



NSF S-STEM Honors Program Honors Contract Guidelines

Honors Contracts enable motivated students to develop, under the guidance of a professor, an enriched curriculum from an existing course. Honors Contracts demand that students achieve “greater depth and rigor” than what is required of their classmates and might well be viewed as a primer for upper level courses. To graduate with a STEM Honors designation, students must complete four Honors Contracts (4 Honor Points per contract). Students may choose to develop an Honors Contract in a STEM course or in a core content area with a problem that is STEM related. Two or more of the four Honors Contracts must be in a STEM course.

“Greater depth and rigor” may be achieved by developing and completing an Honors Contract in one of the four following ways:

1. Integrating a more challenging and sophisticated content matter into the existing course curriculum
Students seeking to engage with a more challenging and sophisticated content must, with the help of the professor, clearly explain in the Contract Proposal how the topic is related to course content, the sophistication to be achieved, and then how the project will be assessed.

Example: A student enrolled in Chemistry might develop a Contract to conduct a literature review of the history, research, and progress of developing truly biodegradable plastics.

2. Student initiated research project
Students seeking to engage in research must, with the help of the professor, clearly explain in the Contract Proposal the research problem, provide substantial background citing prior research, and describe steps and methods of data collection and analysis.

Example: A student enrolled in Environmental Science might develop a Contract for a research study on Hurricane historical tracking to determine seasonal, annual, decadal, and other temporal patterns of hurricanes on the Texas coast and justify a prediction of the next 100-year storm using evidence from the research.



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3. Integrating an allied emphasis into the existing course curriculum.
Students seeking to integrate an allied (or secondary) emphasis into an established course must clearly articulate, in the Contract Proposal, how they expect the integration to complement their STEM interests. Students who pursue allied or secondary emphases must seek guidance from faculty experts in both fields, but *only the professor in whose class the student is enrolled will be responsible for judging student performance.* (In many cases one faculty member will, based on past studies and experience, suffice to guide a student’s primary and allied emphasis.)

Example: A student enrolled in a math course might develop a Contract allowing the study of the history and development of the mathematic concepts described in the course.

4. Integrating a social justice emphasis into the existing course curriculum.
Rather than studying “social justice” as though it were a discipline separate and distinct from other academic pursuits, the Social Justice Emphasis encourages students to recognize how their defined academic interests might be of use in working *for* social justice and to the benefit of others. Key to successful completion of the Social Justice Emphasis is a product-based outcome designed to make use of and to share, in some concrete way, the student’s new knowledge or discovery.

Example: A student enrolled in a government course might develop, in collaboration with a STEM faculty, a Contract exploring the financial, social, environmental, and political influences of Oyster bed management and sustainable production in the Galveston Bay and write a position paper regarding best management practices that consider all stakeholders.



Policies:

1. Honors Contracts might be constructed for STEM courses or for any core-content course with a project emphasis on STEM. Two or more of the four Honors Contracts must be in a STEM course.
2. Benchmarks for achieving “greater depth and rigor” will be determined by the course professor and **must be clearly articulated** by the student in the Honors Contract proposal.
3. Before submitting a contract proposal, **students must attend** at least one Honors Contract Workshop and complete a typed Contract Proposal Self-Assessment.
4. The student’s grade in the course in which s/he is enrolled **remains independent of the Honors course distinction**. If a student fails to meet the requirements of the Honors Contract, but succeeds in meeting the course requirements, s/he will not receive an Honors designation on her transcript but will still receive a letter grade based on class performance. **Therefore, Honors Contract benchmarks must be separate from regular course outcomes**; Honors Contract benchmarks should not affect course grade.
 - a) KEY: In the Contract Proposal **students must clearly describe** how the benchmarks they propose for their Honors Contracts are **separate** from the course requirements. Proposed benchmarks that suggest a student will simply add to a required graded assignment are not acceptable.
- 2) Professors, in consultation with the STEM Honors Program Director, will judge student performance and will award the Honors designation on a pass/fail basis at the end of the semester.
- 3) Successful contract proposals articulate a carefully chosen focus, substantial enough to explore in great depth over the course of one semester. Breadth is no substitute for depth.
- 4) In conversation with their professors, students will complete mid-term progress reports (provided by the STEM Honors Program Director) to evaluate their progress.

Keys to Successful Proposals:

- 1) Speak to your professor early (preferably the semester before you are scheduled to take a course) and begin to focus, narrow and deepen the scope of your research.
- 2) **Use the template** provided to clearly articulate how you plan to achieve your desired objective.
- 3) Remember *benchmarks describe what you will need to learn or master in order to succeed in your overall objective. These benchmarks should be assessable, but independent of the course requirements and should not negatively affect your grade.*
- 4) Create a timeline of deadlines to help you visualize your objective in terms of the time you have to complete it. This will allow you to track (and take comfort in) your incremental progress.



Honors Contract Development Timeline

After registration:

Before the semester begins or within the first two weeks of class, politely solicit the help of the professor in the class in which you wish to create an Honors Contract. Be sure to educate your professor on the requirements and commitment of such an undertaking (which means you first need to educate yourself!). Begin brainstorming contract ideas.

First and Second week of the semester:

In collaboration with the professor, develop the contract, write and submit the proposal. *Before you submit your proposal you must attend at least one Honors Contract Workshop and complete a typed Contact Proposal Self-Assessment.*

Third week of the semester:

The collaborating professor and the Honors Program Director read each contract and determine if the objectives, benchmarks, and methods necessary to achieve greater depth and rigor have been clearly articulated.

Fifth week of the semester:

All contract course proposal revisions due in to the Honors Program Director.

Mid-Term:

After consulting with the professor, the student submits a progress report and a candid evaluation of his/her progress (form provided by Honors Program Director) and decides to a) drop the Honors Contract, b) alter the contract, or c) continue as planned. Any revisions or modifications to the contract must be submitted for review to the Honors Program Director.

End of Semester:

If the Honors Contract requirements are met to the satisfaction of the professor, the student receives honors course credit on his/her transcript and receives four (4) Honor Points. Sixteen (16) points towards the 40 required to earn the STEM Honor designation on the transcript and diploma must be from Honor Contracts.

Honors Contract completers will present their projects in a public forum at the end of the semester.