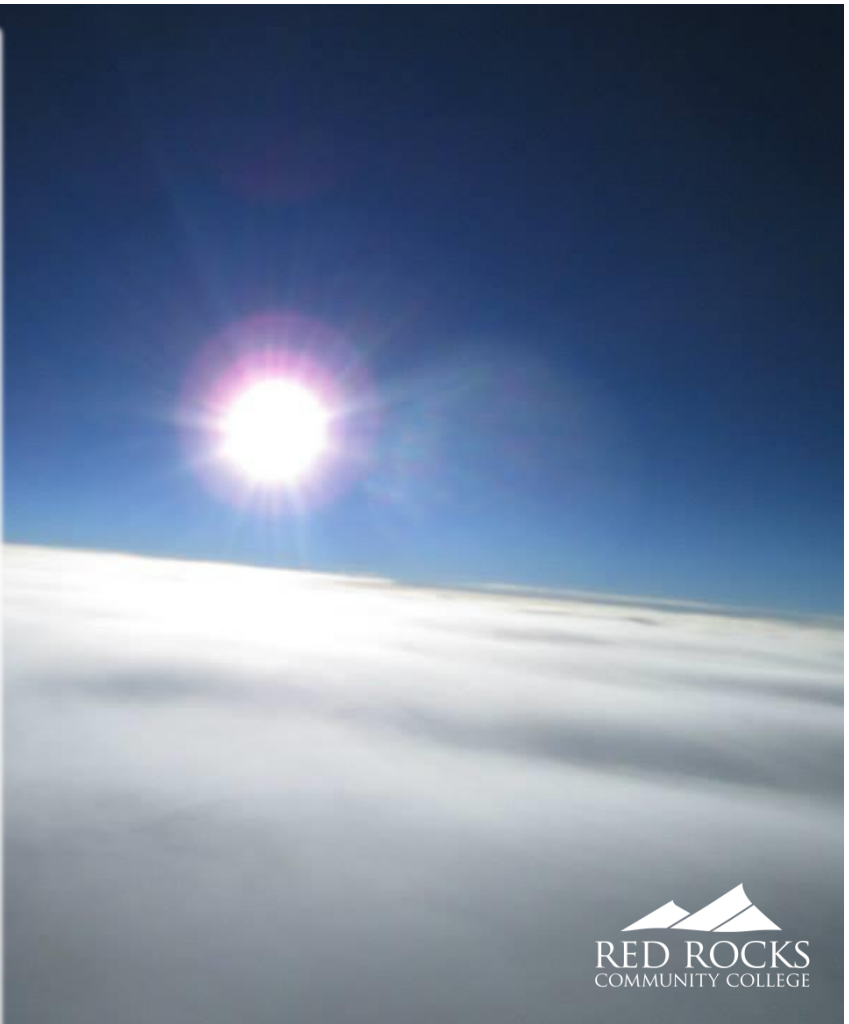


Honors Faculty Guide

Dr. John U Trefny Honors Program

2017-2019



RRCC, Honors Program
Red Rocks Community College
Room 1523
Honors@rrcc.edu
303-914-6366

HONORS PROGRAM
Red Rocks Community College



Contents

RRCC Honors Program - Faculty Guide	4
Program Mission	4
Program Vision	4
Benefits of Participation	4
Honors Program Learning Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes.....	5
Honors Program Structure	6
RRCC Faculty Roles in the Honors Program	6
Honors Faculty	7
Honors Student Recommendation Process	7
Faculty Process.....	7
Honors Office Follow-up	8
Honors Option Course Proposal	9
Distinguishing Characteristics of Honors Courses	9
I. Requirements: Every honors course must:.....	10
Scheduling / Staffing of Honors Classes:.....	10
Cancellation / Conversion of Honors Classes:.....	10
Course Proposal Process.....	11
Honors Option Course Proposal: Application	12
Class Observation Form	15
Honors Option Proposal Checklist: Approval.....	16
Honors Contract Course Credit	17
Originating an Honors Contract project.....	18
Completing an Honors Contract project	18
Evaluating and Reporting an Honors Contract project	18
Recording of Honors credit	18
Frequently Asked Questions about Honors Contracts:	18
Honors Contract Option Best Practices – Tips from Instructors.....	19
Honors Contract Option Form	20
Honors Capstone Advisor.....	23
Background	23
The mentor role	23

Stages in the Capstone process 24
Honors Capstone FAQs 25
Capstone Project Proposal..... 27
General Honors FAQs..... 28

RRCC Honors Program - Faculty Guide

The mission of the Dr. John U Trefny Honors Program at RRCC is to provide exceptional learning opportunities through interdisciplinary education and problem-solving experiences for a community of scholars in order to prepare them to be leaders in a global community. The Honors program will also help them prepare for transfer and career opportunities. As a Faculty member, there are many important roles you can play in the Honors Program. Faculty can promote the program and help identify qualified students, become part of an Honors Faculty Cohort by developing an Honors Option course, serve as a subject matter expert and advisor for an Honors Capstone project. This guide is intended to facilitate that involvement by explaining the components of the Honors Program and providing examples and procedures.

Program Mission

The Honors Program at RRCC provides exceptional learning opportunities through interdisciplinary education and problem-solving experiences for a community of scholars in order to prepare them to be leaders in a global community.

Program Vision

- Promoting equity and access to Honors education
- Developing leaders in STEM
- Providing exceptional opportunities for learning and development for our exceptional students

Benefits of Participation

For students – develop interdisciplinary problem solving and research skills and gain a competitive edge in the college transfer and scholarship process. Students will become part of a community of scholars. Students will also be involved with advanced projects, internships, service learning and travel opportunities through the Honors Program, providing a competitive edge and exceptional experience.

For instructors – develop innovative and interesting ways to help students dive deep into an interdisciplinary problem.

- It is a chance to work with high-achieving, passionate and creative students.
- Presents new opportunities to collaborate with other faculty. Honors faculty will be a cohort as well, developing interdisciplinary relationships among departments.
- Helping students develop their knowledge and skills, using who they are and what they bring as a foundation, and incorporating a global perspective in what they are learning. Culture perspective and personal experiences do not necessarily change how we do math (or STEM) but it does change what we view as important in the world.
- The Fall Honors Retreat will be paid for. The retreat will take place mid-October.

Participation in the Honors program can be the focus of service performance objectives for the faculty performance review and evaluation process.

Honors Program Learning Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes

Intellectual inquiry/Research Skill (PLO 1)

SLO 1: Demonstrate the ability to design, plan, and execute an original research or creative capstone project in the appropriate discipline or interdisciplinary field that would meet professional standards in the field.

SLO 2: Effectively communicate the methods, techniques, and findings of their original research or creative capstone project.

Interdisciplinarity (PLO 2)

SLO 1: Apply the tools (methodologies/content/skills) of multiple disciplines to analyze and/or solve complex issues and problems.

SLO 2: Demonstrate the flexible thinking required in integrative learning environments.

SLO 3: Work collaboratively with persons from different fields of specialization in diverse, cross-disciplinary teams to analyze and/or solve applied, real-world issues and problems.

Leadership (PLO 3)

SLO 1: Demonstrate leadership skills (organization and planning, communication, delegation) by having taken one or more leadership roles in Honors curricular or co-curricular activities.

Civic and Global learning (PLO 4)

SLO 1: Demonstrate civic and global responsibility through informed and engaged participation in community service and/or service-learning projects.

SLO 2: Engage in interdisciplinary research and projects that are student-driven and motivated by their cultural experiences or by the needs in their community.

Honors Program Structure

Honors Core Classes (7-9 credits) must maintain 3.5 GPA

- Honors Seminar (HNR 100) – 1 credit class
- Honors Colloquium 1 (HNR 102) – 2 credit class
- Honors Colloquium 2 (HNR 202) – 2 credit class
- Honors Capstone (HNR 289) – variable credit available based on scope of projects (2-4 credits)

Honors Options (9-11 additional honors credits minimum) must maintain 3.5 GPA

- Honors Options must be completed in at least three different divisions
 - Math and science (GT-MA, GT-SC)
 - Arts and humanities (GT-SS, GT-AH)
 - English and History (GT-CO, GT-HI)

Other Honors Requirements:

- Attend the Honors Retreat
- Attend at least one Honors Field Trip
- Poster session participation – capstone project presentation
- Complete Service Learning Hours

RRCC Faculty Roles in the Honors Program

Faculty are encouraged to participate in the Honors Program in a variety of ways outlined below:

1. Identify and recommend students for the program.
2. Attend Honors Program events and workshops.
3. Serve on the Honors Committee. This involves meeting on a regular basis, reviewing course proposals, student applications and reviewing policy or procedural changes.
4. Develop on Honors Option Course.
5. Advise an Honors student on a capstone project.
6. Advise an Honors Contract student in a non-honors course.

Honors Faculty

While honors faculty should reflect the make-up of the faculty at the college, they must exemplify excellence in the classroom and motivate the students to do the same.

Honors faculty will:

1. Allow their passion for their individual disciplines to shine through in their teaching;
2. Embrace teaching strategies that empower students to take ownership of course material and approach questions from interdisciplinary perspectives;
3. Encourage students to learn independently from direct sources of knowledge, such as laboratory experiences, original documents and other primary sources, data collections, service learning opportunities, etc.;
4. Enhance the critical and creative thinking skills of their students;
5. Promote the active and interactive learning of their students through such techniques as coaching, mentoring, inquiry-based methods, supervised independent projects, and service learning;
6. Provide thorough, frequent, and constructive assessment of students' written and oral work;
7. Be willing to involve students in their own research, scholarship, or creative activities;
8. Be widely available to students outside of class time and posted office hours for mentoring, conversation, guidance, and the general enhancement of the students' academic experience and personal development;
9. Demonstrate a strong and ongoing commitment to promote excellence in honors education, being fully aware of the Honors program mission and helping to evolve the philosophy of the program as needed;
10. Be active and dedicated advocates of the Honors College on campus and off; this includes attending honors events, being willing to serve on the Honors Committee, writing letters of recommendation for honors students, attending honors conferences, recruiting new honors students, working with student groups, etc.

Honors Student Recommendation Process

We will be encouraging faculty to recommend students for the Honors Program. This can start in the pre-STEM track courses, such as MAT 121. By identifying high-achieving students early in the pipeline, we can help to get them engaged with the Honors Programs as they progress towards a degree and/or transfer.

Faculty Process

1. Identify student (look for any or all of these)
 - a. Does the student display curiosity, creativity and a drive to succeed?
 - b. Does the student seem interested in going beyond the material?
 - c. Is the student interested in a STEM subject or career?
 - d. Does the student display leadership qualities?
2. Recommend to the Honors Office

- a. Visit the Honors faculty resource page at www.rrcc.edu/reach/honors/faculty
 - b. Click the “Recommend a Student” button
 - c. Fill out the form with as much information as you can
3. Talk to the student about the Honors program and/or direct them to the Honors office

Honors Office Follow-up

1. Recommended Student will be contacted and provided information about the Honors Program
2. Student will receive an invitation to a pre-honors student event
3. Student will receive advising information about a guided pathway including Honors courses
4. Depending on when anticipated enrollment into Honors program is expected, student will be invited to an event with Honors Program students

Honors Option Course Proposal

Honors students will be required to take a minimum of three Honors Option courses. The courses will be from three different areas, such as English, Math and Humanities. These will be existing courses that fulfill graduation and/or transfer requirements, but the course will be designed for the Honors students and will incorporate the Honors Cohort Theme. The Cohort Theme incorporates science and society and is chosen to encourage students to approach a problem in an interdisciplinary way. Professional development will be provided for the faculty chosen to be in the Honors Cohort.

Distinguishing Characteristics of Honors Courses

According to the National Collegiate Council, in comparison with non-honors courses, “The course objectives of honors sections generally reflect more emphasis on the higher levels of the cognitive domain as students spend more time on application and analysis. Students are expected to contribute more to analytical discussion in class, and writing assignments are generally more demanding in composition and research methodology” (From “Honors in the Two-Year Colleges,” 1985, p.9).

Honors courses differ from regular courses in substantial ways. Honors courses will help the student engage in interdisciplinary problem solving through an interwoven program theme. Active learning, inquiry and other innovative research-based teaching methodologies are emphasized. In addition, any honors course will incorporate some, if not all, of the following criteria:

1. Students in honors courses will be introduced to the normal content of the course, and will gain a heightened understanding of that content through participation in extra learning experiences on and off campus that are connected to the program theme (e.g. debates, mock trials, research project, interviews, student presentations, field trips, international experiences, etc.).
2. Students in honors courses will develop high-level cognitive skills, which emphasize a breadth and depth of learning as well as the acquisition of information.
3. Students in honors courses will develop a heightened appreciation for the methodology of the discipline to prepare them to succeed in upper-division courses. Students will be encouraged to develop appropriate research skills; to this end, the assignments may include data analysis, research models, literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, research projects, and focused analyses.
4. Students will present original interpretations and analyses and demonstrate competencies. Emphasis will be placed on quality, logical presentation, and originality.
5. Students in honors courses will study and evaluate primary source material (e.g. literature, painting, official documents, diaries, journals, statistical data, and letters).
6. Students in honors courses will become involved in activities that encourage them to engage in inquiry and analysis as well as fostering independent learning.
7. Students in honors courses will be encouraged to connect their learning to local, regional, and global issues and perspectives.

I. Requirements: Every honors course must:

- a. Address and integrate the goals of the Honors program mission into course instruction;
- b. Emphasize individual interpretation and analysis;
- c. Encourage creative and critical thinking;
- d. Examine questions from an interdisciplinary context;
- e. Delve more in-depth into the subject matter than the non-honors course version; honors courses should introduce students to the theoretical disputes and historical development of the discipline;
- f. Foster the ability to analyze and synthesize a broad range of materials and concepts;
- g. Stress the importance of effective oral and written communication skills;
- h. Promote teamwork and collaboration;
- i. Acquaint students with discipline-specific research skills;
- j. Encourage students to become active, self-motivated thinkers who will take greater responsibility for their own learning.
- k. Incorporate different instructional materials than the non-honors version; primary source materials (i.e., literature, works of art, official documents, film, diaries, statistical data, etc.) are preferred over textbooks; scholarly journals should be used where appropriate;
- l. Be conducted in a seminar-style classroom setting, with an emphasis on discussion;
- m. Apply theories to real-world situations; the social, cultural, and political context of classroom activities and course material should be considered whenever possible;
- n. Promote learning outside of the formal classroom;
- o. Provide opportunities for publication, public presentation, and peer review of student work;

Scheduling / Staffing of Honors Classes:

To maintain the integrity of the Honors Program, all honors classes will be scheduled with the guidance of the Honors Director. All honors courses will be staffed by the full time faculty that proposes the course. The Honors Director will coordinate classes to ensure courses do not conflict with each other and meet the needs of student enrollment and completion.

Cancellation / Conversion of Honors Classes:

Honors classes should not be cancelled without consulting the Honors Director. Where low enrollment necessitates the conversion of an honors course into a non-honors course, the honors section (and corresponding reference number) must be converted and changed in banner.

Course Proposal Process

Option courses will be developed around the program theme for each cohort. Therefore, approval of an option course is for the two year cohort duration only. New option courses will be developed for each cohort and new faculty are encouraged to apply.

Step 1: Attend an Honors Faculty Workshop (offered late Fall semester and during work week of spring semester).

Step 2: Discuss your course proposal ideas with your department and once a course is identified discuss participation in Honors with your Dean to move forward.

Step 3: If you need additional resources to implement your honors course ideas, meet with the Honors Director to discuss possible assistance.

Step 4: Complete the Course Proposal Packet: completed application needs to be signed by the department chair and Dean. The chair and dean are not assessing the content of the proposal, but the participation of the faculty member in the Honors program. Teaching an Honors option class will impact the workload and the participation in the Honors Cohort will be a significant part of the Service expectation in Performance planning.

Step 5: Proposal packet is reviewed by Honors Committee and Class observation is completed.

Step 6: Decision is made by early Spring semester for the following Fall cohort start and faculty is notified of acceptance.

Honors Option Course Proposal: Application

Requirements:

1. Chair/lead and Dean approval
 2. Attend one Honors workshop
 3. Complete course proposal packet
 4. Class visit and evaluation by Honors Director
-

Name _____

Department _____ Dean _____

Provide a brief statement outlining your teaching philosophy and how it supports the Honors Program mission. (250 words)

Provide a brief statement about how your teaching maximizes student engagement. (250 words)

Course title and number: _____

Course to be offered Spring 2018 Fall 2018 Spring 2019

Course description including what distinguishes your course from a non-honors course and how you will be incorporating the Program Theme (not every aspect of the course has to align with the theme):

Proposed texts and needed course materials:

Example class activity/activities:

Example Integrated theme assignment:

Proposed grading/assessment measures (e.g. tests, presentations, papers, off-campus activities):

Honors Option Course Proposal Signature page

Faculty name: _____

Proposed course title and number: _____

Course to be offered Spring 2018 Fall 2018 Spring 2019

I approve this application for the Honors Option course proposal

Honors Option Proposal 2017-2018

Faculty signature: _____ Date _____

Chair/lead signature: _____ Date _____

Dean Signature:: _____ Date _____

Class Observation Form

Part of the Honors Option Class proposal Review Process

Instructor:

Proposed class:

Class observed:

Date:

Number of students:

Notes on delivery mode:

Notes on student engagement:

Notes on innovation in the classroom:

Analysis: How does the teaching style fit with the Honors Program format?

Signature: _____

Honors Option Proposal Checklist: Approval

Course:

Faculty:

Semester offered:

	Director Approved	Committee Approved	Notes
Workshop attendance			
Option proposal completed			
Signature page for proposal completed			
Class Observation			

Notes:

Honors Contract Course Credit

The Honors Contract allows a student to make a one-on-one arrangement with an instructor in order to earn Honors credit in a non-honors course. Contract applications are accepted during the first four weeks of the fall and spring semester.

The work assigned as a result of the contract should be qualitatively different in nature from the work already assigned in the class. The mere addition of readings or assignments is not sufficient. For example, the assigned work may rely on primary sources not formally introduced in the class, or focus more intensively on particular topics. We will not approve contracts in which students function as TAs for honors credit.

The student must earn a grade of B or above in the class in which the Honors Contract Option is completed in order to earn honors credit. Thus the instructor and student should discuss the student's progress in the course, both when the project is originated and after the midterm, in order to determine if an honors option is advisable. (In the event that a student completes an Honors Contract, but does not earn a minimum B in the class, some instructors choose to convert the project to extra credit—this is entirely at your discretion.)

Contracts will be reviewed to see if they meet the above policies and are:

Specific. Details of exactly what is to be done, such as required format if relevant, products, amount of reading, number of meetings, specific topic or process for choosing a topic where relevant, expected completion date(s).

Measurable. Criteria for evaluating any output such as papers or presentations, level of scholarship expected, etc.

Relevant. Appropriate to the course and course level.

Beneficial. Produce a benefit to the student in terms of developing depth or breadth of knowledge/skills not available to non-Honors students or application of knowledge/skills in ways not available to non-Honors students.

Contracts should be designed to provide an enhanced experience in one or more of the following areas:

1. Applied learning
2. Peer instruction and public presentation
3. Interdisciplinary perspectives
4. A deeper and more challenging view of one aspect of the course material
5. Experience outside the classroom/service learning
6. The use of theory beyond that required of other students

Originating an Honors Contract project

The student is expected to approach the instructor by no later than the end of the third week of the semester to request permission to complete an Honors Contract and to discuss possible projects. Earlier is better, and the students are encouraged to contact the instructor before the semester starts.

If the instructor agrees to supervise an Honors Contract, the project should be outlined in the Honors contract by the end of week four. The student fills out the student contract request. It is the instructor's responsibility to fill out the instructor's contract in the (<http://www.rrcc.edu/honors/faculty>). Once initiated, the student is required to agree to the contract, indicated by a signature.

Completing an Honors Contract project

The student is expected to check in with the instructor at least every other week to report progress, unless otherwise specified by the instructor. It is encouraged to set up a regular meeting schedule.

Deadlines are outlined in the Honors contract, and if those deadlines are not met, the instructor has the right to terminate the Honors Contract.

Since the student must earn a minimum GPA of 3.5 in the class in order to earn Honors credit, it is suggested that the student and instructor meet during week ten to discuss whether the student is on track to earn the necessary grade.

Evaluating and Reporting an Honors Contract project

The Honors Contract project does not need to receive a numeric grade. However, the project must satisfy all of the requirements laid out in the honors contract in order for the student to earn honors credit. The evaluation of the project must be completed in the online honors option tool on the faculty tab of the Honors page. (There is a form to fill out. Evaluations are typically 1-2 paragraphs in length and indicate the strengths of the project, areas for improvement, and whether or not the project met the established objectives.) Once the evaluation is completed, click "Submit Evaluation" in order to finalize the project. This will notify the Director that the honors distinction should be added to the contract.

Recording of Honors credit

Once the registrar's office receives the email from the Director indicating that Honors credit has been earned, and after verifying that the student earned a minimum B in the course, they will manually change the name of the course so that Honors appears in the title. (Please note that it sometimes takes a few weeks for the Honors distinction to appear.)

Frequently Asked Questions about Honors Contracts:

How is a contract different than a whole Honors section?

This is just for one student, not a whole class. So the Honors Class contract lets the Honors Program student make any transfer-level class an Honors class. And while Honors sections are open to anyone meeting the prerequisites for the course with instructor permission, only Honors Program students can make Honors Class contracts.

Do I have to participate if a student asks me?

No, of course not. It's a voluntary program. But many faculty want to support students who have the will and desire to do more. These contracts seek to give the student an opportunity to work closely with an instructor, to experience active learning more typical of 300- or 400-level college coursework or to do work a professional in that discipline might do. It's what we call the Honors Experience.

How do I make an Honors Class contract with an Honors Program student?

Download the form from the website or from the Faculty guide. It can be filled out electronically or by hand. You and the participating student should meet to discuss the extra work or project and fill out the contract together. We'll let you know if the contract is approved ASAP so that the student can get started early in the semester!

Who assesses the student's work?

You do. If completed in accordance with the assessment standard you set out in the Honors Class contract, you the Director know by the first day of the following semester. "Honors" will be added to the course name on the student's transcript retroactively.

Honors Contract Option Best Practices – Tips from Instructors

- Develop one or two "go-to" projects in case the student doesn't have a clear idea of what they want to study. Develop specific guidelines, expectations, grading rubric, etc, and give them to the student at the beginning of the project.—business faculty member
- Make sure to fill out the contract and be clear in the goals. Set a deadline and require more than one draft before the deadline. –psychology faculty member
- Design a project that fits seamlessly into what you are already doing in class, such as augmenting a research paper.—English faculty member
- Develop a project that contributes to the course—something that you can use as a teaching tool in subsequent classes.—English faculty member

Honors Contract Option Form

Student Name: _____

S Number: _____ Student Email: _____

Current academic level (ex: first-semester sophomore): _____

Course prefix, number, and section (ex: PHY 211-001) _____

Instructor Name: _____

Instructor Email: _____

Does this course already have an Honors-designated section? Yes No

If yes, the course is not eligible for an Honors contract.

Have you ever completed an Honors Contract before? Yes No

If yes, please list the courses below (XXX000-000):

Timeline for Completion: (include specific deadlines that encompass the scope of the project)

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Instructor Signature: _____ Date: _____

PROVIDE CONTRACT DETAILS ON BACK SIDE OF FORM

To be completed by the instructor.

Dear Faculty Colleague: Please fill out this form completely. For any questions please contact Barbra Sobhani Barbra.sobhani@rrcc.edu

Describe the work that the student will need to complete to earn honors credit for this course. What will the student be doing that is substantially different from the “regular work” in the course? (The addition of extra work alone is insufficient.)

Contracts should be designed to provide an enhanced experience in one or more of the following areas:

1. Applied learning
2. Peer instruction and public presentation
3. Interdisciplinary perspectives
4. A deeper and more challenging view of one aspect of the course material
5. Experience outside the classroom/service learning
6. The use of theory beyond that required of other students

Which area or areas will this contract address, and how?

How often will you meet with the student to review and discuss this honors work?

Describe how you will assess the student’s performance at the end of the semester to determine if the honors credits have been earned, including any quantitative or qualitative thresholds you will apply. Please note that the work assigned for the contract should not be factored into the student’s final grade, and will only be assessed in order to determine whether honors credit should be awarded.

Honors Office Approval: _____ Date: _____

Honors Capstone Advisor

Background

The goal of the Capstone project is to engage Honors students in a hands-on, participatory learning experience that allows them to see a scholarly project from inception through public defense. The Capstone can range widely from a traditional research project, a creative work, or a service-oriented exercise with a clear scholarly component. The projects may be within any discipline but should have an emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach. Combining the Honors capstone with another project requirement is allowed, though the student's modification must be clearly articulated in the Capstone proposal. Team projects are also acceptable, but each student's role must be clearly defined and go above and beyond the other, non-honors group members.

Capstone projects can inspire considerable anxiety and trepidation in students, but upon completion, many see their projects as high points of their undergraduate experience. Because Capstone projects are not widely required on this campus, students may express concern and uncertainty at the outset about the project and their ability to complete it; a major part of the mentor role is helping students realize their own capabilities and learn to manage their concerns in a healthy, productive way.

The mentor role

The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) is a professional association of undergraduate honors programs. NCHC created the following guidelines to assist Capstone mentors with the Honors Capstone experience.

Be helpful When students come to you as a potential Capstone mentor, some will have good ideas that are too broad, like, "I want to study crime." Some will have focused ideas that would be great for a Master's thesis or a Doctoral dissertation, but not achievable as an undergraduate thesis or project. Some students will have an area of interest, but no topic or idea how to approach the area. And some students will have no real idea at all. Maybe they took an interesting course and decided to approach that instructor. At this stage, students need a lot of help transforming a vague interest into a doable project. They need help to fashion testable hypotheses or working questions with a realistic research plan or project schedule. They need advice and guidance with their review of the literature and their drafts. Work closely with them and help them turn their ideas into an excellent undergraduate thesis.

Be proactive Students are most likely to do their Capstone work when they have regularly-scheduled appointments with their faculty mentors. Busy students put off work that doesn't have a definite due date, but students who are given specific tasks to accomplish at regularly-scheduled meetings will almost certainly complete their theses on time. It's important for a mentor to be proactive: make regular appointments, once a week or once every two weeks, depending on their progress. Students should never leave their mentor's office without scheduling another appointment. If a student doesn't show up for an appointment, he or she should call the mentor and reschedule. If they show up unprepared, the mentor should reschedule and take whatever steps necessary to ensure that they're prepared next time.

Be demanding It's tempting to let students slide, especially when they're bright and the faculty member is overloaded. "I know I said I'd have a hypothesis for you today, but I've been real busy. I'll get my

project done before I graduate.” Mentors should be reasonable, but also demanding. Insist on regular appointments. Insist that the student do the work that was agreed upon. And insist that the work be high quality. Do not settle for sloppy, incomplete, or badly-written work. At the same time, mentors should remember that these are not graduate students, and this is not a Master’s thesis. What faculty should expect is undergraduate work of the highest quality, and our students rely on us for help to achieve that.

Be collaborative Students should be told right from the start that an Honors Capstone project is a collaboration between the student and the mentor. They should know that they cannot simply hand something to an advisor and say, “Here it is. Grade me.” But it is important to recognize that this is the model they’re used to: The professor gives an assignment, the student does the work and hands it in, and the professor delivers a grade. It is part of the thesis mentor’s job to show students a collaborative model and to work closely with them at every stage of the process. If an Honors student has more than one mentor, his or her project should be a collaborative process between advisors. For the sake of clarity, fairness, thoroughness, and consistency, advisors should consult each other on a regular basis to compare notes and to monitor progress.

Be supportive A Capstone project is a long process. It’s easy for students to give up or to believe they don’t have what it takes. That’s when mentors take on the role of ‘pep-talk-giver.’ Reassure them that everyone who’s ever done this kind of work has felt the same things, that they are smart enough, that they can see it through to the end. If we want them to do a good job, sometimes we have to help revive their flagging energy and outlook.

Stages in the Capstone process

Beginning The Capstone mentor’s first official role involves shaping and approving a student’s Capstone proposal, which all students are required to submit at the start of their project. Students may not be familiar with the norms of research proposals so your direction and mentoring will be greatly appreciated. The proposal should be no longer than two pages and general guidelines are available on the Honors website and in the Honors Student Handbook. It is helpful to the student if you, as mentor, establish your expectations for regular meetings, progress reports, and delivery dates during this stage of the process. As you might expect, keeping a long-term time frame in mind is a new experience for many students, any assistance you can provide in terms of keeping them on pace will be helpful. Although it is rare, occasionally students put the work off until too late, only to discover their calculations on timing are seriously in error. The approved Capstone proposal becomes part of the student’s file. Deviation from the proposal is allowed, however major changes, such as choosing a different topic, require the student to submit new documentation to the Honors Office.

Middle Although Honors students have a long “focal length” they are also likely inexperienced with producing a scholarly product that requires a sustained effort. Regular meetings and progress schedules are highly recommended. Recognizing that there are many pathways to successful completion of the Capstone project, you may find it helpful to consider the following progress indicators:

1. Literature research. Students should conduct extensive literature review necessary to provide the context for their project.
2. Methods. Students should successfully master the methods necessary to complete the project. All research compliance issues should be resolved. Access to data sets, field plots, recording facilities, equipment, etc...should be resolved.
3. Data collection. For those project that require data collection (e.g. experiments, interviews, etc...), students should finish in plenty of time for data analysis and writing of the results.
4. Results/analysis. Almost all projects will require a significant write up of the process or analysis of the data.

End All students are required to make a public presentation or defense of their work in a venue appropriate to the project and discipline. Typically, this will take the form of a poster presentation at the STEM EXPO Undergraduate Research Symposium or a regional/national disciplinary conference. Please note that the Honors Program has very limited funds available to help support student travel to present their work at academic conferences.

Honors Capstone FAQs

So is a capstone project like a senior thesis? What is it?

It could be, but it could be more creative or experiential. ALL capstone projects must emphasize a broader, interdisciplinary view of a topic or more in-depth study of a topic, as might be expected in 300- or 400-level college coursework. ALL capstone projects promote active learning and are assessed with rigorous standards. And ALL capstone Projects must involve work typically done by a professional in that discipline. A scholarly paper might satisfy that criterion, but so might creation of a professional portfolio and website for an art student or a business plan for a business student. A social science student might conduct a study and write an article for potential publication. A drama student might write a play. You get the idea.

Does the student get credit for this project?

Absolutely—if your assessment criteria are satisfied. The capstone project contract you write with the student will specify how many semesters the project will take (1 or 2) and how many credits the project will encompass. The student enrolls in the HNR 289 course in the final semester of the project. A student can get credit for the work completed, even if the project is not completed in its entirety and even if that student does not ultimately meet the criteria necessary to graduate with Honors. But only Honors Program students in good standing can get the credit.

Can I make a capstone project contract for credit with any of my students?

No, only Honors Program students can participate. These are students who have met stringent criteria for entrance to the Honors Program. As such they come to you with established learning skills and a desire to excel.

Do I have to participate if a student asks me?

No, of course not. It's a voluntary program. But many faculty want to support students who have the will and desire to do more. These capstone projects seek to give the student an opportunity to work closely with an instructor, to do learning more in line with 300- or 400-level independent coursework and to do work a professional in that discipline might do. Faculty can volunteer to be a subject matter expert for the capstone if they do not want to take on the Capstone Advisor role.

Who assesses the student's work?

You do. If completed in accordance with the assessment standards and along the timetable you set out in the capstone project contract, you let the Honors Program Director know by the end of the semester.

Capstone Project Proposal

General Honors FAQs

Question: Does the faculty member have to be an expert in the Program theme to offer an Honors Option class?

Answer: No. The Honors Program will provide training and professional development to help each Honors Faculty member integrate the theme into their course. The intent is for the option courses to help the students approach a “wicked problem” from many directions and see the connections between disciplines.

Question: Is an Honors Option course just more busywork for students?

Answer: No. Honors courses offer in-depth coverage of the subject matter, stress reasoning and synthesis of information, take an interdisciplinary approach to learning, present views and theories not available in non-honors courses. Honors courses offer a variety of learning experiences. They encourage collaborative learning, offer experiences outside the classroom, seek frequent faculty-student interaction, and accelerate student intellectual growth.

Question: Is graduating with honors the same thing as graduating as an Honors Scholar?

Answer: No. In order to graduate as an Honors Scholar, a student must maintain a GPA of 3.5 or above AND complete a minimum of 18 credits of honors coursework and complete all Honors Program Requirements. (At Commencement, Honors Scholars can be recognized by their Honors Cords.)

Question: What is the difference between PTK and the Honors Program?

Answer: Phi Theta Kappa is a national honors society. Students with a minimum 3.5 GPA are invited to join PTK, which has a local chapter at RRCC. PTK offers scholarship opportunities as well as leadership training to high-performing students to enhance their resumes and their education experience. In contrast, the Honors Program is an academic program that requires completing honors coursework. However, many Honors Program participants are also members in PTK.

Question: Do other community colleges have Honors Programs? Are Honors Options unique to RRCC?

Answer: RRCC is the first two-year colleges in the state system to offer a complete STEM Honors Program. Other community colleges have some honors options and it is expected expand. Honors Contract Options are a common component of many community college honors programs, however RRCC is approaching Honors Options in a unique way.