

Welcome to The University Honors Program

Welcome to The University Honors Program. I am pleased that you are part of the teaching faculty for the program. I hope you enjoy teaching for the program. Please let me know what I can do to support your experience in this program.

This handbook has been compiled to help you understand the program. It is a work in progress. If you would like more materials added, please let me know. If you would like to contribute materials, please let me know. My current goal is to add materials from teaching faculty that concern their experience or that will contribute to the teaching experience of others.

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Section I: Policy and Procedure

Introduction

This handbook is intended to serve as an introduction to The University Honors Program at Southern Polytechnic State University. While this handbook will answer many of your questions concerning the program, it cannot answer all of them. Contact the Director of the University Honors Program for additional information. It is your success that will create the success of the Honors Program. Do not hesitate to ask questions.

Contact Information

You may contact the Director of The University Honors Program, Dr. Nancy Reichert, by calling 678-915-3928 or by sending an e-mail to honors@spsu.edu. You can stop by the Honors Program Office in D103 as well. There is quite a bit of information at our website. Please consult it for additional information <www.spsu.edu/honors/>.

Ms. Alda Wood is the Administrative Assistant for the Program. She can be reached at 678-915-3931.

The Faculty Honors Committee is composed of the following faculty members:

Honors Committee

Dr. Al Churella (chair)	SIS	J311	7941	achurell@spsu.edu
Mr. Lance Crimm	EET	G138	7249	lcrimm@spsu.edu
Dr. Kim Haimes-Korn	ETCMA	J320	7427	khaimesk@spsu.edu
Dr. Bob Harbort	CS	J389	7405	bharbort@spsu.edu
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Dr. Norman Russell	MET	K192	5480	nrussell@spsu.edu
Mr. Tim Zeigler	CET	SJ102	5495	tzeigler@spsu.edu

The following faculty members are currently teaching in the Honors Program. I would like to create a close-knit community: please discuss ideas, issues, and so on. I welcome ideas for improving the program and improving services for the faculty especially.

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Mr. Roger Soiset	SIS	J319	3990	rsoiset@spsu.edu
Mr. Bow Van Riper	SIS	J309	7481	bvanripe@spsu.edu
Mr. Mark Vickrey	SIS	J314	7325	merrick@spsu.edu
Dr. Andy Wang	SE/IT	J391	3718	jwang@spsu.edu

Mission Statement

The objective of the University Honors Program at Southern Polytechnic State University is to recruit and retain academically talented students and to provide them opportunities to develop their special talents and skills in an enriched version of the curriculum. The Program typically features classes with smaller enrollments and more intellectual rigor; and provides academically talented students the opportunity to work closely with faculty on special projects, independent study, and research. In addition, Honors students are part of a community of peers and will be provided opportunities for social interaction with each other and with faculty.

Honors Courses Information

Honors courses come in two different formats. The Honors version of the Core Curriculum courses is the first type. What makes an Honors section different from a regular section of a course? Honors sections tend to have fewer students than regular sections. The faculty members who teach these courses have been selected by the Department Chairs to develop honors courses. The courses themselves were approved by the Honors Committee. While all Honors courses are not taught in exactly the same manner, most Honors courses are open to more discussion and greater professor-student interaction than traditional classes. The course work is intended to help students build numerous skills such as critical and creative thinking skills, problem-solving skills, oral and written communication skills, and collaborative learning skills. These are skills students will need for many purposes throughout their lives.

The Honors seminar is the second type of course offered through the University Honors Program. The Honors junior-level interdisciplinary seminar is a project-based interdisciplinary seminar that focuses on the way knowledge within each major field converges and intersects with other fields. It will ask Honors student to use their growing understanding of their own field to work in teams with students from diverse fields to solve problems of an interdisciplinary nature. The Senior capstone projects and the thesis work allows students to narrow their research to something within their field as they conduct research, design projects, and report on the results of their findings.

Course Proposal Information

Faculty who wish to teach in the Honors Program must fill out the appropriate Course Proposal form. The Honors Committee will review and make decisions concerning course proposals.

Information concerning creating course proposals, worksheets for creating Departmental Courses, and current course proposals can be found on the web at <http://www.spsu.edu/honors/faculty/proposals.html>.

Please make sure you select the appropriate course proposal form: Forms exist for three different types of courses:

- Core-Curriculum Courses
- Interdisciplinary Honors Seminar
- Departmental Capstone Honors Course

It is important to note is that the Honors Program privileges courses that actively involve students in the following skills:

1. collaborative work
2. creative thinking
3. critical thinking
4. experiential learning
5. interdisciplinary components
6. oral or written communication
7. problem solving

Attendance Policies

While the University Honors Program does not have a standard attendance policy, it does suggest that each faculty member consider an attendance policy for his/her course. It's not surprising that studies indicate students who attend classes regularly maintain higher grades. Students are placed in our classes and are required to take our classes because they need the knowledge these classes provide. They need to train their minds through repetition and the learning of new information much as athletes need to train their bodies through practice and new challenges.

If students truly could learn as well on their own, we would simply hand them textbooks and equipment, ask them to make sense of it all, and then we would assess them. As it stands we use placement tests, prerequisites, core classes, instruction, reading, and hands-on activities to ensure that students learn the material deeply. Furthermore, attendance policies, especially in the first couple years of college, may help students to create good habits that carry on throughout their college career.

Because the University Honors Program asks that students learn to think critically and creatively, to problem solve, to communicate their knowledge, and to experience their learning, attendance is even more critical. These are skills that should be practiced in an Honors classroom so they can be modeled and developed by the teacher. Therefore, please keep an attendance policy.

I like to keep my policy simple. I have a "carrot" that rewards attendance as part of an extra-credit grade. I have a "penalty" that fails students after excessive absences. The "carrot" sees to it that I rarely have to use the "penalty" (I have failed five students across ten ENGL 1101

classes and each and every student failed due to lack of work whether they went over the number of absences or not).

Other teachers I know have policies that drop grades incrementally with absences. Use whatever policy you find most effective.

The follow policies have been used for my Composition II course:

Attendance Expectations

- As this course emphasizes the development of discussion skills, the ability to work responsibly in a group, and the honing of critical thinking skills, participation in the class discussions and activities is crucial.
- **Excellent or perfect attendance will be rewarded. For more information see the Portfolio Evaluation section of this syllabus.**
- Since attendance and preparedness are crucial for your success, you will be allowed no more than **five** absences—I have the right to fail you for the semester on your **sixth** absence.

Participation

Participation is a bonus in this class. If you meet the following conditions, you may argue that your portfolio grade be raised a half letter grade.

1. You have no more than two absences for each half of the semester;
2. You were late no more than three times for each half of the semester;
3. You were prepared for class and for your conference. You had drafts completed before class; you had the correct number of copies, you had read your materials ahead of time for class, and you had the necessary

Dismissal from the Honors Program

Academic Requirements

Students who fall below the required GPA are placed on probation for one semester. A student on probation whose GPA does not meet the requirements at the end of their next enrolled semester will be dismissed from the Honors Program.

To earn either a University Honors Scholar Degree or a Departmental Honors Scholar Degree, students must have minimum graduation GPA of 3.4. The following sliding scale applies as students move towards graduation:

- Freshmen must attain a cumulative GPA of 3.2 by the end of the spring term. A Freshman is classified as any student with 0 - 29 hours.
- Sophomores must attain a cumulative GPA of 3.2. This guideline will be used to assess your GPA at the end of any spring term while you have between 30 - 59 credit hours.

- Juniors must attain a cumulative GPA of 3.3. This guideline will be used to assess your GPA at the end of any spring term while you have between 60 - 89 credit hours.
- Seniors must attain a cumulative GPA of 3.4. This guideline will be used to assess your GPA at the end of any spring term while you have over 90 credit hours. You must have a cumulative GPA of 3.4 to graduate from the Honors Program.

Probation: The Director of the Honors Program or a designee will examine GPAs at the end of the spring semester for minimum GPA purposes. Students that fall below the required GPA will be placed on probation for the fall semester. Students on probation must raise their grades to the correct cumulative average by the end of the fall semester or they will be dropped from the program.

Appeals Process: Individual students who have been dropped, but who feel that their work has been solid and who feel they can succeed at bringing their grade point average up by the end of the following semester may bring an appeal to the Honors Committee asking that they not be dropped from the program.

(Notice, the Honors Committee will only review cases if a student brings an appeal to them. They will not automatically review every case where students are dropped after a probationary period.)

The Honors Appeal should be no longer than one typed page. It should address the following issues:

- Why students feel they should not be dropped from the program. Here they may address significant academic improvement that shows their effort even though they haven't reached the guidelines. They may also discuss their involvement within the Honors Program.
- Their precise plans for improving their current GPA. What changes will they make in study habits and what help will they seek to improve their current GPA?
- Students should also include the names of two faculty members who are willing to act as references to support their continuation within the Honors Program. Students should talk to these faculty members first to ensure they have their approval to use their names. Students should supply phone numbers and e-mail addresses for their references.

The appeal should be turned in to the Honors Director on or before the 31st of January in order to give the Honors Committee plenty of time to make a decision.

Academic Dishonesty

As faculty, you need to be aware of important student policies. What follows is the most important policy for students to follow.

All excellent honors programs are committed to academic integrity. An Honors Program is only as good as the reputation of its students. Thus, the University Honors Program may dismiss students from the Honors Program who are found guilty of academic dishonesty.

The University itself has rules concerning academic dishonesty. As you read through the following list, keep in mind that you are also being held to the University's policy as stated in the Student Handbook, <http://www.spsu.edu/student/handbook.html#acedreg>.

Please make sure you are familiar with the following forms of academic dishonesty¹:

- **Cheating** is giving or receiving unauthorized help on academic work, products, and drawings or obtaining unauthorized access to examinations or other academic materials.
- **Fabrication and falsification** include inventing experimental data or changing experimental data, inventing references, or falsely attributing statements.
- **Plagiarism** is the intentional or unintentional representation of someone else's ideas or materials (a book, an article, an essay, your classmate's paper, a paper written for you by a good friend, material from the Internet) or the use of work you have already written for another class without citing the source or the use of that work. The penalty for plagiarism may be failure of the course or dismissal from the university. Clearly plagiarism is one of the most serious acts of academic dishonesty.
- **Reference padding** is the act of listing references you haven't actually read, either to meet a minimum imposed by the professor or to make it look like you did more work than you actually did.
- **Obtaining Unfair Advantage** is any act that gives one student unfair advantage over other students. Clearly cheating and plagiarizing are one way that students attempt to gain unfair advantage; however, acts such as removing pertinent texts from the library are also avenues for obtaining unfair advantage over others.
- **Aiding and Abetting** is the act of helping another student cheat, plagiarize, falsify information, fabricate information, or reference pad.

Grade Appeals

Do know your rights as a student. You can make a **grade appeal** if you believe a grade is unfair, but you must follow the appeal process as it is outlined in the SPSU Student Handbook: <http://www.spsu.edu/student/handbook.html#gradeappeal>. Always begin by consulting the professor who taught the course since a simple error in calculation or in entering the grades into Banner might be the cause of the confusion. While you can ask for my input in this process, do note that I am not within the chain of command for the grade appeal. It goes from professor to the Department Chair on up the ladder to the Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs if necessary.

¹ Definitions of fabrication and falsification, reference padding, and cheating were pulled from Bob Brown and Bob Harbort's handout on "Standards of Academic Conduct."

Field Trips

The Honors Program wants to support field trips since they can contribute to active, hands-on learning. There are at least two ways to handle the travel issues that go with field trips.

Because most students are of legal age, the school is not obligated to provide travel to class activities. However, prior to your trip you should fill out a **Request to Travel on University Business** form for you and your students to ensure the University is aware of your intent to travel. Your request also helps to ensure that field trip costs are covered by the Honors Program. Once you have done your paperwork, you can simply give students all of the pertinent information concerning the field trip, work with them to ensure all can make travel arrangements, and expect them to show up at the right time and place. You can also set a meeting place at the school and have students follow you to the correct location. Student drivers should be of legal age, have a current driver's license and insurance.

Curtis Sartor used the above method since his students took frequent trips. He found that it was beneficial to have a list of students who were attending the field trip and to take an informal roll call of the students once everyone has arrived at the site. He also had students sign a "hold harmless" release. Curtis liked to take photographs of the experience as well. If you do take a digital camera, consider sending copies to the Honors website for viewing.

If you have seven students or fewer, the school van is available. Once more you must fill out a **"Request to Travel on University Business"** for you and your students prior to the trip. The earlier the better since the Honors Program has a limited budget. You will also need to follow the guidelines from P&P 980 although Leigh Ann Holton, the Assistant Director for Student Center Operations, has updated that information with the following information:

- A written departmental request with the information required from P&P 980 should be submitted to Leigh Ann Holton. The information should include the following:
 1. Day(s) of use
 2. Approximate mileage
 3. Driver's name
 4. Pick up time
 5. Approximate time of return
 6. Total estimated cost of (\$25.00 per day plus \$0.45 per mile)
- The van will be approved on a first come, first serve basis.
- The request must be made by an employee.
- The employee must submit a license to campus security two days before the trip.
- The Honors Program will be charged thirty cents a mile.
- You may pick up a credit card from the Student Center Office and charge gas to it as needed. According to Al Churella who has used the van to travel, the credit card is normally attached to the van keys.

During regular business hours (M-F, 9am-5pm), the van may be picked up and returned to the Student Center Office. At all other times, pick up and return will be handled at the University Police Department. The van will be released to the employee of the university shown on the departmental request as "driver". The mileage and condition of the van will be

recorded when released and upon return of the van. Expenses to the user department will be made accordingly by the Accounts Payable Office.

Al Churella has used the van for a couple of trips; you may want to contact him as you make your own plans. You can reach him at ext. 7941 or by e-mailing him at achurell@spsu.edu.

Guest Speakers

The Honors Program would also like to promote the use of speakers as part of the program. Since speaker costs can get expensive, please talk to the Director before making any arrangements. You may also want to see if a speaker can be invited for a time when all Honors students can take part in the activity. P&P 415 deals with the use of guest speakers.

Faculty members who extend an invitation to a guest speaker are responsible for making all local arrangements including scheduling of facilities and publicity. If you consider the desired speaker to be controversial, the dean of students should be consulted in advance of the invitation to facilitate planning arrangements with the University Police, department of Public Relations, and other campus offices.

The following procedure should be followed in order to ensure that the Honors Program can set up payment for the guest speaker:

- When you talk to potential guest speakers, you will want to explain to them that you will be sending them a contract letter that they will sign and return to you. This letter serves as a payment request.
- The contract letter should include the following information:
 1. the purpose of the contract (to speak to class, etc.)
 2. the amount the speaker will receive as an honorarium and the date of the lecture
 3. the speaker's name and address
 4. a signature line for them to sign and date
 5. the speaker's social security number (required for payment) (add a line for them to fill this in under the signature line)

Once the contract letter is returned, it can be submitted for payment with an accounts payable form.

Funding for Equipment, Videos, and So On

Faculty who are interested in funding for equipment, videos, and so on should make a written request that indicates what is being requested, why the Honors Program is the proper program to pay for it, and what the cost will be to the program. One way to justify the Honors Program as the proper channel for payment is to explore the ways in which this item may be used for other Honors classes as well. If the item is field specific, the request should be handled by the faculty member's department.

Once requests are approved, the Honors Program Administrative Assistant will need the pertinent purchasing information so that a Departmental Request can be submitted for purchase. Requests for funding should be made as early as possible since the budget is limited.

Faculty/Course Evaluation Information

Evaluation forms in .pdf form (for filling out electronically) and in .doc form (for downloading, copying and filling out by hand) can be found on the web at <http://www.spsu.edu/honors/faculty/Evaluation.html>

The Honors Committee and the Director of the University Honors Program created the following guidelines for faculty evaluation. Honors faculty members have already submitted course proposals that meet the criteria of the Honors Program. Clearly the Honors faculty members are willing to develop more challenging courses and to create classes that open up the conversation to the Honors students. The data collected to assess teaching effectiveness is used mainly for formative evaluation--to aid teachers in their search for creating the best learning situations possible. Thus, the Director's letter is directed to the individual faculty member who can use it as he or she sees fit: for ideas for improving the course, for documentation of teaching effectiveness in their status and activity files, and so on.

The following data will be used to create a picture of teaching effectiveness for Honors faculty.

- ✓ **Honors Student Evaluations**: Each teacher is asked to use the Honors Student Evaluation form which can be found at the faculty website address listed above. This form consists of quantitative questions for assessing the rigor of the course and teaching effectiveness, and it consists of qualitative questions for assessing what specifically the teacher did well and what in particular the teacher could do to improve the course. **Please give students class time to fill in the evaluation and please collect these evaluations. If you feel uncomfortable collecting them yourselves, please assign a student to do so and have the student place the evaluations in a folder in my mailbox in the HTC Office. Please turn these in by the end of exam week.**
- ✓ Faculty members teaching in the Honors Program are also asked to submit additional data since the student experience of the course is only one measure of it. Teachers can pick **three items** from among the following options for means to supply other data concerning teaching effectiveness.
 - **Individual Course Assessment Forms (ICAs)**: These forms must be filled out for your individual departments for core and capstone courses. Please turn a copy in to me as well.
 - **Peer Observations**: documents showing either observer or observed roles may be included. Please note that these should concern your Honors course or someone else's Honors course.
 - **A Course Syllabus**: All classes must have a course syllabus. This is an easy piece of data to include.
 - **Teaching Materials**: Sample assignments, lecture notes, quizzes, tests, and so on.

- **Web Resources:** Materials from your homepages, Vista information, student assignments, and so on.
- **A Meta-analysis/Self Reflection** that explores what occurred within the classroom for the course. This may address descriptive elements or may be an analysis of what went well and what you are considering changing.
- **A Teaching Philosophy Statement:** What ideas are behind your classroom practices? What great thinkers/theorists have impacted your pedagogy?
- **Professional Development:** A list of workshops attended for purposes of improving teaching. A reading list of recent texts concerning your field or pedagogy.
- **SIRS evaluations for the class in question:** The current quantitative student evaluation tool for faculty evaluations. These are easier to submit for Spring classes than fall classes because of the timeline for when we receive the results.
- **A Faculty-generated Qualitative Evaluation Tool:** SIRS evaluations and other evaluations set up to quantify response often do not ask the questions we would really like answered. Create your own instruments that home in on issues of importance to you and ask students to fully address the questions in writing.
- **Student work for the class.**
- **Any Other Artifacts** that faculty members believe represent their teaching effectiveness

Faculty members will also want to annually assess the quality of the students in general and the quality of the service the Director supplies to them. The forms for doing so can also be found on the web at <http://www.spsu.edu/honors/faculty/index.html>.

Section II: Theory and Pedagogy

SPSU Honors Students: Academic Achievement, Motivation, and Personality Traits (2005)

Background

Over the course of the last two years I have heard many discussions concerning what to expect from Honors students. Several people have articulated the hope that Honors students would be different in very important ways: they would be brighter, more interested in the subject matter, more interested in learning, more motivated to do their work, and so on.

Some of the teachers have found it to be true that the students are brighter and more motivated. They have raved about how smart the students are and how willing they are to engage in the subject. Others have found one class to conform to this ideal, but a second class to be less than ideal. One teacher has found her classes to contain motivated, bright students, but the personalities of the classes to be very different, and at least one teacher has wondered if she indeed had Honor students in her class.

I have read two studies that explore issues of personality, ability, and the Honors student. The first by Larry Clark explores personality and "good" traits of Honors students using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The second by Daniel R. Grangaard explores personality traits of Honors students using the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS). Both studies may add some insight for us.

Clark found that Honors students tend to land at the intuitive end of the N-S scale for the MBTI versus the sensing end. Thus, Honors students are more likely to have insights beyond what their senses tell them (10 - 11). Clark's review of the introversion-extroversion scale showed more mixed results, but the tendency was for Honors students to be more introverted than the general population (11). His research supported the idea that Honors students were more likely to engage in activities with lower sociability than their counterparts. It also showed that they were more likely to want their own autonomy (11). Finally his research indicated that Honors students were more likely to be above average in "good" traits such as "persistence, intellectual energy, originality, and ambition" (15).

Grangaard found Honors students to be average in achievement motivation, average to below average in being organized and average on traits associated with effective leaders. Students were above average in their need to exert their autonomy and were on the whole more likely to be extroverted. Grangaard admitted that his findings were more than likely biased due to the fact that all the students were Honors students in a Psychology course.

It makes sense that a study of students from only one course would show bias, especially considering how different our experiences of Honors students have been here at Southern Polytechnic. I have found that several factors influence the quality, personality, and motivation of the students for each class. For example, the course itself and the day/time the course is taught greatly influence the make-up of the class and the students' motivation to do well in the course. It's the norm at SPSU for both faculty and students to gravitate towards classes that only

meet twice a week. Classes that meet Monday/Wednesday/Friday afternoons have drawn either students who are so interested in the content, they don't mind meeting at this time or students who must take an Honors class, but can't fit any other class in their schedule. This situation can set up an interesting dynamic for the classroom. Because of factors such as the above example, we're each going to have different experiences with Honors students and those experiences will more than likely differ with each class we teach.

Some teachers will consistently be lucky enough to experience a group of students who have taken their class because they are highly motivated to learn the subject. One such teacher has gotten the cream of the crop (according to high school grades and SAT scores) and she has consistently been happy about the quality of her students. Her experience contrasts starkly with another teacher who had a good number of students take her class because they needed an Honors class and hers was open. She expressed concerns early on about the quality of the students and their motivation level. Both experiences contrast with yet another teacher's experience. He really enjoyed the first class he taught (an extroverted group with a great interest in his subject matter), but found the second class to be quiet and a bit resistant to the work (an introverted group with less of an interest in the subject matter).

In my personal dealings with Honors students in and outside of the classroom, I have found them to be similar to other SPSU students in several ways. Honors students (this fits Grangaard's description to an extent) are not necessarily more motivated than other students to work hard if they don't have to do so. For example, I've never had a student ask for a particular teacher because the teacher is going to give out a lot of work. I have had students opt for "easy" classes, especially when those classes aren't in their field of interest and if they feel they need to get their grades up. Honors students (again, this fits Grangaard's findings) aren't necessarily well organized. In fact, my experience has been that some Honors students seem used to being able to get by on their intelligence and don't worry about organization and study habits much.

My classroom experience has shown that the students are clearly brighter, that they are often more motivated than regular students, and that if given clear guidelines for grading criteria, they will excel. On the negative side, I have found that some of them resist thinking creatively and outside of the box. There are probably several reasons for this resistance.

- Thinking outside the box isn't often rewarded in the academic world where linear, logical thinking is privileged.
- It's harder to evaluation success when thinking is creative. Since there is more ambiguity and complexity associated with it, it rarely is a test item and evaluation criteria may be "fuzzier."
- Finally, the type of students SPSU attracts is often even more logical and linear in thought than students who attend schools that don't have such a strong technological mission.

SPSU Honors Student

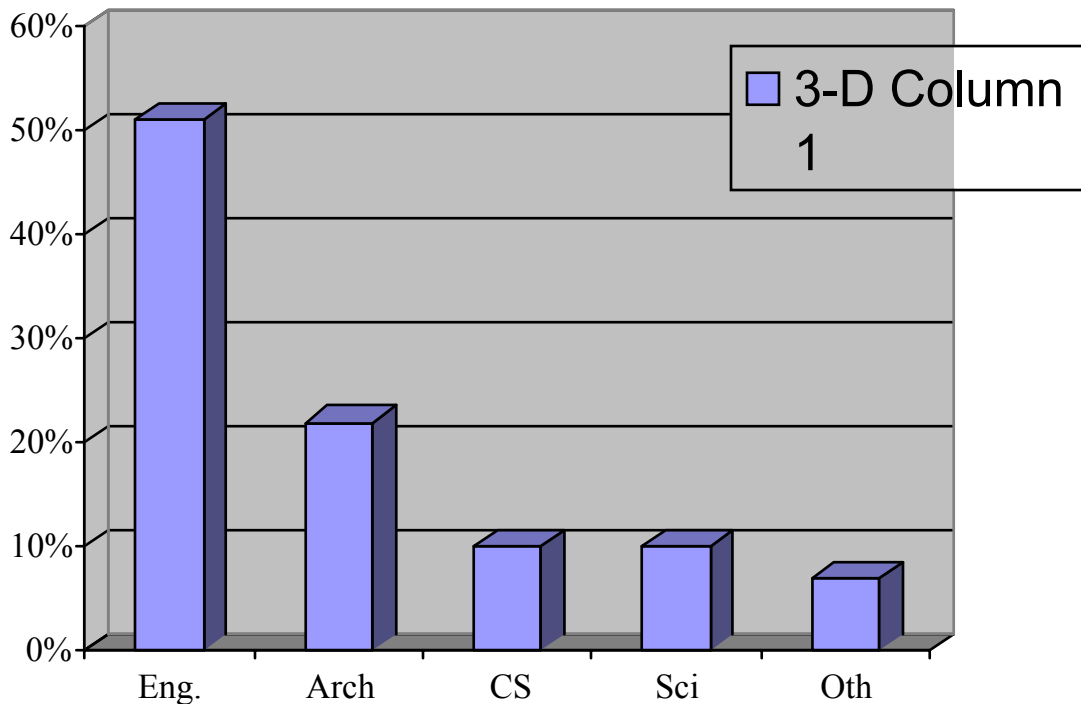
Who are the SPSU Honors students? According to statistics I gathered this summer, Honors students achieve better grades in high school and test better than the average SPSU student, which is to be expected given the qualifications of the Honors Program. (See the following table.)

	High School GPA	Verbal SAT	Math SAT	Total SAT
SPSU Students*	3.17	546	573	1119
Honors Students	3.64	596	635	1232

*(Clark, J. 9, 12)

Not surprisingly, Honors students at SPSU come in to the university with much better Math preparation and Math scores on the SAT. On average there is a sixty-two point difference between Honors students and SPSU students as a whole for the Math SAT. Since SAT scores (especially Math SAT scores) measure mainly analytical, left brain thinking, we can be pretty sure that our students come to us with decent logical, analytical, linear, problem-solving skills. The GPAs also indicate that students have very good left-brain thinking skills, and they often are good indicators of student motivation. It's less clear whether the GPA's measure creative thinking skills or right-brain thinking that privileges visual, spatial, perceptual, and nonlinear skills because these skills are not necessarily privileged in academic settings.

When you add the excellent grades and SAT scores to the choices Honors students make concerning their major field of study, our Honors may be among the most analytical and logical of thinkers on campus. (See the bar graph below.)



As you can see, most of our students are in fields that require excellent analytical, linear thought: half of our students are majoring in Engineering Technology fields. Another one tenth of our students are majoring in a Computer Science Field or a Math/Science field. Only one quarter of the students are majoring in Architecture, Construction or Civil Engineering and of those students only about ten percent are majoring in Architecture, the field at Southern Polytechnic that most fully privileges right-brain thinking.

The above information doesn't necessarily mean that we will get a classroom full of left-brain thinkers. It does seem to indicate, however, that we should realize that there may be some discomfort among our students when we teach creative thinking skills--one of the privileged skills of the Honors Program.

Summary and Conclusion

I would like to sum up the issues I have explored above:

- Honors students will have better academic skills than the average SPSU student.
- Numerous factors will help to determine their motivation as it concerns your class.
- Honors students are not necessarily drawn to classes with a lot of work any more than the average SPSU student is.
- Honors students are not necessarily more organized than the average SPSU student.
- Each class you teach has the potential to vary quite a bit in personality.
- Most students will be left-brain thinkers who are comfortable with linear, logical thinking patterns.
- Many students will be more uncomfortable with the complex, ambiguous, non-linear thinking patterns that go with right-brain thinking.

I am sure that the issues listed above haven't begun to fully explore the nature of Honors students and the nature of how that affects our classroom. For example, I have not yet really had a chance to explore how it will affect the students to know almost everyone in a class as they move through the Honors curriculum. However, I am going to use the above information to begin to explore what we can do in our Honors classrooms to work with and understand the needs of these students. Here are some ideas I have come up with given the issues discussed:

- We may want to leave some of our decisions concerning course content open until we begin to see how the personality of a class develops. Given the experiences of several teachers who have taught more than one class for the Honors Program, there is a good chance that the class personalities will vary and that adapting different curriculum ideas (to some extent) based on this knowledge may be helpful to the students.
- We probably want to come to the classroom with realistic ideas of who these students are. While they are bright, they are still undergraduate SPSU students and they aren't necessarily more motivated to do lots of work than the average student. This doesn't mean not asking for students to work hard, but it may indicate that we need to make it clear how the work relates to the course and/or simply understand that they may groan as much as any other student when we push them to work hard.
- Because many of the students prefer left-brain thinking, they will more than likely want a clear sense of the purpose behind the work you assign. They should easily understand instruction that is presented in a clear, well-organized manner.

- We do want these students to develop right-brain thinking. We don't necessarily want to cut down on such work. We may want to explain in logical terms the purpose of such work and its varying roles in our fields. We probably want to make our guidelines for grading such work extremely clear.

As you can see, I've been thinking on this topic a lot as I have talked with various teachers and students about their experiences. I'm not sure how much this discussion has been helpful to you, but it has helped me to sort out some of my own ideas as I prepare for my Honors Composition class. I hope that we will extend and build upon this discussion as we continue to work with Honors students.

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Tips for Creating Student Participation (2006)

In this section I would like us to build a list of ways in which we can actively engage students in the discussion for our classes early on so that students continue the trend of thinking, listening, speaking, and engaging in knowledge-making for the rest of our own class as well as within the Honors classes that follow.

When I was a teaching assistant at Florida State University, Ruth Mirtz--the Director of First-Year Writing Program at the time--and I wrote a section for the Program's teaching guide about student resistant.* What I have found is that most Honors students aren't resistant to engaging in classroom activities, but that they are instead introverted or following past rules of acknowledging authority by not speaking out of turn or are reluctant to speak out for fear of making a mistake. Three or four quiet students in a class of ten can create stilted conversation and a great deal of silence after a question is asked.

Here are tips for getting students participating early so that they continue to be actively part of the dialogue later.

- Run introductions for the first week. Each day ask students to say their name, nickname, and a piece of information about themselves or that is pertinent to what you are studying. Example, I get names and major fields the first day. Names and hobbies the second day. Names and the title of their favorite book/movie along with what made it a good story on the third day. I use this information to help students pick ideas for writing topics and for helping them to understand the importance of an interesting narrative for the first paper.
- Have students interview each other. Ask each of them to introduce the other student to the class. In larger classes ask students to find out three or four different things about three other people. While students may feel funny getting up and circulating within a classroom, doing so helps them gain a comfort-level with their classmates.
- Create a small-group assignment for the first or second day. Give students plenty of direction and time to talk. This serves two purposes: 1. They're discussing a pertinent issue, and 2. they're getting to know one another which increases their comfort for talking in class. Example, I get students discussing my grading conditions. They have to say what a grade represents, and they have to explore and define the terms I have supplied for how they will be graded. Ruth Mirtz always felt that small group and pair activities not only helped students to participate but that it also helped to ensure they didn't fall into semester-long stances of non-participation.
- When possible get students writing and sharing their writing. Electronic chats are very helpful especially synchronous ones since they are all talking at one time. These types of chats work very well for me with my most introverted students. Even when you have no access to computers for writing, it helps students. You can still have students write and develop their ideas before moving to a class discussion. They can get their "answer" to your question thoroughly developed before they need to respond verbally.

- Gay Lynn Crossley and Kim Haimes-Korn* have also written on creating active student participation. They suggest that teachers not be afraid of silence. Waiting for students to respond or letting them know that they are responsible for continuing the discussion will help them to learn to break the silence themselves and to appreciate the opportunity. They also suggest that you sit among the students when you wish to create discussion. Thus, you no longer are the figure in the front of the classroom telling them what to write down. You may want to form the chairs in a circle, seminar-style and foster a discussion style that doesn't always ask students to speak to you, through you. Help student to respond to each other in discussion as well. One way to get this started is to simply ask if anyone wants to respond to the question or statement another student made.

* The Florida State Teacher's Guide for First-Year Writing can be found at <http://english3.fsu.edu/writing/?q=node/167>

Service Learning in the Honors Classroom: What Difference Does It Make? (2006)

Introduction

I grew up in a family where helping others was a given. My parents have always been more than generous with their time, their money, and their tangible donations. I can remember taking food, clothes, or household items more than once to families in our community who were in desperate need of such basic necessities. A few years ago, my mother received a visit from a woman I attended school with (elementary through high school) and whose family we had assisted in many ways over the years. She told my mom what a difference that help had meant to her personally. She never felt like she was going without because of our kindness. And now she was working in a service capacity in her job, a direct influence of her childhood experience.

So now I encourage my own children, ages 11 and 13, to volunteer. We assist families during the holidays, make and deliver lunches to children for a local ministry's summer lunch program, and work with a local pet adoption facility to help homeless dogs find permanent homes, just to name a few ways we try to help out in our community.

This sense of volunteerism that I've grown up with and now work to instill in my own children made me wonder how I could encourage my Honors composition students to become more involved in their community as well. Although I knew of many students who were dedicated volunteers through their churches or other organizations such as the Boy Scouts, much too often did I hear students espouse the idea of "It's all about me." How much money can I make? What can I do in school to get by with doing the smallest amount of work? Why should I care about others' problems? I'm just a college student. I don't have money or time to dedicate to anybody else. I've got enough to worry about just trying to get through the next assignment, the next exam, the next week!!! These are just a few of the comments I would hear when we discussed moving outside of the classroom walls or out of the "Ivory Tower," so to speak.

I had heard of the need for high schoolers, and even middle schoolers, to become involved in community service so they could add "volunteering" to their college applications. I had also read a few articles about colleges and universities striving to include more service learning in course and school philosophies. So armed with my personal desire to motivate students to VOLUNTEER and a handful of articles and hearsay, I decided to get my Composition Honors students up and at 'em, literally.

The Service Project

In all of my composition classes, including the Honors class, I require three portfolios over the course of the semester. The portfolios include many components, ranging from daily exploratory writings required to prompt thoughtful class discussions, to photographs that visually support the students' writings, to final longer papers and reflections that pull together the entire concept of the portfolio. The second portfolio asks students to study an idea of "reality vs. make-believe." The topics may be anything that students prefer within the parameters of the overall theme. Students often choose topics that investigate their declared or potential majors, or home-school

vs. public school, and the like. With the Honors class, however, I saw this particular portfolio as an opportunity for the students to do more as a class when they thought of their own lives, in other words, their own realities, versus what life is like a mere five miles away from our campus in Marietta, Georgia. We all know that life as a college student can be tough in more ways than one, academically, financially, and socially. Though honestly, these students most often live in a bubble of college life, studying, working, and partying. And isn't that the way it should be? I can easily declare that my college years were some of the best, and most fun, of my life.

But I didn't want them to forget what life is like in the "real world" for many men, women, and children. Poverty, homelessness, and hunger surround ALL of us, ALL of the time, whether we choose to "see" it or not. So I included a requirement in the second portfolio that the students, twelve of them total, and I would visit our local MUST (Ministries United for Service and Training) to serve breakfast for the residents of the temporary shelter there. Located a few miles down the road from our university, the Elizabeth Inn at MUST is an overnight shelter that houses up to 60 men, women, and children for up to six months while the residents search for jobs and permanent housing. MUST also offers such services as a food pantry, clothing shop, and resume and job assistance for the general population in need of such.

This added service component meant that the students and I would have to break into two groups of six students each (plus me), plan what we wanted to serve for the two visits, arrive at MUST at 5:30 a.m., cook the food, and serve it. You can only imagine the moans I heard when I told them they had to get up by 5:00 a.m. to meet me at MUST. "You've got to be kidding?" "This is ridiculous!" "I don't know if I can get up at 5:00 a.m.," and on and on. But I stood firm, set the dates for our two visits, and worked to get the students motivated. I told them that the food they serve to these men and women might be the only good meal they get all day. I reminded the students that the individuals we would serve used to be someone's little baby, and maybe that baby's parents had all the hopes and dreams for him or her that their own parents had for them. I provided a lot of reasons and encouragement for our volunteerism as the dates drew near, and I also reminded them that this was a definite aspect of the "reality vs. make-believe" unit we were focusing on at the time.

A few weeks before we were set to serve breakfast, I asked the students to come up with a menu (within each group) that they would like to serve, and I reminded them that THEY would be doing all of the cooking. I was encouraged to see the two groups jump into the task of menu planning, fully discussing the food and drink options that might be nutritious for the residents while not being overwhelming for a group of college kids to prepare. Group 1 decided on frozen waffles, scrambled eggs, and toast with milk. Group 2 went with homemade pancakes, frozen sausage links, and orange juice.

With \$100 and support from the Honors Program Director, I headed to Costco, a local wholesale warehouse to purchase the food. I was able to get more than enough food to serve the expected 50 residents for under \$100.00, so I splurged and bought butter for the waffles and pancakes as well as some apple juice. The students were feeling good about their food choices when I reported that we were under budget with our shopping. I could tell they were getting more excited about the prospect of our visits to MUST, even though they also felt the need to continue to complain about the early mornings, which rolled around soon enough.

I arrived by 5:30 a.m. for our first group's visit and was surprised to see one or students waiting on *me*! We headed to the kitchen building where a few residents were already standing outside at that early hour, met the director of the dining room, and set to work. Within a few minutes, the remaining students arrived, and I happily "assigned" each student a job. Some kids whipped the eggs, some cooked, some set up the drinks, but everyone stayed busy. I asked everyone to bring a camera, so we all wandered about the kitchen and dining room to take photographs of our personal interpretations of what constitutes reality. Although we were not allowed to take pictures of the residents of the Inn for privacy reasons, the students could take pictures of the facility, the food, the set up, and each other, all of which allowed them to visually support their ideas of reality vs. make-believe when they would later reflect in writing on their experiences at MUST.

By 6:30 a.m., the residents were peeking inside from the porch, wanting to know if they could come in to eat. When the announcement was given, approximately 40 men and women of various races and ages poured through the door. They knew the routine. Find a table, deposit their belongings they would need for the day, and get in line to be served. The students enthusiastically greeted the residents and served the food they had so carefully prepared. Some of the more outgoing students carried on small conversations with the guests as they moved through the serving line, while the shy students offered good morning smiles. The residents were quickly served, some came back for seconds, before the community service volunteers assigned to work at MUST meandered into the kitchen to begin the clean-up.

We were finished. By 7:00 a.m., we were on our way back to campus, and we all were feeling pretty good about our hour and a half of helping others.

The second group of students and I met the next week, all with the same positive results. The most fun for me was seeing how concerned this particular group was about making sure the pancakes they prepared were "perfect." They didn't want to serve anything that wouldn't be acceptable. "Yes," I thought. "They're getting it." Of course the residents shouldn't receive less than perfect pancakes. After all, they're people, too, just like the students and me.

What Was Learned

When we met in class the following morning, after both groups of students had completed their service, we discussed the overall experience and how it fit into our ideas of serving others and what reality is like for more people than we'd like to admit. One young man was embarrassed that he'd asked if the residents *wanted* pancakes. "Of course they'd want the pancakes. They're homeless. What a dumb question," he lamented. But I reminded him that not everyone likes pancakes, so why should we assume that just because a person is homeless, he is going to eat anything put in front of him. We wouldn't eat just anything, would we?

When the students reflected in writing on their experiences, I saw how much the experience had helped them to reflect on themselves and how they might work to help those less fortunate. Chris Jackson, in his reflection entitled "The Irony of a Selfish Brat," wrote, "My English teacher had the wonderful idea that if she tortured us and forced us to work as slaves for people I've never seen in my life, it would help me to appreciate the world around me more. And who

can argue with that logic? I ask you.” Jason Fleischmann admitted that “This is the first volunteer work I can remember doing in a long time besides donating blood. Going in, I really had no idea what to expect.” Their initial apprehensions about the project were obvious early on in their reflections. And I wasn’t sure what to expect as I continued to read either. Were they going to continue in this vein of “torture” and uncertainty? Was my idea of a worthwhile service project just another item to check off of the “things-to-do” lists for these young men and women?

Fortunately, it wasn’t. Chris Jackson pondered:

There were so many kinds of people there, and they were probably all born in different situations. I found myself wondering what it was that brought them here. How did they come to be in this situation? Something that Mrs. Parker had said came back to me. She had said that she saw these people and tried to remember that they were someone’s baby. That somewhere there was or had been a mother and father who cared for that person. And then I thought about what it would be like for me, with my nice house and my closet full of clothes and my familiar things, if suddenly it were all gone.

And Valerie Overcash used the opportunity to reflect on her personal expectations for volunteering when she wrote:

I was kind and helpful. Just like normal, I would suppose you would say. But I think **MUST** opened up new doors for me. I know that the people I served **were** and **are** every day people. However, I didn’t treat them that way. I’m not saying my actions were inappropriate but I think that there is room for improvement. To not consider any circumstances or differences, and treat everyone equally.

Finally, Grayson Byrd offered this: “I can honestly say that I left **MUST** Ministries with a better understanding of what ‘reality’ is and that my world consists of certain aspects that cover ‘reality’ with whatever ‘make-believe’ I put into it.”

All of the students had similar responses to the experience; even getting up at 5:00 a.m. didn’t seem so horrible after all.

Ideas for Others Considering Service Learning

Service learning fits pretty easily into the composition framework because it asks students to look beyond, think more critically, and then reflect **IN WRITING** on their experiences. These are a few of the goals that good composition teachers stress in their classes on a daily basis. So why wouldn’t it work in any other classroom? There’s no reason it shouldn’t. A plethora of organizations and institutions in any small town or large city are begging for assistance at any given time, not just during the holidays. The opportunity to move out of our comfort zones and into the realities of class and ethnic divisions, poverty and the like, could fit into most any course. Students in psychology, education, even history or religious classes, could benefit from tutoring adult learners, volunteering in nursing homes, or assisting at a religious organization of their choosing. Such instances of getting out of the classroom and into the community offer students (and teachers) the chance to study in an up-close and personal way how choices we

make as individuals affect ourselves and so many others. What is life like for an illiterate adult? How do we make the decision to place our parents and grandparents into nursing facilities? What are the ramifications to the nursing home residents and their families? These are just a few of the questions that students might explore as a connection between the classroom and the community.

Conclusion

So, service learning in the composition classroom? Yes, it *does* make a difference. I can honestly say that this was a truly fulfilling experience for the students and me in more ways than one. First of all, it got us out of the classroom and into the kitchen, literally and figuratively, in order to provide assistance to those less fortunate than we. Secondly, I believe it helped all of us to re-evaluate and reconsider our own expectations for service to others. Next, it allowed the students to see another version of “reality” that they are rarely confronted with, and this tied in nicely with our class discussions of the overall theme of the unit. It provided an effective springboard for analyzing other possible methods we use to imbue our personal sense of “reality” and “make-believe” to our lives and the lives of others. In other words, do our perceptions and expectations meet the reality of the situation? And lastly, it gave the students and me in our reflections of the MUST experience an opportunity to write, to open up on paper, to ponder, meander, evaluate, and express ourselves through words and visual representation. Composition. Add that to service learning, and you end up with a great combination for helping others and learning more about yourself.

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