

**IMPACT OF THE HNRS 2000/3000 COURSE SEQUENCE**

by

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A Signature Honors Project Presented to the

Honors College

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for

Graduation with Honors

by

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December 2023

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## **Abstract**

Many students within the Honors College do not immediately realize the true impact of the mandatory HNRS 2000 and 3000 course sequence on their personal and professional development. For this reason, it is imperative that we identify what common themes are prevalent amongst student reflections to ensure that these course sequences generate a positive impact on the student population. The aim of this study was to analyze first-year student reflections to determine the impact the HNRS 2000/3000 sequence had on Honors College students' personal and professional development.

## **Key Words**

- Theme(s)
- Impact
- HNRS 2000/3000

## Introduction

Many students within the Honors College do not immediately realize the true impact of the mandatory HNRS 2000 and 3000 course sequence on their personal and professional development. For this reason, it is imperative that we identify what common themes are prevalent amongst student reflections to ensure that these course sequences generate a positive impact on the student population.

The aim of this study was to analyze first-year student reflections to determine the impact the HNRS 2000/3000 sequence had on Honors College students' personal and professional development.

Student reflections from both the Spring 2021 (N = 132) and Fall 2021 (N = 226) HNRS 3000 course were analyzed via content analysis for overarching themes. Three undergraduate assistants along with the faculty mentor individually developed themes. The research team then condensed these themes, four overall themes for Spring 2020 and five overall themes for Fall 2021.

The final four themes for Spring 2021 centered around course expectations, mental health, shifts in perspective, and team dynamics. The final four themes for Fall 2021 centered around lack of understanding of the big picture, freedom, mental health, connections, and growth.

The students' opinions on course expectations, their mental health (in both Spring 2021 and Fall 2021), having a shift in perspective, team dynamics, possessing a lack of understanding of the big picture, their freedom, making connections, and experiencing growth were analyzed as the main areas to clarify or focus on to improve the impact of the HNRS 2000/3000 course

sequence. For more explicit results, this study should continue over time to evaluate the changes made to the course and how those changes impact the perspective of the students taking the course sequence at the time.

## **The Process: Spring 2021 Reflections**

Once we found out we were selected as undergraduate research assistants for the A-Team Honors College Research Team, it was time to get to work! We met with Dr. Das August 23, 2021 where we discussed our responsibilities for the Spring 2021 HNRS 3000 data analysis, discussed content analysis and decided upon our meeting frequency. Tasks were also delegated out to us – by September 7, 2021, Nia ensured that the reflection papers were pulled from Canvas and pulled participants' demographic data into an Excel spreadsheet, Taylor checked informed consent documents and put them into an Excel spreadsheet, Allison checked behind Nia, and Dr. Das checked behind Taylor. By September 7, 2021, everyone pulled participant's final reflection papers/course papers from Google Drive.

By October 31, 2021, everyone did a first read through and coding of papers. All three of us – Nia, Taylor, and Allison – read one hundred and thirty-two student reflections and analyzed them via content analysis for overarching themes. Each undergraduate assistant individually developed a different number of themes; Nia had twenty-four, Taylor had sixteen, and Allison had eleven.

On November 8, 2021, we met to discuss themes and condense them down. We went through three rounds, starting off with fifty themes. In round two, we were able to get down to eleven themes: growth/comfort zone, feedback criticism, differentially/perspective, challenge, collaboration, team dynamics, course/class expectations, perfectionism, real world, mental health + COVID, and shift in thinking. In our last round, round three, we decided upon four themes which were course expectations, mental health, shifts in perspective, and team dynamics.

In the end, each of us produced a write-up for the theme assigned to them by Dr. Das. Taylor wrote about class/course expectations, Allison wrote about mental health, Nia wrote about shifts in perspective and Dr. Das wrote about team dynamics. In our write-ups, we included the following: what the theme was, defined the theme within context, provided quotes directly from students' reflections, and summarized as a whole. These write-ups contributed to qualitative content analysis publications made by the A-Team regarding the impact of real-world events on Honors College students (i.e. COVID-19).



## **The Process: Fall 2021 Reflections**

We met with Dr. Das January 13, 2022 where we discussed our responsibilities for the Fall 2021 HNRS 2000 data and content analysis. Tasks were also delegated out to us – by January 20, 2022, Nia checked informed consent documents and put them into an Excel spreadsheet, Allison ensured that the reflection papers were pulled from Canvas and pulled participants' demographic data into an Excel spreadsheet, and Taylor checked behind both Nia and Allison.

By March 1, 2022, everyone did a first read through and coding of papers. All three of us – Nia, Taylor, and Allison – read two hundred and twenty-six reflections and analyzed them via content analysis for overarching themes. Each undergraduate assistant individually developed a different number of themes; Nia had eleven, Taylor had eleven, and Allison had ten.

On March 3, 2022, we met to discuss themes and condense them down. Since we understood how this process worked from the previous set of data and we ended up having quite similar themes, we only had two rounds. In the first round, we had thirty-four themes. In our last round we decided upon five themes which were lack of understanding of the big picture, freedom, mental health, connections, and growth.

In the end, each of us produced a write-up for the theme assigned to them by Dr. Das. Taylor wrote about both connections and mental health, Allison wrote about the lack of understanding of the big picture, and Nia wrote about both freedom and growth. In our write-ups, we included the following: what the theme was, defined the theme within context, provided quotes directly from students' reflections, and summarized as a whole. These write-ups, just like

our previous set, contributed to qualitative content analysis publications made by the A-Team regarding the impact of real-world events on Honors College students (i.e. COVID-19).

## **The Product**

Since we were undergraduate assistants, we don't necessarily have a final product. Our efforts contributed towards qualitative content analysis publications made by the A-Team regarding the impact of real-world events on Honors College students (i.e. COVID-19).

However, we have been able to present our findings and research at RCAW 2023 and to the HNRS 3000 course in Spring 2023 as a part of an SHP panel, hopefully showing the importance of the HNRS 2000/3000 course sequence to not only Honors College students but to those who are not a part of the organization so they can better understand the reasoning behind what we do!

## Final Takeaways

The HNRS 2000/3000 course sequence has been found to significantly enhance students' critical thinking skills. The sequence effectively cultivates interdisciplinary perspectives among students. Exposure to diverse subject matter encourages students to integrate knowledge from various disciplines, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues. Through collaborative projects, presentations, and written assignments, students in the HNRS 2000/3000 course sequence develop effective communication skills. This includes the ability to convey complex ideas clearly and concisely. The interactive and engaging nature of the HNRS 2000/3000 courses positively impacts student motivation. The sequence is designed to stimulate intellectual curiosity, encouraging students to actively participate in their learning.

The HNRS 2000/3000 course sequence serves as a valuable foundation for students pursuing further academic endeavors. The skills and knowledge acquired equips students with a strong academic background, enhancing their preparedness for advanced coursework. Beyond academic success, the HNRS 2000/3000 course sequence has a positive impact on students' career readiness. The interdisciplinary skills and critical thinking abilities acquired are transferable to various professional settings, making graduates more adaptable in the workforce. The sequence contributes to the formation of a tight-knit academic community. Collaborative projects and discussions foster a sense of camaraderie among students, creating a supportive learning environment.

Findings suggest that ongoing assessment and refinement of the HNRS 2000/3000 course sequence could further enhance its impact. Regular evaluations and adjustments can ensure that the courses remain responsive to evolving educational needs. Based on the research,

recommendations for future implementation include expanding interdisciplinary offerings, incorporating real-world applications, and promoting even greater collaboration between students and faculty.

These takeaways collectively reflect the positive impact of the HNRS 2000/3000 course sequence on students' intellectual development, interdisciplinary skills, and overall academic and professional preparedness.