

**Northern Illinois University
Division of Academic Affairs
University Honors Program
Assessment Plan
January 16, 2015**

Assessment Plan for the University Honors Program

UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM: MISSION, VALUES & VISION

The University Honors Program at Northern Illinois University provides an enriched educational experience for students of high intellectual potential who are committed to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. It strives to bring together dedicated faculty and highly motivated students to share the experience of creative and challenging educational encounters. Through collaborative interaction with each college and department of the University, enriched opportunities are provided for students in all academic disciplines.

The University Honors Program provides students with the opportunity to participate in the design of their own educational directions within the overall university and departmental curricula along with the opportunity for in-depth study and research in each student's chosen discipline. The program encourages participation in a variety of educational, cultural and community service activities as well as provides a living-learning residential component, all serving to intensify and broaden the collegiate experience.

University Honors courses (seminars, general education and core courses, mini-sections, and a limited contract option) provide the opportunity for greater intellectual interaction between faculty and students, as well as between students. Enrichment may be achieved by more in-depth analysis of the subject, extensive discussions, expanded readings, alternative assignments, and/or research projects; we allow University Honors faculty a great deal of latitude in deciding how to add value to their course.

An important goal of the University Honors Program is to create a community within the larger university and to help students reach their full potential in the educational experience. The University Honors staff and faculty create this atmosphere with advising, special events, academic programs, student interactions, cultural opportunities, community service and many other activities designed to benefit Honors students.

Students, especially University Honors students, must take charge of their own education. The extent to which staff and faculty can accomplish these goals for each student depends largely on the student's participation in the program. The University Honors Program seeks to provide its students with educational experiences that are as individualized as possible within the constraints of university and departmental requirements. The Honors staff is available to help clarify regulations and exercise creativity that will aid Honors students to reach their educational goals. Generally, the more active and proactive the student is, the more successful his/her University Honors Program experience will be.

The University Honors Program at Northern Illinois University promotes and supports excellence in undergraduate education by providing honors students from all disciplines with enhanced learning opportunities that:

- Include small courses taught by outstanding faculty committed to undergraduate education;
- Encourage students to reflect and inquire;
- Develop critical thinking skills; and
- Develop high-level literacy and conversational skills.

This mission is supported by:

- Identifying exceptionally talented and highly motivated students and encouraging them to participate in the Honors Program;
- Providing a living and learning environment that promotes academic excellence; and
- Organizing and delivering extra-curricular programs that help students to cultivate an understanding of the excellence in what is thought, written, and created in the human experience.

These activities create an environment in which students are challenged to develop their talents and abilities to the maximum potential.

Values Statement

The following values drive the University Honors Program to achieve its mission:

- Excellence and academic rigor
- Critical thinking skills
- Interdisciplinary connections
- Global engagement
- High quality faculty-student interactions
- Academically supported living and learning experiences

These values are directed toward understanding the foundations of human inquiry and addressing questions of permanent importance to human well-being. This includes the development of high level literacy and conversational skills and the ability to understand science and technology as well as make sound judgments about ethical and political arguments.

UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM: HISTORY

The University Honors Program at Northern Illinois University was developed in 1968 after a year-long study by the then Council on Instruction and was created in fall 1969. The central purpose of the University Honors Program has not fundamentally changed. The rhetoric in the most recent *Strategic Plan*, is near identical to that used in 1969 (see paragraph one of the Mission, Values & Vision, above).

The founders of the University Honors Program considered two major approaches for

honors programs: a program built on separate classes taught by exceptional faculty and a program based on enriched experiences within regular courses. Rather than select between the two options NIU consciously selected “a combination of both approaches.” NIU Honors students were required to complete some classes as separate, Honors-only classes. These were to include, both “special sections of existing courses and unique courses.” However, Honors credit also would be awarded via enriched experiences in regular courses. Finally, Honors students would complete an independent project, or capstone experience. In this way the Honors students would have challenging and enriching experiences, but regular students would not be deprived of the benefits of having Honors students in their classes. Initially the University Honors Program required 24 hours of Honors credits for graduation “with University Honors.” To ensure that Honors students would be intellectually well-rounded, in 1971 the Honors Council required that in order to receive “University Honors a student would be required to take twelve of the requisite twenty-four hours outside of the major.”

In its first year (1969-1970) ninety-eight students were enrolled in the Program. By 1971-1972 there were 439 students enrolled. It continued to grow throughout the decade and by 1980 the Director reported approximately 1,000 students were enrolled in the Program, and it was said to be the tenth-largest in the country. At that time, however, the University Honors Program did not have the resources to offer a sufficient number of stand-alone Honors seminars for its students. Stand-alone Honors courses were thus increasingly limited and the lack of resources was regularly cited as the major problem facing the program. Over the years the resource situation of the Program has waxed and waned with the fortunes of NIU. Over the past five years, however, the fiscal resources of the Program have been sufficient so as to restore the viability of offering a sustained and vibrant selection of stand-alone courses. In fact, the Program has, over that time, averaged sixteen such courses a year. Enrollment has also rebounded and been sustained throughout these five years, rising and falling with the graduation of seniors and the recruiting and enrollment of new students. The Program began the 2014-15 academic year with 1,158 students.

In 1980 students were required to complete twenty-seven hours of Honors coursework (up from twenty-four), twelve of which were outside the major. At that time, the Program underwent a major revision. Emulating programs at other major US universities, the University Honors Program was divided into two phases: Lower Division Honors (for freshmen and sophomores) and Upper Division Honors (for juniors and seniors). Since the reforms, the completion of Lower Division Honors requires the completion of fifteen credit hours of Honors courses, including a 3 credit hour cornerstone (a stand-alone Honors course generally taken in the first year at NIU). Those students who successfully complete Lower Division Honors are then eligible for Upper Division Honors. Also eligible for admission to Upper Division Honors are those students who have maintained at least 3.2 GPA while at NIU or a prior institution. The completion of Upper Division Honors requires the completion of an additional twelve hours of honors credit, at least three hours of which are to be accrued through a faculty-directed independent study, or capstone project.

Students who successfully complete both Lower and Upper Division Honors are awarded University Honors. The key to the revisions were both the division of University Honors into two parts, and the focus on three unique experiences of the cornerstone, the Upper Division seminar, and the capstone project.

In response to University initiatives, the University Honors Program also switched from a graduate student advisor to a team of “peer advisors” led and trained by a professional staff member. The revisions also formalized the three current methods for offering honors courses: Stand-alone Honors courses (Cornerstones and Seminars); Mini-sections (a specially organized sub-section of a regular course for Honors students), or as part of regular courses (via individual In-Course Honors Contracts). However, it is worth noting, that “contract” Honors courses were to be used on a limited basis, when “sufficient Honors courses are not available for their needs,” and these were clearly not considered as a routine avenue for completing Honors coursework. This practice has been generally restricted to Upper Division Honors students. Although the In-Course Contracts were considered the least desirable of the three methods, during the period between 2005 and 2011 it became the norm for completing most upper division courses, threatening the integrity of the Program and its curricular offerings, as well as its mission and values. Beginning in the fall of 2014 a return to the original goals was instituted and a proactive method for requesting approval of In-Course Contracts was put in place and new policies were started that will better control their frameworks. We fully anticipate that, as a result, the number of contracts will be substantially reduced.

Today, in its present form, the University Honors Program at NIU provides its students with a robust curriculum centered on innovative approaches to content as led by many of NIU’s most outstanding faculty, a substantial number of co-curricular offerings designed to demonstrate how classroom knowledge is integrated with the world, a living-learning community that seeks to develop the social and interpersonal character of those who seek to live with other hard-working students, and to provide them with the opportunities to flourish across all aspects of their collegiate career. It is an all-encompassing program that works in partnership with many departments, programs, and offices across campus to ensure that our students succeed. It also offers many unique, Honors-only opportunities, some of which have related elements throughout the campus, while others remain exclusive. It is a program that is also explicitly global and service-oriented as well as active in its efforts to replicate its success throughout the larger NIU community.

UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM: STUDENT BODY

University Honors students represent the NIU student body at large, coming from all six undergraduate colleges, representing the institution’s gender ratio, are racially and ethnically diverse (besting the institution’s overall ratios in many categories), and include students from all walks of the institution’s profile—Athletics, CHANCE, commuter, non-traditional, scholarship and non-scholarship recipients, veterans, and LGBTQ. We have a high percentage of our students who have learning challenges and need learning

accommodations. Over 80% of University Honors students show financial need; fortunately nearly 70% of our students are awarded academic-based scholarships (granted by the Scholarship Office and University Honors, or one of the many other entities on campus, such as the Alumni Association).

Admissions standards for Honors students have varied over the years. Traditionally the admission standard for first-year students has involved the use of some combination of high school class percentile rank, ACT score, and grade point average. At times the standard has been as low as a 22 ACT or top 10 percent of high school class. At other times the standard has been as high as a 27 ACT score and the top 10 percent of high school class. When the Program was divided into Lower and Upper Division Honors it also became practical to invite current NIU students and new transfer students who achieved a 3.2 GPA or better into the Program.

Presently those students who have a 27 or above ACT and are in the top 10 percent of their high school classes and have a 3.75 GPA are automatically admitted to the University Honors Program. Those who have a 27 or above ACT or are in the top 10 percent of their high school class or have a 3.75 GPA are considered for admission via an internal review process. Students whose record falls below these criteria are invited to apply and are individually reviewed for admission. Individual statements, resumes, and letters of recommendation (when submitted) are considered as part of the admission decision. In keeping with the nationwide trend toward paying closer attention to the applicant's high school GPA as well, University Honors staff is mindful of those data in admissions decisions.

Students are retained within the Program on the basis of their academic and co-curricular success. A student must maintain a 3.0 for their first year, but then achieve a 3.2 overall GPA and University Honors GPA in order to remain in the Program after their third semester and be awarded any level of Honors. Students are also required to be active within the program by attending at least two University Honors-sponsored and supported events (known as *Honors Engaged*) a semester (more if they are a scholarship recipient). Any student who's GPA falls below a 3.2, or who fails to fulfill Honors obligations, is sent a letter placing them on probation for one semester; an extension may be granted at the discretion of the Associate Vice Provost and University Honors Committee. Those who remain on probation for two consecutive semesters are dropped from the program.

Each semester the University Honors Program graduates between sixty and one-hundred twenty students (averages vary from fall to spring semesters, and the ration of graduates with one level or another also vary), providing them with the appropriate Honors designation on their transcripts as well as diploma, and providing them with graduation regalia.

UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM GOALS and OUTCOMES

1. The University Honors Program will provide small courses taught by outstanding faculty that engage honors students in critical thinking, creative writing, and interdisciplinary learning.
 - Objective 1.1. Course sections of honors courses have smaller numbers of students than regular sections and are taught by outstanding faculty.
 - Objective 1.2. Honors students demonstrate advanced levels of critical thinking, creative writing, and interdisciplinary learning.
2. The University Honors Program will provide honors students with opportunities to engage in mentor-led and independent research and/or artistry projects.
 - Objective 2.1. A high quality faculty member successfully mentors each honors student through an independent research project and/or artistry project.
 - Objective 2.2. Each honors student presents a high quality independent research project and/or artistry project.
3. The University Honors Program will provide honors students with quality opportunities to demonstrate knowledge of and experience with global awareness and perspectives.
 - Objective 3.1. Honors students are provided opportunities to learn about and experience global awareness and perspectives.
 - Objective 3.2. Honors students are able to demonstrate an advanced understanding of global awareness and perspectives.
4. The University Honors Program will provide honors students with co-curricular social and philanthropic activities that demonstrate the importance of social justice and service.
 - Objective 4.1. Honors students are provided co-curricular social and philanthropic activities.
 - Objective 4.2. Honors students demonstrate the importance of social justice and service.
5. The University Honors Program will provide honors students with co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that engage students in civic engagement and leadership.
 - Objective 5.1. Honors students are provided civic engagement and leadership co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
 - Objective 5.2. Honors students demonstrate civic engagement and leadership skills.
6. The University Honors Program will facilitate honors students' successful entry in to a graduate education program and/or career success.
 - Objective 6.1. The University Honors Program will offer workshops and seminars providing honors students the information and skills they need to successfully enter a graduate education program and/or have career success.
 - Objective 6.2. Honors students successfully enter a graduate education program and/or a career within six months of graduating.

Explanation of Assessment Methods

Assessment Method	Description	Method Type	Assessment Target	Timeline	Person Responsible	Goal Addressed
CAD System/ Records and Registration	Work with Registration and Records to gather appropriate data to measure course enrollment (Objective 1.1)	Direct	Ideal enrollment is 25 (or lower) for a 100-200 level course and 18 or lower for an upper-division seminar course	Annually	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	1
Faculty Vita	Collect vitae from faculty teaching University Honors courses (Objective 1.1)	Direct	Ideal faculty are those who are recognized for their teaching achievements and excellence in teaching evaluations or who bring added value to the classroom experience	Annually	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	1
Course-embedded VALUE rubric assessment measuring critical thinking, creative writing, and interdisciplinary learning	Faculty will employ a version (with both common and required elements as well as permitted modifications for individual classes) of the AAC&U Value Rubrics to assess course assignments measuring critical thinking, creative writing, and interdisciplinary learning, as identified in the course objectives and categorizations (Objective 1.2)	Direct	The majority of assessed submissions will be scored at a level 2 or above, per the Value Rubric designation.	Semester	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	1
Faculty and Student Survey of mentorship activities	Surveys (separate student and faculty) will measure the quality and success of independent research or artistry mentorship (Objective 2.1)	Indirect	Faculty and students will define an achievement level of "good" as indicated on survey responses	Annually	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	2

Assessment Method	Description	Method Type	Assessment Target	Timeline	Person Responsible	Goal Addressed
Independent Research Project and/or Artistry Project Evaluation	This rubric measures the quality of the projects over six different realms of research and/or artistry (Objective 2.2)	Direct	Projects will be assigned a grade of “B” or higher by faculty evaluators and will be rated with a minimum of “good” on instrument ratings.	Annually	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	2
Entrance into Program Survey	A survey given to entering freshman students who are admitted prior to the start of their first-year to establish baseline values, perceptions, and levels of engagement. (Objectives 1.2, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, and 6.1)	Indirect	A minimum of “good” on instrument ratings by 80% of those surveyed and on 80% of the given responses.	Annually at the outset of the Program during Orientation at Loredotaft	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	1-6 (as baseline data)
End of program student survey	This survey measure students’ perceptions of the degree to which the program, courses, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities provided opportunities to engage in critical thinking, creative writing, interdisciplinary learning, global awareness and perspectives, social justice and service, civic engagement, and leadership. (Objectives 1.2, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, and 6.1)	Indirect	A minimum of “good” on instrument ratings by 80% of those surveyed and on 80% of the given responses.	Annually at the end of the program	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Course-embedded assessment VALUE rubric measuring global awareness and perspectives	This assessment, the AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric measures students’ knowledge and understanding of global awareness and perspectives. (Objective 3.2)	Direct	A minimum of “Level 2” on at least 80% of the instrument ratings, as specified by the faculty member.	Each semester (Fa, Sp, Su)	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	3

Assessment Method	Description	Method Type	Assessment Target	Timeline	Person Responsible	Goal Addressed
End-of-Co-Curricular assessment measuring social justice and service activities	This is an inventory of behaviors demonstrating social justice and service. (Objective 4.2)	Direct (if others observe it) Indirect (if self-reported)	At least 80% of the students surveyed or assessed will indicate or be rated as “good” across the spectrum of the engaged activities.	semester	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	4
End-of-Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular activities VALUE rubric assessment measuring civic engagement and leadership skills	Inventory that measures civic engagement and leadership skills, through applying the Civic Engagement VALUE rubric to indicated activities, a written report, student resumes, or Capstone experience. (Objective 5.2)	Direct	At least 80% of the students surveyed or assessed will indicate or be rated as “good” across the spectrum of the engaged activities.	Semester	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	5
Workshop-Seminar Survey	Inventory that measures the degree to which the workshop or seminar met the graduate education and/or career needs of honors students. (Objective 6.1)	Indirect	At least 80% of the students surveyed or assessed will indicate or be rated as “good” across the spectrum of the engaged activities.	Semester	AVP for University Honors or designated staff	6
Alumni Survey and Supplemental Alumni Survey	This is the university alumni survey, along with a supplemental alumni survey designed to measure each of the University Honors Program Goals. Enrollment in a graduate education program and/or employment are directly measured. (Objective 6.2)	Direct (for grad education program and/or career success) and Indirect	At least 80% of the alumni surveyed or assessed will indicate or be rated as “good” across the spectrum of the elements of their University Honors experience.	Annually	AVP for University Honors or designated staff, in cooperation with institutional offices	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Goals-by-Methods Matrix

Assessment Method	Goal (Outcome)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
CAD/Records and Registration	D					
Faculty Vita	D					
Course-embedded VALUE rubric assessment measuring critical thinking, creative writing, and interdisciplinary learning	D					
Faculty and Student Survey of mentorship activities		I				
Independent Research Project and/or Artistry Project Evaluation		D				
Start of program student survey	I	I	I	I	I	I
End of program student survey	I	I	I	I	I	I
Course-embedded assessment VALUE rubric measuring global awareness and perspectives			D			
End-of-Co-Curricular assessment measuring social justice and service activities				D/I		
End-of-Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular activities VALUE rubric assessment measuring civic engagement and leadership skills					D	
Workshop-Seminar Survey						I
Alumni Survey and Supplemental Alumni Survey	I	I	I	I	I	D

Notations:

D = Direct assessment method.

I = Indirect assessment method.

Bold indicates data is present in the status report.

Lower case indicates data has not been collected.