

# **Colorado State University-Pueblo**

## **Academic Program Assessment Plan**

### **Minor: University Honors Program**

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#### **Program Mission**

##### *Mission Statement*

The University Honors Program at Colorado State University-Pueblo provides high-achieving students with enhanced learning opportunities to stimulate their engagement and development within an intellectual community of scholars, as citizens of the wider university community, and beyond. The Program provides students with special opportunities for close interaction with faculty in thought-provoking seminars and intensive guided research, as well as experiential and service/community-learning projects. The 21-credit minor course of study is predominantly designed to challenge and expand students' critical thinking skills across the four years of study.

##### *Fulfillment of University Mission*

The National Collegiate Honors Council notes that: "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." Moreover, as a member of the Rocky Mountain Honors Council, our University Honors Program is linked to more than a dozen other programs regionally. We share a common philosophy, commitment, and programmatic emphasis as well as the opportunity to work cooperatively to enhance each other's programs through the exchange of information as well as an annual student conference where students meet to engage in academic, social, and extracurricular activities.

“Colorado State University-Pueblo is committed to excellence, setting the standard for regional comprehensive universities in teaching, research and service by providing leadership and access for its region while maintaining its commitment to diversity.” To those ends, the Board of Governors adopted a set of values that include excellence in teaching and research, innovation, opportunity and access, and civic responsibility.

The University Honors Program assists in fulfilling the mission of CSU-Pueblo on multiple levels. In terms of curriculum, it provides not only enriched coursework to engage high-achieving students, but also provides them with extended opportunities to participate with faculty in research projects. This not only gives students a competitive advantage for graduate education but also increases the undergraduate research output of the university. Students also gain professional experience through service opportunities that promote civic responsibility and their ties to the broader Pueblo community, the region and beyond.

Faculty benefit from student research assistance and also gain more opportunities to supervise student research, teach smaller and more intellectually stimulating seminar classes, and foster interdisciplinary teaching with colleagues in other disciplines.

The University Honors Program also enriches the intellectual and social environment of the institution thereby creating and fostering a culture of excellence associated with the whole university. Most current Honors students are also involved in a number of other curricular and extra-curricular campus activities. Roughly half of the Honors students live in a theme residence floor (Crestone) on-campus, and many of the off-campus students also participate in events held on and off campus.

Keeping high-achieving students engaged in both their classes and the university community increases the likelihood that they will remain at CSU-Pueblo and also makes it more likely that they will recommend the university as a worthwhile experience to friends still in high school, thereby increasing future enrollments. Having students in interdisciplinary programs that encourage active learning also creates a stronger sense of campus community, and more top students in service or community-based learning means more ambassadors to increase the university presence in positive ways. A highly visible University Honors Program, therefore, should help generate higher enrollments, a higher rate of retention and students who finish their degrees, and ultimately more alumni who can serve as career mentors, donors, and exemplars of the benefits of a CSU-Pueblo public education.

## **Goals and Student Learning Outcomes**

### ***Program Goals***

- To provide opportunities for enriched work and personal growth for talented high-achieving students.

- To offer only small classes that permit challenging study of advanced material and increased interaction with faculty who serve as academic and pre-professional mentors.
- To provide students with an interdisciplinary approach to academic research through seminars and experiential learning, culminating in research projects supervised by faculty in a student's particular discipline or area of interest.
- To produce civic-minded and socially responsible citizens skilled at critical thinking, with superior communication and leadership skills, technical expertise, and of strong character and integrity.

### ***Expected Student Learning Outcomes***

Student learning outcomes are an essential and critical component for regularly assessing program efficacy and to enhance and maintain optimal program efficiency in achieving the programmatic goals listed above. This is achieved through evidence gathering and evaluation of what Honors students are learning in the various components of the Honors Program curriculum. To those ends, the Honors Program students should demonstrate proficiency in the following five learning outcome areas:

1. Critical thinking:  
Formulate and develop arguments with sufficient support, including reasoning, evidence, and persuasive appeals, and proper attribution as needed.
2. Interdisciplinary learning:  
Integrating knowledge from diverse perspectives, disciplines, and skill sets, both theoretical and applied, and hone them into arguments and/or strategies.
3. Ethics and social responsibility:  
Behave ethically as demonstrated in all performance categories, including classroom, extracurricular, community-based service-learning, and independent research areas.
4. Independent research, creativity, and scholarship:  
Apply discipline-specific as well as cross-discipline-based knowledge to design, execute, and report on a particular problem-solving strategy.
5. Leadership:  
Make substantial contributions to advancing personal and group work.

### ***Performance Criteria***

Standards for Honors courses or credit awarded are decided by individual departments and colleges with guidance from the Honors Program staff. Departments will determine appropriate metrics for student skills at an appropriate Honors level for offerings within their discipline, subject to approval by college curriculum boards. Metrics for HONOR core courses will be determined by the Program Director in consultation with the Honors Steering Committee of faculty and administrative representatives.

Performance in HONOR core courses, HONOR General Education sections, Service-learning and Honors thesis will be based upon (1) evaluation of comprehensive short assignments appropriate for 1-3 credit-hour courses/seminars; (2) site supervisor evaluations; (3) student journal and evaluation reports (for the service or community-based learning components); and (4) appropriate written content for a scholarly thesis project in concert with an appropriate public defense of the project. Owing to different coursework and assessments employed, rather than higher levels of competence in the same skills expected of non-Honors students, Honors students will be expected to demonstrate competence with advanced skills of critical thinking, scholarship as defined by their disciplinary major, and demonstrated ability to apply these skills to experiential learning.

All Honors students shall demonstrate a basic proficiency in each learning outcome to receive a satisfactory grade. Because HONOR classes are sequential, individuals who are not successful or are inadequately prepared will not remain in the Program for the latter courses in the sequence. This is evaluated jointly by maintaining an overall cumulative grade point average of 3.5 and good standing in the program (i.e., no disciplinary or other documented problems).

### ***Communication***

Regularly updated University Honors Program intended outcomes will be posted on the program website as well as on documents on the shared (I) drive for community and university employees. They will be provided to all incoming participants in the program in the form of a Student Handbook for students and parents (beginning Fall 2013).

In order to inform the public and the university community at large, written accounts of current program goals, expected student outcomes, and assessment activities are published in the Colorado State University-Pueblo annual catalog.

Copies of University Honors student projects will be maintained in the LARC and a student-run Open-Access scholarly journal (to be developed Fall-Spring 2014-15) for the benefit of the campus community and the public, respectively.

### **Curriculum**

The University Honors Program curriculum is intended to provide an enriching and challenging experience to students of diverse interests and backgrounds while minimizing the need to take additional credits or to delay the completion of major degree requirements and professional training programs. It is intended that all Honors students (carrying one major and one minor) will complete their degree requirements within four years. This is also the duration of the award packages that they receive. Most program requirements will be fulfilled by Honors sections. Moreover, Honors students will enroll in only one additional course per semester for three of four years to fulfill the University Honors Program requirements.

The purpose of the mini-seminar sequence (101, 102, 201) is a shared learning experience for all students in the program regardless of major. Currently, the three Honors seminars offer an interdisciplinary approach to the question of effective and appropriate scholarship and are intended to assist students in preparing to undertake independent research projects in upper division courses. Seminars will offer guest lectures by diverse faculty across the university, professional and non-professional individuals from the community at large, other professional presentations using available technology, e.g., 'TED Talks', together with periodic recitations between speakers. Course content will therefore vary by semester, but each will be organized around a central theme connected in a progressive sequence leading first from the acquisition of knowledge, next to major problems and approaches in diverse fields and how ideas and data should be evaluated, and finally to the creation of appropriate and feasible research agendas.

Upon completion of the Honors seminar sequence, students are responsible for earning two credit hours of service or community-based learning experience prior to graduation. Many university honors programs incorporate these so that students can observe the impact of their academic field upon the wider community, gain valuable hands-on career and leadership experience, and more effectively serve as ambassadors of the university while giving back to their host communities. Students may work jointly with a community-based organization to "learn by doing" in an area relevant to their major to enhance learning and build civic responsibility, or they may select a suitable on-campus project with the approval of the Director. The term community shall be broadly defined.

Honors students must complete a three credit hour independent project in the area of their Major under the supervised direction of a faculty member. Existing departmental offerings may be appropriate but should also specifically relate to the goals of the University Honors Program.

Some degree programs at the university require that students to complete some form of capstone project (not the same as a capstone course) relevant to the discipline. Honors students who are already required to complete such a capstone project will not be asked to undertake an additional one as well, but a component of that project must relate specifically to the Honors curriculum. This may be accomplished in various ways such as an extended literature review beyond what might be required by the program, additional analyses, etc. Honors students in programs without capstones will be required to complete one under appropriate faculty supervision.

The capstone project (HONOR 481) as well as those from programs that already require a capstone will be presented as an Honors Thesis in the appropriate Honors venue.

### ***Assessment Method and Results***

The National Collegiate Honors Council does not provide any type of accreditation standards or specific metrics for identifying the success of Honors programs. CSU-Pueblo is therefore free to develop appropriate metrics using best practices for the effective implementation of student learning outcomes. Presently, based on the input from various university-wide meetings on the subject of Honors course curriculum development, assessment for the seminars is based on short research paper projects each semester involving the use of academic resources. Additional multi-method assessment tools may be developed in the future in consultation with college curriculum boards overseeing Honors courses in their disciplines and through the Honors Steering Committee.

All Honors Program students will be provided with a hard copy evaluation form at the end of each semester based upon those used in assessment by other Honors programs nationally. The student Peer Mentor who is provided with housing on the Honors Floor on campus is also a valuable resource for soliciting student feedback about whether their perceived academic needs are being met. Continuing student feedback is essential to developing interdisciplinary HONORS offerings that are useful and relevant to students' focus within their discipline. It will also provide professional development opportunities and positive social, extracurricular and co-curricular activities that reinforce student experience at CSU-Pueblo as one of a nurturing learning environment that increases the likelihood of retention.

Upper division (300 and 400 level) student projects for Honors should be displayed in or archived by the university library to provide the university and broader community with the opportunity to observe and evaluate the contributions of Honors students. During the Fall-Spring 2014-15 academic cycle a student-run Open Access research journal will be developed and hosted online through the University Library website.

The faculty Honors Steering Committee will meet at least once every Fall semester for evaluation of Program results. The Committee will examine both instructor assessments of students as well as staff developed student assessments of Honors courses and the program to determine what if any changes would produce a more effective program, including curriculum design, program and scholarship budgets, and college standards for Honors offerings. Committee reports and curricular materials pertaining to the previous year will be available in the Honors folder on the university commons.

Assessment for Honors seminars is based on short research papers each semester involving the use of academic resources and material covered by seminar speakers. Assessment of service and community-based learning experiences will be based on journals submitted

by students and on evaluations provided by site supervisors and mentors. Assessment of Honors courses and supervised research will be conducted by the faculty supervisor in the appropriate academic department.

### Curriculum Map

University Honors	101	102	201	290	380
Critical thinking	I	E	E	M	M
Interdisciplinary learning	I	I	E	M	M
Ethics and social responsibility			I	E	M
Independent research, creativity, and scholarship			I	E	M
Leadership				I	E/M

I = Introduce

E = Expand

M = Mastery