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CHAPTER NINE

A High-Impact Strategy for Honors Contract Courses

GARY WYATT

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

This essay describes a strategy implemented at Emporia State University for offering high-impact honors contract courses in a collaborative environment. After considering the role of honors contract courses in our college, the chapter demonstrates the importance of guiding students and instructors in creating contract applications and shaping requirements to ensure that contract courses are true honors experiences. Our contract applications demand a collaborative effort in which students and instructors demonstrate together how core requirements will be satisfied. Each application is unique and generally involves the development of a mentoring relationship. The chapter includes examples illustrating some key value-added outcomes students can and should expect

from contracts, as well as assessment data supporting this strategy and suggestions to deans and directors interested in implementing a similar approach in their honors curricula.

Emporia State University (ESU) is a regional public institution located in east-central Kansas. It is one of seven public universities in the Kansas Board of Regents System. Founded in 1863, ESU currently has an enrollment of 4,493 full-time-equivalent undergraduate and graduate students. The honors college, which has a theme of adaptive leadership and community engagement, was founded by legislative action in 2014, and it became fully operational in the fall of 2015. Prior to the honors college, ESU had a much smaller honors program that was founded in the early 1980s. The honors college currently enrolls 165 students, about 25 of whom complete the program and graduate “With Honors” or “With High Honors” each academic year. Honors contract courses are an essential part of the honors experience, and most graduates have completed at least one.

Honors contract courses provide one of the most practical ways to deliver an honors curriculum in an environment of mounting pressure to graduate students quickly and with minimal debt. In the state of Kansas, for example, new regulations by the Kansas Board of Regents stipulate that, with precious few exceptions, baccalaureate degrees cannot exceed 120 credits (“Academic Affairs”). Many other institutions in other states face similar restrictions and pressures. While the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) recommends that 20% of the academic curriculum is composed of honors courses, meeting that requirement is becoming difficult in the current environment for at least two reasons: first, college credits earned in high school; second, the cost of staffing upper-division, program-specific honors courses (“Basic Characteristics”). In the fall of 2017, 81% of newly admitted students in Emporia State’s Honors College completed an average of 21 credits of general education courses while still in high school, while only 19% had not completed any general education credits, a statistic comparable with other research (Coleman and Patton; Guzy). As Hageman (81–82), Bambina (104), and Haseleu and Taylor (173–74) have suggested in

this volume, offering honors courses later in the curriculum poses similar problems at resource-challenged institutions, since enrollments in upper-division, program-specific classes are typically very low and thus difficult to justify. These realities leave honors contract courses as perhaps the most practical curriculum-delivery option at many institutions, particularly for upper-division students.

Despite the practicality of contracts, concerns remain about both their quality and delivery of a true honors experience. The paucity of research on contracts means, however, that such concerns have too often been based on anecdotal evidence shared informally by directors, deans, and students. We are indebted in this regard to Richard Badenhausen, whose carefully researched opening chapter gives thoughtful and reasoned voice to a number of important concerns about honors contracts. While he understands that contracts often result from real and difficult curricular problems, the contributors to this volume all recognize that he is right to warn against their potential misuse.

Clearly, the need for contracts does not ensure their quality, and honors educators have the responsibility to eliminate underdeveloped honors contracts that dilute rather than enrich the academic experiences of students. Overworked instructors may agree to contracts but then require little more than completion of extra assignments with minimal instructor-student interaction. Badenhausen rightly cautions readers against an honors education reduced through contracts to additional work alone; rather, this education must be an intentional, collaborative effort (7–8). He is also justifiably wary about the isolated circumstances of some contracts, which undermine the essentially collaborative nature of the honors community (10–11). Fortunately, however, contracts can be both intentional and collaborative. Indeed, Badenhausen makes the case that it is not the *use* but the *misuse* of contracts that causes these problems, and he helpfully articulates a set of concerns that, if addressed, can serve as quality control for successful contracts. Throughout this chapter, I refer to his concerns to demonstrate a strategy that ESU uses to address them.

As students reflect on their experiences with contracts and as assessment data are reviewed, the collaborative nature of this effort becomes clear. Our contracts address one of Badenhausen's concerns by ensuring that they are completed not in isolation but in relationships between students and instructors in regular (typically weekly) meetings. Moreover, the culture of ESU embraces the honors college as part of campus life. While I appreciate Badenhausen's emphasis on the distinctive educational experience of traditional honors courses, this narrow definition can lead to charges of elitism and segregation if honors students, who increasingly tend to be upper-middle-class, white, and female, become insulated from the general student population in an honors curricular bubble. The contract approach allows students to learn in an inclusive campus-wide environment while still engaging in an honors curriculum and community.

Furthermore, ESU's honors curriculum is not just taught by a limited number of designated honors faculty. While we exclude graduate teaching assistants, honors faculty at Emporia State include all motivated tenure-line and non-tenure-line faculty members with the desire to mentor honors students and the willingness to meet the shared requirements, outlined in this essay, for traditional and contract honors courses. This inclusive pedagogical practice opens the curriculum to a wide array of faculty who become stakeholders in honors. I believe these curricular practices have led to greater acceptance of and appreciation for the honors college on our campus.

The job of the honors program or college is to focus and direct this faculty enthusiasm with clear learning outcomes. The problem of intentionality that Badenhausen identifies became clear to me soon after I was appointed dean of ESU's new honors college (14). Colleagues expressed interest in and enthusiasm for teaching honors courses, but when asked to define an honors course and articulate its difference from other courses, faculty struggled to answer. Watching this struggle was an important experience for me. If the best they could offer was that an honors course would be more rigorous than other courses or would enroll more enthusiastic students eager to attend and participate, the honors college had some work to do.

Laying a foundation for this work, I took some time to tour a number of honors programs and colleges and to interview directors, deans, and students, but I was surprised to find that many of them also struggled, claiming that honors courses were defined by the faculty teaching them. One honors dean offered me his experience as a cautionary tale: “We’ve lost control here. Get in front of the question about what an honors course is before you lose control as well. Lay down requirements up front and stick with them, or there will be little clarity about what an honors course is or isn’t.” I took his advice to heart in framing an honors curriculum that includes a range of different kinds of coursework, concluding that while contract courses are not perfect, traditional honors courses have their problems as well. Although this essay focuses on contracts, I argue that both contract and traditional honors courses need the same foundational guidance from honors colleges or programs to realize their full educational potential.

KEY PARTS OF A CONTRACT COURSE

This effort to define honors courses reminds me of the need for researchers to define the variables they study and to articulate relationships and distinguish between key parts of their research. The same holds true for honors courses: we needed to define the key parts of any honors curricular experience clearly. For direction in this undertaking, I turned to the NCHC’s “Definition of Honors Education” and to the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) for its time-tested list of high-impact educational practices. The NCHC’s definition was helpful in establishing our learning outcomes, so much so that it bears quoting in full:

Honors education is characterized by in-class and extra-curricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education. Honors experiences include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy, provide opportunities that are appropriately tailored to fit the institution’s culture and

mission, and frequently occur within a close community of students and faculty. (“Definition of Honors Education”)

Similarly, five of the AAC&U’s eleven high-impact practices were particularly important in shaping our honors curriculum:

1. Common intellectual experiences;
2. Writing-intensive courses;
3. Collaborative assignments and projects;
4. Undergraduate research; and
5. Service and community-based learning. (“High-Impact”)

Combining the NCHC definition and these AAC&U high-impact practices, my colleagues and I developed a list of requirements that all course proposals, including contract course proposals, must satisfy to earn the honors designation. The course will

1. be measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than a comparable learning experience;
2. promote community engagement, leadership, and/or the pursuit of the common good;
3. include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy;
4. help students develop effective written, oral, and/or interpersonal communication skills;
5. help students become independent critical thinkers;
6. develop collaborative relationships among students and between faculty and students; and
7. result in the production of a scholarly or creative product suitable for sharing with others outside of class through some scholarly venue.

While we decided that it would not be feasible for every course to satisfy all of these requirements—although many do—we stipulated that all courses **MUST** satisfy the first two requirements, in

addition to at least two of the remaining five. There are, of course, differences between regular and contract course proposals: applications for traditional honors courses require only one review and approval while the unique collaborative effort personally negotiated between an instructor and a student means that applications must be submitted each time a student wishes to contract a course. An important part of this labor-intensive undertaking, then, is that faculty are compensated with stipends for their pedagogical engagement with honors students across our curriculum.

We consider this collaboration and negotiation process to be crucial parts of the learning experience because they set the stage for the type of interaction that should take place throughout the semester and that positions students to be actively engaged in the planning of their educations. Our honors college therefore offers guidance to both students and instructors as they collaborate in the creation of these contract course applications. (See Application for Contracting an Honors Course in the Appendix.) This document provides faculty and students with specific information about contract design, expected outcomes, and the submission and approval process.

Briefly, all contracts at ESU are tied to existing non-honors courses, the overwhelming majority of which are worth three credits. Students thus earn three credits for completing a contract, as they would for completing a traditional stand-alone honors course. To graduate “With Honors,” students must complete three honors seminars, earn 12 additional credits of either traditional or contract courses, and satisfy substantial co-curricular requirements while maintaining a 3.5 grade point average. To graduate “With High Honors,” students must complete the three honors seminars, earn 18 additional credits of traditional or contract courses, and satisfy co-curricular requirements beyond those for graduating “With Honors” while maintaining a 3.5 grade point average. Our honors college has a separate mentoring program for stand-alone independent study and co-curricular experiences. We hold workshops for interested faculty and students each semester to explain both contracts and mentoring.

Our experience at ESU has been that the requirements for honors transcript designations ensure that students enjoy high-impact honors educational experiences throughout our curriculum. I offer the following explanation, along with examples of contract work our students have completed, for each requirement, in the hope that examples from our honors college can benefit others faced with similar curricular choices.

DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE REQUIREMENTS

Requirement 1:

Be Measurably Broader, Deeper, or More Complex

Consistent with the NCHC’s “Definition of Honors Education,” applications for contract courses must explain how the course will be “measurably broader, deeper, or more complex” than traditional courses. While the importance of this characteristic is obvious, the key word is “measurably,” which means that the superior nature of these courses must be verifiable through assessment activities.

Requirement 2:

Promote Community Engagement, Leadership, and/or the Pursuit of the Common Good

This second is perhaps the most complex of our honors course requirements because of its grounding in our institutional mission and strategic plan, in keeping with the NCHC’s “Definition of Honors Education” as “tailored to fit the institution’s culture and mission.” This statement empowers institutions to be both distinctive in honors curricular and co-curricular offerings and connected to the institution’s strategic plan, vision, and mission statement. Both ESU’s mission statement and its strategic plan emphasize community engagement, adaptive leadership, and the pursuit of the common good. Honors at ESU is a theme-based college that aligns with the university’s strategic plan by including adaptive leadership training and community engagement as foundational activities. Our Vision Statement claims that “the Honors College at Emporia

State University aspires to be recognized as a significant catalyst for the improvement of communities in Kansas and beyond,” and our Mission Statement promises that “the Honors College at Emporia State University will prepare students to be agents of change for the common good in their respective communities.” Inspired by these statements and the AAC&U’s high-impact practice of “service and community-based learning,” this requirement ensures that the courses themselves reflect the mission and culture of our particular institution (“High-Impact”).

While leadership development is a common mission of colleges and universities, ESU has aligned its mission with the idea of adaptive leadership, a model developed at Harvard University by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky and taught by the Kansas Leadership Center, a non-profit educational organization based in Wichita, Kansas (O’Malley and Cebula). This model aligns its very specific definition of leadership—mobilizing others to make progress on deep, daunting, adaptive challenges—with principles and competencies that practitioners aim to master. Adaptive leadership distinguishes between leadership and authority and between technical problems that can be fixed by experts and adaptive challenges that require more complex forms of leadership. Five principles and four competencies of adaptive leadership are essential for our students:

Principles

1. Leadership is an activity not a position.
2. Anyone can lead, anytime, anywhere.
3. It starts with you and must engage others.
4. Your purpose must be clear.
5. It’s risky.

Competencies

1. Diagnose Situation.
2. Manage Self.

3. Energize Others.
4. Intervene Skillfully.

These principles and competencies are embedded in core honors courses as well as other curricular and co-curricular activities.

For a number of reasons, the alignment of activities with institutional mission documents is an excellent strategy for honors programs and colleges. Not only does this practice result in a distinctive approach to honors education, as I have suggested, but it also carries favor from the administration by demonstrating that the honors program or college respects the institution's mission and intends to be a major player in helping to achieve it.

Requirement 3: Include a Distinctive Learner-Directed Environment and Philosophy

Derived directly from the NCHC's "Definition of Honors Education," this requirement empowers students to participate actively in their own educations. The word "empowers" is critical here, emphasizing the role of active learning. This requirement addresses Badenhausen's concern about power differentials between faculty and students in contracts (8–9).

Requirement 4: Help Students Develop Effective Written, Oral, and/or Interpersonal Communication Skills

While submitted contract applications demonstrate the AAC&U's high-impact practice of writing-intensive work, oral communication skills are also important to many contracts. Students need public speaking opportunities and interpersonal skills to grow as leaders and scholars, particularly in the age of social media.

Requirement 5: Help Students Become Independent Critical Thinkers

According to the AAC&U, "Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas,

artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion” (“Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric”). We included this requirement because critical thinking is a habit that empowers students to share in the responsibility for teaching and learning and to become change agents for the common good.

**Requirement 6:
Develop Collaborative Relationships among Students
and between Faculty and Students**

The development of a collaborative relationship occurs from the start of this process when students and faculty are negotiating contracts. Our assessment data show that the relationship generally becomes stronger as contract course activity unfolds, and we therefore offer contact courses as a form of mentoring comparable to undergraduate research and other co-curricular activities.

**Requirement 7:
Result in the Production of a Scholarly or Creative
Product Suitable for Sharing with Others outside of
Class through Some Scholarly Venue**

Opportunities to present scholarly and creative work in public venues challenge students to develop professionally, reinforce connections with communities beyond the campus, and sharpen communication and critical-thinking skills.

* * *

Grounded in well-established, time-tested educational pedagogies, these seven requirements define the intentional, collaborative, and high-impact learning experience that all honors contracts and courses must offer our students. Contract applications that embed these requirements minimize the risk of projects with arbitrary, isolated, or unintentional activities.

THE SUBMISSION PROCESS

Contract course applications must be submitted by the instructor to the honors college by the end of the third week of class. The

ample time allotted for application submission is based on the belief that many students will desire to contract a course only after experiencing a few class meetings, discovering how much they enjoy the class and the instructor, and realizing the benefits of an honors version of the course. While some instructors announce on the first day of class that they are willing to engage in course contracts with interested honors students, students know that they must take the initiative to approach the instructor.

Contract course applications are approved only after review by the honors dean. The application approval process includes careful assessment of selected guidelines to ensure course alignment with published requirements and the likelihood that the contract course will deliver a high-impact experience to the student through its completion. Instructors and students may revise contract applications should the application be found deficient. Upon approval of contract applications, the honors college notifies the Office of the Registrar, and registration personnel create honors versions of the courses and move students from regular courses to the honors versions, ensuring that the courses appear as “honors” on the students’ transcripts. At the end of the semester, instructors provide assessment data documenting the effectiveness of the course design in meeting these requirements.

EXAMPLES FROM APPLICATIONS

This section features a few select examples of contract applications that align with each requirement as well as their final assessments. These examples should provide readers with a sense of the possibilities and potential of contract applications from various disciplines. Under each requirement heading, brief descriptions of ways that students and instructors have met the requirement are followed by some typical, rather than exceptional, application and assessment examples. Since 2015, over 200 contract applications have been approved and completed with assessment data being provided at semester’s end.

**Requirement 1:
Be Measurably Broader, Deeper, or More Complex**

Projects have met this requirement in a variety of ways. Contract work designed to make course content broader, deeper, or more complex has engaged students in 1) exploring the links among local businesses, civic organizations, and the judiciary; 2) designing and conducting research using fitness testing; and 3) preparing and delivering an oral presentation about reed instruments and performing at a recital connected to that presentation, to name just a few approaches.

One particularly illustrative example is a contract application for a literature course, which included the following narrative:

This course will not only have additional material for reading and study, but will also allow the student to practice skills required in the teaching field that would otherwise not be used in the course. In addition, the creation of this literary unit plan will provide a framework for future lesson plans created by the student in the teaching field. This project provides an opportunity to convey literary concepts and principles to children in a new and unique way and to practice techniques to encourage discussions of literary texts. Instead of simply making the plan on paper, the student will really see how young readers who might be learning from this lesson plan react to, understand, and make meaning with texts.

The end-of-semester assessment for this contract then included the following comment from the faculty mentor:

The student was required to design, develop, and execute a project related to the course's dual emphasis on the literary field of young adult literature as well as the pedagogical emphasis on working with young readers. This required additional reading in terms of both literary texts (during the selection process when she was deciding what her reading group would prepare) as well as in the professional

literature, as a part of her preparation for running a book club/discussion group. The final product resulted in the development of a blog [URL included in original], which “housed” photos and examples of the work the young readers developed, as well as lesson plans ultimately aimed at educators interested in utilizing some of the same activities in their own classrooms.

A comparison of the application with the assessment highlighted some notable points. First, the contract clearly stipulated activities that satisfied the broader, deeper, or more complex requirement. Second, the activities were measurable. Third, adaptation that capitalized on the dynamic nature of this experience and added depth to it occurred throughout the semester. For example, the application did not mention a blog, nor the particulars of the project; rather, the value of these activities emerged as the collaboration unfolded. Fourth, a recurring finding is that activities aligned with one requirement often spill over into other requirements. In this case, the assessment highlighted the development of lesson plans that other educators could use in their own classes, an outcome that meets both the common good component of Requirement 2 and the sharing outside the classroom component of Requirement 7.

Requirement 2: Promote Community Engagement, Leadership, and/or the Pursuit of the Common Good

Some instructors expressed initial concern that this requirement might be restrictive or eliminate some courses from the honors curriculum, but that concern proved to be unfounded. With some imagination, most course applications have met this requirement. A chemistry course, for example, required students to test homes for radon and groundwater for pollution. An honors math course included a requirement to tutor middle school students who struggled with math or to offer educational activities at a math and science night held at a local middle school. A literature course contract required the organization of a “love of reading” event at a local high school.

A contract application for an art education course included the following activities beyond regular coursework. The faculty member's narrative highlights the project's collaborative nature, flexibility, capacity to focus on the student's passion, and community engagement:

The student and I discussed a subject of interest to her: Instruction Differentiation and Populations of Exceptionality. From this, we discussed a community venue to get some authentic experience. I set the student up with the non-profit Kansas Free Arts. This organization aims to offer art experiences for at-risk youth. The student set up meetings with the founder, who is an art therapist. The student met weekly with the founder as well as ESU graduate interns. With this community, she was able to discuss her interests and plan a workshop specific to her student population of interest. She created a proposal for a Sensory Art Experience Workshop, which targets K-6 children with autism. The student is planning on actually running this workshop, which will be open to the community, at Kansas Free Arts in August.

The instructor's assessment confirmed that the above-mentioned activities were completed:

I assessed this aspect with the following checklist: 1) Student self-initiative (attending meetings, reaching out to foundation leaders, and co-planning workshop while collaborating with leaders and grad student interns); 2) Student understanding of target population and community environment in workshop proposal (identify characteristics of autism, identify key characteristics of child artistic development, identify key characteristics of the Kansas Free Arts environment including: time, materials, space, and procedures).

Requirement 3: Include a Distinctive Learner-Directed Environment and Philosophy

While Badenhausen expresses concern about the power differential that may occur in contracts, our experience has been that instructors relish working with motivated students eager to step up and assert themselves in the selection of course requirements and activities. Requirements mentioned in a number of applications include strategies that allow students to take the lead in determining the structure of mentoring time and the roles of instructor and student as learning collaborators. Some applications have even described how instructors have created an environment of choice for the students through the selection of requirements, the activities that align with the requirements, the decision about how to spend time, and the delegation of responsibility for specific tasks.

An example from a business management contract application illustrates the learner-directed nature of many contracts:

The environment is learner-directed in that the student was given very broad direction (we must meet objectives and have a tangible product) and asked to design their own course. The student has provided several alternatives as to how they wish to approach the semester. The student will ultimately decide which path to take.

The instructor's assessment for this course included the following:

Other than [the instructor] providing the general idea for what a reasonable product would be, the student chose the topics, how the topics would be studied, and . . . the framework for the final product. The student chose to read a number of resources and [to] build an annotated bibliography as well as a presentation of her findings.

I would add that these findings were presented at Research and Creativity Day on the ESU campus. Once again, readers will see how one requirement dovetails with another. The business management student exercised personal initiative in building a detailed

annotated bibliography and in sharing the findings at a public venue. The student indicated her appreciation of both the guidance and the freedom the instructor gave her.

Requirement 4: Help Students Develop Effective Written, Oral, and/or Interpersonal Communication Skills

While the AAC&U high-impact practice of a writing-intensive focus is often emphasized in the submitted contracts, oral communication skills are also important. Many contracts, such as the following example, include as requirements the completion of a research or scholarly paper and the delivery of an oral presentation at some public venue:

[The student] will be creating a lesson plan to educate students on a social identity of his choice (religion, but subject to change), apart from one he currently holds. [He] will deliver this lesson plan in the future for assessment by [instructor] . . . to improve presentation skills and public speaking. [He] will also expand on the Voice project (see syllabus) by immersing himself into a culture, apart from one he currently holds, instead of simply researching it. [He] will perform practices held by his chosen culture and report on his experiences doing so with extra focus and depth.

The instructor's assessment was simple and concise:

The student facilitated leadership learning with a 60-minute in-class lesson. The student's performance reflected competence in offering oral presentations.

Requirement 5: Help Students Become Independent Critical Thinkers

Students and instructors frequently select this requirement, and a wide range of activities accomplish its goals. An art history contract application addressed the critical-thinking requirement this way:

This proposed contract aims to help [the student] become a more independent and critical thinker in several ways. The in-depth research project and paper will challenge her to go beyond traditional classroom assignments and particularly emphasize the use of application and analysis skills, not just knowledge- and comprehension-level skills. Additionally, [the student] will be able to choose the specific focus of her art historical research and the cultures she will explore and analyze, highlighting independent thinking. The combination of sociological considerations and art historical analysis will also necessitate critical, cross-disciplinary thinking.

The instructor's assessment for this requirement noted the following:

This proposed contract helped [the student] become a more independent and critical thinker in several ways. The in-depth research project and paper challenged her to go beyond traditional classroom assignments and emphasized the use of application and analysis skills, not just knowledge- and comprehension-level skills. Additionally, [the student] was able to choose the specific focus of her art historical research and the cultures she explored and analyzed, utilizing independent thinking. The combination of sociological considerations and art historical analysis necessitated critical, cross-disciplinary thought.

The critical-thinking requirement is one of the most common requirements selected, but even for applications without this specific requirement, many contract activities align with the AAC&U's definition of critical thinking provided earlier in this chapter.

Requirement 6: Develop Collaborative Relationships among Students and between Faculty and Students

The development of a collaborative relationship occurs at the beginning of the process as students and faculty negotiate the contract. Furthermore, our assessment data show that the relationship

generally becomes stronger as contract course activity unfolds. Based on these findings, we have found contract courses to be a form of mentoring comparable to undergraduate research and other co-curricular activities.

An emerging trend in our college is a group of students (three, in this case) approaching an instructor to contract a course; this dynamic develops relationships not only between students and the faculty mentor, but also within the student group. The following proposal narrative from a chemistry course focuses on this collaborative relationship in a STEM field:

Students will work hand-in-hand with the instructor of the course. This one-on-one experience gives the chance to both student and faculty to share more knowledge beyond the textbook. In addition, this helps the faculty explore weaknesses or strengths in the students' body of knowledge and address them to help getting to a deeper level of thinking. Students will develop collaborative relationships with one another and with the faculty by working in groups in order to address civic issues. During our meeting time, we plan to address issues that we have come upon throughout the week. This will also be an opportunity for faculty and student mentors to help guide the students through critical thinking on their projects. In this way, we will be able to collaborate with them and create an environment that will help catalyze learning and a deeper level of thinking.

The instructor's assessment for this contract reported the following:

Students worked in groups of three to complete their research projects, which necessitated collaboration among students. Students also collaborated with several faculty in the Department of Physical Sciences to learn various sampling and laboratory techniques. Faculty trained students and supervised their use of high-tech analytical equipment, such as an HPLC and GC-MS, as well.

This assessment highlights not only collaboration but also the broader, deeper, and more complex requirement. In addition, these

STEM students worked together and with their instructor to think critically about scientific concepts and to learn complex sampling and laboratory skills in a safe and supportive environment.

**Requirement 7:
Result in the Production of a Scholarly or Creative
Product Suitable for Sharing with Others outside of
Class through Some Scholarly Venue**

Many contract applications stipulate that students will write papers suitable for presentation. The following summary is perhaps more instructive than any one example. For each of the past two years, eighteen and nineteen students, respectively, have presented at the Great Plains Honors Conference's (GPHC) annual meeting. Eleven of this past year's nineteen presenters wrote and practiced their presentations as part of completing honors contract courses. Attendance and participation at the GPHC are among the most popular of all honors college activities at ESU, and a critical mass of students have discovered contracts to be a means for achieving that end. Presentation occurs at other venues as well. The use of contract courses in this way was a bit serendipitous; it did not initially occur to us that contracts would be used to prepare for presentations at professional meetings to the extent that they are. Furthermore, in the past year, two contracts have produced publications, one in a refereed geopolitics journal and the other in a nursing magazine.

Other examples of public sharing include art exhibits, musical performances, poetry readings, and service-learning projects for civic organizations such as public schools. One notable scholarly product was the completion and distribution of an oral history of area veterans, including those who served during World War II. The oral history was particularly valuable because Emporia, Kansas, the home of ESU, is the founding city of the Veteran's Day national holiday.

CONCLUSIONS

The strategy and data presented above show that contract courses can and do deliver high-impact honors experiences to students. At ESU, several key lessons inform our approach to honors contracts:

1. Providing a common operational definition for all honors courses, whether traditional or contract, is essential. This definition should be informed by the NCHC's "Definition of Honors Education" and the AAC&U's list of high-impact practices.
2. Creating a manageable list of specific requirements consistent with this definition is also essential.
3. The institution's particular mission and culture, as articulated in mission documents, should drive the requirements.
4. Stakeholders including administration, faculty, and students should be involved in shaping these requirements.
5. Contract course applications should be completed collaboratively by faculty and students and should target specific requirements that align with activities and outcomes stipulated in the contract.
6. The contract activities should involve instructor-student collaboration and mentoring.
7. Assessment data demonstrating the success of the contract are essential.
8. Faculty should be compensated in some meaningful way for their efforts.

Despite the success of this strategy at ESU, a number of key issues from our experience may be useful to those educators considering a similar model. First, we have discovered at our institution a critical mass of motivated instructors involved in most of the contract courses offered. We provide in-service training to instructors interested or engaged in contract courses. This training offers

guidance on the application process and insight into best contract practices. The training also connects instructors with each other, creating space for ongoing guidance and support. While these instructors are motivated primarily by their desire to work with honors students, some form of compensation is helpful as well. The current reality in higher education is the expectation that we do more with less. Many instructors have had minimal pay raises for several years as well as increasing demands made on their time; the need for some form of compensation is essential even if that compensation is minimal. At ESU, we provide stipends of \$750 per contract, but we understand that various kinds of rewards might also work, as others in this volume suggest. For example, Haseleu and Taylor report that their institution provides \$500 stipends and professional-development training (184); Bambina notes the value of social and professional faculty support at honors informational luncheons (122); and Miller reports that her institution recognizes the value of honors contract mentoring in the tenure and promotion of faculty (279–80).

Second, prior to the creation of our honors college, ESU offered relatively few honors courses. Consequently, the push to develop courses based on a common definition and list of requirements was easier than it would have been had our effort required the redesign of a significant number of courses. Changing the culture of an institution where the content of an honors course is the sole decision of the instructor may be more difficult. At ESU, the list of requirements was created by committees of stakeholders that included faculty, students, and administration. While some faculty were reluctant to dedicate the time to retooling their honors courses and a few others saw our effort as an affront to academic freedom, we have found that most are grateful for the guidance that we offer in providing the list of requirements. We trust that other institutions will have a comparable experience.

Third, for this strategy to work, honors students must be willing to contact instructors and to negotiate with them as they collaborate in writing the application. We have found that willing students emerge in a classroom environment where, according to the NCHC,

the “instructors are those who are willing to share the responsibility for teaching and learning with their students” (“Honors Course Design”). The key to successful contracts is to engage willing instructors who respond to students enthusiastically and supportively. This is particularly true for new students who are often a bit timid and reluctant to approach instructors. Experienced honors students can also provide encouragement, guidance, and support to new students as they begin to initiate contracts.

Fourth, while I acknowledge that contract courses do not always provide a venue for honors students to interact with each other, they do create space for students to collaborate with instructors and develop important mentoring relationships. Given the value of such relationships for retention and academic success (Salinitri), the benefits of contract courses outweigh any weakness in this area. In addition, the possibility of group or interactive contracts creates the potential for honors students to collaborate with each other or their peers in the course.

Fifth, while the number of applications to our honors college is high, the demand for traditional honors courses, particularly general education honors courses, has decreased significantly because of the number of college credits earned by students still in high school. This situation results in a growing demand for other forms of high-impact learning. These non-traditional forms can include well-designed contract courses, mentoring, undergraduate research, community engagement opportunities, leadership training, and domestic and international educational travel experiences. I would argue that in the emerging higher education environment, the NCHC’s 20% guideline may need to include such co-curricular high-impact learning activities as opposed to only traditional honors courses. We at ESU are highly motivated to provide high-impact contract courses to honors students. We believe that they are our most viable option for delivering an honors curriculum amidst the current demands to graduate students on time, with no more credits than absolutely necessary, and with minimal debt. While the contract option is particularly salient for offering upper-division, program-specific courses to students who have completed

much of the general education program while in high school, it is also important at two-year colleges, as Haseleu and Taylor argue. Most potential honors students, as well as their parents, are pleased to learn that they can complete honors courses in their major program of study without the need for additional non-program courses. The contract course strategy offered here is not perfect, but it has proven successful at ESU. A strategy such as this one may be a necessary and pragmatic response for many honors programs and colleges now and in the future.

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APPENDIX

Application for Contracting an Honors Course

An instructor in collaboration with an honors college student can transform a regular course into an honors contract course. This option allows students to earn honors credits while completing courses in their regular program of study. The student will attend the regular course while completing additional learning-based honors activities as stipulated in the guidelines below. While any course can be contracted for honors credit, the contracting option is ideal for courses in the student's major program of study.

Part I: Guidance

Prior to preparing a proposal for contracting an honors course, the instructor should carefully read Honors Courses and Honors Contract Courses at Emporia State University: Guidelines for Instructors, posted on the honors college website. While it is not reasonable to expect each honors course to satisfy each of the seven objectives listed on this document, *it is expected that all courses will address Objectives 1 and 2, and at least two other objectives as deemed appropriate by the instructor.*

Part II: Application

1. Provide the name and E# of the student(s) for whom the course is being contracted and the semester the course will be offered.
2. Provide a copy of the course syllabus.
3. Provide a brief description of the role the instructor will play in supervising or mentoring this student.
4. Describe what the student will produce (e.g., paper, presentation, performance).
5. All courses must meet Objectives 1 and 2 from the guidance section above:
 - Describe the ways that the instructors will make this course broader, deeper, or more complex than a regular course.
 - Describe how the experience will include civic leadership, community engagement, or an advancement of the common good.
6. Identify additional objectives (at least two selected from Objectives 3–7 in the guidance section above), and describe how those objectives will be met.
7. The application should be submitted by the end of the third week of class during the semester the course is taught.

Part III: Procedure

1. Submit this form to the director of the honors college for approval: honors@emporia.edu.
2. Once approved, the department will be responsible for working with the Office of the Registrar to create an honors section of the course that will be offered in tandem with the regular course. All honors contract courses should be designated with section letter Z (AZ, BZ, etc.) and have the same number of credits as the tandem course. All honors contract courses should be designated “instructor approval required.” The class cap should be set at zero, with students being added to it on an individual basis; the Office of the Registrar will assist in this process. After the course designation is created by the Office of the Registrar, student enrollees should be transferred from the regular course to the honors course.
3. Applications must be submitted electronically as early as possible but will be accepted until the end of the third week of class during the semester the course is taught.

Part IV: Assessment

All instructors of contract courses will be required to provide assessment data to the honors college within 30 days of the end of the semester in which the course was taught. Data will be collected electronically through Compliance Assist. Data should measure course effectiveness in meeting the stated honors college objectives listed above. Presently, there is no standardized rubric or other measurement instrument that instructors are required to use; rather, instructors should use embedded assessments such as course assignments, tests, and other graded requirements.

Compensation for Creating and Teaching Honors Contract Courses

If an honors contract course is approved, instructors should proceed to create the course and work with department chairs to schedule the course. Instructors will be compensated during the semester the contract course is taught. Although compensation may vary based on budgetary constraints, the current established rate of compensation is \$750 for offering an honors contract course to an honors student who requests it. If more than one student requests to contract the same course, instructors will be compensated \$250 for each additional student up to a total of \$1,500. These funds are intended to compensate instructors for the extra work required for instruction of honors contract courses.