

# 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, 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, the LAUNCH Undergraduate Research Expo, and the LAUNCH 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.

## Undergraduate Research Scholars Program

Completion of the Undergraduate Research Scholars program confers a stand-alone, university-level Honors distinction upon graduation regardless of whether the participant is a member of a departmental or college Honors program, or the University Honors program. Any junior or senior student with a cumulative Texas A&M GPA of 3.0 or above may apply to the Undergraduate Research Scholars (<https://launch.tamu.edu/>)

UGR/URS/) program. Check the program website for additional eligibility requirements. Groups of at least two students collaborating as a team on a single project may also apply. The Undergraduate Research Scholars program requires independent research during the Fall and Spring semesters supervised by an eligible Texas A&M faculty advisor that culminates in a written, scholarly product. The 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 LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research Office. Undergraduate Research Scholars are also required to do a public presentation of their work, such as at the Undergraduate Research Scholars Symposium, Student Research Week, or other venues. 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 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

Undergraduate Research Ambassadors represent LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research at research, recruiting, and outreach events. Undergraduates with an extensive background in research, a GPA 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 research efforts by 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 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 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.

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.

## Admission to the University Honors Program

Honors Fellows is the university-level Honors distinction offered by the University Honors Program run by LAUNCH: Honors. 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 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 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, 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 TAMU 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, ICD, or W courses, as specified in the student's catalog
  - Additional honors points to bring the total to 30 points
- Maintain a 3.25 GPA in Honors coursework and 3.5 GPA overall (<http://registrar.tamu.edu/Transcripts-Grades/How-to-Calculate-GPA/>).
- Annually update an ePortfolio
- 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. 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 University Honors Program advisors to ensure that their course selection meets Honors Fellows 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 University Honors Program advisors about these opportunities.

Honors Students are expected to annually reflect in an ePortfolio on how their long-term goals are connected to their values and how their education, both in and out of the classroom, is preparing them to meet those goals. For more details, see <http://tx.ag/ePortfolio> (<http://tx.ag/ePortfolio/>).

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 subject to approval by their college<sup>1</sup>, 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 as part of the Maroon & White Leadership 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 University Honors Program advisor in the planning stages to seek approval for their capstone experience. Students should register for UGST 497 (0 credit, unless it can satisfy a degree requirement), both semesters of their capstone.

## Maintaining Honors Status

To remain in the Honors Fellows curriculum, 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. Fulfill annual co-curricular participation requirements,
  - a. Freshmen: Live in Honors Housing Community (or obtain a waiver) and participate in the Living Learning Program course (UGST 181 Honors Family Meeting), and
  - b. Continuing Students: meet participation requirements defined by Honors Student Council.
  - 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.

To graduate with the Honors Fellows distinction, 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/>)).

<sup>1</sup> As of Fall 2022, students are not allowed to pursue the Undergraduate Teacher Scholars capstone option of preparing and teaching a seminar course in the College of Arts and Sciences. They may still develop

enriching material for an already existing course with faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences.

## 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 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 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://tx.ag/natlFellows/>) and make note of instructions for our campus application processes.

Continuing students with a minimum 3.5 cumulative GPA 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 (<https://tamu.campus.eab.com/>) (<http://tx.ag/HonorsAdvising> (<http://tx.ag/HonorsAdvising/>)). 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 graduate and professional admissions committees that the student has engaged with an enriched, challenging curriculum. Students who complete the Honors Fellows 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 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 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 <http://registrar.tamu.edu/Graduation-Degree-Programs/Graduation-Diplomas/Graduation-with-Honors> (<http://registrar.tamu.edu/Graduation-Degree-Programs/Graduation-Diplomas/Graduation-with-Honors/>)).

*Undergraduate Studies' units have modified services available to students enrolled via distance education, at branch campuses, or at other instructional locations.*