I. Program Information

The University Honors Program at UNI encourages motivated and interested students to make the most of their collegiate experience. The program offers challenging classroom experiences, interaction with faculty, and social connections with other capable students. Students in the program represent all five undergraduate colleges and membership is compatible with any of the University’s 120 majors.

Mission Statement
The University Honors Program will attract, retain, and meet the needs of students of exceptional academic achievement, provide an intellectual environment that will stimulate the intellectual curiosity of these students, provide a social environment that will help these students develop close ties with each other and with faculty, provide a learning environment that will allow faculty to experiment with new and different teaching techniques with the hope that successful techniques may be implemented with larger classes, and enhance the reputation of the University of Northern Iowa.

(Provost’s University Honors Program committee, April 2000)

Designations
The Honors Program offers two designations for participation, University Honors with Distinction and University Honors. Students who accumulate the appropriate number of honors credits will be recognized at commencement and have their honors courses and designation noted on their transcripts. The following is a standard distribution of hours for each designation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Honors with Distinction*</th>
<th>University Honors**</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts Core</td>
<td>Honors Seminars</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honors Seminars</td>
<td>Honors Electives</td>
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<td>6 hours</td>
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<td>Honors Electives</td>
<td>Senior Honors Thesis/Project</td>
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<td>9 hours</td>
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<td>Senior Honors Thesis/Project</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
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<td></td>
<td>30 hours</td>
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<td>18 hours</td>
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* Designed for incoming first-year students  ** Designed for current or transfer students

To remain in good academic standing, a student must maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.30. Students who do not meet the minimum requirement of 3.30 are placed on probation. The non-cumulative GPA of the following semester should be above 3.30 to provide evidence of overall improvement. Such evidence of improvement, and a continued effort to raise the cumulative grade point above 3.30, will remove the student from probationary status.

If a student is on probation for two consecutive semesters and no improvement is shown, the student will be dismissed from the program. If a student wishes to re-enter the program at a later date, reapplication is necessary. Special circumstances will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Entrance Requirements
Entering first-year students with an ACT of 27 or higher (SAT I of 1210 or higher) and a high school rank in the top 10% are automatically invited to join the University Honors Program upon their admission to the University of Northern Iowa. Students must respond to accept their position in the program. Those who do not meet the criteria for an automatic invitation can request that their case be reviewed on an individual basis. Current UNI or transfer students may apply for admission with a GPA of 3.30 of better and a professor’s recommendation.
II. Teaching Information

Types of Honors Courses
There are four ways for high-ability students to earn honors credit:

1. Honors sections of Liberal Arts Core – specialized sections made up entirely of honors students with a class limit of 20.
2. Honors sections of standard university offerings (major or elective courses) – specialized sections made up entirely of honors students with a class limit of 20.
3. Honors seminars – unique courses developed specifically for the program with a class limit of 15. Seminars should be reading and writing-intensive and, whenever possible, interdisciplinary in nature.
4. Individual learning experiences – opportunities beyond conventional classroom offerings including independent study, contracting a traditional course for honors credit, and the honors thesis/project.

Faculty Profile
Honors courses are taught by tenure/tenure-track faculty who are:

- Enthusiastic about teaching motivated students
- Comfortable teaching in a small class setting
- Skilled in facilitating discussion and interaction among students
- Eager to explore new ideas or innovative teaching styles

Student Profile
The majority of students join the Honors Program directly from high school with an ACT of 27 or better and a class rank in the top ten percent. Honors students are generally:

- Eager to learn
- Prepared for class and ready to discuss ideas
- Open to teaching methods that encourage active learning
- Conscious (even concerned) about their grades

You will find that honors students have a high capacity for learning. However, it is important not to assume they will be exceptionally advanced simply by nature of their honors standing. Students may need refreshers on basic, introductory material just as their counterparts do. Some may have writing, speaking or study skills that need to be improved over time. As a former president of the National Collegiate Honors Council stated, “we are in the business of creating honors students, not simply providing services for exceptional students.”

Characteristics of Honors Courses
What is an honors course? A typical answer is that honors classes aren’t harder; they simply focus on different styles of learning. Another common refrain is that the courses don’t require quantitatively more work, but instead provide qualitatively superior learning experiences. If an honors course isn’t just a harder class that requires more work, what is it? Honors courses have the following characteristics:

- Emphasis is placed on student participation and initiative (e.g., extensive discussion rather than primarily lecturing/note taking, students are responsible for presenting selected information, professor solicits student input on course direction)
- Active learning is encouraged through discussion, debate, writing, experiments, primary research, etc.
- Focus is placed on the development of oral and written communication skills
- Issues are explored in greater depth and breadth, making interdisciplinary connections whenever possible
- Course content, teaching style, or method of evaluation differs from a traditional section of the same course
- Expectations are placed at a level which makes the experience rigorous and intellectually stimulating
Additionally, honors courses are characterized by small class sizes that make it possible to offer unique classroom experiences such as field trips, special guests, or co-curricular activities. Whenever possible, the Honors Program will provide funding to support such educational enrichment.

Small class sizes allow for interaction between student and professor. Students make positive comments when professors know them personally. Conversely, they voice complaints when “s/he never learned our names.” Both students and faculty should enjoy getting to know each other through honors involvement. Don’t be surprised if students later approach you for recommendations or to act as an independent study or thesis/project advisor!

Honors courses should also promote interaction among students. The program’s mission statement mentions the creation of close personal ties. Consider taking time for introductions on the first day of class and encourage students to learn each other’s names. Familiarity among students will lead to a sense of belonging and commitment to the program and university.

Grading
While grading methods are left to the discretion of the instructor, some general comments on grading are in order:

- You may find that honors students are more concerned about grading criteria than their counterparts. Clearly articulate expectations at the beginning of the semester and inform students of any changes along the way.
- Honors work should not result in a lower grade than would be achieved for the same work in a traditional class (a possible result of grading on a curve). Such grading results in the feeling that honors courses are punitive rather than enriching.
- It is expected that instructors will grade students rigorously and assign grades that reflect performance. While honors students usually earn high grades, instructors should not hesitate to assign C’s, D’s, and F’s when performance dictates.

Suggestions for Outside the Classroom
Consider the following suggestions for adding an out-of-class component to your honors course:

- Encourage students to participate in university lectures, films, etc., especially those that tie closely to course content.
- Build extra or co-curricular events into your course syllabus or have students attend lectures/events on an extra-credit basis.
- Interact with your students at various honors events, host a pizza night at your home, or arrange an informal review session in a venue other than the classroom. Students enjoy the opportunity to get to know their honors professors outside of class.

Administrative Details

- Courses are selected based on program needs with the help of the appropriate department heads. Faculty interested in teaching particular courses should approach their department head and/or the honors director.
- Departments provide courses within their regular load whenever possible. Adjunct funds may be provided to replace the honors section when offering within regular load is not possible. Faculty will not normally receive special compensation for teaching honors, except in the case of Presidential Scholar Seminars.
- Reading lists are submitted through departmental offices.
- Instructors are asked to submit a course description and professor biography to be included in the Honors Advising Packet, as well as a copy of the course syllabus for program records.
- Instructors will be asked to allow a few minutes of course time at the end of the semester for students to fill out an honors-specific course survey. Responses are used for honors course planning only, and are not part of any other assessment or evaluation of instructors.
III. Student and Faculty Input

Comments from students when asked to share expectations for what an honors course should be:

- An honors course should offer more opportunities for the student. These opportunities include more intimate class setting with smaller class sizes, more advantages for participation, outside activities and seminars. They should also more thoroughly study the basic concepts of the course.

- Small class size. More engaging than other classes – more discussion – more projects as opposed to memorization based exams. Create an environment that is highly conducive to interpersonal relations – so that the class is more than just a classroom but an atmosphere that one enjoys being in.

- I expected it to be more challenging in terms of workload, evocativeness, and interaction.

- I think an honors course should be more discussion based, with more emphasis on understanding rather than getting through a set amount of material.

- I would like my honors courses to be more discussion based than non-honors courses, but not so much so that nothing is learned. I want my honors courses to be different than non-honors courses, not just another section with a little different test. What’s the point in that? With the discussion, I would like to delve deeper into certain topics, rather than simply skim the surface with an overview.

- I expect an honors class to raise issues other classes don’t, spark more discussion, and challenge me mentally. I don’t believe more homework as in busywork should be assigned though.

- Should challenge the students to think critically.

- I think that an honors class should involve discussion, rather than lecture. I also believe that it would be better for grades to be determined in ways other than by taking tests. Papers, projects, and speeches, I believe, allow a more thorough investigation of the material and a deeper evaluation of the students’ knowledge.

- Challenging coursework, accelerated atmosphere of learning.

- An honors course should cover the subject more thoroughly and apply it to everyday life and other subjects. I don’t think we should necessarily be graded harsher, but I do think our projects and assignments could really be used to shape us as individuals.

- I expect to be challenged, to have fun, and to come out with more knowledge than I came in with.

- Honors classes should be more student input oriented. There should be more in-depth discussion than in non-honors classes. There should be more thought & analysis than non-honors & allow students to draw own conclusions rather than simple right/wrong.

- I have discovered that this is a tough question. It should challenge students in a different way, or a more individual level, through introspection and discussion. However, because in any class you have a variety of majors/areas of knowledge, this is very hard to do. I have yet to see it done well, though through no fault of the professors.

- To move at a bit more accelerated rate, as well as focusing on more complex concepts.
Comments from faculty members who have taught honors courses:

- The main difference with discussion was that students could actually take an idea and run with it. Discussions could be developed and nurtured. In addition, students were not concerned that they would lose status in front of their peers if they actually expressed involvement with the subject matter. Therefore, our discussions were animated and very engaging to all.

- I think that the honors classes are extremely well suited for experimentation. In a regular class when I try something new pedagogically, I don’t know when it doesn’t work out very well if the problem is with the idea or with the abilities of that particular crop of students. With the honors students, if a bright idea doesn’t work the problem is more likely to rest with weaknesses in the idea than with the students. I tried several new classroom activities this semester with the honors students that I would never have felt able to risk in a regular class because I would have felt that failure was likely. The ones that worked really well I am going to implement in simplified form in my regular classes.

- In my honors sections, the students range from good to excellent; in my regular sections the students range from dreadful to excellent. This is to express the obvious; not all excellent students are in the Honors Program. So, I guess I look at my honors sections as places where I can experiment with methodologies specifically with an eye to using them eventually with all my students.

- There are two things that I think ought to distinguish honors courses: first, that they be much more rigorous, intellectually challenging and demanding, and second, that they find ways to encourage creativity on the part of students, usually by the sorts of assignments that are given to them.

- I discovered that teaching an honors course was not like teaching an upper division seminar in my department. Though they are bright, I could not assume the same kind of common base knowledge, and so I had to make appropriate adjustments in my plans for the course.

- Honors students cut to the quick faster. They do not need the traditional exposition of the plot when discussing a novel. Instead, you can concentrate more on themes and interpretations. So, it takes half the time to discuss a novel with honors students than with a regular class. (In addition, most of the honors students will actually read the book).

Approved by Honors Advisory Board, 9/21/05