

# Honors College

## Faculty Handbook

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This brief handbook for faculty who are teaching, or contemplating teaching, in the Honors College sums up our current practice with respect to developing and teaching Honors seminars. We welcome your advice about how we can make it more useful.

## **Suggestions for Honors Teaching**

### **Writing**

A primary goal of the College is to teach students how to write clear, coherent, and substantive essays. While there are a variety of approaches to teaching students to become accomplished writers, we recommend that faculty teaching Honors seminars:

- (1) require students to write and revise several essays during the semester.
- (2) frame assignments that offer a variety of writing experiences and clearly define the instructor's expectations.
- (3) provide extensive comments on the organization, style, and content of these essays, and
- (4) meet regularly with students to discuss paper topics, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their writing, and to make suggestions for revising.
- (5) perhaps offer students brief written mid-semester progress reports, stressing areas in which improvement is needed.

**Revision** is the key component because it makes students address their weaknesses and impresses on them the understanding that almost all writing can be continuously improved. Also, because clear writing is both the product and progenitor of clear thinking, we hope that you will help students to learn to write without using jargon.

You may want to set aside some class time to discuss your expectations regarding writing and to offer guidance on writing problems. If several students are experiencing similar problems, you might consider scheduling a session in which students can work with you and one another on these problems. Finally, you can refer students needing remedial instruction to the Honors writing specialist.

## **Writing Resources**

Because writing instruction is such an important part of Honors seminars, the program offers help to instructors in managing the details associated with teaching writing.

### **The Official Honors College Writing Handbook**

The College is recommending Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* to be used in Honors seminars as a resource, if instructors will make use of the book in their classes. Whether you adopt this book or not, you need to make sure that your students have access to and familiarity with the information outlined in this standardized resource. The Hacker handbook contains concise and easy-to-find explanations of such commonly encountered student writing problems as run-on sentences and fragments; incorrect usage; nonparallel sentence structure; and confusion between plural and possessive forms of nouns. In addition, it has complete sections on strategies for composing and revising, and on MLA, APA, and Chicago paper format. Professors in upper-level seminars will find that most students know at least one professional paper format (usually MLA) and can refer to their handbook as necessary both for format questions and for detailed explanations of writing problems you may note in their papers.

All interested Honors instructors may request a copy of the Hacker Reference for their own use from the College office.

### **The Honors College Writing Specialist**

We offer personal consulting support for any Honors student wishing (or requiring) help with their writing. Our on-staff specialist has extensive writing, teaching, and tutoring experience, and is available to help with any aspect of assignment and paper writing. Many students take advantage of this service on their own initiative, while others find their way to the specialist through the recommendation of their instructor. If you wish to recommend that a student of yours work with the writing specialist, feel free to direct them to Lydia Equitz, in Garland 314. We've found over the last several years that personal support in writing assists instructors in maintaining high standards for the writing in their courses without requiring them to work intensively with students who might not otherwise be able to meet those standards.

If you have any questions regarding writing support services, please feel free to contact Lydia directly at ext. 4658.

## **Oral Presentations**

Each Honors seminar should provide opportunities for students to develop the skills of speaking before a group. Simply asking students to present reports on their work does not contribute significantly to achieving this objective; as you know, poorly planned and executed presentations may, in fact, only provide bad models. Students will benefit most from oral assignments that require them to have clear goals for their presentations or discussions, to

manage their time properly, to be sensitive to their audience, and to be able to think on their feet.

You can help students acquire these skills by planning the presentation or discussion with them in advance. For example, you may want to:

- (1) Discuss with them some of the things that can go wrong and how they might deal with various contingencies,
- (2) Urge them to practice and to time their presentations,
- (3) Provide tips for dealing with stage-fright,
- (4) Offer criticism and advice following the presentation, and
- (5) Invite them to think about what makes a good presentation, and how their own might be improved, by involving them in evaluating each other's presentations.

Formal presentations are not the only way to develop speaking skills. Students should also be able to lead a discussion, participate in a debate, or read a text aloud.

### **Critical Thinking in Oral Argumentation**

Most Honors students attend class regularly, prepare their assignments thoroughly, and enjoy expressing their opinions, but they often need to improve their skills in critical thinking and oral argument. Here are some suggestions:

- (1) Stress the difference between opinion and argument by keeping the discussion focused, discouraging random remarks, and encouraging students to provide reasons and evidence for their statements.
- (2) Acquaint students with academic etiquette by encouraging them to challenge each other in a constructive manner while making clear that effective debate proceeds through argument and not emotion.
- (3) Help them to develop facility in oral argument by encouraging them to expand and develop their statements, insisting, for example, that they use complete sentences to express their ideas in discussion.

## **Your evaluation of students**

Students feel more at ease if they know how they are being evaluated. Therefore, you should outline your academic expectations at the outset. We encourage you to evaluate the work your students do throughout the semester. Whether or not it is accompanied by a grade, written and oral feedback on successive paper drafts and oral presentations focuses the attention of students on where their work succeeds and falls short, and instructs them on how to make improvements. Ongoing, interactive evaluation fosters dialogue between faculty and students in and out of class. It will also help you to know your students better. As part of the course description or syllabus, many faculty assign percentages to class components so that students have a clear idea of the value of papers, class participation, oral reports, etc.

We also ask Honors faculty to prepare a brief written evaluation of each student at the end of the semester. These evaluations help us in advising students, writing letters of recommendation, and identifying promising candidates for awards, scholarships, and graduate fellowships.

## **Student evaluation of the class**

Students evaluate their Honors classes at the end of the semester. Many Honors teachers have found it helpful, however, to give students the opportunity to evaluate the class after five or six weeks. An open-ended mid-semester evaluation lets you know what's going well and what can be improved. It will help you to know if you are meeting your goals as well as those of the students while there is still time to make changes to the structure or content of the class.

Evaluation appendix follows

## Instructor Evaluation of Student Work

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Dept. & Course Number \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_

Semester & Year \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Please comment on the student's performance in your class, focusing on strengths, accomplishments, and areas for improvement.

### Short Answer Assessment

1. The student's performance in developing an argument was:  
a) excellent b) very good c) good d) average e) needs improvement.
2. The student's performance in revising and polishing an essay into a finished work was:  
a) excellent b) very good c) good d) average e) needs improvement.
3. The student's participation in intellectual discussion was:  
a) excellent b) very good c) good d) average e) needs improvement.
4. The student's attendance and class preparation were:  
a) excellent b) very good c) good d) average e) needs improvement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Instructor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HONORS COLLEGE  
Course Evaluation Form

Course Number and Title \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_ Semester and Year \_\_\_\_\_

**Please use blue or black ink.**

PART I: Please circle the appropriate response to each question, **explaining your responses if necessary below.**

4 = Strongly Agree                      3 = Agree                      2 = Neutral                      1 = Disagree

1.      This class was successfully run as a seminar, with active class participation.                      4 3 2 1
  
2.      This class provided helpful guidance in developing topics and writing papers.                      4 3 2 1
  
3.      The assignments were clear. Which were most useful? What would you change?                      4 3 2 1
  
4.      Assignments were fairly and adequately evaluated. If not, explain the nature of the problem.                      4 3 2 1

PART II: Please answer in the space provided.

1.      Discuss the reading you found most interesting, relevant, and stimulating. Also indicate any books you would drop from the course.

**Please complete second side.**

