UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

HON 397 Overview for Mentors

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a mentor to a University Honors Program student's HON 397: Extension and Engagement project. The student-mentor relationship has a significant impact on students' undergraduate experiences and long-term plans. Faculty and community partners who have taken on this invaluable role in the past have appreciated the opportunity to work closely with an enthusiastic, dedicated, and talented student, and it is important to us that this be a positive experience for you, as well as for the student.

The information in this packet is intended to let you know more about the mentor's responsibilities. If you have additional questions, please contact the UHP main office and any of our staff will be happy to assist you.

Background

The goal of the HON 397 project is to engage Honors students in a hands-on, participatory learning experience that allows them to see a scholarly project from inception through completion. As a result, at least 70% of the overall experience must be an independent or group research/creative project. This is to ensure that the experience is not one entirely of repetitive, routine chores. HON 397 contact hours will use the following upper limits as guidelines: 1/4 time internship, fieldwork course, or practicum that requires approximately 10 Hours/week/semester constitutes 3 semester credit hours; 1/2 time internship, fieldwork course, or practicum that requires approximately 20 Hours/week/semester constitutes 6 semester credit hours.

Project overview

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.

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 valued 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.).

The mentor role

The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) is a professional association of undergraduate honors programs. NCHC created the following guidelines to assist mentors with an undergraduate research experience.

<u>Be helpful</u>
When students come to you as a potential mentor, some will have good ideas that are too broad, like, "I want to study crime." Some will have focused ideas that would be great for a Master's thesis or a Doctoral dissertation, but not achievable as an undergraduate thesis or project. Some students will have an area of interest, but no topic or idea how to approach the area. And some students will have no real idea at all. Maybe they took an interesting course and decided to approach that instructor. At this stage, students need a lot of help transforming a vague interest into a doable project. They need help to fashion testable hypotheses or working questions with a realistic research plan or project schedule. They need advice and guidance with their review of the literature and their drafts. Work closely with them and help them turn their ideas into an excellent undergraduate thesis.

<u>Be proactive</u>
Students are most likely to do their work when they have regularly-scheduled appointments with their mentors. Busy students put off work that doesn't have a definite due date, but students who are given specific tasks to accomplish at regularly-scheduled meetings will almost certainly complete their theses on time. It's important for a mentor to be proactive: make regular appointments, once a week or once every two weeks, depending on their progress. Students should never to leave their mentor's office without scheduling another appointment. If a student doesn't show up for an appointment, he or she should call the mentor and reschedule. If they show up unprepared, the mentor should reschedule and take whatever steps necessary to ensure that they're prepared next time.

<u>Be demanding</u>
It's tempting to let students slide, especially when they're bright and the member is overloaded. "I know I said I'd have a hypothesis for you today, but I've been real busy." Mentors should be reasonable, but also demanding. Insist on regular appointments. Insist that the student do the work that was agreed upon. And insist that the work be high quality. Do not settle for sloppy, incomplete, or badly-written work. At the same time, mentors should remember that these are not graduate students, and this is not a Master's thesis. What mentor should expect is undergraduate work of the highest quality, and our students rely on us for help to achieve that.

<u>Be collaborative</u>
Students should be told right from the start that a research project is a collaboration between the student and the mentor. They should know that they cannot simply hand something to a mentor and say, "Here it is. Grade me." But it is important to recognize that this is the model they're used to: The professor gives an assignment, the student does the work and hands it in, and the

professor delivers a grade. It is part of the mentor's job to show students a collaborative model and to work closely with them at every stage of the process. If an Honors student has more than one mentor, his or her project should be a collaborative process between advisors. For the sake of clarity, fairness, thoroughness, and consistency, advisors should consult each other on a regular basis to compare notes and to monitor progress.