

University of Mary Washington Honors Program Proposal

Mission:

As appropriate to a small liberal arts university with strong traditions of individualized attention, honor, and strong community connections, the Honors Program at the University of Mary Washington will enhance students' intellectual growth by engaging them in rigorous honors designated coursework, interdisciplinary seminars, strong internship experiences, extended research and creative projects, and community service that develops a community of learners. The program will seek students whose performance and intellectual abilities demonstrate that they have the range of talents and skills to thrive in diverse communities. Ongoing assessment will insure that the program is continually updated to meet the needs of our students and the institution.

Honors Program Curriculum:

In keeping with the mission outlined above, this curriculum provides students with an intellectually rigorous program that challenges them to apply academic excellence in the broader community. It is a combination of fixed and elective requirements that offer students a great deal of flexibility. To this end, the program is "porous," meaning that there are multiple points of entry and many opportunities for non-Honors students to benefit from Honors offerings. Honors designated courses will not be restricted to honors students. In addition, students who are not formally admitted to the honors program may not complete more than four honors courses during their tenure at UMW.

The first two years of the program will emphasize breadth of study in the liberal arts, interdisciplinary thinking, and community engagement. The second two years of the program will emphasize advanced work on a disciplinary or interdisciplinary project.

In particular, the curricular goals of the program are:

1. To develop intellectual skills such as:
 1. Critical thinking
 2. Communication (oral and written)
 3. Creativity
 4. Independence
2. To integrate academic work with engagement in the broader community through activities such as:
 1. Learning through service on campus and beyond
 2. Participating in internships
3. To provide
 1. enhanced opportunities for long-term student research and performance projects

2. increased opportunities for interdisciplinary experiences in areas where appropriate

Requirements

All Honors students must complete a minimum of **6** credits of Honors work each year and maintain a GPA of 3.2 in all of their coursework. “Honors work” is a broad category that encompasses many learning contexts and pedagogical methods. Students will be able to craft an individualized curriculum that suits and challenges them. Academic departments will also have flexibility to offer those Honors experiences best suited to their curricular and logistical needs. Some Honors courses will have across-the-curriculum and general education designations once approved by the appropriate committees. Students who want to accelerate their experience at UMW can fulfill these course requirements in less than four years.

Yearly Requirements

- Maintain a 3.2 GPA overall – a student who does not maintain a 3.2 overall GPA will not be allowed to continue in the program
- Successfully complete a minimum of 6 Honors credits per year
- Participate in a minimum of one Honors co-curricular event per semester (a minimum of 8 events prior to graduation)

First Year Requirements

- Honors First Year Seminar (3 credits)
- Honors designated coursework and/or Honors contract based coursework** (3 credits)

Second Year Requirements

- Sponsored/mentored Service Project**
- Honors designated coursework and/or contract based coursework** (6 credits)

Third Year Requirements

- Project/Research Design Seminar (1 course)
- Mentor First Year Honors students – attend/participate with the Honors First Year Seminar course or with first year advising
- Honors designated coursework and/or contract based coursework** (3-6 credits)

Fourth Year Requirements

- Capstone Honors Course OR Honors Project (Thesis or Performance) in a discipline OR Interdisciplinary Project** (minimum 3 credits)
- Honors designated coursework and/or contract based coursework** (3 credits)

- Honors Program leadership – help admissions recruit potential honors students through events such as participation in tours, Showcase, special events (2 events during the fourth year)

** must be pre-approved by the Honors Director/Committee

(minimum of 24 credits total)

Overview

All students in the program must complete a minimum of **6** credits per year of Honors work in order to remain in good standing. All students in the program must successfully complete 1-5 below as part of those credits. The program will have multiple points of entry which are described later.

The Honors Program is comprised of several experiences, including:

1. Honors First Year Seminar
2. Second Year Sponsored/mentored Service Project
3. Third Year Project/Research Design Seminar
4. Capstone Honors Course OR Honors Project
5. Honors Electives, including:
 - Independent Study or Internship
 - Honors sections of existing courses
 - Graduate courses cross-listed as honors undergraduate courses
 - Honors individual learning contracts in non-Honors courses
 - Stand alone Honors courses (also open to non-Honors students)

Program Components

Honors Co-curricular Events

UMW sponsors various co-curricular events throughout the academic year (i.e. seminars from outside speakers, the Great Lives series, films). Honors students are encouraged to attend as many of these events as possible and are required to attend at least one per semester. A list of suggested/approved events will be provided to honors students regularly.

Honors First Year Seminar

The *Honors First Year seminar* will build upon the FSEM 100 course. Using a variety of sources, the seminars will emphasize concepts such as leadership and civic engagement to develop important intellectual processes, such as critical thinking, writing, and oral expression. The courses will be problem-focused within a broad general area, e.g. the natural sciences,

humanities, social sciences, or arts. Students will study a problem from multiple perspectives, working as a group to understand its academic and practical aspects. For example, a chemist and a geographer might lead a seminar on “Water Quality.” This might appeal to potential science majors, geographers, or others. Coursework would include water chemistry, understanding the nature of pollution from a chemical and social perspective, and techniques for finding and/or creating clean water. Students in this seminar would be encouraged to work in their second year as a group or individually on service projects dedicated to improving water supplies in communities that need them. Seminars focusing on topics such as biologically caused damage to historic buildings, developing ethics in schools, or green technology would serve this purpose as well.

(3 credits)

The seminar will be intended to meet the FSEM general education requirement.

Sponsored Mentored Service Projects

During the second year, all Honors students will complete a mentored service learning project. These can take many forms, including service internships, individual projects, team service projects, participation with club service learning projects, etc. In all cases, the goal will be to apply knowledge gained in coursework to problems in the community beyond UMW.

A distinctive option will be the Sophomore Honors Team Service Project. Students will be encouraged to create teams and engage in broad, multifaceted service projects that apply coursework from their First Year Seminars. In the “Water Quality” example, students from that seminar and interested others would work together on a year-long service project to, for example, bring clean water to a rural area in Appalachia (or Peru). All Honors Service Projects would be mentored by faculty members and Student Affairs staff and must be pre-approved by the Honors Director/Committee.

These projects might meet the experiential learning general education requirement.

Project/Research Methods Seminar

The project methods seminar will introduce students to epistemological questions within and/or between disciplines. Faculty in appropriate disciplines will mentor students in the introductory phase of the capstone project (e.g. research methodologies appropriate to the discipline). This course will help them find a project advisor, define their learning objectives, explore methodology, consider the nature of disciplines and interdisciplinarity, and begin their literature review. This course must be completed prior to the capstone honors project must be pre-approved by the Honors Director/Committee. Honors program committee envisions that division seminars (i.e. Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, etc.) will be offered with rotating faculty of record. Departments with existing research methodology courses could apply for honors designation to meet this requirement. *(1 course)*

Capstone Honors Course OR Honors Project

There are several options for the capstone project. It is anticipated that the project will grow out of the Project Design Seminar.

The first option is the completion of a departmental project that will bring University Honors. Departments will oversee these projects, perform evaluation, and provide project advising.

The second option is completion of an interdisciplinary project that will bring University Honors. These projects will be advised by appropriate faculty and must be pre-approved by the Honors Director/Committee. This option is intended for those students whose goals do not neatly fit the requirements of their major department(s), but who intend to complete a rigorous capstone research or performance experience.

(minimum 3 credits)

Honors individual learning contracts in non-Honors courses

Honors students may enter into a learning contract with the faculty member instructing any course. The instructor will, in consultation with the student and the Honors program director, create a different (not just additional) program of learning. This might include primary source reading, modified exam questions, projects, etc. The goal of these contracts is to provide flexibility to both students and departments. Instructors may choose to or not to enter into a contract. These contracts must be pre-approved by the Honors Director/Committee.

(credits as appropriate to discipline)

Honors courses

If enrollments permit, departments will be encouraged to offer courses specifically designed for Honors and other advanced students. These courses would be designated as Honors courses, but would be open to all. Rigor, innovative pedagogy and special topics would distinguish Honors courses from other advanced work. Interdisciplinary and team-taught courses will also be encouraged and departments that participate will be supported with hire-behinds by the Dean's Office.

(credits as appropriate to discipline)

Entry Points

Most students entering the Honors program will do so upon admission to the university. However, others may apply for acceptance after matriculation, during their first year. Such students must have a 3.2 overall UMW GPA or higher and two letters of recommendation from UMW faculty. Students entering after matriculation will be required to successfully complete

Honors First-year Seminar, the Project Design Seminar, the Capstone experience and the mentored service project, in order to be awarded University Honors. The 6 credit per year requirement and minimum of 8 co-curricular events before graduation will also apply to these students for those semesters in which they are part of the Honors program. Exceptions to these policies can be made by the Honors committee/director in extraordinary circumstances.

Transcript Designations

A student completing all of these requirements would receive a designation on their transcript of "University Honors." A student who solely completes departmental honors will have "Departmental Honors in *Discipline*" noted on their transcripts.

Note that departmental Honors will continue to be distinct from the Honors program. Honors in each discipline will still be administered by academic departments based on requirements they determine.