



Moreno Valley College Honors Program

Best Practices and Policies for Honors Contract Course Instruction

Introductory comments:

An Honors contract is a platform for enriching the content of a transfer-level course, meriting credit toward Honors Program completion for MVC Honors students who satisfy the contract's stipulations. Contracts are arranged through an individualized proposal articulated by the participating faculty member and approved by the MVC Honors Council.

In working with faculty to offer Honors curriculum, **our program's guiding principle is to respect the relevant discipline and the subject-matter experts who teach it. Still, Honors courses need to have a set of identifiable, common characteristics that unite them in a common purpose.**

In preparing an Honors contract, then, faculty should keep in mind four principal aims that govern Honors curriculum and instruction:

- 1) Strengthen students' aptitude for critical thinking;
- 2) Produce effective communicators, both in speech and in writing;
- 3) Create a community of thinkers who share ideas, offer constructive criticism for each other, and collaborate on projects;
- 4) Nurture each student's creative and scholarly potential.

With these aims in mind, a contract instructor will design a project or assignments, likely with student input, which **go above and beyond the regular coursework. This additional work should relate to the skills and knowledge taught in the class, but it should take this content to a more advanced level and be separable from the work the student completes along with every other student in the regular course.**

Establishing a contract:

- A formal proposal must be submitted through the form provided by MVC Honors, available on the program website.
- The contract proposal is designed primarily by the participating faculty member, who has final say regarding its content, but consultation with interested students is strongly advised.
- Any contract with an MVC Honors student must be approved by the MVC Honors Council. Contracts with willing faculty at any RCCD college are welcome but are subject to the relevant policies of MVC Honors. Correspondingly, MVC faculty are welcome to draft contracts for RCC and Norco Honors students, but must submit proposals to the relevant Council using following their policies and documentation.
- While case-by-case exceptions may be made for emergency approval, contract proposals should be filed with the MVC Honors Council by the deadlines below.

16-week contracts – end of second week of September (Fall) or second week of March (Spring)

8-week contracts – end of first week of the course (Fall or Spring)

Winter contracts – end of first week of December

Summer contracts – end of first week of June

- The MVC Honors Council will respond to proposals as quickly as possible with either approval, rejection, or a request to resubmit with amendments. In the case of proposals submitted for Fall or Spring, determinations are made by the MVC Honors Council as a whole. In the case of intersession courses, determinations are made by the MVC Honors Program Coordinator(s).

Parameters of a contract:

- **A contract must be offered in association with an existing non-Honors, transfer-level course in which the student is enrolled.** Excluded are courses available in the standalone Honors seminar format at MVC within the present or upcoming semester. Exceptions to this exclusion are possible in extraordinary circumstances, such as a student's imminent graduation.
- **A student should complete at least one Honors course prior to contract coursework or have a demonstrated interest in the subject matter, completing at least one course in the discipline and perhaps considering it for a major or minor.** While exceptions to this are possible for faculty members familiar with Honors coursework who are convinced the student has the requisite skill and interest to make the contract's success likely (in such cases, evidence to this effect should be supplied in the proposal), experience shows that contracts risk floundering when students are unfamiliar with either Honors coursework or the relevant subject matter.
- Students are encouraged to take on no more than one contract in a given term.
- Faculty may offer no more than five contracts in a given term.
- A contract requires students to complete work in addition to the regularly-assigned coursework, constituting an enriched academic endeavor. This work could include additional reading, writing, research, or oral explorations of material, reflecting a deeper, more complex understanding of the subject matter. More specifically, the contract must incorporate **at least five** of the attributes in the facing column relative to the associated regular course. **The extent of these additional components should require 20-40 hours of work for the student over the course of the term, including at least six hours of live discussion with the instructor.**

- Greater depth and/or breadth of subject matter investigation, especially requiring synthesis of different points of view
- Greater enhancement of skills in critical thinking, analysis, and interpretation of course subject matter
- Higher degree of student participation and involvement in the class
- More advanced, supplemental reading, especially from primary sources
- More opportunities for writing, and at a higher standard
- Student presentation in the class, on campus, or at RCCCD's and/or the Honors Transfer Council of California's student research conferences
- More opportunities for student research
- Integration of research source material in the work product, particularly in cross- or interdisciplinary contexts
- Use of resources or consultants from beyond the campus, such as university libraries, local professionals/leaders in related fields (lab directors, business leaders, public employees, non-governmental organizations, artists, etc.)
- Community-based research experiences: field trips, interviews, cultural events, service engagement
- Leadership in the classroom: leading study groups, facilitating class discussion, teaching a portion of a class meeting, etc.
- Other (subject to MVC Honors Council approval)

- **Contract work must be evaluated separately from the regular coursework, and so should be kept separate from that coursework.** It is not a form of “extra credit,” nor is failure to satisfy a component of a contract cause for lowering a student’s grade in the regular course. **Simply assigning more rigorous versions of regular assignments should therefore be avoided - the student must be assigned the same coursework as their peers, with the contract work considered as separate but complementary.**
- Students often express an initial interest in a project that is too broad in its ambitions, aiming to address a question or complete a task that is simply too expansive for the time commitment and duration parameters of an Honors contract. The more carefully considered and detailed the proposal is, the less this is a concern.
- If left unsupervised, students may procrastinate and get in over their heads, especially towards the end of the term. Well-formulated contract proposals set deadlines, involve regular meetings, and require tangible outcomes along the way to keep students on track.
- The completion of an Honors contract proposal is the joint responsibility of the instructor and the student.
- Beyond basic transportation expenditures, **any resources the student is encouraged or required to make use of in fulfilling the contract should be without additional cost to the student.** Research should therefore make use of open course materials, texts on reserve, etc.
- Honors contracts are graded on a “Pass/No Pass” basis only. The student must receive a “C” or better in the regular course to receive a “Pass” for the contract.
- If a significant portion of the contract is not fulfilled by a stated deadline, the faculty member may cancel the contract, subject to MVC Honors Council/Coordinator approval.
- If a student fails to complete the Honors contract, they may still receive a grade for the

course, and this will not count towards program completion requirements.

- If circumstances warrant a grade of Incomplete in the regular course, a student must also receive an Incomplete for the contract. Likewise, a student is not eligible to receive an Incomplete for the contract if the student is not eligible to receive an Incomplete for the regular course.
- While a contract is a one-to-one arrangement between instructor and student, the same contract assignments, deadlines, and specifics may be made available to more than one student.

Faculty and student eligibility:

- The option to teach an Honors contract class is available to any MVC faculty member and is completely voluntary. Faculty unfamiliar with Honors instruction are welcome to learn more by talking with veteran Honors instructors and attending Council meetings.
- The option to participate in an Honors contract is available to any MVC Honors student, keeping in mind that per program policy students may have **only two contract or online asynchronous standalone Honors courses count towards the five Honors courses required for program completion**, i.e., at least three courses must be face-to-face, hybrid, or online synchronous standalone Honors courses.
- Students should be aware that completion of a contract will not be recorded on their RCCD transcript. This is a purely internal agreement between the MVC Honors Program and the faculty member and student, and fulfillment of a contract will be included in the reports the program issues to transfer institutions concerning a student’s progress through/completion of the program.

Frequently Asked Questions about MVC's Honors Contracts

Why are we offering Honors contracts?

Contracts offer the "Honors experience" to more students and more instructors in courses that would not otherwise be available for Honors credit. Contracts are recommended by UCLA, and they are an established instructional model supported by the Honors Transfer Council of California.

Are contracts courses restricted to certain departments?

No. Honors contracts may be offered in any course that meets the criteria of a non-Honors, transfer-level course in which the student is enrolled. The aim is to provide access to Honors appropriate work in courses not offered in the standalone Honors seminar format due to facilities limitations, scarcity of non-Honors course sections, instructor unavailability, etc.

How can I let students know I am interested in offering contract coursework?

A simple announcement on the first day of class is a great idea. You can also contact the MVC Honors Program coordinator, who will place you on a list of interested faculty members maintained on our program website - Honors students are regularly referred to this list.

If the associated non-Honors class is canceled for low enrollment, but a student still wants an Honors contract, can I still teach the contract?

Unfortunately, no. The Honors contract is linked to the associated non-Honors course, where the students will acquire the bulk of their subject matter knowledge. If possible, the student can be admitted to a different section of the same course and offered the contract, or can be encouraged to await an offering in a future term.

Once a student has entered into an Honors contract, can a student withdraw from an Honors contract and remain in the regular course?

Yes. A student may choose not to complete or (for whatever reason) may be unable to complete an Honors contract but complete all coursework for the regular course. If so, the student will be able to earn normal course credit, though not credit toward Honors Program completion. In fact, a student can fail to complete the Honors contract but earn an A in the regular course.

How are Honors contracts graded?

An Honors contract is graded on a "Pass/No Pass" basis and the relevant work will in no way affect the student's grade in the course - the Honors student's grade in the course is based on the same assignments and criteria as the other students in the course.

How many student contracts may a faculty member take on in a given term?

Anywhere from one to five students. We want to ensure that both faculty and students can give the additional work the time and attention it will need.

Since faculty can only teach at most five Honors contracts students per term, what are some suggestions to help determine which students I should prioritize?

The MVC Honors Council recommends the following considerations:

1. Is the student a member of the MVC Honors Program, having MVC as their home college?
2. How close is the student to graduation and program completion?
3. Is the regular course part of the student's major prep transfer requirements?
4. Do you have an established working relationship with the student that improves the likelihood of contract completion?
5. How early on did the student approach you?

Being specific, which kinds of projects are appropriate for contract work?

Honors contract assignments/projects explore topics that are more advanced than regular lower division course work. They encourage research beyond normal course assignments, rely more extensively on primary source documents, require more critical thinking and extended analysis not expected in regular course work, and encourage creative projects beyond the regular course requirements. While not an exhaustive list, suitable assignments for Honors contract courses include:

- Research paper
- Quantitative/qualitative research project
- Presentation
- Creative writing or fine arts work
- Research Journal
- Film
- Computer program

Am I able to look at sample contract proposals that have been accepted by the MVC Honors Program and the student completed successfully?

Yes, the section of MVC Honors Program webpage concerning contract courses includes sample high-quality contract proposals for your review.

Where can I go if I have more questions?

Just get in touch with the MVC Honors Program coordinator using the contact information on the program website or attend an MVC Honors Council meeting. Reaching out to Honors instructors in or adjacent to your discipline is also a great idea.

We encourage you to look into participating in an Honors contract!