



Honors Program

Vision

The USC Upstate Honors Program underscores the commitment of USC Upstate to academic excellence: excellent teaching, excellent learning, and excellent programming. The Honors Program cultivates academic excellence by offering enhanced educational opportunities tailored to the special needs, aspirations, and motivations of students with outstanding intellectual and creative abilities. The Honors Program enriches the honors learning experience by playing an active role in raising the intellectual and cultural caliber of the entire campus.

Mission Statement

The Honors Program creates a community of scholars that achieves the highest standards of academic excellence. The goals are as follows:

- to encourage an intellectual orientation by providing a challenging curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking, creative and active learning, integration of academic disciplines, in-depth exploration of new fields of study, and application of learning to other environments;
- to develop the skills and qualities necessary for leadership both at USC Upstate and in the larger community through an emphasis on service orientation; and
- to provide a center of identity to meet the needs of outstanding students and to cultivate a self-image as honors students.

Admission

Admission to the Honors Program is selective and competitive. Great care is taken to admit the best-qualified applicants.

Eligibility for Admission to the Honors Program

First year students, sophomore-level and above students, and transfer students are eligible for admittance in the Honors Program upon review and approval by the Director of the Honors Program and the Honors Faculty Council.

1. **A first-year student** is eligible to apply to the Honors Program if the student meets at least two of the following criteria:
 - a minimum SAT score of 1100 or ACT of 24;
 - a ranking in the top ten percent of high school graduating class;
 - a cumulative high school grade point average of at least 3.5 on a 4.0 scale;
 - a Merit Award Program finalist;
 - a Chancellor or Valedictorian Scholar;
 - evidence of motivation and commitment to academic excellence.
2. **A current USC Upstate sophomore or junior** is eligible to apply to the Honors Program if the student meets the following criteria:
 - a cumulative GPA of 3.25 or higher on a minimum of 30 hours from USC Upstate;
 - evidence of motivation and commitment to academic excellence.

3. **A transfer student** is eligible to apply to the Honors Program if the student meets the following criteria:

- a cumulative GPA of 3.25 or higher from other academic institutions;
- evidence of motivation and commitment to academic excellence.

Application Process

Students apply for the Honors Program by submitting the following:

- an application that includes student's academic record; significant extracurricular, community, and service activities (including employment); accomplishments, awards, and talents; and any involvement in academic research;
- a 500-word essay discussing the goals and aspirations for an honors college experience; and
- two letters of recommendation attesting to academic eligibility.
- an interview with the Director of the Honors Program may be required.

Exceptions to these requirements may be considered by the Director of the Honors Program.

Students who have not been admitted to the Honors Program but have a cumulative GPA of 3.25 may participate in honors courses with the permission of the Director of the Honors Program in consultation with the faculty member teaching the honors course.

Honors Credits from Other Institutions

Up to 9 credit hours or three courses from other National Collegiate Honors Council institutions may be accepted for honors credit into the USC Upstate Honors Program. These courses must be compatible with the USC Upstate Honors Program. A syllabus or complete description of courses offered for acceptance into the program may be required for review by the Director of the Honors Program. All credits must be approved by the Director of the Honors Program.

Completion Requirements

To complete the Honors Program, honors students must earn a USC Upstate degree, satisfy all major and Honors Program requirements, and remain in good standing throughout their college careers.

Honors students must

- maintain a minimum GPA of 3.00 each semester and achieve a cumulative GPA of 3.25 at the time of graduation;
- complete a minimum of two honors courses each year; and
- demonstrate significant contributions to honors activities either by serving on the Honors Student Council or by participating in the programming of the Honors Program.

Students who fall below the required minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 in any semester are placed on honors probation. At the end of the probationary semester, students with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher are returned

to regular honors status. Students with a cumulative GPA lower than 3.0 but with a semester cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher remain on honors probationary status. Students whose probationary semester cumulative GPA is lower than 3.0 are dismissed from the Honors Program. Students may apply for readmission to the Honors Program if their cumulative GPA is 3.0 or higher.

Graduation Requirements

To graduate from the Honors Program, honors students must:

- complete the First Year Honors Experience in the case of first year honors students, or complete the Honors Colloquium in the case of other USC Upstate students and transfer students;
- complete at least 18 hours of honors credit and 3 hours of a senior thesis or project directed by an honors faculty member; the thesis or project must be presented to a public audience;
- complete a minimum of 60 hours of service learning or community service at the time of graduation. Honors students complete service learning or community service hours either as a course requirement or by serving the university or community, independent of coursework. Service learning or community service is approved by the Director of the Honors Program; and
- demonstrate significant contributions to honors activities either by serving on the Honors Student Council or by participating in the programming of the Honors Program.

Curriculum

To enroll in honors courses, students must be members of the Honors Program or granted approval by the Director of the Honors Program in consultation with the faculty teaching the course.

To teach an honors course, faculty members must apply to the Honors Program and be approved by the Faculty Honors Council (see section, Faculty, below). The honors course must also be approved by the Honors Council. The course application must include a description of the proposed honors course that emphasizes participatory classroom styles, intense and in-depth study of subject matter, the use of primary source material, team or group teaching, an interdisciplinary theme, and an element of independent study. Honors courses include intensive reading, writing, and research. Faculty are encouraged to offer courses encouraging civic responsibility, global awareness, service learning, or community service. All honors courses are limited to a maximum enrollment of 20 students.

Priority enrollment in honors courses is given to students in the Honors Program, but students meeting the admission criteria for the Honors Program may enroll in honors courses with permission of the Director of the Honors Program and the approval of faculty teaching the courses.

Honors Sections of Regular Courses or Labs (0-4 credit hours)

An open call for honors courses is issued each semester to faculty. Proposals are reviewed by the Honors Faculty Council and approved through the course approval process outlined in the Faculty Manual.

Courses designated as honors courses can substitute for non-honors courses. Honors courses cover the same material as regular courses, but they must be different from regular courses by requiring coursework that is more challenging and enriching for honors students. Honors sections may involve a different teaching approach, additional readings, or special requirements. Course descriptions for honors sections must show greater rigor, more in-depth study, higher expectations, intensive reading, writing, and research than non-honors courses. Honors courses are not necessarily taught every semester, although some courses may be offered regularly.

Special Honors Courses (1-3 credit hours)

An open call for special, one-time-only honors courses is issued each semester to faculty. Proposals are reviewed and approved by the Honors Faculty Council and the standard approval process for one-time-only courses.

Special honors courses may substitute for regular courses or may be new courses. Special honors courses cover topics not covered in existing courses, allow faculty to experiment with new teaching methods, incorporate new ideas, take risks, introduce cutting-edge material, and develop individual research. Course descriptions must show greater rigor, more in-depth study, higher expectations, more intensive reading, writing, and research than non-honors courses.

Special honors courses may meet general education, major, cognate/minor, or elective requirements. Honors Faculty Advisors recommend to deans course substitutions that allow incorporation of honors courses into the curriculum.

HONS 101. First Year Honors Experience (3 credit hours)

First Year Honors Experience is a facilitated seminar course taught by multiple faculty with an interdisciplinary theme. The First Year Honors Experience is required of all first year honors students. Faculty members propose the theme of the course and outline the format of the class. Courses must include intensive reading, writing, and research.

The First Year Honors Experience may meet general education, cognate/minor, or elective requirements. Honors Faculty Advisors recommend to deans course substitutions that allow incorporation of honors courses into the curriculum.

HONS 301. Honors Colloquium (300-level or higher) (3 credit hours)

The Honors Colloquium is a facilitated course taught by multiple faculty. The course has an interdisciplinary theme. Faculty members propose the theme of the course and outline the format of the class, give assignments, and evaluate students. Course must include intensive reading,

writing, and research. Upper-level and transfer students who do not complete the First Year Honors Experience must enroll in the Honors Colloquium. Honors students who complete the First Year Honors Experience may enroll in the Honors Colloquium for honors credit. The Honors Colloquium may be repeated once if the theme of the Colloquium changes.

The Honors Colloquium may meet general education, major, cognate/minor, or elective requirements. Honors Faculty Advisors recommend to chairs, deans, or the general education committee course substitutions that allow incorporation of honors courses into the curriculum.

HONS 399. Honors Independent Study (3-4 credit hours)

Directed research and reading of a complex and extensive nature in keeping with the student's major interests. A written report or work is required at the end of the term. Research involves both primary and secondary sources. Consent of the Director of the Honors Program. May be repeated with the consent of the Director of the Honors Program for a total of no more than eight hours of undergraduate Honors credit. A university contract must be completed with all required signatures.

HONS 401. Honors Thesis (3-6 credit hours)

To graduate from the Honors Program, a student must complete a final thesis or project as an independent tutorial directed by an appropriate faculty member chosen by the student and approved by the Director of the Honors Program. Students are eligible for the Honors thesis or project when they accumulate a minimum of 12 honors credits. Begun as early as the junior year, the thesis or project must be completed and submitted to the Director of the Honors Program in the senior year. After approval by the Honors Faculty Council, students must present the thesis or project to a public audience. Honors theses are filed in the Journal of Honors Papers.

The honors thesis or project may help to fulfill the requirement of the Senior Seminar in honors students' major disciplines; students work with faculty members directing the thesis or seminar and with the faculty member teaching the senior seminar to determine its feasibility.

The honors thesis or project may meet general education, major, cognate/minor, or elective requirements. Honors Faculty Advisors recommend deans course substitutions that allow incorporation of honors courses into the curriculum.

Faculty members who act as advisors for honors students completing honors theses or projects receive course release time according to the university policy on faculty release time.

Orientation and Advising

The Director of the Honors Program assists the academic Chair or Dean in identifying at least one faculty advisor in each academic unit to advise honors students in the unit. The Honors Program provides an advising workshop to honors advisors each semester.

Extracurricular Activities

The Honors Program sponsors a full range of activities open to both honors students and the entire university community. Such activities include new honors student luncheons; guest lecturers and speakers; coffees with USC Upstate faculty lectures; field trips; cultural events; dinners at faculty houses; receptions; Honors Day ceremonies; and research symposia.

Special Benefits

Benefits for honors students include availability of the Honors Student Lounge, participation in honors activities, priority registration, faculty research mentors, library privileges, and the opportunity to attend Honorary Society meetings. Students graduating in the Honors Program receive special notation on their diplomas and transcripts, an Honors Certificate, and special recognition at graduation. Honors students are identified by a stole at graduation. The name of each honors graduate is engraved on a plaque displayed in the Honors Office.

Honors Faculty Council

The Honors Faculty Council is a committee of seven USC Upstate faculty members. Four of the members are elected by the faculty at-large at the last general faculty meeting of the year. Three of the members are appointed by the Director of the Honors Program in consultation with the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. The Director of the Honors Program is an ex officio member. The Council elects its own chair. Terms are for three years. Initial terms are staggered with the length of term determined by lot.

The Council makes recommendations on admissions, faculty, honors courses, honors requirements, means of assessment, and other matters related to the Honors Program, in accord with faculty governance procedures. The Council forms the examination committee for the honors thesis or experimental project. At the last general faculty meeting each year, the Chair of the Council provides a report on the status of the Honors Program. The report includes the numbers of students enrolled in the program, the numbers of students eligible for participation in the Honors Program, the number of honors courses offered (including the type of course, i.e., honors sections, one-time-only), the number of faculty who taught honors courses, and the number of academic units represented by the faculty who taught in the honors program.

Honors Student Council

The Honors Student Council is an honor student committee serving as a liaison with the Honors Faculty Council. The Honors Student Council represents the needs and concerns of honors students to the Honors Faculty Council and the Director of the Honors Program. The Honors Student Council assists the Director in arranging academic, social, cultural, and service activities.