

# HONORS, UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND NATIONAL FELLOWSHIPS

## Honors Academy

The Honors Academy provides a university-level Honors experience open to undergraduates from all majors through the minor in Honors. The Honors Academy mission is to challenge high-achieving undergraduate students to develop the personal, professional, and intellectual skills they will need to address tomorrow's multifaceted problems.

### Admission to the Honors Academy

Students are admitted to the Honors Academy 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 at Texas A&M. Transfer students are invited to apply as part of the continuing student application (for summer and fall entrants) or via a transfer student application in the late spring (for spring entrants).

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 Academy curriculum, students are designated as "Honors Students" and may then access specific privileges and resources, including additional advising, priority registration, professional development opportunities, contracting non-honors courses for Honors credit, and enrolling in graduate-level courses for undergraduate Honors credit. Honors Students also receive priority for the Honors Housing Community.

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. 1).

Continuing students with a minimum 3.5 cumulative GPA who have not applied or not been accepted to the Honors Academy may enroll in major- and major-aligned Honors course work during their assigned registration time. Students who would like to meet with an Honors Academy advisor may sign up for an appointment through our online appointment system (<https://launch.tamu.edu/honors/advising> (<https://launch.tamu.edu/honors/advising/>)). All students interested in Honors opportunities are encouraged to sign up for the Honors weekly email bulletin.

### Honors Minor Curriculum

The minor in Honors requires 18 hours of Honors course work including 5 hours of Aggie Core Values Seminars and 13 hours of Honors course work in the student's major or major-aligned courses. Students will complete 2 hours of introductory seminars, 3 hours of 300-level seminars with at least 2 hours in the same topic, and a Culminating Experience. For more details, see Honors Minor (<https://catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/interdisciplinary/honors-minor/>).

To graduate with the minor in Honors, students must be in good standing with the university at the time of graduation distinction audit and through graduation, must not have an F\* on the transcript and not have been found responsible for an Honor Code violation as an Upper Division student. Upper Division status is defined as having earned 60 or more

credit hours (including transfer hours and advanced placement credits) on the date of the violation. This sanction is automatic upon a finding of responsibility and is imposed without regard to the severity of other sanctions imposed by the Aggie Honor System Office. (see Student Rule 16 (<https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule16/>)).

### Required Culminating Experience

To complete Honors Academy curriculum requirements, Honors Students must complete a culminating experience. The requirement may be met by engaging an academic research project in the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program (<https://launch.tamu.edu/undergraduate-research/urs/>), by preparing and teaching a seminar or adding enriching material to an existing course as part of the Undergraduate Teacher Scholars Program subject to approval by their school/college, by undertaking a community service project as a participant in the Undergraduate Service Scholars Program, creating an artistic performance through the Undergraduate Performance Scholars program, or by completing a capstone project designated by their home department that meets expectations described at <http://tx.ag/Capstones> (<http://tx.ag/Capstones/>). Students should consult with a Honors Academy advisor in the planning stages to seek approval for their capstone experience. Students should register for HONR 497 in the first semester of their capstone.

### Honors Courses

The Honors Academy works with academic departments across the university to ensure that appropriate Honors courses are offered. Honors courses have limited enrollment and encourage participatory learning. Coursework in Honors courses is intended to provide increased breadth, depth, and complexity, not simply more work or greater difficulty. Honors classes may be special sections of regularly offered courses or courses developed specifically for Honors Students. Students are encouraged to visit regularly with Honors Academy advisors to ensure that their course selection meets Honors Fellows Minor curriculum requirements, as they would confer with a departmental advisor to ensure degree requirements are met.

Honors students are afforded other avenues to earn Honors credit in addition to regularly offered Honors courses. Honors students may contract for Honors credit or take graduate courses that count toward undergraduate degree requirements. Honors students should consult with Honors Academy advisors about these opportunities.

### Maintaining Honors Status

To remain in the Honors Academy, Honors Students must:

1. Maintain a 3.5 cumulative GPA,
2. Maintain a 3.25 GPA in honors coursework,
3. Make progress toward curriculum requirements by taking at least 6 Honors credits per year,
4. Submit three reflections each year on professional development engagement.

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. Students who are found responsible for an Aggie Honor Code violation that makes them ineligible to graduate with Latin Honors will be removed from the program.

## Honors Student Services

Honors Students have access to numerous special services and programs. Throughout the academic year, the Honors Academy 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 Honors Academy through Honors Student Council and as members of the Honors Housing Community.

Honors Students can take advantage of 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 Honors Academy, 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 the Office of 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.

## Graduation with Honors

All Honors courses are designated on a student's transcript demonstrating to future employers or graduate and professional admissions committees that the student has engaged with an enriched, challenging curriculum. Students who complete the Honors Academy curriculum and/or complete the Undergraduate Research Scholars program have these distinctions noted on their transcripts.

Undergraduates in some academic colleges and departments may pursue additional transcript distinctions (See <http://honorsprograms.tamu.edu> (<http://honorsprograms.tamu.edu>)). These distinction requirements work in parallel with the Honors Academy minor but are separate and distinct from the Honors Academy. Many students elect to graduate with multiple distinctions from the Honors Academy, 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 GPA of 3.5, and a cumulative Honors course GPA 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 GPA and residency requirements (See <https://aggie.tamu.edu/graduation/graduation-with-honors/#a-undergraduatestudents-v6rwHm> (<https://aggie.tamu.edu/graduation/graduation-with-honors/#a-undergraduatestudents-v6rwHm>)).

## Undergraduate Research

The Office of Undergraduate Research at Texas A&M University enhances the undergraduate experience for all students across campus. Our initiatives foster connections between students, faculty, staff, as well as promote interdisciplinary collaboration and professional development.

Our office meets the evolving needs of students, faculty, and staff by helping shape campus-wide policies for undergraduate research, building programs that empower the Texas A&M community to engage in meaningful scholarly work, and expanding access to information and opportunities for undergraduates to engage in research activity.

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, and communicate more effectively—life skills that are increasingly valued in our world.

Campus-wide programs coordinated by the Office of Undergraduate Research include the Undergraduate Research Scholars thesis program, the Undergraduate Research Ambassadors outreach, and the publication of *Explorations: the Texas A&M Undergraduate Journal*. The office offers informational sessions and 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.

The Office of 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, the Undergraduate Research Expo, and the Undergraduate Research Scholars Symposium. 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.

## Workshops and Events

The Office of Undergraduate Research hosts informational sessions and workshops on undergraduate research for undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. We also coordinate 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 research efforts by both students and faculty.

## Grant, Proposal, and Project Assistance

The Office of 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.

## Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis Program

Completion of the Undergraduate Research Scholars thesis program confers a stand-alone, university-level Honors distinction upon graduation regardless of whether the participant is a member of any Honors program. The two-semester (fall-spring) experience requires undergraduates to engage in an independent research project that culminates in a written undergraduate thesis to be published in

the Undergraduate Research Scholars Capstone Collection in the Texas A&M OAKTrust Repository (<http://oaktrust.library.tamu.edu/handle/1969.1/3367/>).

Students can apply as individuals or as a team up to five members. Students must secure a project supervised by an eligible Texas A&M faculty member prior to applying, as faculty advisor approval is required upon application and upon completion of the project. Check the program page on the Office of Undergraduate Research website (<https://ugr.tamu.edu>) for eligibility requirements. Students are selected for this program based on the quality of their project proposals and their academic records.

The thesis or scholarly product may be a traditional research thesis, a professional report approved by the faculty advisor, or an accepted article in a professional journal. Theses may also include documentation of an exhibit, a performance, or other product as determined by the faculty advisor in collaboration with the Office of Undergraduate Research Office. Students are required to complete a public presentation of their work, such as at the Undergraduate Research Scholars Symposium, Student Research Week, or other venues. Students in the program must also meet specified thesis installment deadlines and formatting requirements.

Staff within the Office of Undergraduate Research support the students and faculty who participate in the program. While staff do not review research content, which is the responsibility of faculty advisors, they do provide students with thesis templates and formatting support, as well as other professional guidance and resources.

## ***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 editorial board 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 new board members is early in the fall semester each year. The call for submissions begins in the fall semester and extends into the early spring semester.

Manuscript submissions go through a two-stage, double-blind, peer-reviewed process. First, synopses of prospective manuscripts are reviewed by faculty-student teams; second, full-length manuscripts are evaluated in another round of peer review. Authors of accepted pieces are paired with student board members who provide editorial assistance and formatting guidance. *Explorations* hosts a journal release event every fall 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. Published articles include a wide range of academic fields, including music, creative poetry, forensics, cancer biology, astrophysics, nanomedicine, computer algorithms, business, geosciences, sociology, aerospace engineering, cultural anthropology, and architecture. The target audience includes faculty, staff, and students of Texas A&M University, other institutions of higher learning, as well as parents, former students, and current high school seniors. To review recent volumes and to find upcoming deadlines, visit [explorations.tamu.edu](http://explorations.tamu.edu) (<http://explorations.tamu.edu/>).

## **Undergraduate Research Ambassadors**

The Undergraduate Research Ambassadors represent the Office of Undergraduate Research and work to inspire broader engagement in undergraduate research by educating and serving the Texas A&M University community and beyond. Undergraduate Research Ambassadors are available to share advice with fellow undergraduates on how to get started in research and help their peers find research projects, talk to faculty advisors, and make the most of their undergraduate research experience at Texas A&M.

The Office of Undergraduate Research seeks Ambassadors that will represent diverse academic disciplines across campus, including science, engineering, arts, humanities, business, social sciences, and more. Undergraduates with a background in research, a GPA of 3.0 or higher, outstanding oral communication skills, and the ability to describe research to a general audience are encouraged to apply to the program. They are trained in presentation and leadership skills, and participate in a variety of activities, including meeting with highly-placed members of the University Administration, distinguished faculty, outstanding alumni, prospective students, and parents.

Students in the Undergraduate Research Ambassadors program will gain knowledge in networking, public speaking, leadership opportunities, and will have increased competitiveness on graduate and professional school applications. Ambassadors often receive additional grant opportunities and other professional development experiences as a result of their involvement.

## **Capstones**

Capstones provides a year-long integrative experience that allows students to combine their career goals, majors, and interests in faculty-mentored independent projects that focus on leadership, research, community service, teaching, or performance.

The Honors Academy offers one year Capstone experiences to any junior or senior with a cumulative Texas A&M GPA of 3.0 or above. A listing of capstone options can be found at <http://tx.ag/Capstones> (<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 Performance Scholars program allows students to explore the impact of art on their academic career. Under the supervision of a working artist, students will create a performance project that creatively synthesizes their art and experience.

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.

## The Office of National Fellowships

The Office of National Fellowships at Texas A&M University supports students in pursuing nationally and internationally competitive awards. Our office provides guidance throughout the application process, from identifying opportunities to developing strong application materials. We collaborate with faculty, staff, and campus partners to create an environment where students can excel in their academic and professional aspirations. Through mentorship, advising, and tailored resources, we help Texas A&M University students maximize their potential and achieve their goals.

### About National Fellowships

National Fellowships provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their accomplishments and goals, synthesize their thoughts into a coherent whole, and achieve national recognition with access to unparalleled opportunities around the world.

We are eager to assist all Texas A&M students with the National Fellowships process. However, we also have awards that we emphasize in terms of our facilitation. We distinguish between two types of awards, namely, “core awards” and “non-core awards.”

### Core Awards

Core awards are National Fellowships that require a campus nomination. For these awards, students need to apply through our internal campus process. These are awards that involve campus deadlines and review committees. These awards include the following National Fellowships:

- Rhodes Scholarship
- Marshall Scholarship
- Churchill Scholarship
- Truman Scholarship
- Barry Goldwater Scholarship
- Boren Scholarship and Boren Fellowship
- Fulbright U.S. Student Program
- Gilman Scholarship
- James C. Gaither Junior Fellows Program
- Udall Scholarship
- Freeman ASIA
- Astronaut Scholarship

### Non-core Awards

Non-core awards are National Fellowships that do not require a campus nomination. Students have the ability to apply for these awards independently. While we are happy to assist students with these processes, core awards take priority in terms of the usage of our resources. These awards include, but are not limited to:

- Critical Language Scholarship
- Knight Hennessy Fellowship
- Pickering Fellowship
- SALAM Study Abroad Scholarship
- Yenching Academy Fellowship

- Payne Fellowship
- NSF Graduate Research Fellowship

## Becoming a candidate

Becoming a competitive National Fellowship Candidate takes time, dedication, focus and ability. Some National Fellowships require Texas A&M to convene a selection committee and choose only a few students to receive an official nomination. It is highly unlikely that you will be able to walk in the door to the Office of National Fellowships for the first time and have an application that is competitive, especially for those National Fellowships that require Texas A&M to endorse you. Tips for becoming a competitive candidate include:

- Start Early
  - You will need an average of six months to create a competitive application, provided that you have all the experiences, qualifications, and skills required by the selection criteria of these National Fellowships. As soon as you find that you are interested in a National Fellowship, you should contact the National Fellowship advisor ([natlfellows@tamu.edu](mailto:natlfellows@tamu.edu) ([natlfellows@tamu.edu?subject=National%20Fellowships%20Inquiry](mailto:natlfellows@tamu.edu?subject=National%20Fellowships%20Inquiry)))
- Know the requirements
  - Many fellowships have eligibility criteria based on factors such as GPR, citizenship, or major. It is your responsibility to know whether or not you are eligible for an award. If you have questions about the eligibility criteria, the National Fellowship advisor can help you determine whether or not there is an issue.
- Have a backup plan
  - No matter how strong of a candidate you are, there is no guarantee that you will win the award. You should have a contingency plan for what you will do if you are not selected.
- Do your research
  - A National Fellowship that is extremely prestigious or has a large monetary award may not necessarily be a good fit for you. You should research the fellowship to understand what qualities they are looking for in an applicant and what the awarding body hopes to accomplish by providing this opportunity.
- Be honest
  - Never exaggerate or lie about your accomplishments and/or activities. “Honesty is the best policy.”
- Be prepared to work
  - Preparing a strong application will require many hours of hard work. You will be researching, writing, editing, and revising your application throughout the process. Make sure to take advantage of resources like the University Writing Center and Career Center. In applying for a National Fellowship, you gain knowledge of not only the fellowship, but also deeper knowledge of yourself.
- National Fellowship Candidates often come with strengths in a particular group of areas.
  - Academics
    - It is unlikely that your application will look competitive without a successful academic record. Different fellowships have different requirements
  - Service
  - Leadership
  - Research
  - Foreign Language
- Value the process

- Since it is not guaranteed that you will receive a national fellowship, learn to value the process of applying for one. These are the skills you will hone while applying for national fellowships:
  - Writing and Communication Skills
    - Crafting compelling personal statements and research proposals
    - Writing concisely and persuasively
    - Tailoring messages to different audiences
    - Articulating academic and career goals clearly
  - Research and Analytical Skills
    - Conducting thorough background research on fellowship opportunities
    - Developing well-reasoned arguments and justifications for projects
    - Synthesizing complex ideas in an accessible way
  - Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection
    - Evaluating personal strengths, weaknesses, and long-term aspirations
    - Demonstrating intellectual curiosity and originality
    - Connecting past experiences to future goals in a meaningful way
  - Leadership and Initiative
    - Demonstrating leadership experiences through written narratives
    - Showcasing initiative in academic, extracurricular, and community work
    - Advocating for oneself and one's ideas in a compelling manner
  - Time Management and Organization
    - Balancing application preparation with academic and personal responsibilities
    - Meeting multiple deadlines for essays, recommendations, and interviews
    - Strategically planning coursework and experiences to align with selection criteria
  - Interview and Presentation Skills
    - Answering questions concisely and thoughtfully in high-stakes interviews
    - Engaging with interviewers confidently and authentically
    - Thinking on one's feet and adapting responses to different scenarios
  - Networking and Relationship-Building
    - Seeking mentorship and feedback from faculty and advisors
    - Building relationships with recommenders and potential collaborators
    - Learning to present oneself professionally in formal and informal settings
  - Resilience and Adaptability
    - Handling constructive criticism and revising application materials accordingly
    - Learning from setbacks and reapplying if necessary
    - Navigating uncertainty in competitive selection processes