

# Proposed Honors Program at LSUA

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## Preface

The creation of an honors program at LSUA has been discussed for several years. In Fall 2003, faculty members approached Vice Chancellor Stovall about starting an interdisciplinary honors program. Dr. Stovall was supportive, and further suggested that an honors program at LSUA include Honors versions of traditional content courses in the individual disciplines. A committee was formed to frame the Honors Program as part of an overall SACS-required Quality Enhancement Plan. Recommendation #7 of that Plan indicates that one goal should be to “define criteria for a campus-wide Honors Program.”<sup>1</sup>

## Rationale and Mission

The Honors Program will enhance the quality of the university experience for both students and faculty.

Honors students will be offered additional opportunities for intellectual growth and enrichment. They will be encouraged to engage in sustained and serious intellectual inquiry, and they will experience the kind of scholarly community and collegiality that is so vital to authentic university life. In addition, the presence of Honors students at LSUA and their pursuit of academic excellence will inspire the rest of the student body and help raise the intellectual tone across the campus. Finally, the Honors Program will not only enhance the education of our current student population; it will also attract students who may not have previously considered attending LSUA but who wish to meet the challenges the Honors Program affords.

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<sup>1</sup>In preparing this proposal, Committee members studied several comparable Honors programs (McNeese State University, Kennesaw State College, Southeastern Louisiana University, Nicholls State University, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Georgia Southwestern State University, and LSU-Baton Rouge, and others). They also drew on their own experiences in Honors programs and conversations with their colleagues on campus. Three committee

The Honors Program will offer faculty members the opportunity to experiment with new courses and pedagogies and to work closely with students who are ready to meet the highest challenges of a university education. Such faculty members will not only be renewed themselves; they will also be able to share their ideas and experiences with their colleagues and contribute in new ways to the effectiveness of the courses and programs offered by their departments.

## Curriculum

In the Spring Semester of 2004, the Honors Committee proposed these general criteria or guidelines for an Honors Program and its courses:

1. Where appropriate and whenever possible, Honors courses should emphasize the use of primary materials and hands-on investigations rather than secondary sources and textbooks.
2. Clarity of thought and expression in writing, speaking, and critical thinking should be priorities in any Honors course. Appropriate attention should also be given to developing students' information literacy.<sup>2</sup>
3. To foster a sense of communal achievement, Honors students should meet regularly in special seminars, discussion groups, or colloquia.
4. To promote a sense of collegiality in learning, Honors students should have a high degree of access to faculty. Honors courses or special seminars should therefore be sufficiently small to promote student participation and faculty guidance.
5. In addition, opportunities for participation in field trips, travel, lectures, conferences, and community volunteering will be available to Honors students. It is further recommended that Honors courses might include an international component.

The Honors Program as currently envisioned offers interdisciplinary courses in the Liberal Arts Core.

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members also attended the National Collegiate Honors Council annual meeting in October 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. [Sources for definition are the American Library Association; **Error! Main Document**

**Only.**<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm#ildef> ]

## Interdisciplinary Liberal Arts Core Courses

These required courses integrate traditional content into new interdisciplinary courses which focus on general education. These courses draw upon history, literature, philosophy, arts, mathematics, and sciences.

Freshman Level (1000s)	Ancient Greece Ancient Rome Scientific Inquiry I <sup>3</sup>
Sophomore Level (2000s)	Medieval World Renaissance and Reformation Scientific Inquiry II
Junior Level (3000s)	Enlightenment and the American Experiment The Modern World
Senior Level (4000s)	Major Thinkers/Writers (Seminar) Senior Thesis <sup>4</sup>

When possible, all students seeking Honors should take the courses in the appropriate sequence listed above; however, the Program will have sufficient flexibility to accommodate transfer and returning students who might be out-of-sequence with the Honors Curriculum. The Freshman and Sophomore Level courses form the basis of the Honors experience and lend a unity and cohesiveness to the Honors Program; therefore, all students seeking University Honors designation would be required to take these six courses. These interdisciplinary courses might be structured in several different ways, but like all new courses they will be subject to the standard approval process. They may be team-taught with lectures, or offered as small faculty-led

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<sup>3</sup> The Biology major introductory courses will substitute for Scientific Inquiry Courses for students in the Bachelor of Science in Biology Degree Curriculum.

<sup>4</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** Can be supplemented past one semester via Independent Study or Directed Research course in the student's major.

seminars. Team-teaching allows students to observe collegial interaction among faculty members and to participate in shared learning. Conversely, one faculty member might teach the entire course as a seminar, thereby allowing for even more personalized attention and advising.

While it is feasible to have students take these Core courses as electives in their degree curricula, it would be best if the Freshman and Sophomore Core courses could substitute for required General Education courses in the associate or baccalaureate curricula. For instance, the course on Ancient Greece might substitute for History 1001, or English 1002, or Fine Arts 1001; similarly, the course on the Enlightenment and the American Experiment might substitute for Political Science 2051. Of course, any such substitutions would be subject to the standard approval process.

The Liberal Arts Core courses would be worth three (3) credit hours each. The Junior and Senior Level course would count as elective courses in a four-year degree curriculum. Honors students completing the 30 hours (18 hours of Core Content, and 12 hours of Electives) would receive Honors designation on their baccalaureate degrees. Students in Associate degree curricula would receive Honors designation on their degrees by completing the 18 hours of Core Content.

## **Recognition<sup>5</sup>**

Honors Core courses will be designated on student transcripts (e.g., an “H” after the course). Students who complete the Core Honors courses will receive further recognition such as “Honors” designation on their diploma, special notice at graduation, and tangible tokens such as

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<sup>5</sup> The National Collegiate Honors Council recommends that to receive Honors designation, graduates should complete at least 15% of the total number of credits in Honors courses. A baccalaureate degree at LSUA requires approximately 123 hours; 15% of 123 equals 18.45, or almost 19 hours.

medals or certificates. Some special gathering, dinner, or convocation should also mark participation in the Honors Program each semester.

## **Administration**

There will be a standing Honors Program Committee representative of pertinent departments on campus, as well as an Honors Program Director. The Honors Director and the Committee will have responsibility for the following: establishing and applying criteria for what constitutes Honors courses; periodically reviewing and assessing both general curricular requirements and individual course syllabi; co-advising (with the assigned departmental advisor) current Honors students; actively recruiting new Honors students; overseeing the Honors Program budget; and advertising and community relations. If possible, the Honors Program should be housed in a separate office and include a Honors lounge for study and special events.

## **Faculty Participation**

A successful Honors Program depends on collaboration between students and faculty. The Program can only hope to be a success if it can attract faculty who are not only knowledgeable in their fields and dedicated to the Honors Program, but who also are generous with their time, effort, and imagination. The Committee is especially desirous that the Honors Program be a source of pride and unity on the LSUA campus. The perception that the Honors Program participants (faculty, students, or administration) receive undeserved special treatment ought to be avoided. Faculty participation should be voluntary and consistent with achieving the overarching ends of the Honors Program as laid out in this proposal and the subsequent deliberations and findings of the Honors Program Director and Committee.

## **Admissions and Requirements**

The Honors Program is intended to challenge academically-qualified students. Students admitted into the Program should show the academic capacity and temperamental willingness to fully participate in a demanding course of studies. The Committee recommends that students who have been admitted to LSUA with a Composite score of 25 or above on their ACT (or the equivalent SAT score) be invited to apply to the Honors Program.<sup>6</sup> Consideration for admission into the Honors Program may require an essay, recommendation letters, and/or an interview with the Director and other representatives of the Honors Program. The Committee will establish alternative criteria for admitting non-traditional students (e.g., ones who did not take standardized tests or home-schooled students). The Honors Director and Committee will determine the admission of transfer students on an individual basis. Transfer of Honors courses for Honors credit at LSUA will be determined by the Honors Director and Committee on an individual basis. Students admitted to non-Honors programs at LSUA who have excelled in their first 24 credit hours may be admitted to the Program at the discretion of the Director and Committee. These students may request admission or be nominated by LSUA faculty members. While students admitted into the Honors Program may take Honors courses, only candidates for associate and baccalaureate degrees may receive Honors recognition on their diplomas.

## **Evaluation of Students**

Honors courses, which require increased student commitment, seek to spur original thinking by demanding that students continually reaffirm their roles as scholars. The Honors Program, including the process of evaluating students, is intended to mesh with applicable

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<sup>6</sup> LSUA admissions rolls for 2003/2004 indicate that this score cutoff would yield a pool of several dozen candidates. An entrance class of 20 honors students per year would make about 80 students in the program in total.

procedures at LSUA. Because the Program presupposes a high degree of student/faculty interaction, an emphasis on writing skills and critical thinking, and the shared experience of small seminars, faculty will have many occasions to assess student performance. Honors students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 (with no grade lower than a “C” in any Honors Course) to remain in good standing in the Honors Program.

For a more comprehensive assessment of a student’s Honors career at LSUA, a senior thesis will be required. Representing the culmination of the student’s work in the Honors Program, the senior thesis would involve a substantial discussion of a significant thinker, writer, or idea studied in one or more of the Honors Courses. The senior thesis does not exclude a project with a research component. However, since the senior thesis is the culmination of the student’s Honors experience, it should grow out of the content of the Honors courses taken by that student. Moreover, such a thesis would necessarily include a substantial written and analytical component. The senior thesis should also demonstrate the “Clarity of thought and expression in writing, speaking, and critical thinking” as stipulated in the program goals.

### **Assessment of Program**

The Honors Director and Committee will periodically review the policies and procedures of the Program. Such review might include reassessing entrance requirements and student performance in, and student recommendation concerning, the Honors Program.

### **International Component**

The Louisiana Board of Regents recommends that Honors Programs include some international element. Such an element might include “foreign language proficiency, area specialization, study abroad, two or more classes whose primary content is international in

nature, etc.”<sup>7</sup> The Honors Program can easily incorporate an international component. Honors students may participate in one of LSUA’s already-existing travel courses. The Honors Interdisciplinary Liberal Arts Core, because it emphasizes Classical, European, Arabic and other cultures, contains an inherent international component. So, too, University Honors can be framed to include a foreign language requirement. While requiring international travel of all Honors students is not feasible, some national and regional honors councils do have resources to allow Honors students from one school to pursue international study in association with other honors programs.

### **Scholarships**

Honors students would have at least the same opportunities for financial aid as any other LSUA student. It is common, however, for Honors students to receive some form of scholarship towards tuition. Because such scholarships would assist in recruiting the best possible candidates, a separate scholarship fund for Honors students should be established. In this way, Honors scholarships would not diminish the pool of financial aid available for other students.

### **Activities Fund**

Because the Honors Program emphasizes building a community of learners whose education extends beyond the classroom, an activities fund for travel off-campus to cultural events, performances, museums, historical sites, and lectures should be established. The Activities Fund might be partially subsidized by a small Honors student fee.

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<sup>7</sup> Memorandum dated January 30, 2004, from The Commissioner of Higher Education to Chief Executive and Academic Officers of Public and Private Systems and Campuses.

## **Guest Lecture Series**

To introduce Honors students, the entire campus, and the general community to the best scholars and lecturers, a guest lecture series should be inaugurated. Such lectures would supplement extant on-campus lectures and would provide students the widest possible intellectual experience.

## **Student Development and Activities Fund**

A fund should be established to defray expenses for student development. Such expenses might include approved student travel to conferences, materials or technology required for a special presentation, or any other appropriate project related to Honors courses, as determined by the Honors Director and Committee.

## **Budget**

Specifying an annual budget is not possible until the structure of the Program is settled and the number of Honors students is determined. However, a very rough approximation of annual costs might include:

One course reduction for the Director	\$5,000
University Membership in the National Collegiate Honors Council	\$500
Scholarships	\$5,000
Guest Lecture Series	\$4,000
Student Development and Activities Fund	\$4,500
Program Costs (i.e., NCHC travel, office equipment and supplies)	\$6,000
Total	\$25,000

## **Implementation**

Honors Program curriculum, structure, and administration is being developed with a view to implementation in Fall 2006. The October 2004 NCHC Convention held in New Orleans was attended by three members of the Committee. In particular, the “Beginning in Honors” panels served as an important resource. The Program should derive benefits from future participation in NCHC Conventions. Several Directors of regional honors programs have indicated their willingness to help LSUA develop its Honors Program. All new courses will be subject to the standard approval process. External funding sources should be developed.