

CHAPTER TWO

The Timeliness of Honors Contracts

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With roots in a tutorial educational approach introduced by the ancient Greeks and made famous at Oxford and Cambridge, honors contracts in the United States emerged as tutorial arrangements in the late nineteenth century. Early honors programs at Harvard and other universities sought to counter an emphasis on practical training in US higher education after the Civil War with more flexible programs of study, small seminars, and tutorials (Capuana 21–25; Wolken; Repko et al. 28). This curricular reform spanned disciplines and responded to two key changes in education: the late-nineteenth-century growth of graduate education, particularly in the sciences, modeled on German universities that emphasized both research and the consolidation of disciplines (Capuana 19–20; Menand 97), and the early-twentieth-century rise of liberal education in humanities disciplines. These changes caused a marked shift in the US from a belief in the power of standardized vocational programs to fulfill democratic ideals to the

conviction that democracy depended upon the development of individual research and other interests or talents, often through the tutorial model (Harvard President Emeritus Charles W. Eliot, ctd. in Unger 178; Aydelotte 12–19; Capuana 19–21, 25). In this pedagogical milieu, Frank Aydelotte pioneered a well-developed honors program at Swarthmore, based on the tutorials of Oxford and Cambridge, which he had experienced as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford (Aydelotte 30–44; Rinn 70–73; Carnicom 49). His tutorial system is commonly acknowledged as the first modern US honors program (Capuana 12; Guzy, *Honors Composition* 6; Rinn 70; Humphrey 13).

This brief historical context for honors education reveals the distinguished roots of contracts and suggests their overlooked pedagogical value. For reasons Richard Badenhausen makes clear, contracts have instead held a suspect and marginalized curricular position, even though the results of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges in both 2012 and 2016 show that approximately three-fifths of programs/colleges—regardless of institutional type—use contracts (Scott, Smith, and Cognard-Black 208; Scott). That is a sizable number for a form of learning that has earned relatively limited respect. Moreover, NCHC’s publications, conference programs, and listserv illustrate how many practitioners of this pedagogy have developed innovative approaches and best practices that add rigor, flexibility, and oversight to honors contract work.

Our central claim in this chapter is that, anchored in the tutorial model, contracts exemplify the best of honors pedagogy when they cultivate personalized, mentored learning and ensure consistent, documented quality. This tutorial frame responds to Badenhausen’s first concern that contracts represent an “alteration of the honors experience” that has “negative effects on the position of an honors program or college on campus” (5). Ensuring quality necessitates oversight, and assessment of learning outcomes responds to Badenhausen’s fourth issue about rigor through assessment (5, 11–12). As part of oversight, one section of the Gallaudet University honors contract template goes some way toward addressing Badenhausen’s

third concern about a loss of the power of an honors learning community that contracts might cause (10). We argue that at Gallaudet University, a tutorial frame emphasizing a close instructor-student relationship facilitates meaningful contracts. These contracts not only maximize faculty-student contact in classes of any format, but they also accommodate exploration and questioning in a range of research disciplines, from team-taught humanities discussions to innovative investigations in STEM courses, including their labs.

Privately run but largely federally funded, Gallaudet is a small learner-centered university of 800 majority deaf undergraduates and 400 graduate students; it features an honors program of 45–50 students, about six percent of the undergraduate population. Within the liberal arts and pre-professional programs, a good number of faculty are willing and even eager to work in depth with honors students. Aligning the mentoring relationship featured in contracts with the respected tradition of tutorial learning resonates with faculty invested in guiding honors students focused on their own individualized learning. Our students also appreciate contracts built on this hallmark feature of the tutorial model; in a spring 2018 focus group of honors students engaged in contracts, students revealed that they most valued one-on-one meetings with the instructor for deepening their learning and increasing their confidence as learners and future professionals (Whitebread and Myers). The students' experiences are not unique. Three honors-related dissertations reporting mixed experiences with contracts find or imply that students appreciate contracts when they meet two conditions: 1) student and faculty customize the work to fit a student's interests, and 2) contracts involve significant time with the instructor (Bohnelein 81–82; Huggett 44, 46–47, 51–53, 59–60, 156, 163–64; Patino 11–12, 63–64). These are the conditions that describe the tutorial model for contracts. Although the terms “independent study” and “tutorial” are sometimes used interchangeably, tutorials involve a greater degree of supervision and emphasize the mentoring relationship and are thus more relevant to our contract argument. In fact, tutorial contracts acknowledge the necessary dependence of budding scholars on their faculty mentors, a dependence that

allows students to develop the skills and confidence they need to embark on the more independent work of an honors thesis or capstone project.

Perhaps the tutorial tradition in honors education surprises some honors practitioners used to the contemporary emphasis on discussion-based seminars. Tutorials grew out of a period of reform in higher education when leaders such as Charles W. Eliot at Harvard in the late nineteenth century and Woodrow Wilson at Princeton in the early twentieth century embraced liberal education over the Taylorism of vocational and standardized curricula and sought to loosen requirements to fit individual interests (ctd. in Capuana 25). What these reformers valued in the tutorial system in particular is a benefit of the best contract learning today: an emphasis on the “social relationship in learning,” which is realized in the tutorial’s close relationship between faculty and student (Capuana 24, 183). In the first modern honors program at Swarthmore, Aydelotte embraced this emphasis; in fact, he adapted his tutorial system to include very small groups of students precisely for the increased social stimulation of multiple student learners (Rinn 73). With small discussion-based seminars as a regular offering of many honors programs and colleges today, individual or very small group tutorials organized through contracts provide another means to enhance honors learning. Significantly, such tutorial work can lay the foundation of early mentoring and preliminary investigation upon which the more focused and detailed exploration of honors thesis or capstone work can build.

In addition to their role in Swarthmore’s honors program, versions of the tutorial system and other individualized learning became central to a number of honors programs, first at many small eastern liberal arts colleges (Capuana 21), then later at public and private institutions of various sizes (Capuana 26; Rinn 64–70). These programs lasted until after the Second World War, when massive growth in student numbers (Gumport et al. 2) and a focus on preparation in the sciences and technology in the face of the Cold War and its space race brought back standardization (Capuana 171–76). Yet honors education continued to gain attention as a way

to challenge the most academically able students, this time by making the case that going beyond standardized curricula was essential to secure US “leadership in the free world” (Capuana 171). Related to this push, a 1957 Rockefeller grant funded the establishment of the first national honors organization, the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), replaced by the National Collegiate Honors Council in 1966 (Capuana 4–5, 171–72, 240). At the first ICSS conference, the attendees (only 43 participants from 27 institutions) crafted a list characterizing honors that drew upon some features of the tutorial system (Rinn 75); this list evolved into NCHC’s “Basic Characteristics” (Rinn 76).

Even as honors education was re-organizing, students of the 1960s were protesting both the Vietnam War and racism and rebelling against standardization in higher education, a rebellion that sparked government action. What was then called the US Office of Education led the governmental response to this student pressure: they highlighted and connected independent study to honors education. A 1966 report makes clear how important this philosophical connection became: “Honors Programs are called independent study programs on some campuses . . . because, more than anything else, independent study seems to characterize ‘honors’ work” (Hatch and Bennet 1). By the 1970s, others also began to tie innovation in higher education to the creation of essential connections across independent study, self-directed study, and contract learning (Givens; Mayville; Feeny and Riley; Burke). While the nineteenth-century tutorial system gradually faded from honors education, these related forms of learning—independent study, self-directed study, and contract learning—created a historical bridge between the beginnings of honors education in tutorials and the tutorial model of contracts today.

Relying not on this historical context but rather on reports of poor contract quality, much NCHC literature doubts—or even dismisses—the possibility of honors-worthy contracts. In the September 2017 NCHC listserv announcement for this monograph, Jeffrey A. Portnoy, General Editor of the NCHC Monograph Series, calls contracts a “controversial topic” (“Monograph Call for Papers

on Honors Contracts”). The main complaint revolves around the idea that contracts just mean tacking on more work of the kind already assigned in the contracted course (Bolch, “Contracting in Honors” 51; James 30–31; Guzy, “AP” 8; Badenhausen 11). In addition, all three editions of the NCHC monograph *Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges* diminish the value of contracts with the comment that although contracts may be cost effective, “it is probable that Honors options within regular classes are often the least rewarding curricular option for Honors students” (Schuman 49). This deflation by a champion of honors dismays us, given the roots of contracts in tutorials that once enjoyed prominence in honors programs at small, private liberal arts colleges.

On the positive side, we found six NCHC monographs that discuss contracts neutrally or supportively (“NCHC Monograph Series”). As Badenhausen notes, “two-year institutions may have thought most intentionally about the use of contracts” (4). Indeed, besides the monograph Badenhausen cites, Theresa A. James’s *A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges* (2006), two prior publications bolster the claim of leadership on contracts by two-year institutions. First, a survey of community and junior colleges that asks about contract use appeared in a 1975 dissertation sponsored in part by NCHC, *A Statistical Portrait of Honors Programs in Two-Year Colleges* by Michael A. Olivas. Second, NCHC and two other educational organizations published a 1983 handbook on honors education at two-year colleges that includes an explanation of contracts and the forms to document them (Bentley-Baker et al.).

It seems likely that the increasing use of contracts despite their vexed reputation explains why contracts have continued to receive attention through two more informal channels besides publications: NCHC’s conferences and listserv. In an email, Jeffrey A. Portnoy reports that at the 1996 NCHC Conference, he was a panel participant in a standing-room-only Developing in Honors workshop on honors contracts. Digitally searchable conference programs from 1997 and 2002–2017 reveal nothing for 1997 but one presentation and one Idea Exchange (IE) topic about contracts in 2002

(*Conference Program Archive*). Since then, interest has expanded rapidly; NCHC conferences have included 41 more presentations focusing on or involving contracts, including 28 general sessions; three Developing in Honors (DIH) sessions; two Best Honors Administrative Practice (BHAP) sessions (one of which had multiple repeats over two years) on integrating contracts with honors learning outcomes; three roundtables; four IE topics; one poster presentation; and five consultants. A number of presentations, some by honors faculty or administrators and others involving students presenting on their own or with honors faculty or administrators, have centered on specific contract experiences. Several presenters have offered specific guidelines or forms and addressed risks or pitfalls in contracting, and in the last decade, a number have focused on learning outcomes and assessment as the key to strengthening contracts. Conference programs also show consultants naming contracts as an area of expertise (two in 2003; one in 2006, repeated in 2007; one in 2012, repeated in 2013; and one in 2015).

NCHC listserv threads mentioning contracts appear in the first year of available archives (1997) and continue for nearly 20 years. The number of threads alone signals the attention contracts have received from NCHC members. Out of a total 52 threads, 28 focus loosely on topics about contracts, such as sharing opinions on their value. Other postings treat a variety of questions about record-keeping, oversight, faculty workload, and compensation; still others offer specific examples of contracts, ask for responses to surveys, or call for DIH session leaders with expertise in contracts. Within this range, a review of selected threads over 17 years reveals that early postings debated the merits of contracts while later postings turned to sharing materials and advising on effective practices. This gradual shift in topics suggests the development of best practices for creating and managing contracts, work continued and deepened by the chapters of this monograph.

The earliest archived thread with active replies, “Any Presentations on the Goals of Honors Courses” (27 Oct. 1998), contains three posts encapsulating the controversy over the value of contracts. One critical listserv subscriber from an honors college at a

large university notes that faculty unwillingness to invest time in contracts contributes to lack of quality (Stark). Having “seen examples of viable [honors] contracts and good educational experiences that can come from them,” another subscriber nevertheless claims a lack of enthusiasm for two reasons: the subscriber agrees with the point about faculty reluctance to engage in contracts and adds the necessity but impossibility of oversight for what could be a thousand contracts at a time: “No, thanks. Stake me out on a hill of fire ants instead” (Wainscott). This humorous image makes the subscriber’s antipathy clear, but the idea of overseeing thousands of contracts at a time seems hyperbolic. A third subscriber defends contracts as affording a “useful, flexible option” that allows students to complete honors requirements along with major requirements, albeit with clear restrictions and guidelines to ensure quality—“different and better, not more” of the same work required in a regular course (Zubizarreta, “Any Presentation”). It is possible that valuations of contracts may depend on the culture, mission, or other important guiding principles of an institution. That is, institutions investing in personalized learning and/or one-on-one professor-student interactions will more likely succeed with contracting. Positive valuations may also result from successful quality-control measures, such as thoughtfully constructed guidelines, practices, and assessments.

From the early to mid 2000s, listserv subscribers moved on to grapple with specific practices to improve contract quality. In one such thread from this period, “Contract Courses” (12–13 Dec. 2002), subscribers from three large honors colleges and one mid-size university (Bolch, Portz, Sederberg, and Smith) mention concerns with uneven quality and limited oversight, but they also suggest growing confidence in certain practices: explicit contract guidelines and forms, restrictions on the number of contracts or the level of courses with contracts, and faculty compensation (per course or in the overall reward structure). In a 2005 thread, “FW: Learning by Contract” (Clothier), a similar discussion of helpful practices occurs among subscribers from institutions comparable to those represented in the 2002 thread: four large and one mid-size (Conway, Primoza,

Reibstein, Vaughn, and Saiff). By 2015, in a thread called “Honors Contracts” (Holgado), John Zubizarreta suggests a search of the list-serv archives and includes links to websites of various institutions for contract models, while Christian M. Brady includes a link to his contract (“Honors Option”) form. This latest thread completes the seventeen-year arc of conversations that chart growing confidence in the development of contract best practices.

Nevertheless, the disrepute of contracts remains. Badenhausen implies their devaluation when he writes that at his institution he “has the luxury of not having to employ contracts . . . because of a fully developed and flexible stand-alone honors curriculum,” which features discussion-based seminars (5–6). Given the framework and practices presented in this chapter, we counter that our small, learner-centered institution affords the luxury of employing contracts that exemplify the considerable strengths of tutorial learning. For one thing, in a tutorial model focused on student interests above and beyond course coverage, it is simply not possible for contracts just to require more work of the sort already included in the course and thus to lack the depth central to honors learning (Badenhausen 11). Second, when supported by the culture of an institution and its honors program, the close mentoring in a tutorial contract allows for dialogue and agency, rather than the passivity that Badenhausen warns against (14–15). In a recent *Honors in Practice* essay, Patrick Bahls accepts Badenhausen’s emphasis on community as a defining feature of honors education, commenting that honors programs and colleges are “defined as often by a sense of community as by a coherent curriculum” (171). Bahls’s institution “limits the number of credits students may earn through contracts” to prevent “sacrificing community cohesion” (178), but he notes that students’ reflections on contracts demonstrate “great progress in achieving a number of critical learning goals,” suggesting the potential pedagogical value of contracts (174). We argue that faculty and students working together on contracts do not merely complete a transaction but collaborate on a “shared journey,” not unlike classes focused on “pursuing hard questions in a conversational exchange about difficult texts and concepts” (Badenhausen 8). Since tutorial-based

contracts depend upon highly interactive relationships between instructor and student, they share less with independent study, as Badenhausen suggests (15), than with the discussion-based seminars that he places at the heart of the honors curriculum.

In these counterpoints to Badenhausen's challenging characterization of contracts, we have begun to address his first concern, shared by many, that contracts are often perceived as a primarily administrative solution (Lyon 23). Contracts are too frequently executed sloppily and "employed for the wrong reasons or without clear intention" as "a crutch for under-resourced programs," (Badenhausen 5). The idea of contracts as an administrative solution seems to have limited their potential as pedagogical innovations. Conversely, as Badenhausen also notes, "When used properly, honors contracts can be wonderful mechanisms to facilitate creative learning opportunities for students . . ." (5). Proper use, of course, involves guidelines, oversight, and learning outcomes, as Badenhausen indicates (13). For effective contracts, we present our outcomes assessment and oversight as a response to Badenhausen's fourth point about assessment and rigor (5, 11–12). In addition, one part of our contract template addresses Badenhausen's third concern about a loss of honors learning community through the contract process (5, 10–11).

Our program's multi-year overhaul of contracts began in 2010 with in-depth interviews of our students about contracts; we found that most of them disparaged contracts as busy work (Whitebread, Myers, and Peruzzi). Specific issues that came out of these interviews with honors students about contracts resembled some of Bolch's findings at Texas Tech University ("Contracting in Honors"): lack of professor follow-through and incomplete contracts, meaning that the student finished the course but not the honors work. We sought to develop a system by which we could deliver on the pedagogical potential of contracts.

Our improved and still evolving contract practices emerged from two overarching goals: 1) allowing students to conduct meaningful work with an instructor as guide and mentor, and 2) cultivating non-cognitive skills and habits conducive to academic and professional success. Beginning with these two goals, we first

decided on learning outcomes as a best practice (Astin and Antonio 41), aligning them with program and university learning outcomes as another best practice (Astin and Antonio ix). Six Gallaudet honors contract outcomes nest within our program outcomes, which in turn largely align with university outcomes. (See Table 1.)

Table 1 shows that, relative to university outcomes, the honors program and honors contract outcomes emphasize the broader, deeper, and more complex learning that characterizes honors education. The only university outcome the honors program does not assess concerns identity and culture because this outcome forms the core of the university's mission; in keeping with the philosophy of honors as counterpoint to the institution's prevailing academic practices, mission, or focus, the honors program emphasizes other outcomes that still remain aligned with university outcomes.

These outcomes guided the creation of a structure for contracts. The contract template ties into the contract outcomes in three key ways:

- Topic, plan of work, and end-product: outcomes 2 and 3;
- Regular day and meeting time: outcomes 1, 4, and 5;
- “Give back” to peers in class or in discussion with honors peers: outcome 6.

As extensions of non-honors classes, the contracts at Gallaudet expand on a stand-alone honors curriculum in making possible honors-level exploration and questioning in a range of research disciplines. In any non-honors three- or four-credit course, contracting honors students take on about a credit's worth of honors-level work, along with regular meetings with the instructor-as-mentor and possibly some leadership in the non-honors course. A contract turns the whole course into honors credits as long as the student earns a B or higher. For their part, faculty include this work in their personnel action requests; more and more departments explicitly recognize honors contracts as well as honors capstones for merit, promotion, and tenure awards. Two examples of such outcome alignment integrated with examples from contracts and the contract template may illuminate these practices.

TABLE 1. GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY'S ALIGNED LEARNING OUTCOMES

	Gallaudet University Outcomes	GU Honors Program Outcomes	GU Honors Contract Outcomes
Language and Communication	Students will use American Sign Language (ASL) and written English to communicate effectively with diverse audiences, for a variety of purposes, and in a variety of settings.	Honors students will excel in applying conventions of academic and professional discourse.	1 Students will demonstrate an ability to maintain professional, timely, and effective in-person, face-to-face, virtual, and email communications with the course instructor.
Critical Thinking	Students will summarize, synthesize, and critically analyze ideas from multiple sources in order to draw well-supported conclusions and solve problems.	Honors students will learn to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate multiple perspectives and facts, ideas, and interpretations from various sources—particularly academic and professional sources—at an advanced undergraduate level.	2 Students will complete a project that develops intellectual standards and traits applied to the elements* of any discipline in which they are working. * These elements include point of view, information, purpose, interpretation and inference, key questions, assumptions, essential concepts, implications and consequences. (See Paul and Elder.)
Knowledge and Inquiry	Students will apply knowledge, modes of inquiry, and technological competence from a variety of disciplines in order to understand human experience and the natural world.	Honors students will discuss and apply modes of inquiry of humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and natural sciences, including interdisciplinary contexts, using entry-level professional or graduate school practices.	3 Students will demonstrate an ability to comprehend and discuss specifics concerning methodological analysis, argument structure, or other aspects of constructing knowledge in a discipline.

<p>Ethics and Social Responsibility</p>	<p>Students will make reasoned ethical judgments, showing awareness of multiple value systems and taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions. They will apply these judgments, using collaboration and leadership skills, to promote social justice in their local, national, and global communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honors students will describe and evaluate the perspectives of diverse groups. • Honors students will value and participate in civic-minded service as a way to improve society. • Honors students will develop dispositions and abilities conducive to strong cognitive skills. • Honors students will demonstrate professional behavior consistent with expectations of graduate schools or professional employers. 	<p>4 Students will demonstrate an ability to review their own work and make substantial improvements beyond instructor feedback.</p> <p>5 Students will demonstrate an ability to conduct productive, ongoing meetings with the course instructor.</p> <p>6 Students will use their contract learning and individual attention from the professor to enrich the learning of classmates or present to honors peers.</p>
<p>Identity and Culture</p>	<p>Students will understand themselves, complex social identities, including deaf identities, and the interrelations within and among diverse cultures and groups.</p>		

The institutional outcome called knowledge and inquiry, for example, aligns with a broad goal of disciplinary competence: the honors program increases disciplinary knowledge with more advanced application by tying contract work to some basic entry-level professional or graduate school disciplinary practices. Students eventually deepen this disciplinary knowledge in their capstone projects. Contracts thus become a tutorial training ground for gradually increasing disciplinary competence. The first part of the contract template begins this work by asking for a description of the topic and incremental work that will lead to a specified final product. The description must distinguish the honors-level content from the rest of the course and either specify any relation to capstone preparation or provide another reason for the choice of focus, thus marking the start of a professional trajectory. Students usually provide a first draft of these contract proposals and then revise based on the instructor's and director's input, particularly with specific suggestions for steps in the work process. One example of a contract that prepared a student for capstone work at Gallaudet involved the acquisition of advanced statistical skills for a capstone in population genetics, with the short-term end project of a mini-application of the statistical skill as well as a comparison of results using the skills learned in a course and the more advanced skill learned in the contract. Another has been completing a literature review designed to narrow the focus for a capstone, with an end product of an annotated bibliography or a reflection on the development of a specific capstone topic. The contract's topic and end product determine the specific iterative, incremental work included in the contract description. With an annotated bibliography, for example, a student might begin by developing a set of questions to review relevant literature, then read two research articles a week, and keep a journal of evolving understanding that the student brings to meetings with the instructor for discussion and advice. These examples illustrate our cultivation of contracts as one way to prepare students for capstone work in a thoughtful and organized way, whether in STEM, humanities, professional, or arts disciplines, although not all contracts must do so. Students may

pursue other areas of interest related to the course in which they are creating a contract.

Other examples of contract topics that might lead toward a capstone include writing a short story inspired by a philosophical idea, analyzing the nature of different kinds of influences cited by a novelist, designing a theater set and lighting, translating a cookbook written in a foreign language, creating a survey and applying for IRB approval, and adapting scholarly knowledge for student newspaper articles. If students discover through a contract that they want to change direction for a capstone, we tell them it is better to find out early through a contract than later in the capstone process, when changes become more difficult, if not impossible. Most important, as these examples of contract work suggest, the possibilities for exploration are endless. To emphasize this point, we repeat this mantra to students: it's not the kind of work, but the level of work.

Contracts for general studies and lower-level courses, usually begun in an honors student's sophomore year at Gallaudet, are designed to establish the process of mentoring and independent research early. Some students add contracts if they want to develop specialized skills beyond the scope of the course, such as mastering advanced design software in an introductory graphic design course. In addition, because many honors students take introductory science courses in their first year to meet all their science requirements within four years, we allow them to expand upon these courses with honors contracts. For these introductory and lower-division courses, instructors typically take a more hands-on approach to contract design. Such contracts might involve a more complex lab. In an introductory biology class for majors, for example, a regular lab on plant growth might involve selecting a hormone and testing its effects in different concentrations on seed germination, yielding results that students could show on a simple graph with one independent variable. Honors students might deepen this work by testing two independent variables, such as two hormones or one hormone under different light conditions. They could analyze the results of their experimental design with an analysis of variance

(ANOVA), and their lab report would demonstrate an understanding of how to interpret the impact of two or more independent variables. Such introductory contracts do not typically relate to a capstone, but they offer an important opportunity to introduce and develop critical-thinking skills and basic disciplinary conventions. They also build confidence and independence vital to success in upper-division honors courses and the capstone. To ensure these benefits and promote a supportive honors peer community, we encourage students to develop multi-student contracts in these lower-division courses.

Contracts at Gallaudet University also focus on the non-cognitive collaborative and leadership skills that support the university's social responsibility and ethics outcome. Honors aligns two specific contract learning outcomes with this university concern: 1) developing dispositions and abilities conducive to strong cognitive skills, and 2) demonstrating professional behavior consistent with graduate school or employment. Because these skills are also critical to capstone success, three contract outcomes prepare students for capstones by aligning with program and university outcomes: revising work (incremental development) beyond professorial comments; initiating and maintaining professional communication with the instructor; and regularly meeting with the instructor (at least biweekly although some choose weekly meetings of shorter duration than the biweekly meetings, which vary between 30 to 50 minutes). In coming prepared to meetings and following the plan of work, students develop independence and fortify intrinsic motivation. In communications and quality of work, students practice professionalism. In projects that involve correcting initial understanding or revising hypotheses by following up with more sources and making new connections, students begin to experience what long-term projects will be like in capstone work, graduate school, and the professional world.

The regular meetings and communications are where the tutorial or mentoring relationship fully develops. Through this mentoring, students learn not only about a subject or skill but also about professional or disciplinary norms and conventions. Regular

meetings with the instructor foster the skill of dialogic learning valued in honors education and by students today (Bedetti 110); in the case of contracts, that dialogue is between instructor and student or with a small group of honors students rather than in a class discussion. In particular, instructors often model or guide contract students in the critical evaluation and judgment necessary to make an original contribution in one's field, starting with the independent work of capstones. Our students explain why they value one-on-one meetings with their instructors by pointing to faculty's direct intervention in the process of working through ideas or skills, an intervention that deepens understanding and increases memory for students (Whitebread and Myers). Furthermore, students have commented that coming to meetings with prepared questions to initiate discussion increases their confidence in future conversations where they explain capstone ideas and invite faculty to serve on their committees. At Gallaudet, we have found that a number of deaf students harbor insecurities or suffer from imposter phenomenon (Mathwig and Lord), and many of these students combine academic preparedness in some areas with educational gaps in others. For these students, the one-on-one attention of contracts becomes a means of equity, inclusion, and access to honors achievement, as Dotter and Hageman describe in other contexts and in greater depth in the next two chapters.

The honors program's sixth and final outcome for all contracts develops leadership and responsibility through what we call "Give Back." Honors students may choose to tutor other students in the class, prepare study materials, host a film discussion, or present to classmates what they have learned through their contract work, among other activities. Although presenting to non-honors classmates had become the default activity, students complained in our spring 2018 focus group that classmates were either uninterested or underprepared to engage the presenters with questions and comments. Some contract students said that they preferred the opportunity to present their work to fellow honors students and thus to engage in more thoughtful cross-disciplinary discussion. In the coming year, the honors program will therefore institute the

choice to “Give Back” by either sharing ideas and outcomes with non-honors peers in the contracted course or presenting to fellow honors students at a special end-of-semester honors community event. In connecting contract learning to the shared experiences of an honors community, contracts can reinforce rather than pose a threat to that community, addressing a third area of concern raised by Badenhausen (5, 10–11) and mentioned by Bahls (178).

Oversight ensures the quality of the work students carry out in their contracts. We are involved in the drafting and approval of contracts at the beginning as well as at a mid-point check-in and in an end-of-semester assessment for both instructors and students. Besides in-person or online meetings with students at these three points, a handbook provides a written reference for all parts of the contract. After the initial approval of a contract, the director initiates the electronic contract documentation that is shared automatically with the registrar to record an honors designation on a student’s transcript. At midterm, we check grades in contracted courses and briefly connect with students to verify that they are meeting regularly with the professor, finding the contract worthwhile, and coming reasonably close to where they expected to be in their work at that point. This check-in gives us a chance to intervene early if the contract is not going as planned or if the tutorial relationship has broken down. To intervene, we might devise strategies to get the student back on track or contact the instructor directly. Knowing the terms and standards of contracts, faculty also proactively alert the director along with the student about possible barriers to successful contract completion. At the end of the semester, we send to both instructor and student an electronic assessment link. (See the Appendix.) Once the subject selects the appropriate role of either instructor or student, the assessment continues with the instructions and questions for that role.

Instructors use a Likert rating scale to evaluate the extent to which students have met each of the honors program’s six learning outcomes, an assessment that determines whether a student earns honors credit. The first three outcomes rely heavily on instructor judgment while the final three are more direct measures of student

behaviors. In addition, professors can provide more nuanced evaluations in written comments. Calling for judgment on the quality and depth of learning in the field or discipline, the assessment puts authority in the instructor's hands, even as it accommodates institutional pressure to provide quantifiable assessment. At the same time, we recognize that students gain from assessing themselves and their experience with the instructor. With great appreciation, we credit Lucy Morrison for this idea, which we have added with modifications to our contract practices. In addition to rating their own performance on the six outcomes, students answer key questions evaluating the instructor, including: "Did the professor follow through on the weekly or biweekly meetings?" and "Was the professor invested in and engaged with your contract work?" While the student evaluation does not determine honors credit, it does offer a valuable educational opportunity for students to reflect on the content and management of their contract learning. This conscious reflection deepens engagement by keeping the student at the center of a learner-directed environment.

To earn honors credit, students must meet minimum standards, which the honors program established after two years of collecting assessment data and looking at the work done for each rating: no instructor ratings of 1, no more than two ratings of 2, and all other ratings between 3–5. We follow up if a student does not earn minimum ratings or if the student and instructor ratings diverge widely. For contracts not earning minimum scores, the honors director consults with the instructor for more information on the unacceptable ratings and then meets with the student in the director's appropriate advisory role to explain this information and determine what the student learned from the failed contract. To support busy faculty in these cases, the director also notifies the registrar to remove the honors contract credit from the course. Very few of our contracts fail, however, because of the detailed work involved in proposing and vetting contracts, mid-term check-ins, monitored outcomes-based assessments, and early faculty communication with the director about concerns.

Much like the early debates between scholars of interdisciplinary studies, such as Thomas C. Benson's 1982 critique and William H. Newell's 1983 response, the controversy surrounding honors contracts has sparked interest in their pedagogical value and the development of best practices for ensuring compelling, rigorous, and beneficial learning. Early criticism of honors contracts echoes Benson's critique of interdisciplinary courses, which he calls "pedagogically doubtful," "characteristically shallow," detrimental to "disciplinary competence," and costly. Yet, thanks to intrepid interdisciplinary leaders like Newell, Julie Klein Thompson, and others, scholars have developed precise definitions of interdisciplinarity and best practices for interdisciplinary courses, allowing such courses to become a cornerstone of honors education as well as other educational spheres. We anticipate a similar dynamic characterizing an evolving reputation of contracts. Following best practices, contracts typify personalized, mentored learning that is structured to lead students toward increasing intellectual independence; they therefore embody the latest evolution of tutorials in honors education. As such, contracts deserve a central place in honors education today.

As a valued part of honors education, tutorial-based contracts can be seen as a special approach used in various modes of learning—research and creative scholarship, breadth and enduring questions, service learning and leadership, experiential learning, and learning communities—and can therefore similarly result in the "broader, deeper, and more complex learning-centered and learner-directed experiences" with which the NCHC defines honors education ("Definition"). In addition, the measurable skills outlined in this definition—"problem solving, often with creative approaches; critical reading; clear, persuasive writing; oral presentation; critical thinking; forming judgments based on evidence; artistic literacy; articulated metacognition; and spiritual growth"—might productively expand to include the initiative and independence cultivated especially well in tutorially based contracts.

The NCHC's "Definition of Honors Education" is not the only document needing revision to account for the value of honors contracts. As NCHC moves to consider revising its "Basic

Characteristics” to include a focus on inclusion, diversity, equity, access, and social justice, the individual attention of a contract experience may be essential in the development of these attributes for first-generation, racial and ethnic minority, differently abled, and other underrepresented students in honors education who can be empowered to resist systems of privilege that cultivate powerlessness. Badenhausen might find this assertion surprising because of his assumption that students must self-advocate for contracts and thus participate in a system biased toward privileged students who comfortably initiate such learning opportunities (15–16). As he rightly suggests, honors educators need to provide intentional contract mentoring and advising to counter such a stacked deck. Once underway, however, the contract experience can benefit such students, especially in that the instructor can tailor comments to address the non-cognitive as well as cognitive needs of a student in one-on-one meetings, an effective way to build self-confidence and self-advocacy. Along with the benefits already laid out in this chapter, this noteworthy gain is another reason to include contracts in the “Basic Characteristics,” possibly in this statement (insertions bracketed): “The honors curriculum, established in harmony with the mission statement, meets the needs of the students in the program and features special courses, seminars, colloquia, experiential learning opportunities, undergraduate research opportunities, [contracts and tutorials,] or other independent-study options.”

While best practices for contracts are forming, continued adaptations will keep contracts attractive to the learning needs of future honors students, especially as tensions between practical training and liberal education continue and as emerging large-scale social changes pressure higher education to change in ways not yet imagined. Higher education consultant L. Dee Fink contends that changes from an industrial age to an information age are encouraging more individualized learning among other forms of learning honors education has long cherished, such as active construction of knowledge rather than memorizing, collaboration rather than competition, self-directed rather than instructor-directed learning, personal rather than transactional relationships among students and between faculty and students, and the cultivation of lifelong

rather than short-term learning (12–22). Playing a promising role in this information age, contracts exemplify honors education when ongoing faculty guidance supports student-chosen learning and when programs establish effective oversight and assessment based on aligned institutional, program or college, and contract learning outcomes.

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APPENDIX

Gallaudet University Honors Contract Assessment

Please fill out the demographic information below. Once you've completed this form, you will be automatically directed to the evaluation appropriate for your role. Students will be directed to the self-evaluation form, and faculty will be directed to the instructor form. Please direct any questions or concerns to honors@gallaudet.edu.

What course was the contract in? (i.e., GSR 240) _____

Semester Year of Contract (i.e., Fall 2016) _____

Student Name _____

Faculty Name _____

Your Role (select one)

- Student
- Faculty/Instructor

Student Self-Evaluation

Please answer the following questions on your honors contract. Your answers will help us understand your experience in the contract and develop a more meaningful contract experience for your peers. Your answers will not adversely affect your "H" credit for this course.

How much did you invest in making the contract a meaningful project for you?

- A Lot
- A Fair Amount
- Some
- Not Enough
- None

Please explain your answer above. _____

Did you and your faculty member meet regularly as scheduled?

- Yes
- No

Please explain your answer above. _____

We emphasize professionalism in contracts. How professional do you consider your behavior to be?

- Highly Professional
- Moderately Professional
- Somewhat Professional
- Slightly Professional
- Minimally Professional

Please explain your answer above (and provide examples of professional behaviors).

Did you learn advanced knowledge or skills?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what knowledge or skills did you learn? _____

Do they connect with your capstone? _____

If so, how? _____

Students are expected to give back to the community. How valuable was this component of your contract? Please explain. _____

Faculty are key partners in making contracts successful. How likely are you to recommend your instructor for future contracts?

- Extremely Likely
- Somewhat Likely
- Neither Likely nor Unlikely
- Somewhat Unlikely
- Extremely Unlikely

Please explain your answer above. _____

Please provide any additional thoughts, comments, or feedback on honors contracts. _____

Faculty Evaluation

Please evaluate the student's performance in the honors contract.

The student has successfully demonstrated a deepened knowledge of the discipline(s)/field(s) through his/her project.

- Far Exceeds Expectations
- Exceeds Expectations
- Equals Expectations
- Short of Expectations
- Far Short of Expectations

The student has completed substantial improvements to the project between receiving the instructor's feedback and submitting the final project.

- Far Exceeds Expectations
- Exceeds Expectations
- Equals Expectations
- Short of Expectations
- Far Short of Expectations

The student's project demonstrates an ability to manipulate detail and master nuance using discipline-specific scholarship.

- Far Exceeds Expectations
- Exceeds Expectations
- Equals Expectations
- Short of Expectations
- Far Short of Expectations

The student reliably maintained professional email communication with the course instructor throughout the semester.

- Far Exceeds Expectations
- Exceeds Expectations
- Equals Expectations

- Short of Expectations
- Far Short of Expectations

The student attended and was prepared for productive, professional ongoing meetings, usually biweekly, with the instructor.

- Far Exceeds Expectations
- Exceeds Expectations
- Equals Expectations
- Short of Expectations
- Far Short of Expectations

The student enriched the learning of classmates through a well-crafted presentation or other contribution.

- Far Exceeds Expectations
- Exceeds Expectations
- Equals Expectations
- Short of Expectations
- Far Short of Expectations

In your conversations with the student, he/she demonstrates an understanding of and investment in the civic obligation to give back to the community (via a presentation or other contribution) because of the added opportunities to learn the student has accepted.

- Far Exceeds Expectations
- Exceeds Expectations
- Equals Expectations
- Short of Expectations
- Far Short of Expectations

How satisfied are you with your leadership in the contract?

- Very Satisfied
- Moderately Satisfied
- Neither Satisfied nor Unsatisfied

Slightly Unsatisfied

Very Unsatisfied

Please provide any general comments that will help us better understand the ratings you gave. Written comments not only help us understand ratings but also intervene effectively in our advising of honors students.
