-Honors classes. Ultimately, the intellectual quality demonstrated by the students’ work is more important than the quantity of assignments.
- **Interactivity and active learning.** Seminar and discussion-based pedagogies held in small class sizes are intrinsically more conducive to promoting engaged learning than a traditional one-way lecture format. The faculty member facilitates discussion, debate, and student-centered activities such as peer teaching, student discussion leaders, and partner or group work that may not be feasible in large classes.
- **Faculty accessibility.** In addition to being active participants in their own learning, honors students are likely to seek out faculty for detailed feedback on their work and for mentorship on their academic and career aspirations. Honors faculty provide timely, constructive and clear feedback on assignments, and are accessible to consult with students.
- **Content or pedagogy distinctive from that in non-honors sections.** Honors sections of courses that are also offered to the general student population in a non-honors format should be distinct from the non-honors course in substance and/or pedagogical approach. Faculty members have discretion to determine what will be different about their honors section. Distinctive features of the honors section might include one or more of the following:
 - **Greater breadth of topics:** The addition of topics that are not covered in a non-honors version of the class. This might include readings, lectures, assignments, activities, field trips or out of class experiences unique to the honors class.
 - **Greater depth on selected topics:** More in-depth treatment of a particular topic or topics. This might include readings, lectures, assignments, activities, field trips or out of class experiences unique to the honors class.

- **Pedagogical techniques unique to the honors class**, such as the Socratic method, simulations, case studies, peer-teaching or discussion-leading, experiential or service learning, or essay questions rather than multiple choice exams.
- **Adherence to student learning outcomes established by departments.** Honors sections of courses offered by departments outside the Honors College must still fulfill learning outcomes established by that department for that course. For example, an honors section of HIST 1100 – World History must still fulfill learning outcomes defined by the History Department for that course.
- **Grade distributions that may vary from those in non-honors classes.** Because students who are accepted to the Honors College are top academic achievers, it is not unusual that grade distributions in honors classes may skew higher than those for non-honors classes. While the Honors College anticipates high grades from honors students, no honors class should be designed to be an “automatic A.” The Honors College discourages grading practices that use competition within the class to artificially lower students’ grades, such as grading formulas based on a bell-curve model where only a certain percentage of students could receive As, Bs, Cs, etc.

What should appear on my syllabus?

The course title should indicate that the course is an honors course. For example, “COM 2129 – Honors Public Speaking.”

If this is a course that is also offered in non-honors sections, the Honors College asks faculty to provide a description on their syllabi about content, pedagogy or grading standards that make the honors class different from non-honors sections of the same course. This description might include:

- Acknowledgement that some of the course content is different, such as the addition of topics that are not covered in a non-honors version of the class or more in-depth treatment of a particular topic.
- Reference to readings, assignments, activities, field trips or out-of-class experiences that are unique to the honors class.
- Reference to pedagogical techniques unique to the honors class, such as the Socratic method, simulations, case studies, peer-teaching or discussion-leading, essay questions rather than multiple choice exams, and experiential or service learning, service learning.
- Clear policies, including grading implications, regarding attendance and participation as foundational aspects of learning in honors.
- All standard elements required on any KSU syllabus, such as the enrollment policy, the grading formula, major assignments, office hours, the attendance and make-up policies, and statements regarding academic honesty and disabled student services, must also appear on syllabi for honors courses. Honors students are often apprehensive about their decision to take an honors course rather than a non-honors section of the same course and appreciate syllabi that spell out clear and detailed expectations.

Honors faculty should provide a copy of their syllabus to the Honors College at the start of each semester.

What should I expect from honors students?

KSU's honors classes are available only to students who have applied to and been accepted to the KSU Journey Honors College. These students meet higher GPA admissions standards than KSU's general admission requirements. Honors students must maintain a minimum 3.25 KSU GPA and complete a certain number of honors learning experiences based on their assigned or chosen honors designation to remain in good standing in the Honors College.

The following attributes of Honors students (University of Connecticut Honors Program, 2015) are equally applicable to KSU Honors students.

Honors students...

Have demonstrated high levels of academic achievement. They tend to grasp academic material quickly and prefer analysis and synthesis to memorization.

Are individuals. They still have relative areas of strength and weakness, and their learning styles will vary.

Are highly motivated and ambitious. They often show intrinsic motivation for learning, but they also focus on their grades, particularly if they will be attending graduate or professional school.

Tend to have wide-ranging abilities and interests. They are likely to connect material from your class to other subjects you were not expecting. However, they may also over-commit or have trouble making decisions between academic fields.

Have learned to expect success. Honors students tend to participate in class and produce high quality work. They may also demonstrate perfectionism and anxiety, particularly if they have had little experience with failure or even constructive criticism.

Often hold others to high standards. This includes their peers (in group work and class discussions) and their instructors. Establishing clear expectations for the class can be very important.

Are still college students. They deal with many of the same social and emotional issues as other students, although they may not show it. Undergraduate Honors students are also distinct from graduate students, even when they are doing independent research or taking graduate courses.

University of Connecticut Honors Program

What does the KSU Journey Honors College expect from honors students?

Honors students are expected to conduct themselves in alignment with KSU's Student Code of Conduct pertaining to both academic honesty and behavior inside and outside of the classroom.

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We invite honors faculty to notify the Honors College of students who are not meeting their expectations. Honors students who are found responsible for violations of the Student Code of Conduct will be dismissed from the KSU Journey Honors College. Please let us know if you are reporting a violation to the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity office.

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