



RCCD HONORS

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Riverside City College Honors Program

Best Practices and Recommendations for Honors Contract Specialty Course Instruction



Honors Contracts Introduction

An Honors contract is a platform for individualized, enriched content of a transfer-level course arranged through a contract articulated in the form of an additional syllabus established by the participating faculty member.

Every Honors instructor is different, so every Honors course and contract is different. In working with faculty to offer our Honors curriculum, our core principle has always been and will continue to be: **respect the discipline itself and the subject-matter experts who teach it. However, Honors courses also need to have a set of identifiable, common characteristics that unite them in a common purpose.** That's where this document comes in.

In preparing an Honors contract, then, faculty should keep in mind four main principles that govern Honors curriculum and instruction:

- 1) Strengthen students' aptitude for critical thinking;
- 2) Produce effective communicators, both in speech and in writing;
- 3) Create a community of thinkers who share ideas, offer constructive criticism for each other, and collaborate on projects;
- 4) Nurture each student's creative and scholarly potential.

If the student completes the Honors contract, the accomplishment is documented by the instructor of record for the course by completing and providing to the student the Honors contract Completion form. The instructor will design a project or assignments (perhaps with student input) which go **above and beyond the regular coursework non-honors students will complete.** This project should relate to the

skills and knowledge being taught in the class, but it should take it to a more advanced or in-depth level.

Establishing a Contract:

- The contract is designed primarily by the participating faculty member, perhaps with consultation from interested students.
- The contract must be approved by the Honors Advisory Council, as well as the appropriate division dean.

Rationale for Offering Honors Contracts:

- The "Honors experience" is available to more students in more courses that are not currently offered and are highly unlikely to be offered in a standalone Honors format.
- The "Honors teaching experience" is available to more faculty.
- Contracts provide the platform to create personalized, in-depth learning opportunities in topics and disciplines through creative projects, laboratory work, research, and/or service-learning.
- Contracts are recommended by UCLA in its Transfer Alliance Program (TAP) guidelines.
- Contracts are an established instructional model supported by the Honors Transfer Council of California (HTCC).
- Contracts will not impact scheduling or FTES generation.
- Contracts develop and promote writing, research, and communication skills in transfer-level courses.
- Completion of Honors coursework adds rigor and unique learning experiences that can strengthen a college transcript, resume, admission essay, or job application.

Parameters of a Contract:

- A student must be in good standing in the Honors Program to sign a contract.
- Ideally, a student should complete at least one Honors courses prior to signing a contract so that the student is familiar with the Honors Program and the essence of Honors courses. However, exceptions to this are possible and welcome if a faculty member familiar with the Honors Program is interested in directing a contract project with a student intent on joining the Program. Final determination will be made by the Honors Advisory Council.
- A student will be able to have up to two Honors contract courses count towards his/her/their five total courses, but at least three courses must be standalone Honors courses completed in the district.
- A contract requires students to complete additional components to the regularly assigned coursework, which demonstrate an enriched academic endeavor. These components could include additional reading, writing, research, or oral explorations of material reflecting a deeper, more complex understanding of the material. The extent of these additional components should require at least one additional hour (if not more) each week on average.
- A contract is offered in association with an existing non-honors course.
- Contract work should be evaluated separately from the course content. In other words, a contract is not a form of “extra credit” to improve a grade in the standalone course and should not be used as such.
- The main question the Honors Advisory Council asks when evaluating contract proposals is this: *“How does this project supplement and advance the student’s success in the course subject matter?”*
- A contract is directed and evaluated by the instructor; assignments and deadlines may differ slightly from the associated course syllabus given the additional rigor and engagement incorporated into the contract.
- A separate syllabus will be required for each Honors contract section.
- Contracts are available for transfer-level courses only, excluding courses already available in the standalone Honors seminar format. Whereas current standalone Honors courses are designed for introductory-level courses, contract courses are intended primarily for courses beyond the introductory level in a given discipline (or in introductory level courses that are not offered as Honors standalone courses) so that students can explore subjects not offered in an Honors format. This way, students may explore subjects that might not otherwise be offered in an Honors format, especially within their chosen major, as part of their Honors course of study.
- All contract courses will be approved by a majority vote of the Honors Advisory Council on a case-by-case basis.
- Courses best suited for contracts are those that are included on the GE transfer patterns (Plan B, Plan C) or those that are articulated for major preparation.
- A contract is a one-to-one arrangement between instructor and student, but the same contract assignments, deadlines,

and specifics may be made available to more than one student in a given Honors contract course section.

- Honors contracts are graded on a “Pass/No Pass” basis only.
- If a significant portion of the contract is not fulfilled by the stated deadline, the Honors Advisory Council has final authority in deciding whether Honors credit has been earned and should thus be awarded.
- If a student fails to complete the Honors contract, he or she may still receive a grade for the course, but it will not count towards his or her five Honors courses.
- If circumstances outside of the classroom warrant the faculty member to issue a grade of Incomplete in the standalone course, the student must also receive an Incomplete for the contract. Likewise, the student cannot receive an Incomplete for the contract if the student is not eligible to receive an Incomplete for the standalone course. In other words, the student cannot receive an Incomplete for only one or the other; it’s both or neither. Lastly, the completion deadlines for the two Incompletes must be the same.

Student and Faculty Participant Eligibility

- The option to create an Honors contract is available to **any** RCC Honors Program student in good standing who has passed at least one Honors course. Exceptions may be made for students who are recommended by Honors contract faculty to complete a contract in their first term in the program. The final determination of eligibility will be made by the Honors Advisory Council.

- The option to teach an Honors contract class is available to any RCC full-time faculty member.
- The completion of an Honors contract proposal is the joint responsibility of the instructor and the student.
- Participation by either party is completely voluntary.
- Faculty should determine if the student possesses the required motivation and skills to complete the workload expected of an Honors contract. Special, unique cases can be discussed with the Honors Program Faculty Coordinator.
- The Honors Advisory Council requests that interested faculty do several of the following to get a clear sense of the Honors Program and its core values:
 - Meet with current Honors faculty to discuss the differences between Honors and non-honors instruction
 - Attend an Honors Advisory Council meeting and try to attend all HAC meetings during the term in which the Honors contract course is offered
 - Attend Honors faculty brown bag events when offered
 - Receive a recommendation to teach an Honors contract section from their respective department chair or division dean
- Honors contract and syllabus/addendum for an Honors course and non-honors course must be submitted to the Honors Program Faculty Coordinator by set deadlines each semester. This deadline is usually within the first two weeks of instruction during the fall and spring semesters.