Handbook and Resource Guide for Teaching in the Northern Kentucky University Honors College First-Year Curriculum

**HNR 101, HNR 102, HNR 200**

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1. Introduction

The classes that make up the first-year curriculum in the Honors College serve students across every major at Northern Kentucky University, and they serve students with a variety of backgrounds and levels of preparation. In this way, they are like any other Foundation of Knowledge general education course. So what makes the honors experience different for both teachers and students?

- Small Class Sizes
- Highly Motivated, Engaged Students
- An Environment that Encourages Instructors to Experiment, Innovate, and Engage in High Impact Teaching Practices
- An Environment that Encourages Students to Link Classroom Instruction to Communities beyond the Classroom
- An Emphasis on Inquiry-Based Learning that May Encourage Students to Draw from More Than One Discipline as They Seek Answers to Important Questions

Honors education looks a bit different at every college or university that offers it. That said, it is helpful to start with a general definition. The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) (https://www.nchchonors.org/about-nchc), the organization founded in 1966 “to support and promote undergraduate honors education,” developed the following description (https://www.nchchonors.org/directors-faculty/definition-of-honors-education) in 2013 (emphasis added):

*Honors education is characterized by in-class and extracurricular 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.*

Honors education at NKU is modeled after this definition. Our goal is to help motivated students with high academic potential make the most of their undergraduate years while growing as leaders, engaged citizens, and critical thinkers. Honors is not a major in itself, but it enriches and enhances a student’s undergraduate studies. A significant part of honors education involves honors coursework—more on that below—but honors is not a sequenced checklist of classes. As the NCHC definition puts it, an honors education encourages a range of “learning experiences” and should be tailored to students’ individual interests and passions. Honors coursework is complemented by extracurricular and co-curricular activities that foster a sense of community between students and faculty, help students to network and explore career paths beyond campus, and encourage meaningful community engagement. Honors programs and colleges often offer extra layers of advising and faculty mentorship to help students explore their interests and pursue opportunities like study abroad, internships, fellowships, and undergraduate research. The Honors College at NKU does not replace campus offices dedicated to these types of opportunities; rather, it serves as a hub where students can get connected to these resources.

**In short, honors is most commonly viewed as an enhancement or enrichment of a student’s undergraduate experience.**

The first-year curriculum and accompanying co-curricular activities in the Honors College provide students with foundational tools for success that they carry with them into their subsequent coursework
at NKU and into their future endeavors. This handbook gives faculty a framework for the philosophies, principles, and common elements that guide the first-year honors curriculum so that they can feel comfortable designing their own courses. For practical examples of syllabi, assignments, and other course materials, please consult the Honors College Faculty Canvas Site.

2. Catalog Course Descriptions and Common Student Learning Outcomes for HNR 101, HNR 102, and HNR 200

HNR 101, HNR 102, and HNR 200 offer students an entryway into the honors academic experience. While these courses do achieve common learning outcomes in terms of written communication, oral communication, and honors learning, they also offer flexibility for instructors to teach themes that interest them or that connect to learning communities about which students are excited. What follows are the common course descriptions from the NKU catalog as well as the common learning outcomes for these courses. *(Note: the honors SLOs are newly revised; work will begin in collaboration with teaching faculty to develop common rubrics for assessing them in the 2020-2021 academic year.)*

**HNR 101 Introduction to Honors Learning - WC/OC (3 credits)**
*Hours: 3 classroom + 0 lab/studio*
*Prerequisite(s): Honors Admit status.*
*Taught: Fall only*
An introduction to interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving, this course emphasizes critical thinking and communication skills based in an appreciation of the rhetorical situation. This course enables a successful transition to college and honors learning.

Note: Students who complete both HNR 101 and HNR 102 will satisfy both WC and OC general education categories.
*Repeatable: No*

**HNR 101 Foundation of Knowledge Student Learning Outcomes**
A1 Students clearly define the issue/problems to be addressed.
C1 Students consider context, audience, and purpose as appropriate with assigned tasks.
C2 Students use appropriate and relevant content to communicate ideas.
C3 (O) Students demonstrate the ability to express ideas using oral communication skills. (W) Students create and write coherent grammatical pieces.

**HNR 101 Honors College Student Learning Outcome**
H1 Students take a leadership role in their endeavors, demonstrating personal responsibility.

**HNR 101 Common Student Learning Outcomes**
1 Students practice designing effective research questions and creating strategies and work plans to guide inquiry-based projects.
2 Students develop information literacy skills, such as gathering sources to investigate topics that interest them, evaluating the sources that they find, applying what they’ve learned to participate in the
existing scholarly conversation, and respecting the sources that they use by properly integrating, synthesizing, and crediting them in their final products.

3 Students collaborate effectively in a team environment, which involves both fostering a culture of mutual respect among team members and understanding one’s personal responsibility to contribute substantively to the team’s efforts.

4 Students reflect on their own positions in ongoing scholarly conversations to establish independent intellectual identities.

**HNR 102 Interdisciplinary Research Process - WC/OC (3 credits)**

*Hours: 3 classroom + 0 lab/studio*

*Prerequisite(s): HNR 101 or ENG 101/ENG 104.*

*Taught: Fall and spring*

Students will design an interdisciplinary project to answer a research question. Written and oral communication about the project throughout the semester will enrich the steps of the process.

*Note: Students who complete both HNR 101 and HNR 102 will satisfy both WC and OC general education categories.*

*Repeatable: No*

**HNR 102 Foundation of Knowledge Student Learning Outcomes**

A1 Students clearly define the issue/problems to be addressed.

C1 Students consider context, audience, and purpose as appropriate with assigned tasks.

C2 Students use appropriate and relevant content to communicate ideas.

C3 (O) Students demonstrate the ability to express ideas using oral communication skills. (W) Students create and write coherent grammatical pieces.

**HNR 101 Honors College Student Learning Outcome**

H1 Students take a leadership role in their endeavors, demonstrating personal responsibility.

**HNR 102 Common Student Learning Outcomes**

1 Students reflect on the relationship between their personal intellectual commitments and issues that are important locally, regionally, nationally, or globally.

2 Students build on the skills they developed in HNR 101 and apply what they have learned to communities in Northern Kentucky or Greater Cincinnati.

3 Students use appropriate processes for research, writing, and public presentation to conceive, conduct, and communicate about an independent, original project of their own design.

**HNR 200 Project-Based Learning in Honors (1 credit)**

*Hours: 1 classroom + 0 lab/studio*

*Prerequisite(s): HNR 100; or ENG 101, ENG, 102, and CMST 101; or ENG 104 and CMST 101; or permission of program director.*
Introduces transfer or continuing students who have completed university written and oral communication requirements to frameworks for honors education, including: interdisciplinary approaches to problem-solving; scholarly, creative, and applied inquiry; project-based learning; collaboration; critical thinking; and independent project design. Does not fulfill Foundation of Knowledge General Education requirements.

Repeatable: No

**HNR 101 Honors College Student Learning Outcome**

H1 Students take a leadership role in their endeavors, demonstrating personal responsibility.

**HNR 200 Common Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Students collaborate effectively in a team environment, which involves both fostering a culture of mutual respect among team members and understanding one’s personal responsibility to contribute substantively to the team’s efforts.

2. Students reflect on their own positions in ongoing scholarly conversations to establish independent intellectual identities.

3. Students reflect on the relationship between their personal intellectual commitments and issues that are important locally, regionally, nationally, or globally.

4. Students use appropriate processes for research, writing, and public presentation to conceive, conduct, and communicate about an independent, original project of their own design.
3. Foundation of Knowledge Rubrics for Written and Oral Communication

These are the 2020 rubrics created and distributed by the NKU General Education Committee of Faculty Senate. Any questions about these rubrics should be directed to that body.

### ORAL Communication – SLO’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Capstone 4</th>
<th>Milestones 3</th>
<th>Milestones 2</th>
<th>Benchmark 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1: Students clearly define the issue/problems to be addressed.</td>
<td>Issue or problem to be considered is clearly identified and carefully defined.</td>
<td>Issue or problem is partially identified and an attempt to define the problem is evident.</td>
<td>Issue or problem is minimally identified, result in an unclear definition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C1: Students consider context, audience, and purpose as appropriate with assigned tasks.</td>
<td>Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.</td>
<td>Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).</td>
<td>Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience’s perceptions and assumptions).</td>
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<tr>
<td>C2: Students use appropriate and relevant content to communicate ideas.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and well-organized content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer’s understanding, and shaping the whole work.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and organized content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape most of the work.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and somewhat organized content to develop and explore ideas through the work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C3 (O): Students demonstrate the ability to express ideas using oral communication skills.</td>
<td>Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, stage presence, and vocal expressiveness) make the presentation optimally effective.</td>
<td>Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, stage presence, vocal expressiveness) make the presentation effective.</td>
<td>Delivery techniques (posture, gesture, eye contact, stage presence and vocal expressiveness) detract from the effectiveness.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. Key Concepts Covered in the Honors College First-Year Curriculum

Although individual instructors will emphasize ideas, concepts, approaches, or skills that reflect their own interests, training, and expertise, it is critical that students come away from their first-year honors experience with common knowledge that prepares them to succeed in future courses as well as in their culminating honors capstone projects.

Key Concepts in HNR 101

1. Rhetoric

Rhetoric is important for both written and oral communication, and students must leave HNR 101 with an understanding of key facets of rhetorical communication, which include:

- **Audience.** Students should learn to identify who makes up the audience for their communication and address the needs of that audience through the decisions that they make as speakers or writers. An understanding of audience may influence everything from topic and organization to sentence structure and word choice.

- **The Rhetorical Situation.** The rhetorical situation is the circumstance that makes it necessary for the speaker or writer to use rhetoric. For example, situations where one is called upon to make a toast, introduce someone, inform about a topic, or persuade are all rhetorical situations.
• **Aristotle’s Rhetorical Appeals.** Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals include *ethos* (the credibility established through the speaker or writer’s character), *logos* (the case being made through the speaker or writer’s use of reasoning and evidence), and *pathos* (the emotions aroused within the speaker or writer’s audience).

• **Rhetorical analysis.** Students should be able to apply their understanding of rhetoric to evaluate and assess popular and scholarly sources to determine their value.

2. Information Literacy

Information literacy is the focus of NKU’s Quality Enhancement Plan, and it also is foundational to student success in honors. In Honors 101, students must leave with an understanding of basic information literacy concepts, which include:

• **Research Questions as a Foundation for Inquiry-Based Learning.** Students should understand that research begins with genuine curiosity and the motivation on the part of the researcher to explore open-ended questions that may result in multiple or complex answers.

• **Ability to Locate and Distinguish between Different Source Types.** Students should be able to search for and distinguish between primary sources and secondary sources as well as popular sources and scholarly, peer-reviewed sources.

• **How to Access and Use Library Resources.** Students should know what a database is, how to find a book, and how to find an article. They should also know how to get help from a librarian if they are having trouble finding sources.

• **Research as an Iterative Process.** Students should learn that there are steps to the research process and that those steps include finding sources, reading and evaluating them, reflecting on what one discovers, and sometimes returning to do more research, before one can synthesize what one has discovered and join the scholarly conversation oneself.

• **Proper Crediting of Sources.** Students should grasp why we cite, why there are different citation styles for different disciplines, and how to follow an academic citation format. Typically, instructors may choose a default citation style, such as MLA format or APA format, or they may encourage students to choose and practice the most frequently used citations style in their major discipline.

3. Written Communication

As students learn about the writing process in HNR 101, they must come away with an understanding of the following elements of effective written communication:

• **Meeting Expectations for Professional and Academic Written Communication.** Students should learn how to address audiences appropriately, choose words effectively, and organize, revise, edit, and proofread their writing.

• **The Writing Process.** The writing process includes idea generation, drafting, peer review or workshopping, revising, editing, and proofreading. Students will understand these different elements of the writing process and practice designing work plans that afford time for these different activities.
• **Thesis Statements.** Students should understand that a thesis statement guides a piece of writing and that it not only communicates what the author will write about but also why that content is significant.

• **Topic Sentences and Paragraphs.** Students should understand that each paragraph must begin with a strong topic sentence that reflects the one main idea of the paragraph that connects to the thesis statement of the essay.

• **Bibliographies.** Students should understand what working bibliographies, annotated bibliographies, and works cited bibliographies are and how they differ from each other.

• **Abstracts, Short Research Proposals (for course projects or presentations at academic conferences), and Formal Project Proposals or Prospectuses (for capstones, funding applications, grant applications, and more, and which may include budgets, literature reviews, and longer narratives).** Students should understand the forms, purposes, and audiences for these different types of writing.

4. **Oral Communication**

As students learn about public speaking in HNR 101, they must come away with an understanding of the following elements of effective oral communication:

• **Meeting Expectations in Professional and Academic Interpersonal Communication.** Students should gain experience contributing productively in small and large group discussions, presenting their research in a conference setting, and responding to audience questions in a presentation setting.

• **Oral Presentations of Proposals, Projects, and Research.** Students should practice oral presentation aimed at community and academic audiences, and they should understand that effective speeches are “built” and not “written” – that speeches do not have the permanence of written texts and that they can be best described as the ordering and systematizing of fragmentary outline bits. Even in fields where presentations are “read” to an audience, they are built differently from publishable essays.

• **Effective Delivery in Public Speaking Situations.** Students should practice and get feedback on the embodiment of their public speaking, with attention to volume, rate of speech, gestures, posture, verbal tics, etc.

• **Organization of Formal Oral Communication.** Students should clearly identify the topic on which they will speak, tailor their communication to their target audience, and explicitly assert the argument of their speech. Speakers need to be explicit about where they are taking the audience (and where they’ve been). There should be previews, reviews, synopses, and signposts. The structure of a speech must be overt and should be easily recounted by the audience.

5. **Honors Learning**

Students in HNR 101 need to learn the values, habits of thought, and methods of learning in honors. These include:
• **Active Listening and Responding with Engaged Inquiry.** Students should learn to respect classmates’ contributions and to make connections between others’ ideas and their own when they join a conversation.

• **Honors as an Intellectual Community.** Students should come away from the course with a sense of their role in a larger endeavor to seek solutions to complex problems through creative, innovative, and research-based approaches. The most important activity connected to this key concept is the Honors College First-Year Research Week.

• **Project-Based Learning and Independent Problem-Solving.** Students will, both collaboratively and individually, design projects that allow them to participate in the intellectual community of honors and to explore ideas, issues, problems, and possibilities that connect to their intellectual and ideological commitments.

• **Reflection as Critical to Intellectual Growth.** Students will learn that it is not enough to follow directions and to meet the instructors’ expectations. Rather, they must reflect on and process the work that they do to build on prior learning, to plan for future projects, and to understand the transformative power of intellectual endeavors.

**Key Concepts in HNR 102**

HNR 102 builds on what students begin to explore in HNR 101, and throughout the course students gain more autonomy and independence as thinkers, writers, and speakers.

1. **Rhetoric**

In HNR 102, students gain a more sophisticated understanding of rhetoric while continuing to practice the skills that they developed in HNR 101. They pay special attention to:

• **Disciplinary Audiences and Rhetorical Conventions.** Students learn that different disciplines value different primary sources and present information and use rhetoric differently by comparing and contrasting research in the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences.

• **Visual Rhetoric and Document Design.** Students learn that rhetoric applies not only to language but also to images, and they learn the rhetorical conventions of visual texts such as PowerPoint slides, academic posters, print documents, and digital platforms such as blogs or websites.

2. **Information Literacy**

Information literacy is the focus of NKU’s Quality Enhancement Plan, and it also is foundational to student success in honors. In Honors 102, students continue to learn about important information literacy skills. They pay special attention to:

• **Entering the Scholarly Conversation by Conducting Original Primary Source Research.** Instead of merely reporting what others have said about a topic or how others have answered research questions, students themselves contribute to the scholarly conversation by offering their own primary source analysis.

• **Engaging with the Research of Others.** Students learn that knowledge creation is an ongoing process and not just something that appears in final form in journal articles or books. In particular, they engage with the research projects of their classmates, and they participate in the audience of NKU’s Celebration of Student Research and Creative Activity, attending both poster and oral sessions.
• **Understanding, Interpreting, and Judging Quantitative and Qualitative Sources.** Students learn how to approach sources that use different types of evidence and how to evaluate the quality of both the data and the analysis of it.

• **Using Discipline-Specific Databases and Advanced Search Strategies to Find the Best Sources.** Students will practice using the Steely Library Research Guides to find appropriate databases for exploring their independently designed research questions. Additionally, they will learn advanced techniques such as how to narrow searches by using Library of Congress Subject Headings, how to use the thesaurus feature in databases to expand their searches, how to take advantage of SourceFinder (interlibrary loan) to get sources from other libraries, and how to practice citation tracing or tracking to understand the most important contributions to the ongoing scholarly conversation.

3. **Written Communication**

Having learned the basics of written communication in HNR 101, students in HNR 102 have greater freedom to design their own approaches to written communication. In HNR 102, they will focus on:

• **Writing in Different Formats for Different Audiences.** Students get experience with types of writing beyond the traditional research paper, including writing for public audiences.

• **Defining and Executing the Writing Process and Research Process for an Independent Project of the Student’s Own Design.** Students make their own decisions as writers and researchers, choosing in consultation with their instructor methods and approaches that are appropriate for the project they have conceived.

• **Engaging in Productive, Professional, and Courteous Disagreement in Scholarly and Professional Contexts.** Students use evidence to support claims, but they also engage directly with sources to challenge them and provide context for areas of disagreement.

• **Creating Smooth Transitions between Main Ideas.** Students attend to the flow of their written communication, making it clear how they move from one idea to the next and logically organizing their main points.

• **Integrating Sources Smoothly into One’s Own Writing using Summary, Paraphrase, and Quotation.** Students understand that sources must be clearly and explicitly introduced in written texts and that when sources are used, they should be contextualized with the writer’s analysis. They should also understand proper documentation of sources using an academic style guide and when to use quotation marks. Finally, they should understand the difference between summary, paraphrase, and quotation and know when it is best to use each method for integrating sources.

• **Synthesizing Multiple Sources to Create a Context for One’s Own Ideas.** Students should be able to discuss multiple sources simultaneously to paint a picture of an ongoing scholarly conversation, attending to areas of agreement, disagreement, and debate.

4. **Oral Communication**

In HNR 102, students continue to practice their oral communication skills, and they gain experience with different oral communication formats and ways to connect with different types of audiences through oral communication. In particular, they learn about:
Developing Appropriate Topics for Different Rhetorical Situations. Students should understand that skill as a public speaker involves not only how one communicates but also choosing an appropriate topic for that communication, which can adequately be covered in the time allotted and which appeals to the audience being addressed. Typical oral communication situations include: to introduce, to inform, to explain, and to persuade, among others.

Practicing Public Speaking in recorded and live environments. Students present in recorded environments, such as short sound recordings, screencasts, or videos to be disseminated through platforms like YouTube; they also speak publicly in live environments, such as face-to-face presentation in front of a live audience or a synchronous Zoom presentation.

Creating effective visual aids for academic presentations. Students learn that citing sources, incorporating research, and visually representing claims happen very differently in spoken—as opposed to—written discourse, and they will attend to effective use of color, font, images, text, and visual rhetoric to supplement their oral communication.

Productive, Professional, and Courteous Disagreement in Scholarly and Professional Contexts. Students should provide evidence for their arguments and rely on logical reasoning both to assert their own positions and to refute the claims of others.

Public Speaking as Performance. Students understand that the delivery of the speech should enhance the reception of the speech in real time. The elements of performance the speaker exhibits will reinforce the message and add credibility to the claims.

5. Honors Learning

Students in HNR 102 discover the ways in which honors can help them to achieve their unique ambitions and foster their creativity in personal, community, and academic contexts. The most important concepts they explore include:

Different Types of Inquiry, Research, and Problem-Solving: Applied, Creative, Academic. Students see the ways in which inquiry-based research enriches their understanding of the world around them and their ability to contribute positively to it.

Breaking Out of the Honors Cocoon: Sharing Ideas with Broad and Diverse Communities. Students learn that it is important to connect with people of different backgrounds and perspectives and to approach communities with a sense of social responsibility, purpose, and respect.

Key Concepts in HNR 200

In HNR 200, students should get instruction about the following:

1. Information Literacy

Information literacy is the focus of NKU’s Quality Enhancement Plan, and it also is foundational to student success in honors. In Honors 200, students must leave with an understanding of basic information literacy concepts, which include:

Research Questions as a Foundation for Inquiry-Based Learning. Students should understand that research begins with genuine curiosity and the motivation on the part of the researcher to explore open-ended questions that may result in multiple or complex answers.
• **Research as an Iterative Process.** Students should learn that there are steps to the research process and that those steps include finding sources, reading and evaluating them, reflecting on what one discovers, and sometimes returning to do more research, before one can synthesize what one has discovered and join the scholarly conversation oneself.

• **Entering the Scholarly Conversation by Conducting Original Primary Source Research.** Instead of merely reporting what others have said about a topic or how others have answered research questions, students themselves contribute to the scholarly conversation by offering their own primary source analysis.

• **Engaging with the Research of Others.** Students learn that knowledge creation is an ongoing process and not just something that appears in final form in journal articles or books. In particular, they engage with the research projects of their classmates, and they participate in either the Honors College First-Year Research Week or the audience of NKU’s Celebration of Student Research and Creative Activity, attending both poster and oral sessions.

• **Understanding, Interpreting, and Judging Quantitative and Qualitative Sources.** Students learn how to approach sources that use different types of evidence and how to evaluate the quality of both the data and the analysis of it.

• **Using Discipline-Specific Databases and Advanced Search Strategies to Find the Best Sources.** Students will practice using the Steely Library Research Guides to find appropriate databases for exploring their independently designed research questions. Additionally, they will learn advanced techniques such as how to narrow searches by using Library of Congress Subject Headings, how to use the thesaurus feature in databases to expand their searches, how to take advantage of SourceFinder (interlibrary loan) to get sources from other libraries, and how to practice citation tracing or tracking to understand the most important contributions to the ongoing scholarly conversation.

2. **Honors Learning**

Students in HNR 200 need to learn the values, habits of thought, and methods of learning in honors. These include:

• **Active Listening and Responding with Engaged Inquiry.** Students should learn to respect classmates’ contributions and to make connections between others’ ideas and their own when they join a conversation.

• **Honors as an Intellectual Community.** Students should come away from the course with a sense of their role in a larger endeavor to seek solutions to complex problems through creative, innovative, and research-based approaches.

• **Project-Based Learning and Independent Problem-Solving.** Students will, both collaboratively and individually, design projects that allow them to participate in the intellectual community of honors and to explore ideas, issues, problems, and possibilities that connect to their intellectual and ideological commitments.

• **Reflection as Critical to Intellectual Growth.** Students will learn that it is not enough to follow directions and to meet the instructors’ expectations. Rather, they must reflect on and process the work that they do to build on prior learning, to plan for future projects, and to understand the transformative power of intellectual endeavors.
• **Different Types of Inquiry, Research, and Problem-Solving: Applied, Creative, Academic.** Students see the ways in which inquiry-based research enriches their understanding of the world around them and their ability to contribute positively to it.

• **Breaking Out of the Honors Cocoon and Sharing Ideas with Broad and Diverse Communities.** Students learn that it is important to connect with people of different backgrounds and perspectives and to approach communities with a sense of social responsibility, purpose, and respect.

5. **Common Academic Experiences and Student Workload Expectations in HNR 101, HNR 102, and HNR 200**

Part of what makes the learning experience in honors exciting for students is the creativity, passion, and innovation that instructors bring to the courses that they teach. With this in mind, it is important that instructors feel free to put their own stamp on the courses that they teach in honors, even while there are common academic experiences and workload expectations across course sections. This section of the handbook aims to offer guidance about those common experiences and expectations, but it does not intend to prescribe the full scope of the course that an instructor may develop. Instructors should feel free to include other sorts of assignments as well and to shape their expectations of their students accordingly.

**Common Academic Experiences and Student Workload Expectations in HNR 101**

Although instructors have freedom to design their courses independently, all HNR 101 students should have exposure to the following common academic experiences:

- **Writing a Statement of Purpose/Personal Narrative (~200-300 words; SLOs C1, C2, C3).** This type of assignment usually happens early on in the semester, and it prepares students to write statements for competitive scholarships and awards, applications, and other opportunities that they might pursue. Some instructors frame this type of assignment as a reflection on students’ intellectual commitments; others frame it in terms of communicating about goals to a public audience. The objective of this type of assignment is to teach students to write with clarity about what motivates, inspires, and engages them both as thinkers and as members of a community.

- **Attending and Participating in the “Lunch and Learn” Series (SLO H3).** Faculty teaching HNR 101, 102, or 200 schedule two to three guests per semester that connect to the Learning Communities with which they are linked or that connect to important topics that might be of interest to students. These guests do not give formal presentations. Instead, they spend about 10 minutes informally introducing themselves to students and then open up the rest of the hour for a dynamic conversation that is driven by students’ questions. Typically, faculty require students to attend at least two or three “Lunch and Learns” over the course of the semester, which may or may not be directly linked to the course in which they are enrolled.

- **HNR 101 Library Instruction (SLO H2).** Students complete, either virtually or face-to-face, instruction with a librarian at Steely Library.

- **Attending and Participating in the Honors College First-Year Research Week (SLOs A1, C1, C2, C3, H3, H4).** Each fall, students in their first semester in the Honors College participate in a week-long academic conference at which they deliver a 5-minute oral presentation or participate in a poster session about...
the research projects on which they are working. Students submit a title and abstract to appear on the Research Week program, and typically they will have completed some initial research about their projects and met with their instructor to get feedback prior to presenting. All students enrolled in HNR 101 present their research, and students also are required to attend the conference to see what other students are working on. Finally, students write a short reflection about their experience presenting their research and participating in a larger conversation about research with others (~300 words). This Research Week introduces students to communicating publicly about their intellectual work in a safe and welcoming environment, and for that reason it is closed to all but first year honors students and instructors. During this week, we also invite an alumni keynote speaker and present the Brinkman award for excellence in writing to a student from the preceding academic year. HNR 101 faculty attend presentations and evaluate them for program assessment purposes.

**Writing an Academic Abstract (~100 words; SLOs A1, C3, H1).** All students learn to write an abstract or proposal describing a research project. Students submit these abstracts to participate in the Honors College First-Year Research Week.

**Delivering an Oral Research Presentation (~5-7 minutes; SLOs A1, C1, C2, C3).** Most students do this at the Honors College First-Year Research Week, and some instructors also do this in class as part of the final for the course.

**Writing a Research-Based Academic Essay (~1,800-2,400 words minimum; SLOs A1, C1, C2, C3, H1, H2, H4).** Students learn the process for devising research questions, shaping a research proposal, doing research for popular and scholarly sources, and drafting a polished essay. Some instructors conceive of this assignment as a scholarly literature review that concludes with a proposal for future original research. Other instructors encourage students to work with primary sources as well as secondary sources to write a more traditional academic essay.

**Writing a Letter to Your Former Self (~300 words; SLO C3, H4).** Students write to their first day of NKU selves, talking about what they have learned in their first semester, what they would have done differently, what challenges they faced, and what successes they experienced. Specifically, they think about what they have learned and experienced through honors and how it connects to their broader campus experience at NKU.

In general, students in HNR 101 will submit approximately 20 pages (~6,000 words) of written work over the course of the semester. That writing will generally have varying levels of formality depending on the assignment and audience, but 8-10 pages (~2,400-3,000 words) of that written work should allow students to practice written communication appropriate to a formal academic context.

Additionally, students in HNR 101 will be expected to do approximately 15 minutes of formal public speaking over the course of the semester. Along with this formal public speaking, they will practice other types of informal interpersonal oral communication, such as informal small group discussion, participating in full class discussion, etc.

Finally, the reading load in HNR 101 will depend on the types of reading assigned, though typically expecting students to read approximately 60 to 80 pages per week is reasonable. Students may need instruction about how to approach the reading assignments that they are given, and they may need
assistance with digging into dense texts. Reading loads may need to be lighter when texts are especially dense or difficult or if students are working on major projects.

Common Academic Experiences and Student Workload Expectations in HNR 102

Although instructors have freedom to design their courses independently, all HNR 102 students should have exposure to the following common academic experiences:

**HNR 102 Library Instruction (SLO H2).** Students complete, either virtually or face-to-face, advanced instruction with a librarian at Steely Library.

**Writing for and Speaking to Public Audiences (SLOs A1, C1, C2, C3, H6).** Students should have the opportunity to complete writing and speaking assignments that connect with non-academic audiences, through assignments such as blogs, websites, podcasts, vlogs, social media pages, or other formats suited to reaching the general public.

**Attending and Participating in the “Lunch and Learn” Series (SLO H3).** Faculty teaching HNR 101, 102, or 200 schedule two to three guests per semester that connect to the Learning Communities with which they are linked or that connect to important topics that might be of interest to students. These guests don’t give formal presentations. Instead, they spend about 10 minutes informally introducing themselves to students and then open up the rest of the hour for a dynamic conversation that is driven by students’ questions. Typically, faculty require students to attend at least two or three “Lunch and Learns” over the course of the semester, which may or may not be directly linked to the course in which they are enrolled. Students usually write an informal response about the ones that they attended.

**Attending and Responding to the NKU Celebration of Student Research and Creative Activity (SLOs C3, H5).** Students will be required to attend the Celebration, both to view posters at the poster session and hear oral presentations. As part of their active participation, they should be active audience participants, asking questions of the presenters and engaging deeply with the research that they encounter. Students will then submit a reflection piece (~300 words) in which they describe their experience of the event, discussing how the different presentations and formats represented engagement with a scholarly conversation, the questions they asked and the responses that they garnered, and what they learned from attending the event.

**Delivering an Oral Research Presentation (~5-7 minutes; SLOs A1, C1, C2, C3).** This assignment typically takes the form of a final presentation of the student’s research-based project.

**Completing a Research-Based Project with Reflection (~2,400-3,000 words minimum; SLOs A1, C1, C2, C3, H5, H7).** Students design a research-based creative, applied, or traditional academic project that critically engages with the scholarly conversation and contributes their own original work that is inspired and informed by and/or contributes to that conversation. Students who choose applied or creative options complete an accompanying literature review to establish their deep engagement with the research that they conducted. All students also typically write a reflection to conclude the project, which situates their work in the broader context of their research and considers how they will build on what they have learned in the future.

**Writing a Letter to Your Former Self (~300 words; SLO C3, H5).** Students write to their first day of NKU selves, talking about what they have learned in the first year experience in honors, what they learned in
their first year at NKU, what they would have done differently, what challenges they faced, and what successes they experienced.

**In general, students in HNR 102 will submit approximately 20 pages (~6,000 words) of written work over the course of the semester.** That writing will generally have varying levels of formality depending on the assignment and audience, and 10-12 pages (~3,000-3,600 words) of that written work should connect to their research-based project.

**Additionally, students in HNR 102 will be expected to do approximately 15 minutes of formal public speaking over the course of the semester.** Along with this formal public speaking, they will practice other types of informal interpersonal oral communication, such as informal small group discussion, participating in full class discussion, etc.

**Finally, the reading load in HNR 102 will depend on the types of reading assigned, though typically expecting students to read approximately 60 to 80 pages per week is reasonable.** Students may need instruction about how to approach the reading assignments that they are given, and they may need assistance with digging into dense texts. Reading loads may need to be lighter when texts are especially dense or difficult or if students are working on major projects.

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**Common Academic Experiences and Student Workload Expectations in HNR 200**

HNR 200 serves as an introduction to the Honors College for students who have already completed Foundation of Knowledge General Education requirements in written and oral communication. While students will communicate orally and in writing, completing similar assignments to students in HNR 101 and 102, they will not receive extensive instruction in rhetoric, writing, and speaking. Instead, the course focuses on information literacy and honors learning to give students a first-year experience in honors without extending their time to degree.

**Writing a Statement of Purpose/Personal Narrative (~200-300 words; SLOs H4, H5).** See description under HNR 101.

**HNR 200 Library Instruction (SLO H2).** Students complete, either virtually or face-to-face, advanced instruction with a librarian at Steely Library.

**Writing for and Speaking to Public Audiences (SLO H6).** See description under HNR 101 or HNR 102.

**Attending and Participating in the “Lunch and Learn” Series (SLO H3).** See description for HNR 101.

**Attending and Participating in the Honors College First-Year Research Week (Fall) or Attending and Responding to the NKU Celebration of Student Research and Creative Activity (Spring) (SLOs H3, H4, H5).** See descriptions under HNR 101 or HNR 102.

**Delivering an Oral Research Presentation (~5-7 minutes; SLOs A1, C1, C2, C3).** See description under HNR 102.

**Completing a Research-Based Project with Reflection (~2,400-3,000 words minimum; SLOs A1, C1, C2, C3, H5, H7).** See description under HNR 102.

**Writing a Letter to Your Former Self (~300 words; SLO C3, H5).** See description under HNR 101.
In general, students in HNR 200 will submit approximately 15 pages (~4,500 words) of written work over the course of the semester. That writing will generally have varying levels of formality depending on the assignment and audience, and 8-10 pages (~2,400-3,000 words) of that written work connect to their research-based project.

Additionally, students in HNR 200 will be expected to do approximately 10 minutes of formal public speaking over the course of the semester. Along with this formal public speaking, they will practice other types of informal interpersonal oral communication, such as informal small group discussion, participating in full class discussion, etc.

Finally, the reading load in HNR 200 will depend on the types of reading assigned, though typically expecting students to read approximately 30 pages per week is reasonable. Students may need instruction about how to approach the reading assignments that they are given, and they may need assistance with digging into dense texts. Reading loads may need to be lighter when texts are especially dense or difficult or if students are working on major projects.

6. Honors First-Year Learning Communities and Co-Curricular Programming

Learning Communities bring together students who are interested in a career path or other focused topic in a section of HNR 101 or HNR 102. Learning Communities are designed to encourage students to collaborate, and they are designed to serve students with curricular and co-curricular opportunities that directly speak to their interests and goals. Students may try out different Learning Communities in HNR 101 and HNR 102, or they may pursue one Learning Community in sequence across both courses. If a faculty member’s section of HNR 101 or HNR 102 is linked to a Learning Community, they may want to choose reading assignments, projects, co-curricular activities, and other assignments that directly connect to the focus of that Learning Community. Learning Communities that have been offered in the past include:

- Law and Legal Studies
- Arts and Entertainment
- Social Justice and Community Engaged Research
- Pre-Medical
- Entrepreneurship
- Nursing
- Leadership
- Health

If you have questions about Learning Communities, or if you have an idea for a new Learning Community to offer, please contact the Honors College Dean.

7. Designing Effective Assignments for Honors Students

While there are some assignments that are common to the first-year honors curriculum, instructors have a great deal of freedom to play, take risks, experiment, and create in the honors classroom. So what should instructors keep in mind as they do those things?
1. Honors should provide students with a measurably broader, deeper, or more complex learning experience than conventional classroom instruction.

2. Honors emphasizes inquiry-based learning, in which students are encouraged to explore questions that matter to them and to design their own approaches to answering them.

3. Honors welcomes unconventional and innovative approaches to reaching desired learning outcomes.

Practically speaking, keeping these three things in mind should help instructors to question the types of assignments that they typically use and to think about how those assignments might be transformed, reinvented, or abandoned as they approach teaching small classes filled with highly motivated and intellectually engaged students. If instructors are interested in thinking more about what makes honors courses distinct, The National Collegiate Honors Council offers insight (https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/PDFs/Definition-of-Honors-Education.pdf) and Kent State’s Honors College offers some useful advice as well (https://www.kent.edu/honors/teaching-honors-courses).

When instructors embark on designing new assignments, they may find that they will have most success with the following assignment types:

- Collaborative assignments, in which students work together to create an artifact, solve a problem, or develop a project.
- Problem-solving assignments, in which students take a real-world problem and work either independently or collaboratively to identify possible solutions to it.
- Creative or applied assignments, in which students draw on research to invent, make, design, or create an original work.
- Community-based assignments, in which students take what they learn in the classroom and use it to connect with the community beyond the campus.
- Multimodal assignments, in which students engage with more than one medium or format of communication to explore a question or problem.

Transparent Assignment Design

Whatever types of assignments you choose, one key to success with the diverse population of students that honors serves is to practice transparent assignment design (see template on next page). The practices associated with transparent assignment design have been shown to increase student persistence, retention, and success, and they shift emphasis away from completing assignments to please a professor and toward practicing and developing skills in order to gain proficiencies that will serve students not only in academic settings but also in the world beyond the classroom. Transparent assignment design can be a useful pedagogical tool in many different settings, but it is especially appropriate in honors courses, where students may not share disciplinary knowledge that the instructor expects students in their home department to have, and where students may tend to focus outsized attention on the grade they earn as opposed to what they learn.
Transparent Assignment Template

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This template can be used as a guide for developing, explaining, and discussing class activities and out-of-class assignments. Making these aspects of each course activity or assignment explicitly clear to students has demonstrably enhanced students’ learning in a national study.¹

Assignment Name Due date:

Purpose: Define the learning objectives, in language and terms that help students recognize how this assignment will benefit their learning. Indicate how these are connected with institutional learning outcomes, and how the specific knowledge and skills involved in this assignment will be important in students' lives beyond the contexts of this assignment, this course, and this college.

Skills: The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in this course / in school / in this field / in professional life beyond school:

Terms from Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives may help you explain these skills in language students will understand. Listed from cognitively simple to most complex, these skills are:

- understanding basic disciplinary knowledge and methods/tools
- applying basic disciplinary knowledge/tools to problem-solving in a similar but unfamiliar context
- analyzing
- synthesizing
- judging/evaluating and selecting best solutions
- creating/inventing a new interpretation, product, theory

Knowledge: This assignment will also help you to become familiar with the following important content knowledge in this discipline:

- ...
- ...

Task: Define what activities the student should do/perform. “Question cues” from this chart might be helpful: [http://www.asainstitute.org/conference2013/handouts/20-Bloom-Question-Cues-Chart.pdf](http://www.asainstitute.org/conference2013/handouts/20-Bloom-Question-Cues-Chart.pdf). List any steps or guidelines, or a recommended sequence for the students’ efforts. Specify any extraneous mistakes to be avoided. If there are sound pedagogical reasons for withholding information about how to do the assignment, protect students’ confidence and sense of belonging in college with a purpose statement something like this: “The purpose of this assignment is for you to struggle and feel confused while you invent and test your own approach for addressing the problem...”

Criteria for Success:
Define the characteristics of the finished product. Provide multiple examples of what these characteristics look like in real-world practice, to encourage students’ creativity and reduce their incentive to copy any one example too closely.

Engage students in analyzing multiple examples of real-world work before the students begin their own work on the assignment. Discuss how excellent work differs from adequate work. This enables students to evaluate the quality of their own efforts while they are working, and to judge the success of their completed work. It is often useful to provide or compile with students a checklist of characteristics of successful work. Students can also use the checklist to provide feedback on peers’ coursework. Indicate whether this task/product will be graded and/or how it factors into the student’s overall grade for the course. Later, asking students to reflect and comment on their completed, graded work allows them to focus on changes to their learning strategies that might improve their future work.

Assignments and Assessment
Transparent Assignment Design can also assist with developing assessable assignments that facilitate the work of program assessment and make it clear to evaluators what the expectations of an assignment are and how they link to the learning outcomes that the course promises to achieve. When designing assignments for honors courses in the first year experience, remember that these courses will be assessed as part of general education assessment (HNR 101 and HNR 102) for written and oral communication, as well as of assessment of the Honors College and its programs (HNR 101, HNR 102, HNR 100, and HNR 200). With this in mind, you should develop assignments that clearly connect to the those program learning outcomes, and the assignments should clearly ask students to address what the outcome is looking for. For example the assignment should either identify the audience with which the student will communicate or specify how the student should approach identifying their own audience for the communication. Leaving such things unspecified in the assignment makes it difficult for evaluators to understand whether an artifact demonstrates student learning.

8. Essential Campus Resource Links for Honors Students
- **Office for Student Accessibility** https://inside.nku.edu/osa.html
- **Health, Counseling, and Student Wellness** https://inside.nku.edu/hcsw.html
- **Steely Library Help** https://inside.nku.edu/library/help.html
- **University Connect and Persist** https://inside.nku.edu/ucap.html
- **FUEL NKU - Zero Waste Food Pantry** https://inside.nku.edu/fuelnku.html
- **Institute for Student Research and Creative Activity (ISRCA)** https://inside.nku.edu/gero/isrca.html
- **Student Organizations** https://www.nku.edu/academics/cob/beyond/student-orgs.html
- **PLUS Tutoring** https://inside.nku.edu/plus/tutoring/plus_tutor.html
- **The Writing Center** https://inside.nku.edu/plus/tutoring/wc.html

9. FAQs about Honors Teaching and Learning and Honors Students
- **How do NKU faculty teaching in the honors first-year curriculum connect with each other?**

The Honors College holds informal meetings for faculty teaching in the first-year curriculum that convene at least once a month throughout the fall and spring semesters. These meetings allow us to check in, to confer about challenges our students are encountering, to share success stories, and to reflect on honors pedagogy. The meeting schedule will be set within the first two weeks of each semester after consulting with faculty about their schedules.

- **How do NKU faculty teaching in the honors first-year curriculum connect with their students outside the classroom?**

While honors faculty hold conventional office hours, as they would do in any of the classes that they teach, they are also encouraged to offer students the opportunity to meet one-on-one at different points during the semester. Sometimes, faculty cancel conventional class in order to make time for this one-on-one instruction, while leaving students to work independently on projects for the class. Additionally, faculty are encouraged to participate in Honors College co-curricular programming as well
as to connect with students informally in the Honors Suite, in virtual spaces, or at other events when that is possible.

- **Are honors students the smartest and best students at the university?**

Honors at NKU is not restricted to conventionally high-performing students—that is, students who score well on standardized tests, earn straight A’s, or participate in a dozen extracurricular activities. Rather, we are looking for *motivated* learners who want to engage differently and more deeply with their college education. Some honors students are brilliant and ready to do high-level work from day one, but others may require a little (or a lot) of extra help. Because they are motivated learners, most honors students are eager to seek advice from their professors and to help their peers succeed. Honors classes can encourage a “close community of students and faculty” through small- and large-group discussions, one-on-one conferences, peer review activities, etc. Honors 101 and 102 are particularly important venues for developing the kind of engaged “classroom citizens” professors love to see. Ideally, students will carry those skills into other honors and non-honors classes. Sometimes, highly motivated and talented students decide they do not want to continue in the Honors College; our hope is that having taken *any* number of honors classes (even just one or two) will enrich and enhance their undergraduate experience.

- **If I want to teach an honors class, can I just adapt an existing course but make it harder?**

Honors classes are not simply “harder” versions of existing classes that require, for example, a heavier reading load, more challenging texts, longer essays, etc. Honors classes offer “broader, deeper, or more complex” learning experiences that engage students’ interests. Because honors classes are often not tied to a specific department or major, instructors have greater latitude in designing the course content; in many institutions, honors programs and colleges function as a kind of “sandbox” for instructors to play with new pedagogical strategies or explore topics that might not fit neatly into a disciplinary curriculum. Additionally, honors classrooms tend to be populated by a more diverse set of students than might be found in, say, an upper-division seminar for majors. The students’ varied perspectives and skill sets tend to enrich class discussion, even if particular kinds of disciplinary knowledge might be lacking.

- **Where can I learn more about teaching in honors?**

You can talk with current Honors College faculty about their experiences teaching honors students at NKU, but you should also explore the wealth of honors resources available beyond our campus. There is a robust scholarly community of honors educators throughout the U.S. (and beyond) who conduct research about the benefits and challenges of an honors education. The NCHC publishes monographs, a refereed journal, and practical, nuts-and-bolts resources for teaching, advising, and directing honors students. The annual NCHC conference and intensive summer workshops offer excellent opportunities for professional development and networking with both novice and long-time honors educators. To start, you can find a number of journal copies and monographs in hard copy in NKU’s Honors College suite, or [online](https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/natlcollhonors/). NKU’s Honors College has an institutional membership to NCHC; contact the Honors College office if you are interested in accessing members-only online materials or finding out about professional development opportunities.

- **How do I know whether students are doing course readings or engaging meaningfully with class discussion, activities, or lecture?**
Instructors new to honors often have these questions, especially if they have experience teaching required courses that students aren’t excited about. The good news is that honors students, with very rare exceptions, are very motivated and will do the work that they are assigned. More good news is that they have chosen honors because they want to engage meaningfully with the content inside and outside of class meetings. While individual instructors may choose to give students guidance about how to read strategically, how to take notes, or how to participate in class to demonstrate their engagement, it is not typical for honors courses to involve assignments that exist for the sole purpose of policing student engagement, such as collecting students’ notes or quizzing to make sure that they completed assignments or paid attention. Instead, honors courses tend to measure student attention to reading assignments, other course materials, and lecture by the contributions they make in learner-centered class discussion and activities.

- **How do I get students started on doing research independently?**

One of the most important components of the first-year curriculum in the Honors College is introducing students to processes for doing research and communicating about it. The research process begins, typically, with helping students to think about research as a process of discovery that begins with a question. One simple way to give them practice with this is to incorporate opportunities early in the course for students to think about reading assignments in terms of questions that emerge from what they’ve read. At the end of each assignment, have students record one thing they learned or insight that they had, and then have them devise one open-ended question that they are curious to explore or that they think demands further research. This practice will prepare them for embarking on the research process. Students also participate in library instruction in first-year honors courses, where they will learn the nuts and bolts of information literacy and how to start the research process. [This article](https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/teaching-research-first-year-writing-classroom-us) has more tips about helping students with research.

- **How should I approach grading honors students?**

Not all honors students are “A” students (regardless of their prior experiences or their claims to the contrary), though many of them are. As faculty envision their grading and feedback policies, they will want to consider how to communicate with students transparently and to give them the tools to take ownership over their performances in the course. There is no one standard approach in the Honors College for grading student work. Instructors in the Honors College use a variety of methods, including [ungrading](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/04/02/professors-reflections-their-experiences-ungrading-spark-renewed-interest-student), [contract grading](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contract_grading), [portfolio grading](http://reachinghighernh.org/2018/07/02/learning-growth-competency-portfolio/), and [instructional scaffolding with weighted grades](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/course-design-ideas/scaffolding-student-learning-tips-for-getting-started/), for example. What is most important, regardless of the grading approach that individual instructors take, is the shared value that grades are not the measure of a student’s worth or value in the world.

The Honors College seeks to encourage students to focus on learning and not grades, emphasizing the intellectual and social value of digging deeply into important questions, taking intellectual risks, serving the communities of which we are a part, and doing work responsibly, ethically, and to the best of our
ability. To achieve this goal, providing meaningful feedback beyond a grade is essential. Faculty often do this using some combination of rubrics, marginal or longer-form narrative responses delivered as oral recordings or in writing, individual student conferences, or small group student conferences. Using these approaches, instructors build students’ confidence and give them the tools to excel.

- **What are some challenges to teaching honors students?**

Honors students care deeply about earning good grades. They often take heavy course loads (to support multiple majors or minors or graduating early), and they often are involved in many different activities on campus in addition to working. These characteristics can cause stress for students, and students often bring that stress to their interactions with their honors instructors. Instructors should not be surprised if students cry over not getting the grade that they would prefer, or if students seem to “check out” of honors at different points in the semester when they are focused on work in classes for their majors or minors. Instructors should be prepared to direct students to support services on campus and to work with students to overcome unrealistic expectations about grades, performance on assignments, and workload.

- **What are some rewards to teaching honors students?**

Those very qualities that can make teaching honors students challenging also make them a pleasure to teach. Honors students are highly motivated, creative, passionate, and committed to getting the most out of their educations at NKU. They embrace challenges in the classroom, and they typically understand the necessity of coming to class prepared and ready to engage. More than this, though, honors students value community, and they typically treat each other, and their instructors with kindness and respect.