



Honors Course Design: Suggestions, Questions, and Tips

- I. The University Honors Program has three principal goals. Our students should graduate from Auburn University at Montgomery having (i) strengthened their **critical and creative thinking skills**, (ii) become better **teammates and leaders**, and (iii) grown in their understanding of **citizenship in a pluralistic society and global community**. Everything a professor does when designing an honors course—selecting readings, creating in-class activities, writing rubrics, etc.—should have a discernible connection to at least one of these three goals.
- II. The National Collegiate Honors Council identifies the essence of honors education as providing experiences “that are measurably **broader, deeper, or more complex** than comparable [non-honors] learning experiences.” Bear this description in mind as you construct your course.
- III. Honors courses should genuinely *challenge* our students. This does not mean, however, that they should be far more difficult than non-honors courses. Merely assigning extra work (or making the standards for an ‘A’ unachievable) is counterproductive. Think through the following as you seek to build a challenging course.
 - Honors courses should be *student-driven* in meaningful ways. At the very least, this means incorporating a high discussion-to-lecture ratio. Beyond this, consider creating assignments and activities that empower students to set the agenda. This could mean asking them not merely to answer questions about course content, but asking them to identify the *kinds of questions* that need to be asked, articulating connections between the course and their other interests (academic/professional or otherwise), or even designing a course assignment and/or grading rubric for the course in which they’re enrolled.
 - Look for opportunities to get students engaged in [metacognition](#) and other forms of introspection.
 - Different people are wired in different ways; for all of us, some [learning styles](#) come more naturally than others. A [recent study](#) questions the overall pedagogical value of emphasizing these differences, but finding ways to incorporate them remains an excellent strategy for promoting creative thinking and novel ways of engaging with course material.
 - Think about the connections between the assignments students are required to complete: are the various components of your course merely a hodgepodge of activities, or does the course build toward a satisfying culmination? (The [revised Bloom’s taxonomy](#) can be a useful resource here.)
- IV. How will you use the first day and the [last day](#) of the semester? Merely going over the syllabus and completing course evaluations is a missed opportunity.
- V. Challenge yourself, too! Take risks. Try out [innovative pedagogical strategies](#) you’ve never used before. Have fun. Embrace weirdness. Blow up the box.