



**HONORS**  
PROGRAM  
Mt. San Antonio College

**FACULTY HANDBOOK**  
2017 Edition



# Mt. SAC Honors Program: The Basics

## History

Officially established as the Mt. SAC Honors Program in the Fall of 1995, the program was founded by the Dean of the Humanities Division, Dr. Stephen Runnebohm, and faculty member Dr. Mary Brackenhoff. Although the program started with only three classes and 26 students, it has grown to include nearly 800 students and more than 40 Honors courses.

## Philosophy

The Honors Program is designed to provide students with an enriched experience. It shares features common to all outstanding Honors programs, such as small classes, talented professors, and a community of highly motivated students. Honors courses give students additional experience in *expressing ideas* (written and/or oral communication), *inquiry and analysis*, and *research skills*.

For many students, Honors offers a “second chance” for students to attend their dream college or university. In other cases, students who never saw themselves as scholars discover they have academic talents and strengths.

## Courses

Honors courses fulfill requirements for Mt. SAC’s associate degrees and transfer requirements for UC, CSU, and many private universities. Students who are “program certified” (complete 15 units of Honors classes) receive priority consideration for transfer at certain universities, may be eligible for special scholarships or perks, and are recognized as Honors Scholars at graduation and on their transcripts.

## Class Size

Honors courses feature smaller class sizes, typically around 20 students. Classes in which both honors and non-honors courses are offered at the same time (called “stacked” or “blended” classes) may have 25 students. Faculty may follow the faculty contract and add up to 20% of the established class size.



## By the Numbers...

**782:** Enrolled Honors Students (Fall 2017)

**146:** Number of students earning honors certification (Summer 2016-Spring 2017)

**33:** Students accepted to present at the HTCC Research Conference

**72%:** Acceptance to UCLA (compared to 22% non-honors)

**83%:** Acceptance to UC Irvine (compared to 54% non-honors)

## The Benefits of Teaching in the Mt. SAC Honors Program

By Linda Rillorta, Professor of Sociology and Member of the Honors Advisory Board

I really, really enjoy teaching the Honors classes. They are fun, stimulating, and I am able to present material that I cannot in my regular classes. The papers are **interesting to read** because they are well written and well researched. The students spend more time on their assignments and put a lot of effort into them.

The Honors Students seem to want more **personal relationships** with their professors. They will come to visit during office hours and outside of class. Students **keep in touch** with me even after they are no longer in my class. They come by to **visit** or just to say hello. They also keep in touch after they have graduated or transferred. Former Honors students come by my office or sometimes show up at my classroom. They also email me or write to me on Facebook. I have had two Honors Reunion parties at my house. I have been invited to graduations, graduation parties, weddings, and baby showers. I have written numerous letters of recommendation for students who apply to Masters Programs, Ph.D. Programs, Medical School, Law School, and even a Marine Officer Training Program.

Here are a few other things I really love about teaching Honors:

### Students are the best and the brightest.

- Their writing and reading skills are at the college level, and they actually do the reading
- They come prepared for class and are rarely absent, and there is a low attrition rate
- Class discussions are dynamic and interesting, and they turn in their papers on time

### The Honors students form a close-knit environment because they tend to know one another.

- They tend to form study groups on their own
- The small class size also helps increase in-class discussions and relationship-building

### Teaching Honors classes does mean extra work, however, the extra work is very rewarding.

- Students will ask you to write recommendations for college applications, scholarships, and personal statements
- Students want to visit during office hours
- Students seek help with their research projects that they want to present at conferences
- Students are concerned about their grades so they want to check up on how they are doing in the class
- Students invite you to participate in the activities (Conferences, Debates, Honors Parties, PTK Inductions, Performances)

## Honors Course Design and Objectives

The National Collegiate Honors Council, a national consortium of Honors directors, faculty, and administrators, publishes guidelines for Honors courses nationwide. (For more information, see <http://www.nchchonors.org/>.) The following excerpts their section on Honors Course Design.

Every Honors instructor is different and every Honors course is different. Still, there do seem to be some characteristics that are common to many, if not most, Honors courses. Below are some guidelines that you may find helpful. In the words of one Honors faculty member, the finest instructors are those who are 'willing to share the responsibility for teaching and learning with their students. The key to a successful Honors program is not the intelligence of the student or the subject matter of the course, but the attitude and approach of the instructor.'

Most Honors courses will have the following five objectives, or some variation:

1. To help students develop effective written communication skills (including the ability to make effective use of the information and ideas they learn);
2. To help students develop effective oral communication skills (while recognizing that not all students are comfortable talking a lot in class);
3. To help students develop their ability to analyze and synthesize a broad range of material;
4. To help students understand how scholars think about problems, formulate hypotheses, research those problems, and draw conclusions about them; and to help students understand how creative artists approach the creative process and produce an original work;
5. To help students become more independent and critical thinkers, demonstrating the ability to use knowledge and logic when discussing an issue or an idea, while considering the consequences of their ideas, for themselves, for others, and for society.

The NCHC's focus on critical thinking, research, and oral and written communication is mirrored in SLOs written for Honors courses. Ideas for implementing these criteria are given on the next page.

## Teaching an Honors Course: Instructional Design

At an Honors program faculty workshop, faculty described an array of possible course design options for Honors courses. These run the gamut from minor modifications to the comparable non-Honors course, to a complete reimagining of the syllabus, assignments, and classroom experience.

### **Minor Modifications:**

- Require more readings, and/or increase difficulty of readings
- Expand writing assignments to increase breadth and depth of research and inquiry
- Require a class presentation on the topic of a major assignment

### **Seminar Modifications:**

- Reduce faculty lecture and facilitate more discussions
- Require regular verbal participation in discussion
- Create more presentation opportunities for students on topics in course outline

### **Conference/Outside Activity Enhancements:**

- Require students to participate in an academic conference, either on or off campus
- Require students to attend or present at a public event, forum, or contest
- Add a significant field trip experience (must be noted in schedule of courses and approved by the dean)
- Include service learning as a component of curriculum

### **Critical Thinking Enhancements:**

- Choose a focus area for the semester for in depth research and exploration (i.e. writing course with theme of China)
- Include in-class debates requiring students to research and argue opposite sides of the same issue
- Expand problem-solving and case study activities
- Require students to design lab experiments and write exam questions

### **Major Modifications:**

- Create semester-long teams that complete regular “challenges” in the style of reality television
- Create “companies” that students work collaboratively in

## Teaching an Honors Course: Course Delivery

Honors Faculty brainstormed a list of course delivery considerations to best reach our students.

### Classroom Environment/Climate Issues:

- Smaller numbers of students can sit differently in a classroom. Avoid rows. Create small group pods, a conference-style setup, or semicircle.
- Relocate the teaching position from the front and center of the room to demonstrate a less top-down approach to learning.
- Schedule the course in a nontraditional space (conference room, computer lab, black box theater) to generate a different feeling than a typical course.
- Get outside of the classroom and/or allow students to move around frequently to stimulate engagement.
- Before banning all technology, find creative ways for students to use their smart phones and tablets to enhance learning.
- Bring in students from previous semesters to give students suggestions and motivation for your course.

### Management and Accountability Issues

- Consider “jobs” for students so they can take ownership in the experience (roll taker, extra credit coordinator, proofreader, etc.).
- Engage the students in a discussion about appropriate classroom rules and norms that will create a positive climate for their learning needs, and ask them to help monitor and/or enforce these.
- Provide, as needed, suggestions to help students with time management, stress reduction, and self-management.
- Maintain strong standards for your Honors courses – even if students seem frustrated by it. Our transfer universities make it clear that they expect Honors students to meet a higher standard than other transfer students.



## Sending a New Honors Course Through Curriculum

At Mt. SAC, Honors courses have a comparative conventional, or non-honors, course and are designated with an “H” at the end. For example, ENGL 1C and ENGL 1CH.

This makes it easy to design curriculum! Professors will need to cover the same topics as the non-honors course, plus add some kind of enrichment. Faculty members determine the enrichment by setting a course objective that is pertinent to their discipline and fulfills one or more Honors Course Design principles.

After setting the objective, consider what **enrichment** can be made to your course. See the Instructional Design section of this handbook for ideas. From this enrichment, construct a sample assignment or design the course to provide this enrichment.

In WebCMS, **create a new course proposal** (do NOT modify an existing course – it will overwrite the old course!). Start by copying and pasting the non-honors course information into the new course proposal section. Then make the following modifications.

**Course Description.** This description will be the same as the non-honors course. At the end of the paragraph, add: An honors course designed to provide an enriched experience. Students may not receive credit for both [course ID] and [course ID]H.

**Course Measurable Objectives.** Add one or more objectives that fulfill an Honors Course Design principle. It is appropriate to use the higher level Bloom’s taxonomy domains here, such as analyzing, synthesizing, or evaluating, if these accurately describe what you are trying to do.

**Course Methods of Evaluation.** Add an indication of the enrichment activity you will expect into the appropriate category.

**Sample Assignments.** One of your sample assignments should reflect the Honors Course Measurable Objective you wrote.

Please note that it is not necessary to *add* assignments to an Honors course. Course designers can reformat current assignments or expect a different level of student engagement in the classroom. However, faculty will have to measure these differences, and include the description of these in the Course Measurable Objectives and Sample Assignments.

Don’t forget to get **Department approval** for the course first, and have that approval reflected in the Department minutes. If you are a CTE discipline, you should also get **Advisory Committee** approval for the course and include approval in the minutes. Minutes should be attached in WebCMS.

## The Honors Program Advisory Committee

The Honors Program is a collaborative effort between faculty from all divisions in the college. Honors faculty can serve on the Honors Program Advisory Committee, a group that meets once per semester to review Honors Program goals and advise further actions to take. The Advisory Committee consists of the Honors Program Director, Honors Faculty Coordinator, Honors Educational Counselor and Advisor, Dean of Humanities, five Honors faculty members, and the directors of EOPS, Career and Transfer Services, and ASPIRE.

Honors faculty are also invited to participate in Faculty Workshops. In past Faculty Workshops, Honors faculty have evaluated proposed SLOs, suggested program certification changes, and exchanged tips on effectively teaching in Honors.

## Outcomes Assessment of Honors Courses

The Honors Program has developed three Student Learning Outcomes that reflect the Program's emphasis on critical thinking, research skills, and written and oral communication.

### **SLO #1: *Inquiry/Critical Thinking and Analysis***

Students will demonstrate inquiry (a systematic process of exploring issues, objects or works) and analysis (assessment of evidence resulting in conclusions or judgments) as part of their Honors coursework.

*This SLO can be used for assignments or projects in which students engage in secondary research.*

### **SLO #2: *Written and Oral Communication Competence***

Students will write and or speak effectively as part of their Honors coursework.

### **SLO #3: *Problem Solving Competence***

Students will demonstrate problem solving and evaluation skills as part of their Honors coursework.

*This SLO can be used for assignments or projects in which students engage in primary research.*

Each SLO has a rubric that professors can use to evaluate the completion of the outcome. According to the Outcomes Committee, Honors faculty may evaluate an Honors SLO in place of a course SLO.



## Transfer Opportunities for Honors Students

### UCLA - Transfer Alliance Program (TAP)

TAP certified students receive priority consideration for transfer from UCLA's College of Letters and Sciences (not engineering, communications, film or theatre), and may opt to complete the requirements for a second major. Rates of acceptance are much higher for TAP-certified students; for example, for Fall 2017, while only 22% of non-honors Mt. SAC applicants to UCLA were accepted, 72% of Mt. SAC's TAP students were accepted!

### TAP Requirements:

- Attain a minimum of 3.2 cumulative bachelor-level GPA by end of the Fall that you apply (in reality, highly competitive majors require a GPA of 3.7 or higher for acceptance)
- Complete at least two Honors classes by the end of Fall before you transfer
- Complete 15 units of Honors classes with at least a C by Spring/Summer after you apply
- Are NOT majoring in Film, Theatre, Engineering or Communications

### UCI - Honors to Honors

Mt. SAC Honors students who complete 15 units of Honors classes, with a GPA of 3.7 or higher and have finished their major preparation, are eligible for **guaranteed** Honors to Honors admission to UCI and may win Regent scholarships. (83% of other Honors students were admitted to UCI in 2017; the overall admit rate was 54%). Excluded majors include Performing Arts and Business Administration.

### Other Transfer Opportunities

Through our membership in the Honors Transfer Council of California, Honors students may get transfer opportunities to these schools, including financial aid, housing, or priority registration:

UC Irvine	La Sierra University	Whitman College
CSU Fullerton	Loyola Marymount	Whittier College
San Diego State University	University	Columbia School of General
Cal State LA	Mills College	Studies
Azusa Pacific University	Pitzer College	
Chapman University	Pomona College	

For more information about the options and benefits these institutions provide Honors students, visit the Transfer Council's web site at <http://htcca.org/transfer-partners/> .

### UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley does not have a special agreement with the Honors Program, but Cal will consider Honors program completion as a criterion for admission into the university. Honors students are more successful transferring to UC Berkeley. 56% of Mt. SAC Honors applicants were admitted to Berkeley, but only 18% of non-honors students were accepted. The overall admit rate from Mt. SAC was 25%.

## Research/Conference Opportunities for Honors Students

Honors students have a variety of opportunities to present independent research and publish their work. Please consider adding a research assignment to your honors courses and encourage students to present their research at a conference.

### **On the Mt. SAC Campus**

Student Research Conference – Spring (usually late April). For more information, contact Prof. Karla Hernandez ([khernandezmagallon@mtsac.edu](mailto:khernandezmagallon@mtsac.edu))

### **Honors Students Only**

H.T.C.C. (Honors Transfer Council of California) –  
Spring (usually late March or early April)  
UC Irvine

B.A.C.H.S. (Bay Area Consortium Honors Symposium) –  
Spring (usually May)  
Stanford or Berkeley

### **All Undergraduates**

S.C.C.U.R. (Southern California Conference of Undergraduate Research) – November  
Various locations

N.C.U.R. (National Council on Undergraduate Research)  
-- Spring  
Various locations

C.U.R. (Council of Undergraduate Research) Posters on the Hill – November  
Washington, D.C.

### **Publishing Opportunities**

Abstracts may be published in the booklets that accompany the above conferences.

Honors students may publish original, creative work in *Scribendi*, an annual publication edited by Honors students at the University of New Mexico.



## The Honors Center

The Honors Center is located in Bldg 26A-1640. The center is where Honors students can study, network, and meet with the honors advisors, counselor, faculty coordinator, or director.



## Contact Information

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