



## **Honors Distinction Project Guidelines** (rev. 8/19)

The aim of the Distinction Project is to provide Honors students with an opportunity to explore a subject or field in greater depth than allowed in the main college curriculum. The goal is for students to see connections between knowledge and skills and develop an understanding of how these might be applied at a professional level.

During the third and fourth years, students bring their academic, intellectual, cultural and/or service interests to bear on a distinctive extended Project. HNRS 111-114 (the initial stages of the Honors Portfolio) provide academic enrichment and a co-curricular foundation out of which the Distinction Project emerges. The Project should be the equivalent of two units of credit, span at least two semesters (summer can count with approval, though prevailing tuition rates apply if academic credit is sought), and include a significant written or creative work. It is expected that each Distinction Project will be shared with an on- or off-campus audience through presentation or performance, as appropriate.

The Distinction Project may take many forms; examples include but are not limited to the following:

- Two-unit research or creative Project
- Semester or year of study away with associated Project
- Extended service learning Project
- Internship + related one-unit research Project.

Students will be expected to engage in regular reflection throughout the Project as well as a more extended final reflection that both caps the Project and connects it to the Honors e-Portfolio. The culminating written or creative work also becomes part of the Honors e-Portfolio.

In most cases credit will be taken in the appropriate disciplines. For Projects not registered in an academic department, students may enroll in HNRS 405/406/407 or HNRS 416 as appropriate. Honors Distinction Projects may simultaneously fulfill requirements for Honors in the major or other program requirements in individual departments, subject to departmental requirements. Distinction Projects are not required, however, to correlate with a student's major.

### **PROJECT GUIDELINES**

#### **HNRS 113/114**

In their second year, all Honors students enroll in the second part of the Portfolio Seminar sequence (HNRS 113-114). During both semesters students are responsible for attending Distinction Project Preparation Meetings that are relevant to their interests and emerging plans. A student may propose a Distinction Project during her Hnrs 114 term, but in most cases has an additional year (fall and spring of the third year) to submit the proposal. The goal is for the student to have a clear, purposeful, and directive starting point by the middle of Hnrs 114. Distinction Project Preparation Meetings will also be

devoted to finding suitable Project Supervisors. It is not the responsibility of HNRS 113/114 instructors to find possible Project Supervisors. The student must conduct that research and contact the potential Supervisor.

Proposal development must include a drafting and revision process that includes the Project Supervisor. It is recommended that this work involve several contacts with the Supervisor during the weeks prior to submission. Two weeks prior to the Proposal due date you must submit the name of your Project Supervisor, your Project title, and a preliminary project summary to the Honors Director. The Honors Director will share this guidelines document, a Project Supervisor Questionnaire, and the Honors Program Advisory Group (HnrsPAG) rubric with your Project Supervisor at that time, and will remind the Supervisor that HnrsPAG expects ample contact between the student and the Project Supervisor prior to Proposal submission.

### **PROJECT PROPOSAL**

Students may or may not be ready to develop and submit a formal Project proposal during HNRS 114. However, formal Project proposals must be submitted no later than the Friday before Spring Break of the student's 3<sup>rd</sup> (Junior) year.

Distinction Project Proposals must be submitted on the appropriate Distinction Project Proposal form and include:

- Project Summary
- Project Background
- Personal Background
- Project Outline
- Timeline and Plan for Academic Credit
- Study Away Clarification (if applicable)
- Budget (and justification)
- Designated Project Supervisor and Committee Members

Detailed instructions can be found on the proposal form.

### **Honors Advisor and HnrsPAG APPROVAL**

When the student has produced his/her formal proposal, met with the Supervisor to discuss the Project and obtained Supervisor and committee signatures, the proposal must then be submitted to his/her Honors Advisor for review. The due date for this is the Friday before fall/spring break. The Honors Advisor will review the proposal for appropriateness and completion, and may request, or require, that the student work with the Project Supervisor to make changes to the proposal in preparation for Honors Program Advisory Group (HnrsPAG) review. Any changes must be completed by the second Monday after the fall/spring break, when the Honors Advisor's signature is due. Once the Honors Advisor's signature is obtained, the proposal can be submitted by the student to the Honors Director and HnrsPAG for formal approval. The Project Supervisor Questionnaire must also be submitted (by the Project Supervisor). HnrsPAG further ensures that all components of the Project Proposal have been properly completed, and provides input regarding quality of the Project and an estimate of its feasibility. Distinction Project funding is granted when the Project is approved.

Once the Project Proposal has been approved, the student is officially eligible to begin work. IRB approval, if applicable, is not required prior to proposal submission, but must be obtained before any human subjects-related work is begun, per College policy (see: [http://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z\\_index/institutional\\_review\\_board](http://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z_index/institutional_review_board)).

Sometimes Project plans change midstream, either owing to student choice or to circumstances beyond the student's control. In cases of significant change to a Distinction Project, consult the Honors Director for advice on whether a proposal revision should be submitted to HnrsPAG. Only large-scale topic changes need be reported to HnrsPAG. Failure to seek approval for significant Project changes could jeopardize a student's ability to fulfill Honors Program requirements.

## **STRUCTURE**

### Parts One and Two: An Introduction

The Distinction Project consists of two parts. Part One can include internship, service learning, study away, and/or scholarly/creative work. Part two entails scholarly or creative work, typically as part of an Independent Study/Honors in the major. These may be pursued in any order and need not be immediately consecutive. The standard expectation is that Part Two will immediately follow Part One. However, curricular and skills requirements in some disciplines may necessitate otherwise. Depending on HnrsPAG and Supervisor approval, Part Two may, in some cases, be deferred to a later date. For example, students could do Study Away in the fall of their 3<sup>rd</sup> (Junior) year and then complete Part Two of the Project in the spring of their 4<sup>th</sup> (Senior) year. For some Projects it may make more sense to do Part Two first. For example, students might spend a semester conducting research or working on a creative product before going away for a semester to finalize or cap their research. Their final product would be due at the end of their semester away. Finally, students who do choose to pursue study away need not necessarily count that as either Part One or Two. Rather, they might do a semester of Scholarly/Creative Work (see below) on campus, followed by study away as part of their regular curriculum and then return for Part Two of Independent Study to complete their Project. Students pursuing this path, in consultation with their Project Supervisor, might continue to gather information, inspiration, and so on beyond their coursework for the host institution that they then apply to Part Two upon return.

### Part One

Part One of the Project, whether it occurs in a student's 3<sup>rd</sup> (Junior) or 4<sup>th</sup> (Senior) year, may take any of several possible forms. Here the student gains knowledge, training and experience that will be applied to the final Project. Part One should include a clear timeline and statement of Project goals. It should entail one of the following categories:

1. Internship
  - a. Typically following current departmental guidelines for Internships (hands-on experience or apprenticeship with a business/institution/organization/professional individual etc.) If Project is not appropriate to a single discipline, student may enroll in HNRS 416.
2. Service Learning
  - a. Student engagement with an institution or organization, likely, but not necessarily a non-profit, in which the student actively furthers the activities and mission of the institution/organization.

### 3. Study Away

- a. Semester away from campus (either abroad or “in the field” for domestic Projects).
- b. Student work on the Project will occur alongside coursework at the host institutions and will be monitored by regular contact with the RC Project Supervisor.
- c. Proposals including a study away term must include clear description of work to be undertaken during the term, evidence of the value of the study away location to the overall Project and, importantly, evidence of the feasibility of the work. Usually feasibility is established through sharing of contacts made or facilities/communities present in the chosen location.

### 4. Scholarly/Creative Work

- a. Students may be doing traditional text-oriented research; they may be doing lab-work in the sciences; they may be doing studio or performance work in the arts; or there may be a combination of some of these as determined by the Project Supervisor.
- b. Will often take the form of an Independent Study and follow departmental guidelines for such.

Many elements of the Distinction Project, including ongoing reflection and public presentation, are also elements of Pathways Projects. Students are encouraged to design one or both parts of the Distinction Project in accordance with Pathways guidelines and to apply for Pathways funding as appropriate.

Note: In some cases, such as in departments where a student’s Distinction Project work is tied to a series of .5 unit research credits, it may be difficult for a student to achieve the equivalent of two units of academic credit if proposing the project in the junior year despite a large amount of credited work that is clearly preparatory toward the Project. In such cases the student and project supervisor should communicate with the Honors Director, and may be invited to submit a petition for up to .5 unit of Distinction Project credit to be granted in the proposal term itself (provided the overall proposal is approved by HnrsPAG).

### Part Two

Part Two of the Distinction Project entails scholarly or creative work, typically as part of an Independent Study. Like Part One, Part Two should include a clear timeline and statement of Project goals. For many students, Part Two of the Distinction Project will also fulfill honors in the major requirements (subject to departmental approval).

### Reflection

Students should participate in regular reflection throughout the Distinction Project. At the end of each semester spent working on the Project, students will post a reflection essay under the Distinction Project tab of their Honors e-Portfolios. This essay is intended to help students contextualize their experiences and should reflect on connections between the Project, the student’s coursework, the broader community and the student’s personal/professional development, as well as connecting current progress to the following semester’s work and the final product. At the completion of the Project, students will submit a culminating reflection tying the entire Project together and drawing connections between course work, personal development, and societal engagement.

### Distinction Project Completion

The Distinction Project concludes with the following four elements. Where relevant (with text documents, for example), the final product must be submitted to all committee members in time for them to review the product prior to the oral defense.

1. Final Product. This may take a number of forms:
  - a. A text document including a thesis, original research and conclusion, along with a review of the relevant literature. Document length will typically range from 25-30 pages, (the rough standard for Honors in the Major), but may vary according to disciplinary norms.
  - b. A body of artistic/creative work, which might entail exhibition or performance as relevant to the field and determined by the Project Supervisor.
  - c. A methodical presentation of data/experiments with written explanation/conclusions as relevant to the field and determined by the Project Supervisor.
2. Oral Defense
  - a. A presentation of the student's Distinction Project to the Supervisor and Committee for approval.
  - b. Supervisor in consultation with the Committee assigns a grade and reports approval to HPAG to acknowledge final successful completion of the Project.
  - c. Passing Grades for Honors Distinction Project: B or higher (note this differs from current standards for Honors in the Major).
3. Public Presentation
  - a. Presentation of the work in a public venue either on or off campus. Possible venues include but are not limited to student or disciplinary conferences (including poster sessions); public or private galleries; theatres/recital halls; the annual spring Virginias Collegiate Honors Council conference; and the Showcase or RC Conference on Research and Creativity. It is permissible for the public presentation to take place prior to the oral defense.
  - b. Where appropriate and at Supervisor's discretion, students are encouraged to submit work for publication.
4. Reflection

Satisfactory completion of Distinction Project reflections as part of the Honors e-Portfolio including the culminating reflection essay.

The final stages of the Distinction Project require the active participation of the Project Supervisor with support from HnrsPAG and other Roanoke College constituents in bringing the student's work to a public venue.

Completion of the Distinction Project is signified to the Honors Director via submission of the Distinction Project Defense Grade Form and Defense Checklist.

## **FUNDING**

Distinction Project expenses are Projected to fall under several categories, as follows:

- Student travel abroad (e.g. for study abroad and on-site research) –Airfare, possibly some living expenses, and expenses for enrichment or research related travel. Depending on the merit of

the proposal and funding available, airfare requests may be partially funded (e.g. \$500 of a \$1500 ticket to and from Fiji for a study abroad term). Summer travel is permitted.

- Research supplies and local travel (e.g. lab supplies, books, creative arts supplies, support for trips to research libraries such as the National Archives, support for travel to conduct interviews).
- Organizing community events and/or service Projects (e.g. environmental clean-ups, school mentoring programs)
- On-campus summer research: If your Distinction Project plan includes at least 10 weeks of full time summer research on campus you should apply for a Summer Scholar award (or a departmental summer research position, if available) and indicate this in the appropriate checkbox in the budget section of the proposal form. You should also request separate summer stipend funding through Honors as a fallback in case Summer Scholar funding is not awarded. \$125/week of summer stipend and free housing may be requested for up to 10 weeks. (Summer housing need not be a line item in your budget, but it does represent a significant savings of roughly \$2000 for a ten-week summer residency period.) Summer Scholar funding and selection for departmental summer research positions will supersede Honors summer stipend funding. Whether funded by Summer Scholar award, an academic department, or by the Honors Program, summer on-campus Project work is expected to be full-time. Students may not enroll in any coursework other than independent study directly associated with the Project or hold a job on- or off-campus during the Summer Scholar/Summer Departmental Research/Honors stipend period. Please note that summer tuition rates apply for courses undertaken outside of the Summer Scholar Program. Summer internship and independent study rates are much lower than the rate charged for a classroom course.
- Research incentives (e.g. stipends for interviewees or focus group attendees, honoraria for key research informants)
- Conference fees and travel expenses associated with local, national and international research presentations: Remember that all Distinction Projects require some form of public presentation. In many cases this will involve travel to an off-campus scholarly conference. If you plan to do this, please ensure that estimated conference expenses are part of your budget, noting that additional support is available via the Dean's Travel Fund (see paragraph below).
- Other expenses related to the Project as discussed and advised by your Project Supervisor. Feel free to address any questions about potential expense approval to the Honors Director.

Students are encouraged to apply for Summer Scholar ([http://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z\\_index/research/summer\\_scholars](http://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z_index/research/summer_scholars)) and Dean's Travel Fund awards ([http://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z\\_index/research/present\\_your\\_research](http://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z_index/research/present_your_research)) as appropriate, and to indicate plans along those lines in section V. b. of the proposal document. Because Honors Distinction Project funding is similar in mission to Pathways funding for individual student Projects, Distinction Projects are not eligible for Pathways support.

Distinction Project funding is available for all Honors students. Funding decisions are made based on the merit of the Project and justification of expenses (some Projects are naturally more expensive than others). In other words, you're not competing against other students for this funding – it is part of the promise we made to you when we extended the Honors Program invitation. There is a ceiling, of course, but your Honors Advisor and Project Supervisor will be able to help you arrive at a sensible budget given the Project you wish to do. Careful justification and priority ranking of expenses in the Project proposal document is critical.

## Guidelines for Expenditure of Distinction Project Funds

1. Expenses may not be incurred prior to notification of HnrsPAG budget approval.
2. All College policies regarding reimbursement shall apply to Distinction Project funding. Expense reports and reimbursement requests should be routed through the Honors Program secretary, who will track expenditures and provide budget updates upon request. Appropriate forms and policies can be found at: [http://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z\\_index/business\\_office/business\\_office\\_forms\\_and\\_policies](http://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z_index/business_office/business_office_forms_and_policies). Please make careful note of the timetable for check requests and plan accordingly. In cases of immediate need, an Honors Program credit card can be used for Distinction Project expenses. Consult the Honors Program secretary for assistance.
3. Expenses incurred over the total amount approved will not be reimbursed. Please consult your Project Supervisor and/or the Honors Director for advice as soon as possible should the possibility of budget overage arise. We can help you determine ways to cut other areas of your budget and/or contemplate other funding sources.
4. Minor changes in anticipated costs are a normal part of the process of overseeing a Project. You should do your best to minimize costs where possible, but in the event that the cost for one line item is higher than anticipated, you are free to deduct planned expenses from another line item given the approval of your Project Supervisor. If the change results in a significant reframing of your Project, then consult the Honors Director to discuss whether new HnrsPAG approval is required.

## **FACULTY SUPERVISION**

The role of the Project Supervisor is first and foremost an act of long-term mentoring. Distinction Projects are designed to help students have meaningful experience in Project design, implementation and presentation in a manner that will enhance the student's ability and opportunity after graduation. Students are encouraged to begin thinking about Project Supervisors in Hnrs 113 (sophomore fall), and to work closely with the Supervisor in the development of a purposeful and feasible Distinction Project proposal.

It is acceptable, but not required, for the Distinction Project to be a logical offshoot of a faculty member's research agenda. In such cases the proposal should make it clear that the work being done for the Distinction Project involves substantial opportunity for the student to contribute to and learn from the larger Project.

Students should maintain regular contact with their Project Supervisors, even if the Project involves a period away from campus. Remember, too, that regular reflection is a required component of the Distinction Project. When students are on campus, Project Supervisors are compensated for independent studies, Summer Scholars, or supervised internships, as approved and appropriate (internships in departmental or ROA group internship courses are not individually compensated). In the case of off campus student work (e.g. study abroad) that is not compensated as an independent study, Project Supervisors will be compensated for regular mentoring throughout the term at the prevailing internship compensation rate. This off-campus mentoring compensation comes with the expectation that the student and the Project Supervisor will be in regular contact throughout the term to ensure successful progress on the Project (e.g. a student studying abroad in France would hold a weekly email or skype conversation with the Project Supervisor to share progress and solicit advice, plus receive

feedback on regular written reflections). Faculty compensation need not be included in the proposal budget.