

Course Contract FAQs for Students

What is an Honors contract?

An Honors contract is an agreement between a student and a professor to do extra work in a regular (non-Honors) course with the purpose of receiving Honors credit for that course. It should exceed the work done in a non-Honors class and should be intellectually challenging and stimulating (and, if at all possible, creative and unique). At the same time, a contract project should not be an overwhelming amount of work akin to taking an additional two or three hours of coursework (think quality, not quantity here). See also page two of the Contract Proposal Form and the list of sample contract projects, below.

Where do I get a Contract Proposal Form?

The form is available online (both on Blackboard, under “Honors Documents,” and on the Honors website). It is also available in the Honors College office.

What courses may be used for contracts?

Any 2000-level or above course, not including regular Honors-only courses. Most students contract courses in their major or minor, but you may contract any 2000-level or above courses in any discipline. On occasion, you may need to contract a 1000-level course. If this is the case, simply state on the form why you want to contract a particular 1000-level course: chances are very good that Dean Bell will approve it if you do.

How do I choose a course to contract, and how do I get the instructor to agree to the contract?

You should try to choose courses that interest you and for which contracts will be real benefits to you. Sometimes you will be able to contract ahead of time (perhaps with an instructor you know), but sometimes you will need to size up a course (and the instructor) before asking about a contract. Regardless, you need to form a general idea of what a contract project might be (or at least be able to tell the professor which course topics you find particularly interesting). Don't approach a professor without any ideas.

When you have a basic contract idea, approach your instructor and, if necessary, explain what a contract is. Bring in a copy of the Contract Proposal Form and this FAQ sheet for your professor so that s/he can see what a contract typically entails. Do your best to design a contract topic that is interesting and useful for both you and your instructor. Dean Bell will be happy to discuss contracts further with your instructor.

How do I apply for a contract?

Once you and your professor decide on your contract project, you will complete the Contract Proposal Form. Fill in the contract description in detail. Then get the required signatures (from you, your instructor, and your instructor's department chair). Take the completed contract proposal to the Honors College office for final approval.

How detailed does my contract proposal need to be?

Give as much detail as possible. Certainly avoid overly general descriptions, such as “student will write an extra paper.” If your contract description is too general, it will be returned to you for revision.

What kind of extra work will I be doing?

It depends on the course, the topic, and the agreement you reach with your instructor. There are many different forms a contract can take. Some will involve extra reading and extra writing, but you and your instructor should feel free to design the contract that will be the most interesting and the most beneficial to both of you. In the past, students have satisfied contracts in many different ways: teaching parts of the class, leading discussions, designing course or website documents, performing research tasks, tutoring, giving a performance, producing artistic or electronic products, and many other projects. There is no set-in-stone form that a contract must take. Again, you and your professor may contact Dean Bell if either of you has any questions. See also the list of sample course contracts, below.

What are my professional obligations when my professor and I agree to do a contract?

Your professional obligations are clearly stated in the Contract Proposal Form: namely, that you will complete the agreed upon project by the end of the semester and that you will meet twice per month with your professor. If you cannot complete the contract, you must inform the professor immediately and schedule an appointment with Dean Bell. You will not be cleared to do any future contracts until the matter is resolved with her (and we do understand that there can be good reasons for not completing a contract, but it is still your responsibility to remain in open communication with your professor and with Honors).

What are the contract meeting requirements?

The contract proposal stipulates “at least twice per month” (bi-weekly) meetings, but there is some flexibility in how meetings are conducted. For instance, it may be acceptable to “meet” with your instructor through e-mail or Skype, particularly later in the semester, when you are likely to be working more independently. The specific details and timing of your meetings are for you and your instructor to work out. Ultimately, of course, you are responsible for arranging meetings.

What is the deadline for submission of Contract Proposal Forms?

The deadline is the 12th class day of each semester. If there are extenuating circumstances, and you know your contract will be submitted after the deadline, e-mail the Honors College (honors@shsu.edu) and explain why. It is possible that a contract will be approved after this deadline, but do not assume that it will be. Do everything you can to get your contract proposal turned in on time.

What final form should the contract report take?

That is between you and your instructor, although you may contact Dean Bell with any questions or concerns you might have. In some cases, there might not be a physical report at all, particularly if you did some alternative activity, such as tutoring.

How is the contract finalized?

Your instructor will need to complete the Contract Certification Form. You are responsible for giving this form to your instructor, who will complete it and mail it or bring it to the Honors office. It is preferable that your instructor complete this, but it is acceptable for you to get the signature and then deliver it to the Honors College office yourself.

What is the deadline for turning in the Contract Certification Form?

All Contract Certification Forms are due in the Honors College office by the day on which grades are due (the Monday after graduation).

What if I miss the deadline?

Turn it in anyway as soon as you are able. If by some chance it is not complete, contact your professor and Dean Bell immediately. It is possible that you can complete it after the semester ends and submit it at the beginning of the following semester (that is up to your professor).

How many contracts can I do each semester?

The number of contracts depends on several factors, including your graduation date, semester course load, and whether or not you are also taking an Honors course or seminar. Typically, though, students take three- to six-hours of Honors per semester, so you can do two contracts if you are not also in a seminar or Honors class. In extenuating circumstances, a student may contract three courses, but s/he must have advance approval from the Dean Bell. Under no circumstances can a student contract more than three classes in a semester.

Is it possible to contract a course over the summer?

Students who have extenuating circumstances (e.g. are graduating early or started the Honors College late), might be able to contract a summer course, but only with Dean Bell’s approval. You must schedule an appointment with Dean Bell prior to the Summer Session to discuss the additional requirements needed to do a summer contract. Any contract forms submitted for summer will not be considered if you have not received prior approval.

Is it possible to contract an online course?

Yes. Honors students may contract two classes (up to six hours) of online courses. This does not include the Honors online seminar.

Is it possible to contract a study abroad course?

Yes. Students may contract one study abroad course (up to four hours) for Honors credit with prior approval from Dean Bell.

How many hours of Honors credit do students earn in variable-hour or six-hour classes?

Students will receive up to four hours of Honors credit for variable-hour and six-hour classes.

Is it possible to do a contract with a professor if I am not taking a course with that professor?

No. Contracts are projects that can only be done in courses in which you are currently enrolled; however, pending your course instructor's approval, you may also work in consultation with another professor on the course contract project.

Do I get a grade for the contract?

No, but in order to receive Honors credit for successfully completing a contract, you must earn an A or B in the course.

Sample Contracts:

Below is a list of several highly successful contract projects undertaken by professors and Honors students in a variety of disciplines. If you have had any contract experiences that you have found particularly exciting and interesting, please e-mail Dean Bell with details (honors@shsu.edu).

- Learn Middle English
- Create a piece of original artwork based on your interpretation of select literary works
- Perform a scene from a play that is included on the class reading list
- Assist with a research project in a lab with the goal of submitting an abstract and presenting a poster at a conference
- Create a power point presentation on the Greek Archaic Age and present it to the class
- Teach the class how to make tabouli in Arabic
- Write a fantasy fiction short story in a non-English class related to the course materials (say, a psychology course)
- Keep a meditation and mindfulness journal and reflect on the efficacy of the various techniques used
- Critique a book related to some topic in class that you find interesting but that is not included on the syllabus
- Create a 10-12 minute research project and present it at the URS

NOTE: If your questions are not answered by this FAQ, contact Dean Bell at honors@shsu.edu.