What Makes an Honors Course an Honors Course?

There are many approaches to developing and teaching honors courses. Fundamentally, however, honors courses should be qualitatively different than non-honors courses. In other words, they should be more challenging and demanding not by simply assigning more work, but by mining more educational value from the work that is assigned.

When the Calhoun Honors College Committee considers a proposal for a new honors course, it wants to see concrete evidence on the Sample Syllabus accompanying the Course Approval Form that the course will be different in some, but not necessarily all, of the following ways:

- approaching the material from an interesting or unconventional thematic perspective;
- emphasizing written and oral communication skills;
- emphasizing discussion and other interactive teaching/learning techniques that are generally unsuitable for larger undergraduate classes;
- promoting learning outside the formal classroom setting (e.g., service projects);
- fostering teamwork and collaboration;
- applying principles learned in class to “real-life” problems and situations;
- exploring connections among various fields of study;
- providing opportunities for independent research;
- providing opportunities for publication or public presentation of work;
- developing assignments and exercises that require students to reconcile conflicting findings or to synthesize different points of view;
- emphasizing the use of original or primary sources, as opposed to traditional textbooks and secondary readings

N.B. The innovative elements that distinguish the honors course pedagogy and learning objectives should also be incorporated into the grading scheme indicated in the Evaluation section of the Sample Syllabus.