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Proposed change: Number of Courses Required Outside Major for UHP Completion
Approved by Honors Committee on 9/4/2020.

Overview of Proposal:

Currently, students pursuing Associate University Honors must have 2 out of 3 Honors courses outside their major, and students pursuing Full University Honors must have 4 out of 6 courses outside their major. Outside the major means outside their major code, not outside their major requirements. The Honors staff has conducted a study to look at feasibility issues regarding requiring 2/3 of Honors courses outside the major. We have found that students who do not begin as first semester freshmen in Honors are disadvantaged by the number of courses needed outside the major. In the case of some majors, it becomes simply impossible based on a four-year graduation model.

Note that the current point system has been in place only since fall 2018, and we are working out the kinks in the operationalization of this program, and trying to avoid unintended consequences. The Honors advisors were starting to notice anecdotally that students were struggling with completing their majors while also having to do so many courses outside their major, so we conducted a program completion feasibility study with the top six majors of current Honors students. Along with the completion issues, we also noted some other findings that led us to propose a slight lowering of the outside the major requirements.

We propose requiring one fewer Honors course outside the major for both Associate and Full University Honors: 1 out of 3 Honors courses for Associate University Honors and 3 out of 6 courses for Full University Honors. Please note that there still outside the major requirements, holding true to the program's attempt to champion interdisciplinarity. Please see our detailed rationale below.

1. Completion challenges

This is the chief concern. Current program requirements make many academic programs difficult if not impossible to complete once students complete their general education classes. Nursing and Psychology are good examples of this issue; note that these are two of the most popular majors for Honors students.

To proceed with the Nursing example, once a student starts the Nursing program all their classes are NURS designators, and therefore none of their classes would be considered outside their major. NURS honors students would have to take two additional honors classes above and beyond their major and university graduation requirements. This is a barrier to entry for joining and also for completion for one of our most popular segments of NIU honors students. In addition, we need to be mindful of the four-year completion message that students receive from their academic advisors.

2. Transfer/ Continuing Student Recruitment and Retention

Given that most opportunities to have outside the major courses come at the general education stage, transfer students are uniquely hindered from getting outside the major courses. Their Honors seminar will likely provide them with one such opportunity, but then, generally speaking, they have an intense need to complete their major requirements. Also, consider that if they find some way to get a second or third outside the major class, they will surely have to forego the option of a capstone (which will be in their major).

It is important to note that the transfer population has typically graduated at a lower rate than non-transfer population with University Honors designations. It is a more diverse and often non-traditional

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population, and we need to do more to facilitate their success.

While we focused on transfers here, please note that native recruits are going to face this issue too. They will likely join Honors after most of their opportunities to complete courses outside the major have occurred, and, thus, also have a difficult time completing the Honors Program having to take a majority of their Honors courses outside the major. (About half of the Honors population is made up for transfers and continuing students.)

3. Disparity across majors

Different majors allow for a different amount of flexibility, as we know and went through in item one above. In addition, some majors have requirements across other disciplines while others have few if any of these. This means that in some cases, completing your major requirements goes hand in hand with completing your Honors outside the major requirements and in some cases not. Where students are completing their outside their major requirements that are actually part and parcel of their major requirements, one might argue that they are not exploring or developing breadth. So, if it is easy for some majors to achieve this proxy for breadth (courses outside major) and hard for others, those who do it easily aren't actually pursuing breadth and those who cannot do it easily through their major requirements and are in constrained scheduling situations will be unfairly penalized for not meeting the breadth requirements.

We provided a couple of important examples of how some majors leave almost no room for outside the major courses after general education credits. Here we will give you a couple of examples of how easy it is for some majors to fulfil this requirement without effort -and, arguably, without actual academic breadth since they are required for their major. BIOS majors can fulfill their honors outside the major requirements through MATH, STAT, CHEM and PHYS classes. ACCY majors can fulfill their honors outside the major requirements through MGMT, MKTG, FINA and OMIS classes. Again, this is not true breadth as these classes are all required and would have been taken regardless of honors requirements.

Catalog Change:

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 **one (1)** ~~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). 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.

The second option is Full University Honors and is achieved when students accumulate twelve (12)

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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 **three (3)** ~~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 Honors Engaged activities). 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, 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-.