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ALL UNIVERSITY SECTION



University Honors Committee

2019-2020 Undergraduate Catalog [LINK](#)

Program of Study

The program is divided into two distinct options for students to complete - each with their own separate requirements. The Associate University Honors option requires six (6) points from a combination of curricular and co-curricular activities. Specifically, students who elect to pursue this distinction are required to earn a minimum of three (3) points through honors designated course work, with a minimum overall GPA of 3.30. (Each class must be greater than or equal to three-credits to earn one point towards Associate University Honors requirements.) Included within the minimum three (3) curricular points is a requirement of at least two (2) points of honors designated curricular credit outside the major. Furthermore, and included with the minimum three (3) curricular points, another requirement is one (1) University Honors Seminar. In addition, students must **earn two (2) points by completing a minimum of two (2) Honors Engaged approved co-curricular activities (including all approved Engage PLUS activities).** ~~achieve Engage PLUS Silver Scholar status by completing and having approved a minimum of two (2) non-credit bearing, co-curricular learning experiences as defined by the Engage PLUS program.~~ The remaining one (1) point is an elective that can be satisfied through either additional honors designated curricular course work or an added co-curricular experience that is approved through **Honors Engaged Engage PLUS.**

The second option is Full University Honors and is achieved when students accumulate twelve (12) points from a combination of curricular and co-curricular activities. Students are required to earn a minimum of six (6) points through honors designated course work with a minimum overall GPA of 3.30. (Each class must be greater than or equal to three-credits to earn one point towards Full University Honors requirements.) Included within the minimum six (6) curricular points is a requirement of at least four (4) points of honors designated curricular credit outside the major. Furthermore, and included with the minimum six (6) curricular points, other requirements include one (1) University Honors Seminar, and one (1) Honors Capstone independent study project completed during the senior year. In addition, students must **earn four (4) points by completing a minimum of four (4) Honors Engaged approved co-curricular activities (including all approved Engage PLUS activities).** ~~achieve Engage PLUS Gold Scholar status by completing and having approved a minimum of four (4) non-credit bearing, co-curricular learning experiences as defined by the Engage PLUS program.~~ The remaining two (2) points are electives that can be satisfied through either additional honors designated curricular course work, added co-curricular experiences that are approved through **Honors Engaged Engage PLUS,** or a combination of both. (Students may elect to begin the Associate University Honors option, successfully fulfill the requirements, and then continue in pursuit of Full University Honors - with all previous credit accrued counting towards the requirements of the latter.) Within either option, students may earn honors credit in general education, elective, and major courses with a grade of A, A-, B+, B, or B-.

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RATIONALE:

The change amounts to broadening the scope of co-curricular or engagement activities that count for the University Honors Program (UHP) beyond the Engage PLUS approved experiences. There are some philosophical reasons for this broadening, but the main reason for the need for an immediate change is practical. Due to very specific program requirements for experiences noted on students' transcripts, Engage PLUS does not have the capacity to accommodate the Honors population and is making it difficult if not impossible for students to complete their Honors requirements. The changes requested do not detract from the purpose of having co-curricular activities as part of the Honors curriculum, but, quite to the contrary, affirm this purpose.

In general, the broadening of scope will allow three major changes as to what kinds of experiences will count. First, co-curricular experiences that earn course credits (such as Study Abroad experiences and most internships that are pursued) will be permitted. Second, well-established programs outside NIU (and, thus, with no NIU mentor) will be permitted as long as there is a way to verify the participation in the program. Third, the strict 80 hour minimum that Engage PLUS establishes will be more flexible depending on the kind of experience in question. For instance, externships for a week usually fall below the 80 hour minimums, but are the appropriate length of time for the kind of experience that they are. We want to encourage NIU students in the Honors Program to pursue meaningful experiences rather than constrain them unduly in the kinds of activities they will pursue. We are, of course, proposing to continue to count any activities that are approved by Engage PLUS for Honors Engaged and we are moreover continuing to promote Engage PLUS notation. The Honors Engaged categories correspond to the engagement priorities of the university, and were developed in consultation with OSEEL.

Let us be specific about what it means that Engage PLUS alone does not have the capacity to facilitate co-curricular requirements for Honors students. Over the course of a year, OSEEL programs' student capacity is roughly 200 engaged learning experiences. These are programs available and promoted to all NIU students. This represents the majority of Engage PLUS approved experiences and reflects roughly the overall capacity (not just of usage). See table below. Honors students number at 1000 overall, with about half of them now actively having to secure Engage PLUS activities -two to four over the course of their time at NIU. Within two years, all students will need the co-curricular piece to achieve Honors status. If all 1000 students wanted to attempt Full University Honors under the PLUS system, the system would have to bear about 1000 per year. Even if all 1000 students only wanted to achieve Associate Honors status, they would still need roughly 500 experiences each year. An additional constraint to fulfilling Engage PLUS notation lies in the requirement that students have experiences across four different categories; not all categories are readily available as pre-approved and the standards of approval are very specific. Based on a list of students who have begun the process of trying to earn Engage PLUS notation and Honors points, about 53% succeeded in the course of FY19. 93 signed up and, for a variety of reasons, 51 completed an experience for a point.

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OSEEL Programs Capacities # of students per academic year (based on funding)	AY2018	AY2019	AY 2020
Huskie Alternative Break	--	30	50
Huskie Service Scholars (including peer mentors)	24	24	35
Research Rookies (including peer mentors)	60	60	60
Student Engagement Fund	~60	~60	~70
Summer Research Opportunities Program	12	11	15
Undergrad Special Opportunities in Artistry and Research	12	5	<i>Merging with Student Engagement Fund</i>
	168	190	230

OSEEL concurs with the capacity concern to accommodate even the number of Honors students currently subject to the co-curricular engagement requirements. In fact, it was a surprise to them that Honors had abdicated the power to identify non-Engage PLUS co-curricular experiences. The way in which the Engage PLUS system was designed was for the sake of a notation -not as a means to identify all worthwhile and meaningful co-curricular experiences. As it stands, it is important to note that Engage PLUS is not a database of opportunities and there is little help for students to find new experiences. OSEEL is reviewing the functions and aims of the Engage PLUS system, and is planning to launch broader set of engaged learning experiences presented to NIU students going forward.

Another purpose of this catalog change is to make it possible to advise students within Honors adequately. With the current situation, students meet with Honors Advisors who cannot help them adequately with the co-curricular requirements of the Honors program. Students are sent to OSEEL to submit applications; if they want to find their own experiences, these applications are then reviewed by faculty and staff outside of OSEEL. At times, reviews of experiences take a lot of time, and students are left without answers for some time. The final reporting piece also seems to be holding up the process of counting experiences, which may be cause to worry about how onerous the process is. As of middle of summer 2019, 11 Honors students had been waiting 3.5 months (average) for a decision.

Anecdotally, we are already hearing that Honors students from the PLUS cohort are dropping out. It is hard for us to affirm these numbers before it is too late to deal with the problem, as inactivity is tracked for one or two semesters before we drop a student from the Honors roster.

The change requested here is true to the original purpose of the co-curricular model -to encourage students to have incredible, transformative experiences beyond the classroom curriculum – without binding them to a system that wasn't intended to provide a database of experiences from which to choose or to give appropriate advising to facilitate completion of these experiences.

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