



University Scholars Program
Student Handbook

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About the University Scholars Program

Established in 2018, by Honors College Dean, Patricia Smith, and University President, Houston Davis and in conjunction with the University Honors Council, the University Scholars Program at UCA provides enhanced educational opportunities in a living/learning environment designed to develop socially responsible leaders. Admitted through a highly competitive application process, University Scholars benefit from a curriculum that emphasizes leadership, social responsibility, and disciplinary expertise. University Scholars are empowered to be leaders within the community and beyond by honing their skills in academic research and writing, developing a personal leadership identity, and practicing ethical decision making.

Vision

Honors Education at the University of Central Arkansas seeks to develop public scholars whose values are shaped by inquiry and exploration; whose deliberate actions are grounded in interdisciplinary understanding; and whose skills as leaders empower them to fulfill their potential to guide change within the university, the community, the state, the nation, and the world.

Values

The key values of Honors Education at UCA, underlying everything we do, include:

- Academic and Personal Excellence
- Inquiry and Exploration
- Integrity and Social Responsibility
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Interdisciplinary Understanding

Mission

The University Scholars Program identifies highly motivated students, immerses them in a learning community where they can explore their passions, provides them with opportunities to take intellectual risks, and develops them as socially responsible leaders who are ready to take action in their profession and community.

Guiding Principles

Inclusion Statement: The University Scholars Program upholds that diversity fuels the scholarly advancement of knowledge. In order to foster excellence and prepare culturally competent leaders, we seek to create an environment of inclusiveness and respect for the similarities and differences in our community. Through thoughtful conversation about ethnicity, race, socio-economic class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, age, and ability, we expand our minds and move beyond raising awareness toward creating sustainable social change.

Leadership Statement: The University Scholars Program provides a constructive forum that fosters the cultivation of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that develop capacity to effectively communicate and interact with others in order to accomplish a goal in a manner that is as free as possible from prejudice and presupposition and that reflects high ethical standards and disciplinary expertise.

Goals for Student Development

The goal of the University Scholars Program is to develop socially responsible leaders, capable of carrying out research, and collaborating with others in order to be prepared to take action in their profession and community.

The following goals for student development guide this process:

- **Social Responsibility**—addressing social and environmental challenges and finding ethical solutions, a process that culminates in individual and collective interventions;
- **Expertise**—practicing communication and inquiry, a process that culminates in academic research, writing, and oral presentation; and
- **Leadership**—engaging as citizen-scholars exercising informed judgment and an ability to collaborate, a process that culminates in the capacity to guide social change for the common good.

Learning Objectives

The University Scholars Program is a learning laboratory, furthering our institutional mission by developing talented students with developmental yet challenging instructional techniques. Student success in contemplating important questions and in acquiring the fundamental skills of working with and generating knowledge requires innovative, skill-driven pedagogies. As such, the University Scholars Program has these Learning Objectives for its curriculum:

Social Responsibility Objectives

- **Ethics:** The ability to address real-world problems and find ethical solutions for individuals and society.
- **Diversity:** The ability to analyze familiar cultural assumptions in the context of the world's diverse values, traditions, and belief systems as well as to analyze the major ideas, techniques, and processes that inform creative works within different cultural and historical contexts.
- **Personal and Social Responsibility:** The ability to take informed and responsible action to address ethical, social, and environmental challenges and evaluate the local and broader consequences of individual and collective interventions.

Expertise Objectives

- **Critical Inquiry:** The ability to analyze new problems and situations to formulate informed opinions and conclusions.
- **Information Literacy:** The ability to communicate, organize, and synthesize information from diverse and appropriate sources to form a clear and articulate argument.
- **Disciplinary Expertise:** The ability to articulate a relevant research or creative agenda, to develop clear research questions or goals, and identify and demonstrate appropriate methodologies in a project of one's own design.

Leadership Objectives

- **Collaboration:** The ability to develop and present ideas logically and effectively in order to enhance collaboration with diverse individuals and groups.

- **Written and Oral Communication:** The ability to develop and present ideas logically and effectively in order to enhance communication with diverse individuals and groups.

University Scholars Program Course Descriptions

The curriculum for the University Scholars Program was developed by a team of faculty from across all academic colleges at UCA. University Scholars participate in a specially designed curriculum that focuses on developing skills in the areas of personal and social responsibility as well as disciplinary expertise and leadership. The University Scholars Program embraces both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to delivery of its curriculum. All students will participate in small-group classes that integrate the best practices used within higher education today.

University Scholars Core Program

Courses in the Honors Core offer students credits that satisfy university Core requirements. Students will enroll in four honors-sections of Core classes within their first two years at UCA. These classes will have smaller enrollments, be discussion-based, and will focus on developing a specialized skill set. The first of these classes is the gateway course, "On Expertise: The Necessity of Leadership and Scholarship." The remaining courses are chosen from a variety of disciplines depending student course needs.

On Expertise: The Necessity of Leadership and Scholarship (USCH 1300)

Taken in the fall semester of the freshman year, "On Expertise" is a gateway course to the University Scholars Program. The goal of the course is to explore areas of leadership, social responsibility, and disciplinary expertise. Through an interdisciplinary approach, students learn how to read, write, and engage in intellectual discourse. Students will learn to identify and evaluate sources of information, and they develop a base of knowledge essential for engaging in conversations about contemporary social issues. This course draws on material from a variety of traditions and requires students to engage with challenging readings, frame arguments and provide evidence during in-class discussions, and participate in critical communication about current issues within

and across disciplinary areas. Students may count the course as fulfilling the Responsible Living (RL) requirement for the lower division core. The course also satisfies the Freshmen Year Seminar (FYS) requirement and the Humanities (H) requirement.

University Scholars Seminars

For the completion of the University Scholars Core Program, students must complete three additional university courses with the University Scholars Seminar (USP) designation. These seminars are offered every semester and are offered in a variety of disciplines. These courses allow students opportunities to practice the skills that are introduced in the “On Expertise” course throughout the remainder of Core Program and move them toward proficiency of these skills while preparing them to undertake the University Scholars Capstone Project.

University Scholars Capstone Project

The goal of disciplinary expertise remains critical to the mission of the junior and senior curricula, through which students are able to complete an Honors Capstone Project within their major. They are required to complete two courses dedicated to the completion of the Capstone Project, during which a student completes a project of their own choosing rooted in undergraduate research or creative work.

Capstone I

Capstone I fulfills the first of two required courses for completion of the Honors Capstone Project. It is designed to help students look critically at evidence, understand research ethics, develop research questions, try out arguments, and learn processes of scholarly inquiry. Capstone I should help students to not only synthesize information and respond critically to their sources, but also to master the facts and evidence upon which their responses are based. The course goal is for each student to develop a proposal and plan for their Capstone Project and to complete a substantial portion of the literature review before the end of the term. The student will identify a Capstone mentor with whom the student will meet weekly until the project is completed.

Capstone I satisfies both the Communication (C) and Critical Inquiry (I) requirements for the UD Core.

Capstone II

Capstone II is designed to support students as they develop, write, and present the Honors Capstone Project. Its most important function is to ensure that each student contributes new knowledge through completion of the project. The heart of the course will be the workshop, which will consist of writing, sharing, reading, and commenting on one another's work. By the conclusion of this course, students should demonstrate proficiency in integrative scholarship, written and oral communication, and critical inquiry and analysis.

Capstone II satisfies the UD Core Capstone (Z) requirement.

Learning Environment

Student Commitments

As a participant in the University Scholars Program, you are asked to commit to:

- Co-creating a learning community that supports its members in their growth and action;
- Openly examining values, beliefs, and assumptions you hold about yourself and others;
- Engaging as a scholar, expanding your imagination by conversing with others and integrating diverse knowledge, perspectives, and skills;
- Participating in reflective civic action, gaining skills to solve real-world problems; and
- Growing as a responsible leader, working with others for the common good.

Guidelines for Class Discussions

Our primary commitment is to learn from each other. We acknowledge differences amongst us in backgrounds, skills, interests, and values, but we realize that these differences will increase our awareness and understanding. To facilitate discussion in the small group setting, we observe the following guidelines:

1. Be courteous. Don't interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking. Keep confidential any personal information that comes up in class. Be aware of the fact that tone of voice and body language are powerful communicators. While some postures or facial expressions (e.g., crossed arms, eye rolls, loud sighs) can silence, provoke, or intimidate, others (e.g., facing and looking at the speaker, staying quiet, nodding) can show you are listening respectfully.

2. Listen. Pay careful attention to what others are saying even when you disagree with what is being said. Comments that you make (asking for clarification, sharing critiques, expanding on a point, etc.) should reflect that you have paid attention to the speaker.

3. Challenge the idea and not the person. Respect others' rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. If you wish to challenge something that has been said, challenge the idea or the practice referred to, not the individual sharing it.

4. Support your statements. Use evidence and provide a rationale for your points. Share briefly from your own experiences when appropriate, rather than simply your positions.

5. Step Up, Step Back. Allow everyone the chance to talk. If you have much to say, try to hold back a bit; if you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion and empower yourself to speak up.

6. Speak your discomfort. If you are offended by something or think someone else might be, speak up and don't leave it for someone else to respond to it.

Co-Curricular Programming

Challenge Week

Challenge Week is a weeklong event each Fall that brings to campus nationally known thinkers to engage the community in a reflective interchange of ideas. Speakers present compelling arguments to UCA students, faculty and staff, and to the broader community, in an effort to inform, educate, and thoughtfully address contemporary problems and concerns. All events take place on the UCA campus and are free and

open to the public. Challenge Week serves as an opportunity for the Honors College to engage the larger community in issues that impact our society.

Issues in the Public Square

Issues in the Public Square is a symposium-style event held each Spring to provide an opportunity for students, faculty and staff, and the broader community to share research that impacts our society. As scholars, students in the Honors College are encouraged to submit proposals to share their research in order to begin a meaningful dialogue and to help advance our understanding of issues of public concern. Each year a theme and keynote speaker is selected to represent a critical issue being faced at present within our society.

Leadership Retreat

Leadership Retreat is an event held for incoming students each year (typically within the first few weekends of the fall semester) where the faculty and student leaders join all incoming students for a day-long retreat dedicated to team building and leadership training.

Soapboxes

Soapbox is an informal Honors student, faculty, and alumni forum for the dissemination and exchange of ideas on a wide variety of topics. Most soapboxes take place on Friday afternoons at 3 PM in the Presentation Room of Farris Hall. Digital projectors are provided to those who want to utilize visual aids. And of course there are snacks -- lots and lots of snacks. UCA students, faculty, and the public are welcome to join us at Soapbox.

Living and Learning Community

Jefferson D. Farris, Jr. Honors Hall

Since 1993 the Honors College has maintained residential space, and today it is located in Jefferson D. Farris Jr. Honors Hall. Students there form a unique living-and-learning community, housed in private rooms arranged in two-, three-, or four-bedroom suites. Suite-style living features private rooms, a shared bathroom, access to a community kitchen and a community area on the first floor for student activities. The University

Scholars Program awards a private-room upgrade scholarship to pay for the additional cost of single rooms for its eligible students residing in Farris Honors Hall. Additional private bedroom honors housing options are available to upper-class honors students.

Honors students are required to live in Farris Honors Hall during their freshman year, and residing in one place makes possible significant first-year enrichment programs. These programs include Freshman Mentors, Peer Coaches, and Pedagogical Assistants.

Citizenship Contract

Members of the University Scholars Program must agree to make positive academic, social, and civic contributions that reflect their commitment to intellectual and educational inquiry, their willingness to foster a living/learning environment of inclusiveness, and their pledge to respect others' ideas and lives. As such, the University Scholars Program requires all students to sign a citizenship contract upholding these values and agree that the University Scholars Program and the Department of Housing and Residence Life hold the right to remove the student from the Honors Living/Learning environment if it is deemed that their presence causes a disruption to that learning environment.

Student Leadership Programs

Freshman Mentor Program

University Scholars Mentors live with the freshmen in Farris Hall. All mentors are carefully selected for their leadership skills and act as academic and civic role models to each incoming class of students. Mentors also work with Resident Assistants to conduct programs designed to build community. Mentors are trained in a variety of areas in order to become familiar with student needs, satisfaction, and retention. They serve as advocates for student issues and foster a spirit of open communication, honesty, trust, and mutual respect among all students.

Each year new mentors are sought to develop and lead community-building events, academic and technical programs, and public scholarship activities. The selection

process includes an application, faculty recommendation, group interview, and individual interview. Mentors must attend training and regular coordinated meetings with the faculty supervisors of the program.

Peer Coaches

Peer Coaches hold regular hours in Farris Hall in order to be available to students who may need to talk about the typical stressors of college life. Their purpose is to provide honors students with an affirming and welcoming environment through which they can receive information and skills on handling emotional and social issues. Peer Coaches offer support and guidance in order to help Honors College students adjust to the academic rigors of campus life at UCA. The Peer Coach program is offered in partnership with the UCA Counseling Center, who provides a professional team member to train and mentor the Peer Coaches. The process of being selected to serve as a Peer Coach requires an application, faculty recommendation, and interview. Peer Coaches must attend training and regular debriefing sessions with the appointed Counseling Center representative.

University Scholars Advisory Council

The Advisory Council is the elected student council of the University Scholars Program and holds Recognized Student Organization (RSO) status on the UCA campus. The purposes and objectives of the Advisory Council are:

- to organize and promote curricular and co-curricular activities among members,
- to work with the Honors College faculty and staff in the organization and implementation of University Scholars events,
- to coordinate with faculty and staff in the development and the enforcement of policies regarding the use of the McAlister Honors Center and other Honors community facilities,
- and to work with the Honors College administration, faculty and staff in advising curricular development and the borrowing of exceptional faculty from other departments.

Honors Ambassador Program

The UCA Honors Ambassador Program's goal is to recruit prospective students for the Schedler Honors College and University Scholars Program and assist these students with their interests in the programs of the Honors College.

The program consists of members from the Schedler Honors College and University Scholars Program chosen by a committee consisting of the Ambassador Program Chair, the Ambassador Program Advisor, and two Honors College faculty members.

Ambassadors assist with recruiting prospective students through the following ways:

- Send letters and Honors College brochures to the high schools throughout the state, including those from which they graduated.
- Set up and run recruiting visits at various high schools throughout the state, including those from which they graduated.
- Attend Bear Facts days.
- Assist on I-Squared Days when applicants are on campus.
- Respond to e-mails from prospective students. Ambassadors will answer questions from the students, set up informational sessions and tours of Honors facilities, etc.

Retention Requirements

Annual Renewal Requirements

Maintaining good standing in the University Scholars Program requires:

- Cumulative GPA of 3.25 and at least a 3.50 GPA in honors courses at the end of the sophomore year
- Attendance at the First-Year Student Leadership Retreat (Held on a Saturday in August)
- Attendance at a minimum of 2 Challenge Week Events (Typically first week in October)
- Participation in USP Service Project
- Participation in Leadership Development Programs

- Participation in at least one Mentor-led Programs per month

Matriculation Eligibility

During the second semester of the sophomore year, students wishing to continue to the University Scholars Program must successfully complete a sophomore lecture on a subject of their choosing. The student must have completed 60 hours of course credit and meet a 3.25 overall cumulative GPA requirement as well as a 3.50 GPA in their honors courses to continue in the University Scholars Program and be eligible for the second tier of University Scholars course work. The six credits in the second tier of the program satisfy the requirements of completing an undergraduate thesis and earning the distinction of undergraduate scholar.

Sophomore Orientation

In order to continue in the University Scholars Program past the core, students must take part in a sophomore matriculation process. At the Sophomore Orientation Session, students are given a detailed description of this process. They are told what will be expected of them at the time they deliver their sophomore lectures.

Sophomore Lecture

Sophomore lectures are usually delivered on a Saturday in the Spring semester. Sophomore lectures are typically no more than 10 minutes long and are attended only by the other students assigned to that moderator. Students will be provided with a rubric prior to the lecture. Students will receive a pass/fail ranking. Students who fail will be given an opportunity to re-present their lecture.

Graduation Requirements and Traditions

Applying for Graduation

Prospective graduates must meet the university deadlines to apply for graduation. Graduation applications are signed by major and minor departments. If the student has more than one major or minor, all department advisers must sign the graduation application.

Honors in the Major Capstone Requirements

To complete the University Scholars Program, students must take 6 hours of Capstone Courses.

Capstone Presentations

Capstone students will be assigned a time for their presentation on Capstone Presentation Day, which takes place on Study Day, the Friday of the week before final exams, during the semester they are enrolled in Capstone. See the University Scholars Capstone Handbook for additional information.

Class Photo

The graduating class gathers with faculty and staff for an official class photo on the last day of the Spring semester. 8x10 copies of the photo, suitable for framing, are mailed to all members of the graduating class.

Senior Banquet

The final event is the Senior Banquet also held on the last day of the Spring semester. Graduating seniors, their families and guests, and University Scholars faculty and staff come together for this celebration of the graduates' years in the program. Graduates are awarded their official certificates and given a medallion to wear at the University commencement ceremony the following day. Seniors selected by the faculty give student addresses and serve as masters of ceremony.