Dear New Honors Faculty,

First, thank you.

Thank you for taking on the challenge of an Honors course. Every year, more students need our help to steer them safely to the colleges and universities they deserve to attend and help them be successful once they arrive there. Thank you for being part of this effort for those students who aspire to be among our very best.

Because a few of you told me these were helpful when I first issued them, I’m sending out the “Honors Professor FAQs” again, with some modifications reflecting changes since that time.

Exactly How Are Honors Courses Different?

Short Answer #1: Honors isn’t more, longer, or even harder. It’s just richer.

Short Answer #2: See the Honors Program Student Learning Outcomes posted on the new “For Faculty” section of the Honors Program webpages.

Long Answer #1: It’s up to the Honors Program faculty, within these general guidelines:

- The Official Course Outline, Catalog description and Schedule of Classes description for the Honors class and the non-Honors version of it (if there is one) are the same and accurately reflect the course.

- The work required for the course follows California Education Code rules for units. For example, for a lecture course, 1 unit of credit requires 1 hour of work in class and 2 hours of work outside class each week.

- As opposed to a non-Honors class, the course involves more independent research by students, more interaction with scholarly sources as opposed to standard textbooks, more use of primary (translated) sources as opposed to secondary sources, and much more reliance on the active participation of a relatively small, informed, involved student community.
Is Everyone in My Class an “Honors Student”?

Short Answer: Yes!

Long Answer: Yes, while they are in your class. Not all of them, however, will have applied to or been accepted to the Honors Program. From its inception the Honors Program was designed to offer the rewards of an exceptional academic experience to all Saddleback College students who accept the challenge. They may not be “Certificate-Track” students – they may be our “Walk-In” students – but in your class they must be treated as Honors students; that is the experience for which they enrolled and the experience they are entitled to expect.

What Do You Mean, “Certificate-Track”? 

Short Answer: Someone whose application was accepted.

Long Answer: Someone who wants the rewards of Honors Program status and/or completion. Students in good standing are entitled to benefits that include priority registration (so others don’t squeeze them out of Honors classes) and a transcript statement of “Honors Program Completed.” Certificate-Track students are probably also interested in participating in one of the 15 Honors transfer agreements for which completion of the Program is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition.

Do I Give “Certificate” and “Walk-In” Students Different Work or Grades?

Short Answer: No.

Long Answer: The work your students do, and the standards to which you hold them, must be the same, regardless of their status. Every student’s transcript will show the “H” next to the course, so all must be graded by the same standard.

It does not matter whether they have applied to the Program, have been accepted to the Program, would not be accepted into the Program, or want nothing to do with the Program.
Why Are “Walk-In” Students Enrolling In an Honors Class?

Short Answer: A great variety of different things.

Long Answer: It might be a good idea to ask them; it might be an interesting class discussion. Here are sentiments – and not just the great ones – from some of my Honors Microeconomics (Econ 4) students:

- I’m an econ major, so I wanted to take a class that would put me in with other people who are really interested in the subject.
- I want the “H” on my transcript to help me transfer.
- It’s the only time I could get the class, but I think I can do it.
- I wanted to take you, and this is the only one you weren’t teaching online. [BROWN-NOSE RADAR BEEPS HERE]
- I took AP Econ, and I want to do something beyond the regular class.
- I’ve heard upper-division econ is really hard, and I want to be ready.
- I’m thinking about joining the Honors Program, and I want to know what the classes are like.
- I wanted a smaller class.
- My friend here is really good in econ, and he wanted to be here, and I don’t want to take it by myself.
- I’m good at math, and figure I can do the Honors econ easier than the regular one because you’ll let me use calculus.
- With my schedule I can’t finish the whole Program, but I want to take as many Honors courses as I can.
- The books looked more interesting than the one for the regular class.
How Many “Walk-In” Students Are There Going to Be in a Class?

Short Answer: It depends on the subject, time, and professor.

Long Answer: Usually the largest fraction of non-Program students will be in English 1AH, English 1B, and mathematics classes. The smallest will be in Humanities 10.

- English 1AH has a large population that is fairly confident of success. All the students have qualified by pre-requisite or other placement method; they tend to think the class is a good one in which to test Honors waters with not much risk. Also, English 1AH has a very high number of freshman students who may be intending to complete the Program but have not begun the paperwork.

- English 1B, at least until the current re-articulation process is over and we can offer 1BH, may have a large number of accidental enrollments, and some of those will continue because they do not have the option of getting into another 1B after they realize – at the start of the semester, though we do try to contact everyone beforehand – that it is, indeed, an Honors class that they’re in.

- Math classes have a number of students who want an enriched experience in the subject or an “H” to spice up their transcript but do not want to complete the Program (especially, frankly, the core courses in English and Humanities).

- Humanities 10A/10B is accepted by UC Irvine as a substitute for its Humanities core, which English and Humanities majors must otherwise take there after they transfer. Certificate-Track students usually make up about 85% of the class.

How Do I Tell Who the “Certificate-Track” Students Are?

Short Answer: You can’t, and we don’t want you to.

Long Answer: We are able to give you information about the students in your class with respect to how many have been accepted into the Program, what the cumulative GPA distribution is (for those with previous Saddleback College records), what their placement status is with respect to English and mathematics (if they have gone through matriculation), how many other Honors Program classes they’re taking, and other things you may find helpful, but we may not do it in a way that identifies particular students. We have just today (no, yesterday – it just passed midnight – I really have to stop proofreading this at some point) received direct access to this data, and will be distributing it by the end of the week.
What if the “Walk-In” Students in My Class Can’t Do the Work?

Short Answer: Don’t let that affect the class!

Long Answer: First, don’t assume the “Walk-In” students are less able or intelligent.

As Honors faculty, you need to preserve the Honors experience. Don’t be afraid of losing students, as long as they know from the beginning that the course is an Honors course, and that Honors courses are different. You want to help all your students attain as much success as possible, but you must do that while maintaining your “Honors” standards.

Our mission is “to develop exceptional talent, ability, and scholarship in highly motivated students.” Our initial design by the Academic Senate 25 years ago was to make the experience available to all students who wished to try. Most fundamentally, we’re not trying to “serve” Honors students. We’re trying to create them – even among the population that has already filled out the paperwork.

Time and time again, students have discovered themselves to be scholars when exposed to Honors pedagogy in a small class of excited students and an enthusiastic professor. The environment does have some magic!

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter; I hope it is helpful, and I hope you are looking forward as much as I am to making the Program provide the best possible experience for our students.

If I haven’t answered your questions, please let me know. My phone number is 582-4854, I’m almost always in LRC 114, and my email is arosenberg@saddleback.edu

With best wishes,

Alannah
What is Honors?

Honors education is a general term that covers a wide variety of courses, teaching styles, and even educational objectives. While an introductory chemistry course may be basically the same everywhere, one Honors course may be very different from another equally distinguished Honors course, even if they have similar titles or subject matter. This is because Honors programs and Honors courses may attempt to fulfill diverse goals, utilize different teaching approaches, and employ a variety of ways of mastering subject matter.

Always however the central goal of Honors education is academic enrichment; the ways to this goal are defined by the specific institutional context, the faculty teaching in the program, and the needs of the particular students. In general, Honors programs are based on the belief that superior students profit from close contact with faculty, small courses, seminars or one-on-one instruction, course work shared with other gifted students, individual research projects, internships, foreign study, and campus or community service.

For students filled with ideas, longing for creative expression, and ready to take on career-shaping challenges, an Honors education is the way to go. Honors programs and Honors colleges offer some of the finest undergraduate degrees available and do so always with students in mind. The essence of Honors education is personal attention, top faculty, enlightening seminars, illuminating study-travel experiences, numerous research opportunities, and career-building internships - all designed to enhance a classic education and prepare students for a lifetime of achievement. And there’s a bonus: many Honors programs and colleges have their own scholarships that help pay for a student’s undergraduate education.

You can find Honors education at community, state, and private schools; at two-year and four-year schools; at large schools and small schools; at schools that focus on research and those that focus on teaching. What they share in common is a commitment to excellence. Honors education teaches students to think and write clearly, to be excited by ideas, and to become independent, creative, and self-confident learners.

Are you thinking about Honors? Maybe you’re a high school student preparing your college applications. Maybe you’re a community college student thinking about transferring to a four-year school. Or maybe a student already at a four-year school - and doing better than you expected. Honors may well be right for you. Honors programs and colleges admit students from every background and with every educational goal. Do you have a major and career in mind, or do you need direction and advice? One of the great strengths of an Honors education is that it offers a nurturing, supportive environment in which students can develop and grow.

Although every Honors program is different, a typical Honors program consists of a sequence of seminar courses that either supplements or substitutes for a student’s general education or distribution requirements. (There are also a growing number of Honors colleges in the United States.) Many Honors programs and colleges include a capstone project or thesis. Honors programs are available for students in most majors, and rarely require students to take more courses or credits than non-Honors students. Students who complete an Honors program or college typically receive Honors designation on their transcripts and/or diplomas.