What Makes an "Honors" Course Honors

Departmental honors courses are an invaluable part of every honors student's experience, providing in-depth study within the major and building close relationships with instructors in the discipline. Departmental honors courses contribute to the professional life of instructors as well by offering the opportunity to work closely with bright, eager students just starting out in the field.

Commonwealth Honors College joins with departments and programs campus-wide to offer various types of officially recognized honors courses, each type carrying its own set of expectations but all promoting deeper and richer inquiry into the particular field of study.

- **Enriched Honors Courses** are three- or four-credit honors courses and seminars taught at the honors level with a 25-person enrollment capacity.

- **One-Credit Honors Colloquia** are weekly one-hour group sessions that augment and enrich standard multi-credit, non-honors UMass courses.

- **Honors Independent Study (ISH)** may take one of two forms: a one- or two-credit ISH associated with a standard multi-credit, non-honors UMass course or a stand-alone ISH of three or more credits.
Further Information

For more information on the various types of departmental honors courses supported by Commonwealth Honors College and the expectations associated with them, click on the relevant category.

Enriched Honors Courses

An enriched honors course is three credits (3 hours per week) or four credits (4 hours per week) and has a maximum capacity of twenty-five students in order to provide an environment conducive to discussions and oral presentations. There should be a writing component, e.g., final take home paper, journals, reviews of literature, etc. The course might extend and enrich the parameters of its non-honors counterpart, be a forum for dialogue and research on an interdisciplinary topic, or take some other form of the instructor's own design providing that it meets the approval of the honors curriculum committee. In any case, it should increase interaction among the students as well as between the instructor and the students. Instructors and students are encouraged to be creative in integrating field research, in-depth readings, oral presentations, group projects, field trips or other modes of honors learning into the course structure.

One-credit Honors Colloquia

A one-credit honors colloquium is more than simply “read an extra book” or “write an extra paper.” It is a dialogue between motivated students and a concerned instructor that develops in greater detail the topics covered in the two- or three-credit graded course with which it is associated or reaches beyond the scope of that course by exploring avenues not open to the larger section. This dialogue should take the form of hour-long (or more, if desired) weekly or biweekly discussions or tutorials, depending on enrollment. In addition, one or more of the following options might be incorporated to enrich the experience:

• Oral reports  
• Short papers on selected topics, peer reviewed and discussed  
• Development of an annotated bibliography  
• A multi-dimensional group research project  
• Problem-solving sessions  
• In-depth research paper concerning one of the topics in the discussion sessions  
• Field trips to local plays, museums, conferences, research stations, etc.

Note: To fulfill Commonwealth Honors College requirements, both colloquia and their affiliated courses must be graded with a "B" or higher.
Honors Independent Studies (ISH) are expected to be as rigorous as regular honors courses and to carry a workload equivalent to three hours per week per credit.

An ISH must involve frequent interaction between the instructor and the student. This mentoring component usually consists of at least a half hour of one-on-one time per week, which needs to be specified on the Honors Independent Study Contract.

When reviewing an independent study contract, the instructor must ask, “what makes this an honors level independent study as compared to a regular independent study?” Qualitative and quantitative enrichment must be evident on the independent study contract. The instructor's signature certifies approval of the content and intent of a given ISH.

Most students enrolled in Honors Independent Studies are expected to write papers which are superior to what is acceptable for a regular independent study. These papers will be characterized by a more extensive bibliography. Further, the papers will be more than descriptive narrative; they will have original elements, be analytical in nature, and stress the synthesis of ideas and information.

Alternative examples for a formal presentation might include: an oral report to an appropriate group, a portfolio of artistic renderings, or a proposal for curriculum revision. Again, any alternative proposal must meet the standards of quality and quantity discussed above in reference to independent study papers.

Departmental ISH are registered under the offering instructor's home department. Alternately, students have the option of doing interdisciplinary honors independent studies, which combine topics from more than one area of study. Interdisciplinary ISH are registered as "HONORS."

Note: Contracts for both departmental and interdisciplinary honors independent studies must be approved by Commonwealth Honors College. Forms are available in room 201 Commonwealth Honors College, or may be downloaded here.

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