

University Honors Program



2025

Report

A summary of activities and outcomes from the 2024-2025 academic year.

Katherine H. Tennis, Ph.D
Faculty Director

Kira A. Castle, M.A.
Assistant Director

Our Program

Mission

The DU Honors Program cultivates student capacity for original academic inquiry and creative exploration.

Our students emerge as self-directed learners, encouraged to ask new questions and pursue their curiosities – both within the classroom and beyond.

Every year, the program recruits a diverse cohort of creative thinkers who want to go beyond the requirements – whether they were part of an Honors program in high school or not.

The three pillars of the Honors Program are our curriculum, our community, and our contributions to original research, scholarship, and creative activities.



Vision

Our diverse community of faculty, staff, and students is a campus hub for innovative teaching, liberal arts education, and undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative activities.

The DU Honors Program contributes to the University's vision of being a "great private university dedicated to the public good" by cultivating critical thinking and original inquiry in a select group of highly motivated students.

By bringing these students into the process of academic inquiry we also contribute to the University's goal of being a great research university that brings that its R1 research agenda into its teaching and learning.

Values

The DU Honors Program is committed to the pursuit of Honors in all of its forms:

1. *An award for proficiency in scholarship beyond that required to pass a particular program (noun)*

We value creating spaces where students are encouraged to take intellectual risks and feel safe doing so, in order to pursue their intellectual curiosities and achieve their academic ambitions

2. *A code of ethics and integrity (noun)*

We value academic integrity, honesty, intentionality, and curiosity

3. *To respect or to hold in honor (verb)*

We honor ourselves, our colleagues, our community, and our values
We honor and promote diversity in all of its forms, including diverse identities, lived experiences, and intellectual perspectives

Overview



AY 2024-2025 Summary

The past year has been a significant one for the DU Honors Program, marked by growth, curricular development, and increased engagement across the university community. These developments reflect the important role Honors plays in supporting high-achieving students and contributing to DU's broader goals of academic excellence, student retention, and post-graduate success.

We welcomed 106 new students into the program and graduated 48 who completed all Honors requirements and earned distinction in their majors. Many student workers and volunteer mentors stepped into critical leadership roles in both new and existing capacities. We continued to expand alumni engagement, including with our first alumni engagement event. Notably, we also received university approval to increase the size of the program by 50% which enables us to engage more students, offer more class variety, and do more to support the University's recruitment and retention efforts.

This year's incoming students were the first to enter under the revised Honors curriculum, which introduces a new three-course sequence taken across students' first, second, and final years. Though each course is low-credit (0-1), the sequence is designed to provide continuity across students' time in the program and to meet the specific needs of high-achieving students. These classes provide opportunities for us to advise our students at crucial moments during their college education, encourage students to think about their whole person on their academic journey, to create mentorship across class years, and to prompt students to think intentionally about their futures. To offset the increased two credit requirement, we incorporated more flexibility in common curriculum requirements. We are enthusiastic about these changes and believe that they will create meaningful experiences for students and help them prepare to meet challenging requirements, such as earning distinction in their majors.

Overview

continued

Following the recommendations our 2024 program reviewers, Honors also took the opportunity to reflect intentionally on our mission, vision, and values. With input from campus partners, we developed a clearer articulation of the program's purpose—one that better reflects how Honors serves its students and contributes to DU's broader goals. This process has helped focus our priorities and clarified the program's direction moving forward.

This spring, we were asked to expand our incoming cohort to help DU's recruitment and retention efforts, as we know that students admitted into Honors are more likely to choose to attend DU, and are more likely to stay at DU into their second year. As of the end of summer, we have enrolled 127 new students—our largest class to date—and we expect bring in a total of 150 new students by the end of Fall Quarter by working with FSEM advisors and other partners to ensure that all interested students have a chance to apply. To support this growth, we've also received approval to hire a new Honors Program Coordinator. This role will focus on recruitment, advising, and transition support for incoming students, helping to ensure a strong start within both Honors and DU.

We also made progress on alumni engagement, sending out newsletters and surveys, distributing Honors pennants, and hosting our first alumni-led networking event—an information session on law school co-hosted with a former Honors student now at DU's Sturm College of Law. We plan to build on these efforts in the coming year, particularly through HNRS 3000, a class for seniors that will incorporate alumni-student connections.

We are deeply thankful to everyone who has supported the program over the past year, from our students, to our student workers, to our many partners across campus. We are looking forward to another wonderful year in 2025-2026!

Contents

06 COMMUNITY

- Student Events
- Co-Sponsorships, Grants, & Scholarships
- Student Leadership
- Online Presence
- Admissions
- App Data
- Faculty Engagement
- Honors Faculty
- Honors Council
- Alumni Engagement

20 CURRICULUM

- 2024-2025 Honors Courses
- Planned 2025-2026 Honors Courses
- Honors Core Sequence

25 DISTINCTION & RESEARCH

- Distinction & Research Summary
- 2024-2025 Honors Graduates
- Annual Survey Research
- Mental Health Research
- First Destinations

32 PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR

- Four Priorities for 2024-2025



Community

Mission Statement:

“Every year, the program recruits a diverse cohort of creative thinkers who want to go beyond the requirements – whether they were part of an Honors program in high school or not.”



The community element of the Honors program is an essential piece of the Honors experience at DU, and the goal of the program is to foster a vibrant community of learners who engage with each other both within and outside of the classroom.

The next page summarizes community-building activities as they related to current students, new students, faculty and staff, and our online presence.

Student Events

Honors Student Association was in its third year and continued to lead the planning, organizing, and running a number of events under the mentorship of the Honors Assistant Director. They organized cultural, sporting, and other social events, which were all very well-attended and well-received. Some staple events like pumpkin painting, sports, and theater remained in the lineup, joined by new events including Bouquets & Rom Coms, and partnerships with MSU Denver and local alumni. This year's HSA leaders cemented the strong foundation established in prior years.

**FALL
2024**

Colorado Avalanche Game (15)
Video Game Night (13)
Yoga with Honors (4)
Pumpkin painting (20)
Hamilton (27)
Study Abroad Panel (4)*

**WINTER
2025**

Denver Nuggets Game (16)
Western National Stock Show (8)
DU Gymnastics (7)
Research and Thesis night (3)*
Bouquets & Rom Coms (19)
MSU Denver Spring Ball (13)***
Headshots & Hot Cocoa (30)

**SPRING
2025**

Law School Tour & Info Session (7)**
The Wiz (14)
Paint & Sip (15)

*Peer Mentoring event
**Alumni mentorship event
***Organized and hosted by MSU Honors



Above is a list of the 2024-2025 events with attendance noted in parentheses

Student Events

In addition to orientation, advising, and graduation-related events, Honors leadership also organize a few on-campus activities each quarter, including food, board games or lawn games depending on the weather, and opportunities for informal socializing with peers and Honors leadership. All of these took place in the Dimond Family Residential Village 195 Events Space, or in the Honors/PLP/LLC suite. Most are held in a drop-in format in order to be accessible for those who may only have a few minutes to say hello and grab some food between classes.

**FALL
2024**

Discoveries Week Orientation (91)*
Ice Cream Social (50)
Honors Summit (89)
Pizza & Advising (10)
Relax Night w/ PLP, LLCs (39-Honors)

**WINTER
2025**

Winter Brunch (30)
Honors Mini-Summit (18)
Donuts & Advising (12)
Relax Night w/ PLP, LLCs (38-Honors)

**SPRING
2025**

Italian Soda & Advising (15)
Spring Picnic (50)
Relax Night w/ PLP, LLCs (41-Honors)
Graduation (275**) **45 students plus families



Honors Summit, a required event for all incoming Honors students, ran for the third time this year, in a condensed 4-hour evening format. Based on feedback from the previous year, we kept elements that resonated, and built content more content that would scaffold into HNRS 2000 and 3000 such as advising and peer mentoring. Students spent time reviewing their major's Distinction requirements and started on their four-year plans. We also focused on reflection and visioning, encouraging students to think about what they wanted out of their time at DU. We also held a smaller iteration of this event in the winter for our newly-admitted students.

Co-Sponsorships, Scholarships, & Grants



The DU Undergraduate Research Journal (DUURJ) has strong ties with Honors, with many of our students serving on the editorial board and submitting their work for publication. Our Honors Faculty Director serves as their advisor, and they are based out of the Honors Classroom space.

We awarded a \$1,300 course grant to Don Sullivan so that he could bring the Honors Geography class (GEOG 1265: Global Environmental Change II) to the Denver Botanic Gardens & the Denver Museum of Science and Nature.



Preisidan-Schmid Endowed Scholarship Recipients

- Grace Hudson
2025 Fall Quarter graduate

- Paula Curtidor
2026 Spring Quarter graduate

Student Leadership



In addition to the faculty members on Honors Council, two elected student representatives serve overlapping two-year terms. These student representatives attend all Honors Council meetings and provide valuable student perspectives on program and curriculum discussion. Each spring, an election is held to replace the outgoing representative. This year, because both students were graduating in the same year, we have two new incoming student representatives.

Outgoing student representatives

- Gavin Hood '25
- Tessa Appel '25

Incoming student representatives

- Skyler Kasnoff '27
- Sarah Krohn '27

Now in its third year, Honors Student Association (HSA) continues to meet bi-weekly to plan, coordinate, publicize and execute events and programming for the Honors community, under the direction of the Honors Assistant Director. This year's HSA built upon the previous year's successes and has continued to offer events that have been successful in the past while trying new events to replace those that were not well attended.

Honors Student Association 2024-2025 Leadership

- Lindsay Baker '25
Events Coordinator
- Sarah Geffen '27
Events Coordinator
- Sana Khayat Kholghy '27
Events Coordinator
- Kenna Stephen '25
Peer Mentor Coordinator

To help make these roles accessible, Honors Student Association Leaders and Honors Council Representatives were paid a stipend for their work:

HSA Leaders:
\$500 per quarter

Honors Council Reps:
\$150 per quarter



Student Leadership



Honors Program & Marketing Assistants

Amanda McKellips '26 & Emma Reger '28 served in the Honors Program Assistant & Marketing Assistant roles respectively, handling administrative functions, including the Honors newsletter and Instagram. They also provided logistical support for Honors Summit and off-campus events.



Honors Recruitment Coordinators

Sarah Olson '25 and Muqit Matin '26 were our Honors Recruitment Coordinators. They helped at Honors recruitment events and reviewed Honors applications. They provided valuable insights to prospective students and a near-peer perspective on application quality that was extremely valuable



Honors Advising Coordinator

Colton Arciniaga '24 served as our Honors Advising Coordinator, helping at orientation and summit events, and serving as the primary advisor for our first year students through both email and advising appointments.

Peer Mentoring

The Honors Program was fortunate to have a number of excellent Honors Student Mentors this year. These students volunteered at Honors Summit in the Fall & Winter and hosted two mentoring events during the year based on their availability and interests. Next year, they will shift from mentoring events (which have declining participation) to giving informational interviews about Distinction for HNRS 2000 students.

Honors Peer Mentors 2024-2025

Kabe Aberle '25	Emma Kuhn '25
Brock Anderson '25	Daniel Lange '25
Tessa Appel '25	Ryker Lott '25
Kenzie Claflin '25	Clara Phillips '26
Will Dammann '25	Kenna Stephen* '25
Nicole Doris '25	Jasmin Storer '25
Mollie Estepp '25	Mio Yamauchi '25
Sydney Gainforth '26	

Peer Mentor Panel/Discussion Event Topics

- Study Abroad
- Distinction

*Peer Mentor Coordinator



Online Presence

The Honors Instagram account continued to grow this year, increasing its followers to 724 (an increase of 16% since summer 2024). We continued to use this platform to market events and Honors courses. This year, we did a feature on each of our graduates during spring quarter. Next year, we hope to expand our use of Instagram to share helpful tips about advising, particularly around course registration periods.

We continued to send our newsletter, *The Compass*, weekly. Honors Program Assistant, Amanda McKellips '26, continues to lead the creation of these newsletters.



Open Rate & Click Rate

Our open rate and click rate numbers are generally orders of magnitude higher than national averages, and we have no reason to suspect that that has changed. But the transition from Anthology to Salesforce Marketing Cloud (SFMC) was unfortunately rocky, and the new system still lacks critical features. We had to send newsletters from the honors@du.edu email account, which does not provide analytics. We hope to have open rate and click rate data again next year, given the planned development of the SFMC system!

Admissions



*Summary of 2024-2025
Recruitment Cycle*

The Honors program was asked to expand its incoming class size this year in order to help encourage high achieving students to attend DU and be part of the program. We received 250 applications during the three application cycles prior to the May 1st deposit deadline and one additional round afterwards. Of these, we admitted 211 students of which 128 decided to attend DU. We are intentionally leaving another 22 seats open so that we can recruit students during the fall quarter who may not have heard about Honors prior to arriving at DU.

We worked closely with the Office of Admissions at many of their campus visit days and info sessions. Specifically, we participated in the following events:

- Boettcher Open House (1)
- Friday@DU (8)
- Virtual Open House (1)
- Journey to DU (2)
- Virtual Journey to DU (1)
- Pathway to DU (1)

We also did a lot of direct outreach to admitted students, set up a Zeemee group for newly admitted students to communicate with each other, reached out to all admitted students about joining DU and about housing options, and ran summer advising sessions for newly admitted students.

Admissions

continued

We continued our review process from last year: all Honors applications are read initially by one program leader and one of the student recruitment coordinators. The other two reviewers only read applications if the first two readers' opinions differ significantly. This way all applications are read by both a student and someone in the leadership team.

We added new questions to the application this year that helped us review applications more holistically and align admissions with our revised mission statement. Students were asked why they wanted to join Honors, and were prompted to reflect on a long-term project they had already completed and what they might want to work on for their distinction projects. Students also had an optional question allowing them to add more context to their unique lived experiences. Most of the other questions remained the same, and we continued referring students to PLP and the LLCs through our application process.

As shown by the Application Data on the following page, the demographic profile of our applicants and admitted students closely reflects the demographic profile of admitted DU students generally.



INCOMING FRESHMEN

- 245 applications received (-17.5%)*
- 207 applicants accepted (+29%)
- 122 deposited (+34%)
- 84% acceptance rate (+55%)
- 59% yield rate (+7%)

INTERNAL TRANSFERS

- 21 applications received (-16%)
- 19 applicants accepted (+12%)
- 90% acceptance rate (+32%)

*Percentage changes compared to previous year

EXTERNAL TRANSFERS

- 5 application received (150%)
- 4 applicant accepted (+100%)
- 4 deposited (+100%)
- 80% acceptance rate (-20%)
- 100% yield rate (0%)

App Data



Gender	All Applicants		Accepted Applicants		Deposited at DU		DU incoming cohort
F	178	71%	157	74%	89	69%	54%
M	72	29%	54	26%	40	31%	46%
Total	250		211		129		

First Gen	All Applicants		Accepted Applicants		Deposited at DU	
Yes	39	16%	24	11%	19	15%
No	211	84%	187	89%	110	85%
Total	250		211		129	

In State	All Applicants		Accepted Applicants		Deposited at DU		DU incoming cohort
CO	85	34%	72	34%	55	43%	33%
Total	250		211		129		

Faculty Engagement

We continue to work to build connections and dialogue with exceptional faculty from across campus, both through our Honors Council as well as through teaching opportunities.

At our Honors graduation and cording ceremony, we recognized two faculty members. Faculty were selected based on student nominations in two categories.

The first award for excellence in teaching went to Dr. Geoffrey Stacks in the University Writing Program who teaches both Honors WRIT 1622 and 1733. A student who nominated him for this award wrote that Prof. Stacks made him, “a better writer, a better thinker, and a better human...and always provoked reflection and growth.”

The second award for excellence in mentorship of research, scholarship, or creative work went to Dr. Kateri McRae, Professor and Chair of Psychology. The mentee who nominated her this year stated: “Dr. McRae always met me where I was at, offered fantastic support, and challenged assumptions or level of thinking.”

Teaching:

Geoffrey Stacks, Ph.D

University Writing Program



Mentorship:

Kateri McRae, Ph.D

Psychology

Honors Faculty

2024-2025

Julia Baldassari
Academic Advising

Angelo Castagnino
Languages, Literatures, & Cultures

Kira Castle
University Honors Program

Elizabeth Cambell
History

April Chapman-Ludwig
University Writing Program

Richard Colby
University Writing Program

Paula Cole
Economics

J. Michael Daniels
Geography & the Environment

George DeMartino
International Studies

Robert Gilmor
University Writing Program

Hava Gordon
Sociology & Criminology

Helen Hazen
Geography & the Environment

M. Roger Holland II
Ethnomusicology

Lindsay Lawton
Scholar Development & Fellowships Advising

Chad Leahy
Spanish

Logan Middleton
University Writing Program

Laura Perille
4D Experience

LP Picard
University Writing Program

Savannah Pine
Scholar Development & Fellowships Advising

Chiara Piovani
Economics

Trace Reddell
Emergent Digital Practices

Naomi Reshotko
Philosophy

David Riche
University Writing Program

Lapo Salucci
Public Policy

Rebekah Shultz Colby
University Writing Program

Jonathan Sciarcon
History

Geoffrey Stacks
University Writing Program

Don Sullivan
Geography & the Environment

Kate Tennis
International Studies

Erika Trigoso Rubio
Geography & the Environment

Benjamin Williams
Business Information & Analytics

Honors Council

Honors Council is the primary consultative body for Honors. It consists of 10 faculty from across campus as well as 2 student representatives. Their charge is to review and advise on major programmatic changes, to review and approve new Honors courses, and to act as a conduit to their respective departments. They also are sometimes asked to meet with new faculty in the program. This year Honors council met 3 times:

- In Fall 2024, to review the new mission, vision, and values statements
- In Winter 2025, to discuss new course proposals and the proposed program expansion
- In Spring 2025, to discuss new course proposals and other curriculum initiatives

Honors Council Membership 2024-2025

Tessa Appel (Student Rep)

Phil Chen (CAHSS)

Richard Colby (Writing)

Mike Daniels (NSM)

Ryan Elmore (Daniels)

Matt Gordon (Ritchie)

Helen Hazen (NSM)

Gavin Hood (Student Rep)

Pamela Miller (CAHSS)

Lapo Salucci (Korbel)

Susan Schulten (CAHSS)

Benjamin Williams (Daniels)

Alumni Engagement

FIRST ALUMNI NETWORK EVENT



This spring we were excited to host our first alumni engagement event! Sasha Shadrina '22 (Honors graduate and current DU Law School student) generously donated her time alongside Rita O'Connell (DU Law School advisor) to talk to current Honors students who are interested in attending law school and to attend a tour of the DU law school.

Student, Alumna, & Course Featured in Alumni Newsletter

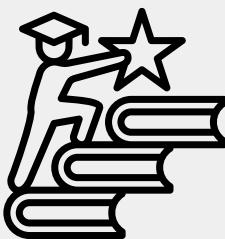
- Andres Pulido '22
Alumni Feature
- Melissa Shambach '20
Alumni Feature
- Frankie Stroud '26
Current Student Feature
- W. Scott Howard
Faculty Profile



UPCOMING OPPORTUNITY FOR ENGAGEMENT

Starting next spring, we will work with students in the required HNRS 3000 class (Into the Unknown) to do an informational interview with an Honors alumnus. Students will prepare for the interview in class, will learn how to engage alumni constructively through informational interviewing, and will follow up in order to build meaningful and lasting connections.

Curriculum



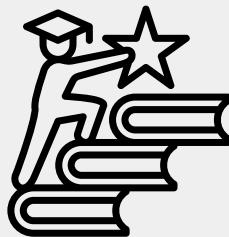
Every year, the Honors program offers a number of four credit courses, taught by faculty from across the University, that overlap with students' common curriculum requirements. These classes are designed to be smaller, more discussion-based, and to require more active learning engagement from all students.

In addition, we offer a number of two-credit Honors Seminars, taught on subjects that are near and dear to our faculty members' hearts. These classes provide an opportunity for students to join faculty on intellectual journeys, and to engage deeply on topics outside of their majors.

This year's incoming students were the first to be held to the new curriculum changes that we approved last year. Most notably, this means that they will have three scaffolded courses, required for all students, to be taken in their first, second, and final years in the program. The courses carry very little credit and are minimal time commitments, but they are designed to help high-achieving students find their place in Honors (HNRS 1000), plan to make the most of their time at DU (HNRS 2000), and prepare for life after undergrad (HNRS 3000).

Curriculum

continued

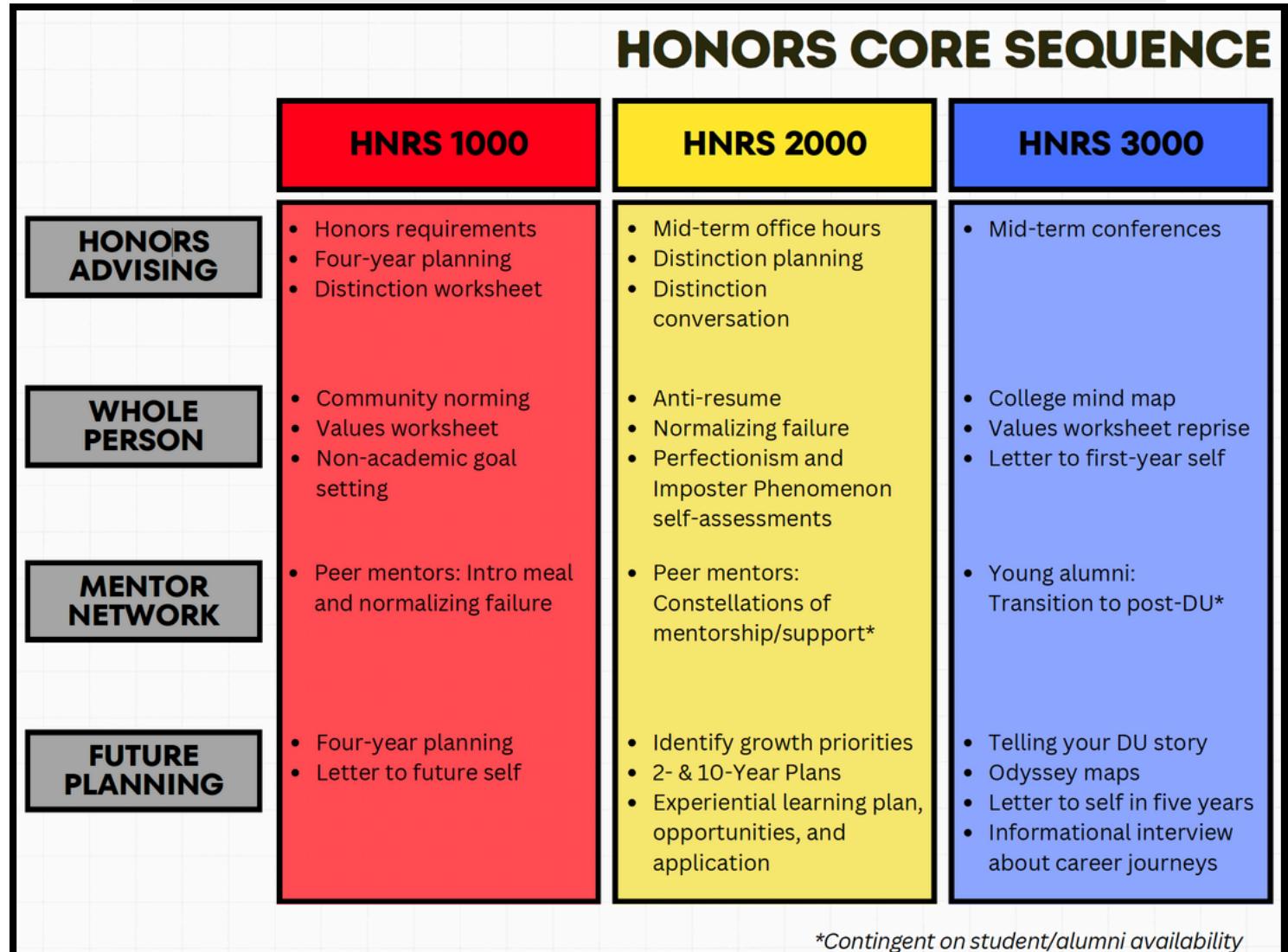


These courses offer a number of touch points to meet students where they are at with advising, whole person centered activities, mentorship initiatives, and opportunities to think intentionally about their future (as illustrated on the following page). The new curriculum also provides a bit more flexibility to students who brought in credit for some of their Common Curriculum AI: Society or SI: Society requirements.

This past year, we also introduced seven new Honors courses, and Honors council has approved an additional five new classes for the upcoming academic year.



Honors Core Sequence



The Honors Core Sequence (HNRS 1000, 2000, & 3000) builds on four pillars: Honors Advising, Whole Person, Mentor Network, and Future Planning. These courses are meant to build upon each other and provide connective tissue for the Honors experience. Students take these courses at specific points in their DU journey:

- HNRS 1000: *Honors Summit*, first quarter in Honors
- HNRS 2000: *Extreme Academics*, second year at DU
- HNRS 3000: *Into the Unknown*, one of final three quarters at DU

Curriculum

This past year we introduced seven new Honors courses (marked by an asterisk below), and repeated many successful courses from previous years

2024-2025 HONORS COURSES

**FALL
2024**

- WRIT 2650: *Digital Rhetorics* (Colby) AISC
- ECON 1020: *Economics: A Critical Introduction* (Cole) SISC
- INTS 1500: *Contemporary Issues in the Global Economy* (DeMartino) SISC
- GEOG 1264: *Global Environmental Change I* (Trigoso) SINP
- HNRS 2400: *Poetry as Social Activism* (Brakefield) HSEM*
- HNRS 2400: *The Why of Work* (Middleton) HSEM*
- HNRS 1000: *Honors Summit* (Castle, Tennis) CORE1
- HNRS 2000: *Extreme Academics* (Tennis) CORE2
- HNRS 3000: *Into the Unknown* (Picard) CORE3
- ASEM 2736: *Spirituals and the Blues* (Holland) ASEM



**WINTER
2025**

- HIST 1320: *European Culture in the World Wars* (Campbell) AISC*
- PPOL 1910: *Introduction to Public Policy* (Salucci) SISC
- INTS 1700: *Intro to International Politics* (Tennis) SISC
- GEOG 1265: *Global Environmental Change II* (Sullivan) SINP
- HNRS 1000: *Honors Summit* (Castle, Tennis) CORE1
- HNRS 2400: *Cervantes & the Canon* (Leahy)
- HNRS 2400: *Native Plants in Urban Ecosystems* (Sciarcon) HSEM
- HNRS 2401: *Adventures in Fellowships* (Pine) HSEM
- HNRS 3000: *Into the Unknown* (McFail, Baldassari) CORE3
- ASEM 2861: *Taboo Tales* (Chapman-Ludwig) ASEM*
- ASEM 2748: *What We Eat Matters* (Piovani)*
- WRIT 1622: *Advanced Rhetoric & Writing* (multiple sections) WRIT



**SPRING
2025**

- ITAL 2201: *20th Century Italian History & Culture* (Castagnino) AISC
- PHIL 2260: *Philosophical Approaches to Perception & Reality* (Reshotko) AISC
- GEOG 2511: *Principles of Sustainability* (Trigoso) SISC
- GEOG 1266: *Global Environmental Change III* (Daniels) SINP
- HNRS 2400: *The Human Population* (Hazen) HSEM
- HNRS 2400: *Chance Encounters* (Williams) HSEM*
- HNRS 2401: *Adventures in Fellowships* (Lawton)
- HNRS 2000: *Extreme Academics* (Perille, Pine) CORE2
- ASEM 2460: *Psychedelia in the Age of AI* (Reddell) ASEM*
- ASEM 2641: *Globalization from Above and Below* (Gordon) ASEM
- WRIT 1733: *Honors Writing* (multiple sections) WRIT



Curriculum

With the help of Honors Council, we have approved and scheduled a number of new and exciting courses for next year (marked by an asterisk below), and are bringing back a number of successful courses from prior years.

2025-2026 HONORS COURSES

FALL 2025

- PHIL 2182: The Making of the Modern World (Nail) AISC
- INTS 1500: Introduction to the Global Economy (DeMartino) SISC
- MFJS 2270: Activist Media (Liu) SISC*
- ASEM 2406: Myths of Medieval Encounters (Melleno) ASEM
- GEOG 1264: Global Environmental Change (Daniels) SINP
- HNRS 2400: Poetry as Social Activism (Brakefield) HSEM
- HNRS 2400: The Why of Work (Middleton) HSEM
- HNRS 2400: American Racial Politics (Chen) HSEM*
- HNRS 1000: Honors Summit (Castle & Tennis) CORE1
- HNRS 2000: Extreme Academics (Lim & Pitts) CORE2



WINTER 2026

- HIST 1510: War and the Presidency (Schulten) AISC
- COMN 2450: Between Memory and Imagination (Willink) AISC
- INTS 1700: Introduction to International Politics (Tennis) SISC
- PLSC 2703: Women, Gender, and the Law (Chatfield) SISC*
- ASEM 2861: Taboo Tales ... (Chapman-Ludwig) ASEM
- ASEM 2454: Psychology of Religious and Spiritual ... (McIntosh) ASEM
- GEOG 1265: Global Environmental Change II (Sullivan) SINP
- HNRS 2400: Shakespeare's Americas (Howard) HSEM
- HNRS 2400: Denver Wilds (del Rosso) HSEM
- HNRS 2400: Gender and Memory in Early Christianity (Cobb) HSEM*
- HNRS 2401: Adventures in Fellowships (Pine) HSEM
- HNRS 1000: Honors Summit (Castle & Tennis) CORE1
- HNRS 2000: Extreme Academics (Dinh) CORE2
- WRIT 1622: Advanced Rhetoric and Writing (Multiple Sections) WRIT



SPRING 2026

- PHIL 2260: Philosophical Approaches ... (Reshotko) AISC
- HIST 1320: European Culture in the World Wars (Campbell) AISC
- PPOL 1910: Introduction to Public Policy (Salucci) SISC
- ASEM 2462: Psychedelia in the Age of AI (Reddell) ASEM
- ASEM 2777: Stranger Things ... (Yeung) ASEM*
- GEOG 1266: Global Environmental Change (Daniels) SINP
- NHRS 2400: Migration and Diaspora Narratives (Nwosu) HSEM
- HNRS 2400: Reproductive Geographies (Hazen) HSEM
- HNRS 2401: Adventures in Fellowships (Lawton) HSEM
- HNRS 2000: Extreme Academics (Tennis, Pine, & Perille) CORE2
- HNRS 3000: Into the Unknown (McFail and Baldassari) CORE3





Distinction & Research

Mission Statement: Our students emerge as self-directed learners, encouraged to ask new questions and pursue their curiosities – both within the classroom and beyond.

Every year, the program recruits a diverse cohort of creative thinkers who want to go beyond the requirements – whether they were part of an Honors program in high school or not.

This year, we graduated 48 students, all of whom achieved distinction in their majors, which is a huge accomplishment that usually requires advanced original contributions to research, scholarship, or creative work in the student's discipline. We encouraged everyone to participate in the Undergraduate Signature Work Showcase, and required students to submit their work to the DU Digital Commons whenever it was applicable to their projects.

We also continue to partner with the DU Undergraduate Research Journal and encourage students to submit relevant projects for publication

Distinction in
24
different majors

2025 Honors
Graduates
48

Latin Honors
88%
earned

Graduation

2024-2025 University Honors Program Graduates

Aberle, Kabe <i>Psychology</i>	Dervin, Soren <i>Emergent Digital Practices</i>	Kuhn, Emma <i>Physiology in Health & Disease</i>
Adams, Lil <i>Anthropology</i>	Doris, Nicole <i>Biological Sciences</i>	Lange, Daniel <i>Socio-Legal Studies</i>
Anderson, Brock <i>International Studies</i>	Estepp, Mollie <i>Socio-Legal Studies</i>	Lewey, Kerstin <i>Molecular Biology</i>
Appel, Tessa <i>Biological Sciences</i>	Fedorovich-Klein, Larissa <i>German</i>	Loeber, Emma <i>International Studies</i>
Baker, Lindsay <i>Anthropology</i>	Flores, Jonathan <i>Economics</i>	Lott, Ryker <i>Mechanical Engineering</i>
Bienstock, Rachel <i>International Studies</i>	Forcier, Sophia <i>Psychology</i>	Marlow, Anna <i>Environmental Science</i>
Bilodeau, Robin <i>Political Science</i>	Freedman, Hadley <i>Psychology</i>	Nord, Loklin <i>Japanese</i>
Brown, Ruby <i>Hospitality Management</i>	Friesen, April <i>Biochemistry</i>	Olson, Sarah <i>Environmental Science</i>
Brownell, Aidan <i>Mathematics</i>	Highfill, William <i>Chinese</i>	Rodriguez, Derek <i>Mathematics</i>
Bryant, Madison <i>International Studies</i>	Hood, Gavin <i>Psychology</i>	Rothenberger, Mason <i>International Studies</i>
Campbell, Kiena <i>Environmental Science</i>	Hoy, Alexis <i>Biological Sciences</i>	Sobolewski, Ashley <i>Mathematics</i>
Claflin, MacKenzie <i>Film Studies & Production</i>	James, Alexis <i>Emergent Digital Practices</i>	Spittal, Alexis <i>Political Science</i>
Cooper, Emilia <i>Political Science</i>	Jacques, Sydney <i>Biological Sciences</i>	Storer, Jasmin <i>Accounting</i>
Cooper, Kati <i>Business Analytics</i>	Joys, Douglas <i>History</i>	Vahl, Cate <i>Molecular Biology</i>
Dammann, William <i>History</i>	Knudsen, Hayley <i>Public Policy</i>	Wright, Keely <i>Psychology</i>
Daugherty, Olivia <i>Accounting</i>	Kruger, Elijah <i>German</i>	Yamauchi, Mio <i>Music Performance</i>

*Distinction department listed

Annual Survey Research

In spring quarter of 2025, we surveyed our Honors students about their experiences in the program. We got feedback from 67 students, with the the highest rate of feedback from first and second year students.

When asked about the strongest elements of the program, the most common answers were related to community and classes. When asked about the weakest elements of the program, the most common concerns were lack of course variety, a need for more advising, and concerns about building community in Honors.

Relating to community, The most common thing that students appreciated was the events, but there were also a lot of positive mentions of community generally and of the Honors cohort. On the negative side, some people struggled to find community in Honors the most common reason given for this was that they didn't live on the floor.

Here are a few of our favorite responses relating to Honors community:

“The honors community is a very supportive and collaborative environment that makes me feel seen, appreciated, and heard.”

The Honors community “made my transition to college so much easier and truly helped me feel at home at DU.”

Honors events “have been instrumental in my social network! Attending these events allowed me to get to know people that I otherwise would likely have never met.”

Annual Survey

Research

continued

Regarding Honors classes, positive responses included widespread praise for the faculty, the subject matter, the format (often noting discussion-based and small sizes), and for specific courses. The most common negative comment was that there wasn't enough choice, and that there were too many classes in the humanities and social sciences. This seemed to be particularly a concern for a couple of our STEM majors who didn't see their interests represented in the program.

Here are a few of our favorite responses relating to Honors classes:

“I really appreciate the honors classes. It has been really helpful to get to know professors in smaller class sizes and I think I learn much more in my honors classes than my regular classes. I added a minor based on one of my honors SI classes because I liked it so much”

“I liked that they felt like they had less busy work and were more substantive than some other classes.”

The Honors classes “have the most wonderful professors I’ve had at DU. My honors professors are who I turn to for letters of recommendation and are the ones I can’t stop telling classmates about.”

Mental Health Research

In last year's focus groups, many students mentioned wanting more mental health support. They told us that many Honors students face a number of mental health challenges that are directly associated with high-achievement, both because of putting too much pressure on themselves and because of being "twice exceptional" - students who have been flagged as being intellectually "gifted and talented" as well as having a learning disability.

Concerned about these comments and wondering how Honors could best support these students despite not having direct mental health resources, we recruited an advanced Honors psychology student, Gavin Hood, to do an independent study with program director Kate Tennis.

Gavin wrote an extended literature review during the fall of 2024, and then worked with Kate to run two focus groups with Honors students on the subject of mental health. The motivating research questions for this study were (1) Are there mental health issues that are different in honors and other high-achieving student populations as compared to the general student population? If so, what are they? (2) Is there any evidence of effective interventions to address these issues?

Gavin found research that identified issues with academic identity, perfectionism, burnout, and overcommitment as prominent themes in the mental health challenges of high-achieving students. Gavin and Kate took the literature review and the data from the focus group and wrote an article for the Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council.

Mental Health Research

continued

While Honors does not have the resources to directly address clinical mental health diagnoses, this research helped us understand that Honors has a role to play in normalizing seeking help and building a culture of support for the whole person rather than academic competition.

We followed up on Gavin's work directly in two ways. First, we invited an advanced social work Honors student, Iain Magruder, to complete an independent study with program director Kate Tennis to write newsletter content relating to mental health. He wrote short blurbs for the newsletter combined with longer pieces for our website focusing on the following themes: academic self-concept, balance, burnout, overcommitment, future facing, imposter phenomenon, motivation, and perfectionism.

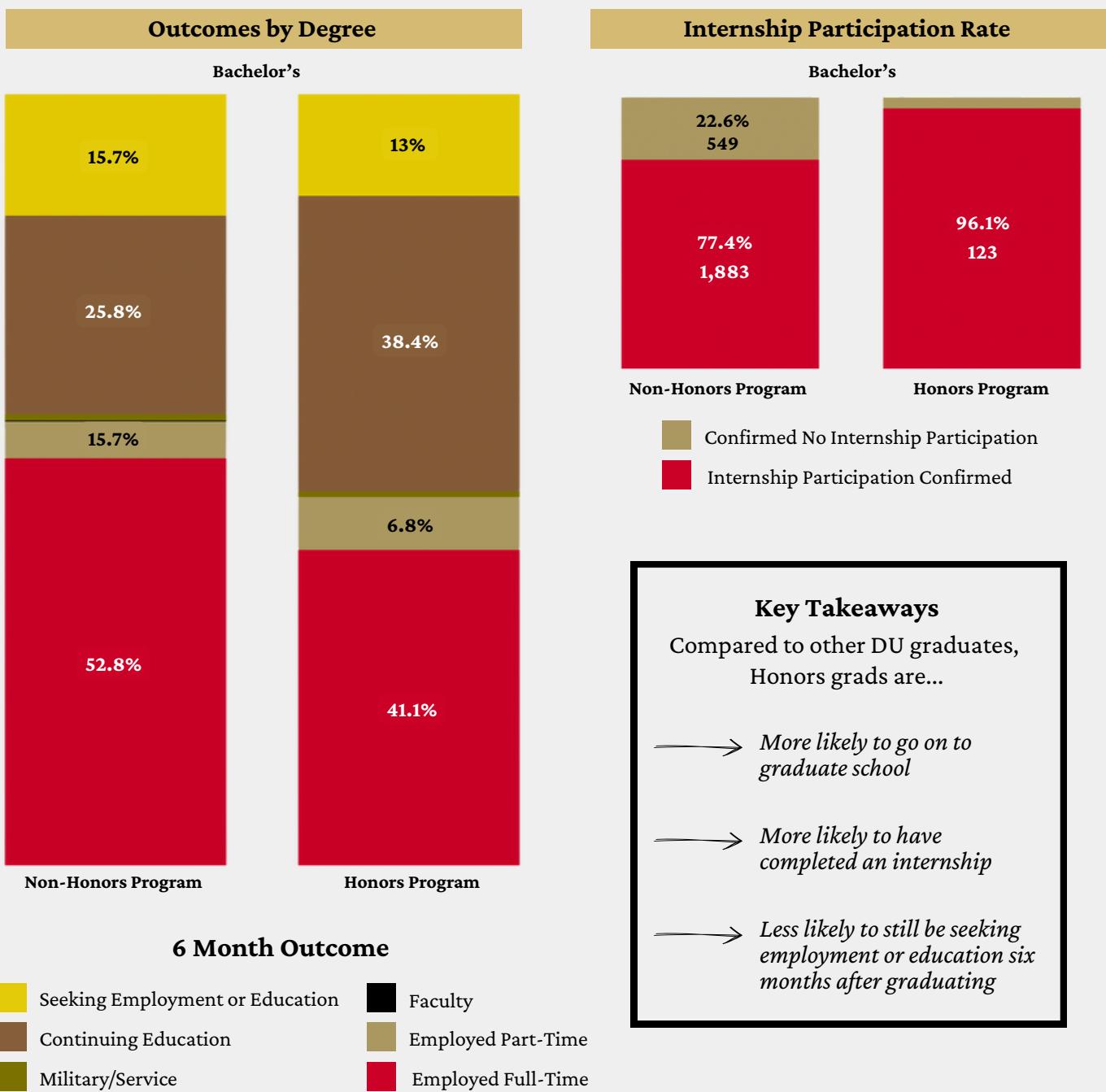
Mental health challenge	Intervention focus
Perfectionism	Reframing failure
Burnout	Normalizing self-care
Motivational challenges	Fostering supportive community
Self-perception and academic identity	Non-academic self-exploration

Second, we integrated some of the findings into our core curriculum. For example, in HNRS 2000, instructors are encouraged to help students think about their relationship with success and failure and to give them information and self-assessments on imposter phenomenon and perfectionism. We give everyone in the class a sticker proclaiming "I love intelligent failures" to help normalize failure and promote growth mindsets.

I ❤️ INTELLIGENT FAILURES

First Destinations

This year for the first time we worked with Career and Professional Development to gather “first destinations” data for our Honors graduates. The data below compare the 170 students who graduated with Honors between 2022-2024 with the 4,151 non-Honors graduates.



Plans for Next Year

We are enthusiastic about the direction the University Honors Program is headed and have a number of priorities for our AY25-26 activities:



- **Onboarding our biggest ever cohort**
This year we will bring in our biggest cohort yet. We anticipate 150 students. Even during the pandemic, the largest group we ever brought in was 125 students. This will be a challenge for successfully onboarding everyone and ensuring that we have enough classes, resources, and opportunities for connection for everyone, but we are looking forward to welcoming this exciting new group of learners!
- **Hiring & onboarding a program coordinator**
We are excited to be able to be expanding our team this year by adding a program coordinator! We will be hiring in the Fall and look forward to integrating this new person into their role, focusing on first year student recruitment, retention, and advising.
- **Growing HNRS 2000**
With our first cohort of students under the new curriculum entering as sophomores this year, we will be offering seven sections of HNRS 2000 to meet their needs. We have recruited a wonderful team of (mostly staff) instructors to help these students chart their paths and pursue meaning in the rest of their college careers.
- **Books over break**
We have been trying to find a format that works for an Honors book group. This year, we are going to try "books over break" - reading an entire book over summer and over winter breaks and meeting once early in Fall and Winter quarters to discuss it.

Thank You

It was a great year for the University Honors Program, and we look forward to continuing our work strengthening the Honors community in the years to come. Thank you to our partner offices across the University of Denver campus, and congratulations to our 48 graduates and 128 incoming first-year and transfer students!



Address
2020 South High St, Denver, CO 80210



Email
honors@du.edu



Website
du.edu/honors