HONORS AND UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

LAUNCH promotes student success by providing high-impact educational experiences and challenges motivated students in all academic disciplines to pursue an enriched, intellectually-stimulating curriculum. LAUNCH joins the university community in making Texas A&M a welcoming environment for all individuals. We are committed to helping our students understand the cultures that set us apart and appreciate the values that bring us together.

Undergraduate Research

LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research promotes, coordinates, creates, and assesses undergraduate programs involving creative scholarship, inquiry, and research in all academic disciplines at Texas A&M. As a recognized “high impact practice,” undergraduate research experiences increase undergraduate student learning and success, not only while students are at Texas A&M, but long after graduation.

In terms of professional and intellectual development, being involved in undergraduate research allows students to participate in a scholarly community of students with common interests, to learn more about their future professional field, and to develop a close working relationship with acclaimed faculty. Research experiences make students more competitive for scholarships, internships, jobs, international opportunities, and admission to top graduate and professional programs. Perhaps most importantly, engaging in undergraduate research allows students to experience the excitement of working collaboratively to create new knowledge, solve cutting-edge problems, work collaboratively, and communicate more effectively—life skills that are increasingly valued in our world.

Campus-wide programs coordinated by LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research include the Undergraduate Research Scholars program, the Undergraduate Research Ambassadors, and the publication of Explorations: the Texas A&M Undergraduate Journal. The office offers workshops for undergraduate students on getting started in research, finding summer research opportunities, developing research presentations, and organizing thesis writing, as well as workshops for faculty and graduate students on mentoring undergraduate researchers. LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research also works with groups across campus to promote and facilitate activities that support undergraduate research opportunities, such as Summer Undergraduate Research Experiences, National Science Foundation Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) programs, and the LAUNCH-Sigma Xi Research Expo. Lastly, the office provides assistance for developing externally-funded proposals and implementation of funded projects that have undergraduate research involvement, such as National Science Foundation REU, Beckman Scholars, and Howard Hughes Medical Institute Education grants.

Undergraduate Research Scholars Program

Any junior or senior student with a cumulative Texas A&M GPR of 3.0 or above may apply to the Undergraduate Research Scholars (http://ugr.tamu.edu/UGR/UGRS) program. Groups of at least two students collaborating as a team on a single project may also apply. The Research Scholars program requires independent research during the Fall and Spring semesters supervised by a faculty advisor that culminates in a scholarly product. The scholarly product may be a research thesis, an accepted article in a professional journal, an exhibit, a performance, or other product as determined by the faculty advisor in collaboration with the LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research Office. Participants are selected for this program based on the quality of their project proposals and their academic records.

Explorations: the Texas A&M Undergraduate Journal

Explorations is an interdisciplinary, student-led journal guided by faculty and administrators that selects and publishes student-authored research, scholarly, and creative pieces of general interest in any area. Explorations is composed of an Executive Board, Editorial Board, as well as a Marketing and Design Team made of students that work to accomplish the many facets of editing, publishing, and marketing the journal while representing departmental diversity, critical thought, and creativity.

The call for submissions begins late in the fall semester and extends into early spring. Articles are submitted in a two-stage process: first, synopses of articles are reviewed by faculty-student teams; second, full-length articles are evaluated in another round of peer review. Creative works are reviewed by faculty-student teams in a one-stage process. All authors of accepted pieces are paired with student board members who provide editorial assistance and formatting guidance. Additionally, the Explorations Board extends a call for cover art submissions based on one of the accepted pieces for each volume. Every fall Explorations hosts a journal release event to recognize all who were involved in the making of the latest volume.

Acceptance to the journal is highly competitive—less than 20% of submitted synopses result in published articles. Recently published articles cover a wide range of academic fields: music, creative poetry, forensics, cancer biology, astrophysics, nanomedicine, computer algorithms, business, geosciences, sociology, aerospace engineering, and cultural anthropology. To review recent volumes and to find upcoming submission deadlines, visit explorations.tamu.edu.

Undergraduate Research Ambassadors

Undergraduate Research Ambassadors represent LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research at research, recruiting, and outreach events. Juniors or seniors with an extensive background in research, a GPR of 3.0 or higher, outstanding oral communication skills, and the ability to describe research to a general audience may apply to the program. A cohort of about a dozen Ambassadors are chosen to join existing Ambassadors from multiple disciplines each year. They are trained in presentation and leadership skills and then participate in a variety of activities including meeting with highly-placed members of the University Administration, distinguished faculty, outstanding alumni, prospective students, and parents.

Workshops and Events

LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research offers informational workshops on undergraduate research for undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. Additionally, we coordinate numerous public events that celebrate and promote undergraduate research, providing venues for students to present their research projects, for faculty to recruit new student researchers, and for recognition of the research efforts of both students and faculty. Workshops and events are publicized through emails, newsletters, and the LAUNCH (http://ugr.tamu.edu) website.
Grant, Proposal, and Project Assistance

LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research provides a wide variety of support services for undergraduate research programs, proposal development, and implementation. Please contact the office directly for more information.

Other Capstones

LAUNCH: Capstones offers one year Capstone experiences to any Junior or Senior with a cumulative Texas A&M GPR of 3.0 or above. A listing of capstone options can be found at http://tx.ag/Capstones.

The Undergraduate Teacher Scholars program allows students to collaborate closely with a Texas A&M University faculty member to create a one-credit hour seminar or to improve an existing course in collaboration with a faculty expert. The Teacher Scholar will have the opportunity to research, design, and arrange the content of the seminar. The Teacher Scholar will be responsible for the presentation of class material under the supervision of the Texas A&M University supporting faculty member.

The Undergraduate Service Scholars program pairs students with community leaders to develop and carry out projects that benefit the greater community. The Undergraduate Service Scholars capstone allows the student to draw upon their undergraduate education to plan, coordinate, and execute a project aimed at improving the community while learning about issues that affect that community.

The Undergraduate Leadership Scholars program enables student leaders in various organizations to refine their leadership skills and methodologies. In collaboration with their faculty advisor, Undergraduate Leadership Scholars plan and implement improvements to their organization’s programming and impact on campus or in the community.

All capstones require a proposal and timeline, two semesters engaging with the project, supervision by a faculty member or similar expert, a public presentation, regular reflection, and a scholarly project appropriate for the field. Students are selected for participation in these programs based on the quality of their proposals, their academic record and the recommendation of their faculty or community advisor.

Admission to the University Honors Program

Honors Fellows is the university-level Honors distinction offered by the University Honors Program. Students are admitted to the Honors Fellows curriculum on a competitive basis. Incoming freshmen apply as part of their application for admission to the university. Continuing students may apply each spring for entry in the fall prior to completing 60 credit hours.

Applications are evaluated on the basis of the student’s record of academic achievement and demonstrated potential for creativity, intellectual ability, imagination, curiosity, willingness to try new things and self-awareness. Once admitted to the Honors Fellows curriculum, students are designated as “Honors Students” and may then access specific privileges and resources, including additional advising, priority registration, contracting non-honors courses for Honors credit, Honors Independent Study and enrolling in graduate-level courses for undergraduate Honors credit. Honors Students also receive priority for the Honors Housing Community and advising for competitive national fellowships.

Freshmen admitted to the University Honors Program are required to live in the Honors Housing Community and participate in the Honors first year experience course. To remain in the program, all students (freshman and continuing students) must make progress toward the Honors Fellows distinction and meet minimum co-curricular participation requirements. See the section on Maintaining Honors Status (p. 3).

Honors Fellows Curriculum

To receive the Honors Fellows distinction at graduation, Honors Students must:

- Earn a total of 30 Honors points. Each credit hour of Honors coursework equals 1 point. 21 points must come from Honors courses distributed as follows:
  - Depth: 12 hours in upper-division (300/400-level) courses or graduate courses taken for undergraduate credit
  - Breadth: 9 hours in the Core Curriculum, as specified in the student’s catalog
  - Additional honors points to bring the total to 30 points

- Maintain 3.25 GPR in Honors coursework and 3.5 GPR overall (http://registrar.tamu.edu/Transcripts-Grades/How-to-Calculate-GPA).

- Practical Application: Complete an Honors Capstone experience (http://honors.tamu.edu/Capstones).

The University Honors Program works with academic departments across the university to ensure that appropriate Honors courses are offered. Honors courses have limited enrollment and encourage participatory learning. In Honors classrooms, students work closely with many of the University’s most acclaimed faculty. Material in Honors courses is intended to provide increased complexity, not simply more work or greater difficulty. Small class size (usually not more than 25 students) also allows Honors courses to undertake activities and utilize facilities not readily available to undergraduate students. Honors classes may be special sections of regularly offered courses or courses developed specifically for Honors Students. Students are encouraged to visit regularly with University Honors Program advisors to ensure that their course selection meets both degree and Honors curriculum requirements.

To complete Honors Fellows curriculum requirements, Honors Students must complete a capstone experience. The requirement may be met by engaging an academic research project in the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program, by preparing and teaching a seminar or adding enriching material to an existing course as part of the Undergraduate Teacher Scholars Program, by undertaking a community service project as a participant in the Undergraduate Service Scholars Program, by developing an enhancement project for a student organization through the Undergraduate Leadership Scholars Program, or by completing a capstone project designated by their home department. Students should consult with a University Honors Program advisor in the planning stages to seek approval for their capstone experience.

Honors Students are afforded several avenues to earn Honors credit in addition to regularly offered Honors courses. Honors Students may contract for Honors credit, engage in Honors independent study or take graduate courses that count toward undergraduate degree requirements. Honors Students should consult with University Honors Program advisors about these opportunities.

Honors Students with unique intellectual interests and specific educational goals may also “major” in Honors by pursuing the innovative
University Studies – Honors (USHN) degree. Students may combine a range of related academic areas into a coherent degree plan by designing an "area of concentration" in combination with two established minor fields of study. The formulation of the degree plan requires students to conceptually link their course selection to a specific "problem" that will be addressed in a capstone thesis.

Maintaining Honors Status

To remain in the Honors Fellows curriculum, Honors Students must:

1. Maintain a 3.5 cumulative GPR,
2. Maintain a 3.25 GPR in honors coursework,
3. Make progress toward curriculum requirements by taking at least 6 Honors credits per year,
4. Fulfill annual co-curricular participation requirements,
   a. Freshmen: Live in Honors Freshman Housing (or obtain a waiver) and participate in the Learning Community Course, and
   b. Continuing Students: Participate in at least two Honors Student Council events each semester, with at least one designated as academic/intellectual.
   c. All: Prepare or update an ePortfolio on an annual basis.

Honors Students who fail to meet any of these requirements will be given a semester of probation to correct any deficiencies. Honors Students who fail to meet requirements after a semester of probation will be dismissed from the program.

University Scholars

The University Scholars program identifies students who embody academic leadership and enhances the personal, professional and intellectual development of these students.

University Scholars receive a scholarship stipend and participate in a number of development activities, including University Scholar Exploration Series, which are intimate discussion-based seminars offered on a wide variety of topics. Additionally, University Scholars serve as ambassadors for LAUNCH at Texas A&M University, representing the office at outreach events and in publicity materials.

Each spring semester, eligible freshmen are invited to apply for the University Scholar program. The application process involves an extensive written application and, for the approximately 40 students selected as semi-finalists, an in-depth interview. In the end, approximately 10 students are invited to join the University Scholar program.

Freshmen who meet the eligibility criteria for the program will be contacted via their official Texas A&M University email accounts at the start of the Spring semester. Students with questions about eligibility should contact LAUNCH.

Honors Student Services

Honors students have access to numerous special services and programs. Throughout the academic year, LAUNCH: Honors coordinates recreational and community-building events, lectures and workshops. Honors students are invited to engage in leadership opportunities and contribute to the development of the University Honors Program through the Honors Student Council, the University Scholars program, and as members of the Honors Housing Community.

Honors students receive supplemental advising to help them identify ways to enrich their college experience and complete the requirements for the prestigious Honors Fellows distinction. Throughout their time in the University Honors Program, students are encouraged to take on challenging and enriching experiences such as undergraduate research, study abroad, service learning, capstone experiences, and application to nationally-competitive scholarships and fellowships. This program is uniquely designed to make Honors students good candidates for opportunities coordinated through LAUNCH: National Fellowships. These include scholar programs such as the Rhodes, Truman, and Goldwater Scholarships. They also include other prestigious opportunities such as the Fulbright Program for U.S. Students and the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program.

Information about upcoming opportunities for Honors students appear regularly in our email bulletins (https://listserv.tamu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=honors-l).

Services for All Students

LAUNCH challenges all motivated and high-achieving Texas A&M students to explore their world, expand their horizons and excel academically. While some services of the office are exclusive to Honors Students, advisors are available to talk with any undergraduate student who is interested in sampling the academic challenge of an Honors course, committing to an undergraduate research project, applying to the University Honors Program or engaging the process of self-discovery entailed in preparation for national fellowships. Students interested in applying to nationally competitive scholarships like the Rhodes, Marshall, Goldwater, and Fulbright U.S. Student Program should view our list of fellowship opportunities (http://natfellows.tamu.edu/National-Fellowships/About-National-Fellowships) and make note of instructions for our campus application processes (http://natfellows.tamu.edu/National-Fellowships/Apply-to-National-Fellowships-2016).

Continuing students with a minimum 3.5 cumulative GPR who have not applied or not been accepted to the Honors Fellows program may enroll in honors coursework during their assigned registration time. Students who would like to meet with a University Honors Program advisor may sign up for an appointment through our online appointment system (http://swan.tamu.edu/launch). All students interested in the services offered by LAUNCH are encouraged to sign up for the Honors weekly email bulletin.

Graduation with Honors

All Honors courses are designated on a student’s transcript, demonstrating to future employers or admissions committees that the student has engaged with an enriched, challenging curriculum. Students who complete the Honors Fellows curriculum and/or completion of the Undergraduate Research Scholars program are further denoted as graduation and transcript distinctions.

Undergraduates in some academic colleges and departments may pursue additional transcript distinctions (See http://honorsprograms.tamu.edu). These distinction requirements work in parallel with the Honors Fellows plan, but are separate and distinct from the University Honors Program. Many students elect to graduate with multiple distinctions from the university, college, or departmental offerings. In general, all Honors transcript distinctions require that the student complete a substantial body of Honors coursework, hold a minimum cumulative Texas A&M GPR of 3.5, and a cumulative Honors course GPR of 3.25, and meet other program participation requirements. Students are encouraged to work through their college
and/or departmental advisor to ensure satisfactory completion of the distinction requirements.

These Honors transcript distinctions are separate and distinct from “Latin Honors” such as *cum laude*, *summa cum laude* or *magna cum laude*, which are conferred by the Office of the Registrar and are based upon cumulative GPR and residency requirements (See http://registrar.tamu.edu/Graduation-Degree-Programs/Graduation-Diplomas/Graduation-with-Honors).