

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Chapters from NCHC Monographs Series

National Collegiate Honors Council

---

2020

## An Undeserved Reputation: How Contract Courses Can Work for a Small Honors Program

Jon Hageman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcmonochap>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Liberal Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the National Collegiate Honors Council at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Chapters from NCHC Monographs Series by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# An Undeserved Reputation: How Contract Courses Can Work for a Small Honors Program

JON HAGEMAN

NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

### INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter of this volume, Richard Badenhansen argues that contract courses have often suffered from ambiguous or homogeneous expectations, compromising honors pedagogy and learning. Anecdotally, not many positive attributes have been ascribed to contract courses in the honors community. Contracts often require more work than courses to establish and administer to completion. Given the shortcomings and the amount of work required to implement contract courses successfully, why are they used at all? I argue that, in some cases, contract courses—or non-honors courses that move beyond regular course requirements with agreed-upon independent study work mentored by the professor—are the best option

for small honors programs. At institutions where dedicated upper-division honors classes could not meet institutional enrollment minima, contracts can be used to create access to honors education that would otherwise be unavailable. Further, the advantages of contracts can be leveraged even as their disadvantages are mitigated to a large degree, particularly through high-touch, proactive advising practices, in order to improve the quality of the honors experience for students. At a small honors program, contract courses can be a cost-effective means of providing access to a valuable and customized honors experience for students.

Located on the north side of Chicago, Illinois, Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) is a largely commuter institution of about 6,400 undergraduate and 1,700 graduate students. NEIU is a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, with 37.5% of its fall 2018 undergraduate enrollment identifying as Latinx, 27.8% as White, 11.1% as African American, and 8.4% as Asian. About 56% of students identify as female and 43% as male. Significantly, NEIU serves a large number of students who are immigrants or whose families are immigrants—over 40 languages are spoken in its hallways. The average age of undergraduate students is 26.4, and NEIU offers a robust series of evening and night classes that serve working adults. Importantly, about 43% of undergraduate students are part-time, and over half of NEIU undergraduates transfer from two-year colleges in the area.

The University Honors Program (UHP) numbers about 115 students (about 2% of the undergraduate student body) and largely reflects the demographic makeup of the university but with some important differences. Fewer UHP students identify as Latinx (28.6%, compared to 37.5% institutionally) and African American (10.2%, compared to 11.1%), while more identify as White (38.8%, compared to 27.8%). Honors also has a higher female-to-male ratio (77% to 23%, compared to 56% to 43% university-wide). Although we do not have an average age for UHP students, 58.2% are between the ages of 17–24 and 27.5% are between the ages of 30–45, suggesting that they are generally younger than the overall undergraduate population. The UHP serves not only traditional

high school graduates, but a significant number of community college transfer students. About 25% of UHP students are working adults. We also have at least five undocumented students. We never ask; those students volunteered this information. Since they are ineligible for federal financial aid, the \$100,000 in institutional tuition scholarships that we are able to offer annually is of inestimable help for undocumented students. The UHP is staffed by a tenured faculty coordinator/director (67% appointment) and a full-time administrative assistant, who draw on the expertise of an eight-member faculty advisory board and nine-member student advisory board.

In 2005, the UHP undertook a self-study and evaluation with an external consultant to assess the program and then to completely revise its curriculum. The result is that the UHP now consists of the Honors Student Program for first-year students and sophomores and the Honors Scholar Program for juniors and seniors. The Honors Student Program features 15 hours of interdisciplinary honors general education courses, and eligible first-year students and students who join the UHP after their first semester at NEIU but before achieving junior status may apply to this program. The 15-hour Honors Scholar Program for juniors and seniors caters to our large transfer student population. (See Bahls, "Opening" 73–76.) This program emphasizes a discipline-based research/creative activities approach culminating in a two-semester, six-hour thesis/creative project. Students who transfer to NEIU with an associate's degree from an Illinois community college (or with 60+ credits) may be eligible to apply directly to the Honors Scholar Program. Students in this program are required to complete nine hours of 300-level (upper-division) contract courses, with the contract stipulating a sizeable research/creative activity component. The size of the institution and honors program do not allow us to offer dedicated junior- and senior-level courses outside of our thesis proposal course, so contracts are by far the best way to offer an honors curriculum to our students.

**CONTRACT COURSES:  
A NECESSARY EVIL?**

Informal conversations I have had with my honors colleagues regarding contracts often include tepid to negative descriptions of contract courses, including “they are a necessary evil”; “we use them occasionally, but only when absolutely necessary”; “they are freighted with problems”; and “it’s complicated.” The last comment, while the least descriptive, is probably the most compelling. At best, honors contracts seem to be merely tolerated, but contract courses can also serve important needs, particularly regarding access and inclusion, as Dotter argues in Chapter Three. Throughout his introductory chapter, Badenhausen describes the potential drawbacks of contracts; they can:

1. turn the honors experience into simply “doing more”;
2. position honors programs or colleges negatively on campuses;
3. detract from the honors learning environment;
4. threaten the honors community;
5. challenge standards for assessing student work; and
6. complicate the relationship between honors programs/colleges and a university’s approach to resource allocation, faculty compensation, and equity. (3–19)

A reader might well stop at those objections, asking why anyone would seriously consider contracts.

Part of the reason contracts still exist and are even widely used is that they have clear and measurable strengths. Contracts provide a degree of flexibility and access to an honors experience that might otherwise be impossible, whether at a large institution like Dotter’s or a small institution like mine. Working adults typically cannot attend daytime honors classes; because many institutions do not offer nighttime and weekend options, contracts provide an opportunity for working adult students, at NEIU and elsewhere, to pursue an honors experience. One adult African American UHP

student, for example, wrapped up her degree in social work by taking night classes for her major and adapting them for honors credit through contracts. Without those contracts, she would not have been able to graduate with honors. Strictly in terms of the honors credential itself, the value added to her BSW degree helped her gain admission to her preferred MSW program shortly after graduation.

This flexibility brings honors education to a broader range of students, not only as a credential but also as an enrichment to their college educations. Contract courses can provide an exciting opportunity for students and faculty to work more closely together than they otherwise would, even as they allow students to pursue topics more directly aligned with their research interests. This is particularly true for students in highly structured, credit-heavy majors, such as biology, education, business, and computer science, where specific courses are taken at certain times and in a specific sequence. One of our adult computer science students had two children pursuing their own undergraduate degrees, and between his family obligations and the nature of the degree program, his time was largely spoken for. He did a contract for a biology class to use his programming and mathematical skills to model simple biological processes. This modeling required him to work closely with the biology faculty member to achieve optimal results. The contract project worked out well, and in the subsequent semester, the biology professor hired the student to work on a grant-funded research project doing similar, but more advanced work. The student's facility with modeling specific processes saved the lab time and money. The student later modeled changing telomere length with age for his thesis, and he had five job offers upon graduation.

The inherent flexibility in contracts can also become an asset when students are directly involved in research as part of the contract. As with the computer science student described above, some courses allow students to pursue topics that may be of interest as a potential capstone project or thesis. In addition, contracts can help determine whether a student and faculty member can work well with each other, potentially allowing the student to identify a capstone/thesis mentor. Contracts provide these important honors

opportunities not only for students whose majors have few or no honors courses, but also for those in small honors programs with upper-division curricula that may be largely composed of contract courses. (See Bolch.) This chapter explores that curricular imperative, asking how contract courses can work (or not) for a small honors program.

## **HOW CONTRACTS CAN WORK FOR A SMALL HONORS PROGRAM**

The diverse nature of our NEIU student population and the small sizes of both the institution and honors program demand a flexible honors curriculum. We have come to learn that contract courses can be advantageous to a wide variety of students in three ways: they allow students to 1) engage directly in research, 2) “test-drive” topics and faculty with an eye toward capstone/thesis topics, and 3) identify and build relationships with appropriate capstone/thesis mentors. To maximize these benefits, the UHP has created a two-pronged honors advising strategy for juniors and seniors that leverages contract course requirements to enhance the likelihood that students will complete the Honors Scholar Program. First, in my role as faculty UHP coordinator (analogous to a program director), I meet with each student upon admission to the UHP to discuss program requirements and opportunities, learn about the student’s major and interest in that subject, and ascertain post-graduation goals, if any (Hause). Subsequent meetings normally take place at least annually to review these topics.

The UHP coordinator normally helps the student identify a range of courses with titles or topics relevant to the student’s interests for contract adaptation and honors credit; together, they brainstorm some specific contract options as the student prepares to approach the course instructor. We use a handout that outlines our emphasis on giving honors students a more research-based experience, with brief examples of past contracts, and a reminder that honors is not more work but instead a qualitatively different kind of work (Lacey). The coordinator also offers to talk with both faculty member and honors student to help find ways of meeting student needs without placing undue burdens on faculty. Research

indicates that students of color are often reluctant to seek out mentors (Schwartz et al.), but the process we have developed in the UHP empowers students to approach faculty successfully. This individual advising is always available to students as they shape their contract experiences.

A good example of this process is the case of an English major. At her first advising session, I outlined how honors works and asked her why she chose to major in English. She said she enjoyed American literature and was interested in composition. We examined the English course list to identify relevant classes that might give her opportunities to explore this area via contracts; they included Young Adult Novel, the Art of the Short Story, Creative Writing, and Hybrid-Form Writing. We touched base each semester as she decided upon courses in which to complete contract work. Based on her experience in the courses she contracted (Hybrid-Form Writing, the Art of the Short Story, and Contemporary Poetry) and the Young Adult Novel class, which she took as a non-contract course, she decided to write her own novel as a senior thesis. This novel is based loosely on her own experiences as a biracial Muslim teen girl in Trump's America, navigating racism and xenophobia while trying to fit in and find a place of belonging.

The second prong of our Honors Scholar retention strategy is a proactive form of advising begun in 2016–2017 and run by the UHP administrative assistant. Evaluating each student's progress against an individualized advising plan, the assistant tracks completion of UHP requirements for each student in a database, reaching out to students directly as necessary. In 2016–2017, we also moved our due date for contract forms from the first week of the semester to four weeks before the start of the semester. As a result, if a student is due to complete a contract form but has not yet done so, our assistant can call the student. If eligible students have enrolled for the upcoming semester but have not yet submitted the appropriate contract form, she asks them which course they will be adapting for honors credit next term; if the student has no answer, she books an advising appointment for the student with the UHP coordinator. This process helps to cement in students' minds the expectation

of adapting one course per semester for honors credit, making it clear that the UHP coordinator is a faculty resource available to help them sort out the details.

We incentivize this process by tying our UHP institutional tuition scholarships to honors progress. Our scholarships are valued at between 3–9 hours of tuition per semester, and students can receive an award only if they meet with the honors coordinator for an advising session. In essence, we use program requirements and funding opportunities as tools to bring students into the office for faculty advising.

These strategies have helped to increase the number of contracted courses per year from 57 in 2015–2016 to 112 in 2017–2018. The number of UHP students during this same interval went up 21%, from about 95 to 115, while the number of contract courses has increased by almost 100%. We interpret these figures as evidence that our advising has made UHP students more academically engaged. Similarly, the number of students enrolling in capstone/thesis project hours has increased from 16 in 2015–2016 to 31 in 2017–2018. Students would be less likely to enroll in thesis hours if they had not completed outstanding contract courses: most likely they would not complete the honors program at all.

## **ALUMNI AND STUDENT VIEWS OF A CONTRACT-BASED CURRICULUM**

For the purposes of this chapter, I am interested in exploring how our advising has impacted our students' contract experience. (For a discussion of the role of self-reflection in assessing the role of contracts in an honors curriculum, please see Bahls, "Contracts" 179–86.) In summer 2018, the UHP at NEIU surveyed both former and current students about the outcomes of contract courses. The author and the NEIU Office of Institutional Research created a Qualtrics survey about relationships between contract courses and capstone/thesis projects and between contract courses and capstone/thesis advisors to be distributed to 63 UHP alumni who graduated between spring 2013 and summer 2018. This survey was

open for two weeks, with two reminders, and we received complete responses from 28 alumni. Five current students preparing to begin their theses in fall 2018 were also engaged by the author as part of regular advising to discuss these same kinds of relationships.

For the alumni survey, we were specifically interested in whether contracts helped students to identify capstone/thesis projects and mentors or even to avoid potentially difficult mentor-student relationships. Similarly, we wanted to learn whether contracts helped students decide against a particular capstone/thesis topic in which they thought they might have been interested. The questions in the survey and a note on responses to specific questions can be found in Appendix A. Tables summarizing survey data are in Appendix B.

## **Quantitative Alumni Results**

Table 1 shows that 82.14% of alumni report having been advised to use their contract courses to identify a capstone/thesis advisor. Table 2 shows that 75% of respondents then either agree or strongly agree that these courses were actually successful in helping them to identify a capstone/thesis advisor; only 17.85% disagreed to any extent. A full 75% report being advised to use contracts to help them identify a capstone/thesis topic (Table 3); 66.67% then agreed or strongly agreed that their adapted courses helped in identifying their capstone/thesis topic, while 18.52% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 4). The results in Tables 1–4 suggest that, with appropriate advising, students can use contract courses to their advantage in terms of identifying a capstone/thesis advisor and/or topic. Since spring 2016, we have regularly incorporated insights from these observations into advising UHP students, although several students were clearly advised this way before we made the institutional change.

Only 7.14% of alumni reported that contract courses led them to change potential capstone/thesis advisors (Table 5), while 14.28% indicated that their contract courses motivated them to change capstone/thesis topics (Table 6). Although these numbers are small, they do suggest the potential value of the contract experience for students unsure about their plans. Contracts clearly allowed some

students to test drive topics and/or potential advisors to check the intellectual fit. I would argue that without the kind of research-based experience that connects students closely with faculty in a contract course, some students might have ended up with either an unfulfilling honors experience or even a decision not to graduate with honors.

## **Qualitative Alumni Results**

Twenty-seven alumni responded to the question asking what they liked most about their contract courses. Of these respondents, eight saw contracts as offering the opportunity to “dive deeper” into interesting material, “providing a challenge” to students or allowing them to go “beyond what was offered” in a regular class. An additional six described working “more closely” with “eager professors” to “get more out of the course” and developing a “professional relationship” with their faculty. Four others “enjoyed the flexibility” of “having a say” in their own learning and the opportunity to “personalize” courses to their interests. Two comments mentioned that these courses were “really interesting and enlightening” and “allowed room for creativity within my major.” Two other comments indicated that the students unexpectedly learned about new areas of their majors, and as a result they ended up using these areas as part of their theses. Additional comments praised contract courses for helping students find jobs or for teaching skills such as how to conduct a comprehensive literature review.

We received only 25 responses about what alumni liked least about their contract courses, and of these, only 19 were actually negative, while the remaining 6 were “N/A,” neutral, or positive. Of the 19 negative comments, 4 indicated that some faculty were unable or unwilling to adapt a course for honors credit because, the students remember being told, there was “already enough work to do in the regular course.” Other alumni noted that “some professors were confused,” others “were not familiar with the UHP” or in some cases, the “department chair didn’t allow” faculty involvement. Five other alumni focused on the quality or quantity of work, saying that contracts “involved more work” (including “so much field work to

do”), were too “heavily research-based,” involved just “banal busy-work,” or contained “a lot of extra fluff.” Two others focused on the contract form itself, describing how the form “could be a hassle at times though I always enjoyed the courses themselves,” and even “wish[ing] there was a way to do [the paperwork] online.”

Overall, alumni reported enjoying the flexibility, personalization, and intensive experience of working closely with faculty on contracts. Some negative comments, however, suggest that the experience was a bit uneven and that some faculty were unfamiliar with this kind of honors experience.

### **Current Student Results**

Of the five students interviewed, all reported that their contract courses aided them in finding a capstone/thesis topic and/or an advisor. The contract course experience was helpful in focusing on both a capstone/thesis topic and advisor for one student, capstone/thesis topic only for one student, and capstone/thesis advisor for three students. Although this sample is admittedly small, the students’ experiences are nonetheless revealing, particularly when examined alongside the alumni interviews.

The student who found both thesis mentor and topic through contracts is a traditionally aged secondary-education major interested in classroom inclusion. Her first contract course was Young Adult Novel, in which she engaged in research exploring a broad range of secondary sources: her final paper was twice as long as the required assignment. This class confirmed the student’s interest in classroom diversity. Her next contract was in English Grammar, where she explored how to address and overcome communication barriers to diversity in the classroom. She created a portfolio of exercises for English language learners, built a thirty-minute lesson plan around one of these exercises, and used it to teach her peers in the course; this work allowed her to combine her aspiration to teach with her interest in diversity. For her third and final contract, the student adapted Language, Society, and Education by examining certain English dialect samples for speech patterns, formulating rules that speakers follow to produce these patterns, and presenting

her work to the class. She is currently writing a thesis that develops a one-semester curriculum template for discussing racial and cultural issues in a high school classroom. When I asked if her adapted courses helped her identify her topic and/or her thesis advisor, she noted that one of her thesis advisors taught the Young Adult Novel course and that, “absolutely,” all of the courses helped her narrow her topic and the form that her thesis would take.

The student who found her thesis topic but not her advisor through contract courses is a traditionally aged geography and environmental studies major. She took some time to consider my question about the relationship between contracts and thesis and then answered in writing:

All three of my [contract courses] ultimately helped me identify a thesis topic and methodology. . . . I found I was drawn to/stronger at qualitative research methods and in combining my major and minors in each [contract course]. The [contract course] that had the most impact on my thesis choice was a field methods course within my major. . . . I used part of this work in my finished thesis, which was incredibly gratifying and helped me make the connection as to what types of research I was truly interested in, and how I had been preparing all along. I selected my thesis advisor regardless of the [contract courses].

This student’s thesis is on shifting patterns of Latinx identity and gentrification in Chicago neighborhoods since 1970. One of her contracts was for a sociology course entitled “Race and Ethnic Relations,” and the others were in two geography courses (Field Methods and Gentrification and Urban Redevelopment).

Of the three students who said that their contract courses helped them to find a thesis advisor, two STEM majors attributed the relationship that developed to the work completed in the contract course. A computer science major in his late twenties found his thesis advisor when he completed a contract for his Mobile Development course. Part of his contract involved working as an apprentice on the faculty member’s research project, which led to a highly productive mentoring relationship. This student’s experience

is analogous to the highly productive, high-impact honors experience outlined for an art course by Killinger and Mares. The student is now completing a thesis exploring the degree to which people perform better on cognitive tasks in the presence or absence of music, using an app he created. A second STEM student, majoring in biology, also found her thesis advisor through a contract that similarly involved apprenticing with the faculty member on his research. The student reported having an “excellent experience in the class,” and she asked the faculty member to direct her thesis, which examines the genetic variability between populations of a plant found in North America and Eurasia.

Finally, one first-generation student majoring in psychology noted that her contract courses did not really help identify her exact thesis question, but they did help her learn how to develop a research question that was “innovative, relevant, and answerable.” Although her contracts did not connect her with an advisor, she nonetheless credited her contract experiences with teaching her how to interact with professors:

I was able to grow relationships with professors and discover their passions and areas of expertise. As a result, I knew exactly which professors I worked well with. . . . I felt comfortable reaching out to them, and I owe that to NEIU’s UHP. Without the [contract course] requirement, I am positive I wouldn’t have made these lasting relationships with my thesis advisers, nor would my thesis have gone as smoothly as it did.

Baker suggests how important faculty mentoring is for Latinx and African-American students, in particular. By working closely with our students as they begin their contract process, the UHP facilitates the kind of contact and mentoring that such students need to succeed.

## **DISCUSSION AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

In most cases, contracts have connected our students with faculty and given them the skills to succeed in the capstone/thesis

project required for honors graduation. Because some of the negative responses to our alumni survey were in line with broader critiques of contract courses within the honors community, such as those by Badenhausen and Bolch, our self-assessment at NEIU, although still a work-in-progress, has led to some specific efforts to alleviate these problems. Our faculty and student advisory boards have recently examined these results and will soon recommend some specific courses of action that we hope will mitigate many of the issues raised in the first alumni survey. While our advising has nearly doubled the number of contracts each year, we are, of course, primarily concerned with the quality of each contract experience for students. Our key steps moving forward are to educate faculty, standardize the contract process while continuing to encourage creative approaches to content, and expand our assessment to the faculty who teach honors courses.

Faculty will be our first emphasis. In spite of a long history at NEIU, the UHP is not well known at the university. Thus, we have decided to launch an information campaign led by the coordinator and the UHP Advisory Board faculty, who have agreed to serve as honors representatives within their departments. The UHP coordinator is working with department chairs to visit department meetings, where he will talk with faculty about the UHP processes regarding contract courses. Such discussion will directly address misunderstandings about what the courses are, how they work, and what extra effort, if any, may be required of faculty. We are a unionized faculty, and contracts are not currently remunerated; faculty choose to mentor contracts as part of their commitment to student development. Our ongoing programmatic assessment will involve surveying contract faculty, much as we did our students, with questions including the following: 1) What would you have wanted to know *before* talking with UHP students to establish the contract? 2) What strengths and shortcomings did the contract course model have from your perspective? and 3) How would you suggest improving the contract process or requirements? One goal of meeting with and surveying faculty is to ensure that all students can expect a uniformly high-quality experience in a context where

such quality assurance can be difficult to achieve. Another goal is to provide important information regarding faculty effort and contracts, which may be incorporated into the next faculty contract negotiation.

Our honors advising can also help to achieve this goal. Although we have emphasized the need to advise students early and often, particularly on contracts as a means of identifying a capstone/thesis topic and advisor, the student survey has reminded us of the need to continue emphasizing the process of designing contract courses with clear goals and objectives. These refinements involve closer oversight of the forms and proposed modifications to existing courses themselves to keep the students from being underworked or overworked, and they may include using the faculty UHP Advisory Board as a review panel for contracts to ensure that honors learning outcomes are being met. The process will focus on how a quality contract experience can prepare students for an outstanding capstone/thesis experience.

Finally, there is the question of the form itself. Although NEIU uses Banner, many of the Banner functions that would enable a paperless experience are not yet enabled in our campus system. One of the ideas we can consider is working with the administration as appropriate modules become enabled in the future to ensure that the UHP is one of the areas of the university that has access to paperless forms. In the meantime, we plan to update our forms to foreground learning outcomes and objectives in contract courses.

## **CONCLUSION**

Contract courses backed by proactive, high-impact advising can provide access to honors for a highly diverse student body. We anticipate little growth in our undergraduate student population in the next several years, and in light of the risk-averse nature of high-achieving students, we also expect that, accordingly, our honors program may grow only slightly. Thus, until we see indications of change in either of these areas, our short-term goal is to fine-tune the existing curriculum and our processes around contracts

to the extent possible. We have to some degree mitigated certain shortcomings of contract courses, including impact on the honors learning environment and the perception that the honors experience is about doing more work. We hope that educating faculty and chairs across the university about honors education, as well as listening for suggestions to improve the contract process, will produce higher quality contract experiences for our students. Part of what makes our program so useful at NEIU is that it is hugely flexible: we can address the needs of a variety of students, regardless of age, class, race or ethnicity, religion, citizenship, parental situation, employment, marital or retirement status, and credit hours per term.

Certainly I would never recommend our model as a replacement for schools with sufficient enrollment and institutional support to offer dedicated honors courses to juniors and seniors. As Badenhausen points out, the latter configuration is preferable for many reasons. For institutions with limited resources, small honors programs, and a highly diverse student body, however, I am convinced that our model is an example of one way to provide access to an honors experience that would otherwise not exist for students who, for a variety of reasons, do not attend larger and more prestigious institutions. This work is of immense value to students from all backgrounds who seek to push their educations further and thus open doors for employment or graduate education. As demographics shift across the United States in the next decade and colleges and universities become increasingly inclusive, small institutions and programs might benefit from a flexible honors strategy that leverages contracts through proactive and personal advising.

## WORKS CITED

- Badenhausen, Richard. "Curriculum Gone Bad: The Case against Honors Contracts." *Building Honors Contracts: Insights and Oversights*, edited by Kristine A. Miller, National Collegiate Honors Council, 2020, pp. 3–19. National Collegiate Honors Council Monograph Series.

- Bahls, Patrick. "Contracts for Honors Credit: Balancing Access, Equity, and Opportunities for Authentic Learning." *Honors in Practice*, vol. 16, 2020, pp. 171–96.
- . "Opening Doors: Facilitating Transfer Students' Participation in Honors." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2018, pp. 73–100.
- Baker, Christina N. "Social Support and Success in Higher Education: The Influence of On-Campus Support on African American and Latino College Students." *The Urban Review*, vol. 45, 2013, pp. 632–50.
- Birgen, Mariah. "Pick Your Battles: It Is Possible to Have Belonging without a Space to Belong To." *Housing Honors*, edited by Linda Frost, Lisa W. Kay, and Rachael Poe, National Collegiate Honors Council, 2015, pp. 147–51. National Collegiate Honors Council Monograph Series.
- Bolch, Kambra. "Contracting in Honors." *Honors in Practice*, vol. 1, 2005, pp. 49–61.
- Dotter, Anne. "Honors Contracts: Empowering Students and Fostering Autonomy in Honors Education." *Building Honors Contracts: Insights and Oversights*, edited by Kristine A. Miller, National Collegiate Honors Council, 2020, pp. 55–80. National Collegiate Honors Council Monograph Series.
- Ghosh, Jayati, M. Patricia Dougherty, and Kenneth Porada. "Dominican University of California's Honors Program and its Relation to University Heritage and Mission." *Honors in Practice*, vol. 2, 2006, pp. 27–32.
- Hause, Jeffrey P. "Two Neglected Features of Honors Advising." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2017, pp. 151–62.
- Killinger, Mimi, and Aya Mares. "Fertile Ground: Reflections on Collaborative Student-Faculty Research in the Arts." *Honors in Practice*, vol. 6, 2010, pp. 203–06.

Lacey, Jim. "Honors Courses: More Difficult or Different?" *Honors in Practice*, vol. 1, 2005, pp. 79–83.

Schwartz, Sarah, et al. "I Didn't Know You Could Just Ask': Empowering Underrepresented College-Bound Students to Recruit Academic and Career Mentors." *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 64, 2016, pp. 51–59.

---

Address correspondence to Jon Hageman at  
[jhageman@neu.edu](mailto:jhageman@neu.edu).

**APPENDIX A**

**Survey Instrument**

*The survey distributed to honors alumni consisted of the questions listed below.*

1. When did you graduate from NEIU? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Were you advised by the UHP Coordinator to use contract courses to help identify your capstone/thesis advisor?

Yes     No

3. Were you advised by the UHP Coordinator to use contract courses to help identify your capstone/thesis topic?

Yes     No

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
----------------------	----------	-------------------------------	-------	-------------------

4. My contract courses were helpful in identifying a capstone/thesis advisor.

                                                                                      

5. My contract courses were helpful in identifying a capstone/thesis topic.

                                                                                      

6. I thought I had identified a faculty member I liked to be my capstone/thesis advisor. After taking a contract course with this faculty member, I chose someone else as an advisor.

                                                                                      

7. I had an idea for a capstone/thesis. At least one contract course convinced me to do something different for a capstone/thesis.

                                                                                      

8. What is the one thing you liked best about your contract courses?

---

9. What is the one thing you liked least about your contract courses?

---

*Note: While all 28 respondents answered the first seven questions (except question 5), only 27 described what they liked best, and 25 shared what they liked least.*

## APPENDIX B

## Tables

*Please note that percentage totals may not equal 100% because of rounding.*

**Table 1. Number of Alumni Reporting Being Advised to Use Their Contract Courses to Identify a Capstone/Thesis Advisor**

Answer	Percent	Count
Yes	82.14	23
No	10.71	3
Not sure	7.14	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.99</b>	<b>28</b>

**Table 2. Number of Alumni Reporting Their Contract Courses Helped Them to Identify a Capstone/Thesis Advisor**

Answer	Percent	Count
Strongly agree	46.43	13
Somewhat agree	28.57	8
Neither agree nor disagree	3.57	1
Somewhat disagree	10.71	3
Strongly disagree	7.14	2
Not applicable	3.57	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.99</b>	<b>28</b>

**Table 3. Number of Alumni Reporting Being Advised to Use Their Contract Courses to Identify a Capstone/Thesis Topic**

Answer	Percent	Count
Yes	75.00	21
No	14.29	4
Not sure	10.71	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>28</b>

**Table 4. Number of Alumni Reporting Their Contract Courses Helped Them to Identify a Capstone/Thesis Topic**

Answer	Percent	Count
Strongly agree	40.74	11
Somewhat agree	25.93	7
Neither agree nor disagree	11.11	3
Somewhat disagree	11.11	3
Strongly disagree	7.41	2
Not applicable	3.70	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>27</b>

**Table 5. Number of Alumni Reporting Their Contract Courses Convinced Them to Select a Different Faculty Advisor for Their Capstone/Thesis Project Than the Faculty Member They Originally Identified**

Answer	Percent	Count
Strongly agree	3.57	1
Somewhat agree	3.57	1
Neither agree nor disagree	0.00	0
Somewhat disagree	3.57	1
Strongly disagree	60.71	17
Not applicable	28.57	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.99</b>	<b>28</b>

**Table 6. Number of Alumni Reporting Their Contract Courses Convinced Them to Select a Different Topic for Their Capstone/Thesis Project Than the Topic They Originally Identified**

Answer	Percent	Count
Strongly agree	3.57	1
Somewhat agree	10.71	3
Neither agree nor disagree	25.00	7
Somewhat disagree	10.71	3
Strongly disagree	32.14	9
Not applicable	17.86	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.99</b>	<b>28</b>