

University Honors Program HON 397 (Honors Extension and Engagement): Guidelines for Crafting Undergraduate Engagement Opportunities

Description

Undergraduate Engagement opportunities should . . .

1. Be grounded in fully reciprocal and mutually beneficial **partnerships**. Engagement experience should be designed to maximize both learning and civic outcomes for all parties; and the process by which it is designed, implemented, and assessed should include the voices of all partners as well as the perspectives of others affected by the work of the partnership. An objectives agreement (see attachment A for sample template) can be a helpful symbol of and vehicle for the synthesis of multiple perspectives and can provide a foundation for shared assessment and conflict resolution.

Relatedly, the particular engagement experience, while itself time-limited, should occur in the context of long-term partnerships between the university and the broader community; entry into and exit from the particular relationships should be informed by and in turn nurture the evolution of the partnership process.

2. Include structured opportunities for guided, integrative **reflection** (see [Model for Reflection](#) for more information).
3. Engage students in the challenges existing in North Carolina communities by linking them with key local government and economic leaders, and with scientists and others involved in new, developing, or existing industries. Students are to invest their knowledge in solving real community problems while also learning in an atypical (non-classroom) setting. In addition, students are expected to become involved in the larger issues related to the community and not to merely focus on a narrow (although important) component of an issue or need of the community. For example, a student working on a computer-engineering problem that is related to production efficiencies in a local manufacturing company should examine her/his role and those of others in terms of citizenship and community, and should assess objectives and methods needed to impart long-term, systemic change.
4. The student should make every effort to connect these unique experiences with the various components of her/his curriculum. For example, although the student may be in Computer Science, the activities undertaken in an important industry of the community may draw upon the student's knowledge of economics, psychology, sociology, technical writing and oral communication skills, and more. Thus, strong connections are to be made to courses already taken, and the hands-on experiences should instruct the student about personal gaps in knowledge that could be filled by taking specific courses and/or graduate studies.
5. Include both "micro" and "macro" level dimensions. Student experience should not be limited to "bottle washing" but should provide opportunities for complex role-taking and for thought and action related to the larger scale (e.g. policy) issues at stake; however, such encounter with the "big picture" should be thoroughly grounded in first-hand exposure to the daily support needs and practices of the setting or issue area.
6. Be designed with developmental considerations in mind. Engagement experience should be appropriately matched to student maturity (intellectual, emotional, interpersonal) and level of academic/professional ability as well as to the capacity of the partnering individuals and

organizations to enter into a fully reciprocal partnership with the student; all partners should identify their comfort zones with respect to such opportunities and structure the engagement process to push slightly (but not dangerously) beyond them so that individuals and organizations alike grow through but are not overwhelmed by the experience.

7. Be conceptualized as **building individual and organizational capacity in the context of a collaborative learning community**. Engagement experience should enhance the ability of all parties to function as reflective and collaborative social change agents, beyond the scope and time limitations of the particular partnership. All partners should be seen as learners, and the process itself should be one of learning together within the context of community, with each party contributing to the learning of all others and each being receptive to learning from all others.
8. Be structured to support all parties through what can be a substantial **learning curve**, given the counter-normative nature of engagement experiences for many students, faculty, staff, and community partners. Reflection on the challenges associated with such opportunities and on options for addressing them effectively is key, as is reflection on the role-crafting dimensions of such processes as they are experienced by all parties. Maximizing the value of self-directed, highly collaborative learning processes that have a direct effect on others requires commitment to shared objectives and to one's partners, intentionally learning one's way through and adapting as needed, and a willingness to live with ambiguity - most participants in such a process will have to make adjustments from their normal practice, and support in this process is crucial (through reflection, mentoring, tools for regular assessment, etc.).



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