

Graduating *in cursu honorum*:

Instructions for Completing Your Mission (aka Graduating From the Honors Program)

1. *Reaching the Milestones*
2. *Scheduling Your Exit Interview*
3. *Honors Exit Interview Checklist*
4. *Writing Your Exit Essays*
5. *Excerpts from Critical Thinking Essays and Developmental Essays*

1. Reaching the Milestones

By now, you've probably finished most of your Honors courses, and kept up your GPA. Here's what's next on the *in cursu honorum* agenda:

- An essay demonstrating maturity in critical thinking
- A developmental essay
- A final resume, spanning your entire undergraduate career
- An exit interview with a committee of Honors faculty
- A reception and ceremony for Honors graduates and their families

2. Scheduling Your Exit Interview

The exit interview, formal though it sounds, is really a congenial conversation in which you meet with Mrs. Roberts and a faculty member of your choice from your major field. Ask early for specific dates and times of day when they will be available. After you've identified an assortment of times when you and the professor are available, send them to Mrs. Roberts for confirmation. **Exit interview times must be confirmed before spring break (October 31 for December graduates). Don't delay: it becomes increasingly difficult to schedule as time goes on.**

3. Honors Exit Interview Checklist

___ Ask a professor in your department to attend your Honors Program exit interview.

___ Collaborate on a list of three possible dates and times when both you and the professor are available for the one-hour exit interview.

___ E-mail this information to Mrs. Roberts (lrroberts@ tntech.edu), with the subject line "[Your Name]: exit interview scheduling." Mrs. Roberts will respond to confirm your exit interview time.

___ Confirm the time and date of your interview well before spring break if you're graduating in May; December grads should do this before October 31.

If you're not sure if you'll graduate *in cursu* (with a 3.5 GPA), schedule your interview anyway; you can always cancel if necessary.

__ Write your **critical thinking essay** (see directions below)

__ Write your **Honors assessment/developmental essay** (see directions below)

__ Submit an up-to-date **resume**. In the **Education** section, add: *in cursu honorum*, Honors Program. This is an educational credential, not an extracurricular!

__ Turn in your Honors essays. Essays must be received by your professor and Mrs. Roberts at least four working days before your interview.

__ Your exit interview must take place at least two weeks before the end of classes.

4. Writing Your Exit Essays

Your essays are the basis for your conversation during the exit interview. The two essays can offer you some important perspectives on your experiences—not only as an Honors student, but also as a person who has been thinking about your major and life as a whole. At the end of this document, you will find examples of short excerpts from *in cursu honorum* essays written by previous graduates.

Your essays (at least 500 words each) must be given to your faculty member and to Mrs. Roberts at least four business days before your scheduled exit interview. If sent by e-mail, confirm their receipt.

The critical thinking essay

The object of this essay is to demonstrate your critical thinking skills and apply them to an issue related to your major field. To do so, follow these steps:

- Select a topic that is debated—or at least, not generally agreed upon—by experts in your field of study. The topic should have interdisciplinary implications. For example, an engineering major might argue that the impact of using certain construction materials does less long-term damage to the environment than other, seemingly more efficient, materials that must be shipped long distances. A psychology major might address a controversial treatment plan. Every field has controversies. If you are not aware of them, talk to your faculty mentor.
- Your essay must grapple with actual and specific issues and include real-life, complex points of view, rather than setting up a straw man
- The essay needs to be accessible to an audience outside of your field. Do NOT dumb-down, however:
Define your terms, carefully setting up what you are going to discuss. It's more important in this essay to ask reasonable questions and explore them logically, than to emerge with a clear-cut

- answer. If the issue is black-and-white for you, it's not going to be a good avenue for demonstrating your critical thinking skills.
- Do not plagiarize, or your essays will not be accepted. Evidence needs supporting documentation from reliable academic studies (not Wikipedia, popular news sites, or the dictionary).

The developmental essay

This essay analyzes and reflects upon your growth during your time at TTU. For inspiration, you could look through the materials in your Honors portfolio in the office, such as your Honors 1010 autobiography and resume; notes or evaluations you've written about workshops, projects, and service activities; memorable events that made a difference for you; and copies of term papers from your Honors Colloquia, Directed Studies, and other Honors credit-bearing activities. As you think about some of the assumptions and viewpoints you have held during the last several years, make some notes of any specific examples that show changes in your perceptions. Describe any personal and critical thinking skills you have developed during college. In what ways have your Honors experiences helped you grow?

5. Excerpts from Critical Thinking Essays

In 1781, Jeremy Bentham penned a famous response to the subject of whether animals perceived to be non-sentient could feel or understand pain. He wrote, "The question is not Can they reason? Nor Can they talk? But, Can they suffer?" This simple sentence caused a nation of people to wake up and discover that suffering and sentience are not mutually inclusive. Our nation has come a long way since then, but we are still struggling with the same issues of our ancestors. How far can we take our dominion over animals? We eat their meat, control their breeding, and often control when they live or die. Is it too much to ask that we ensure their deaths are not painful?

—Amy Macintire (Chem '09)

The central problem revolves around the meaning of the word 'equal.' If 'equal' means "identical," then perhaps special programs for gifted students are unfair. If this is the case, providing special services for handicapped students is also unfair. The practice of selecting the best candidates for sports teams, dramatic productions, and musical groups would also have to go. I believe that the position "equal means identical" is untenable because it ignores the essential differences that make us human. Instead, I propose the idea that equal treatment means appropriate treatment. Not all students have the same skills, background, and ability.

—Matt McBee (Psy '02)

...And a Sampling of Developmental Essay Excerpts

I have always been a "doer." I like to be involved and feel lost when I am not involved in at least five projects. I first became aware of this about myself in high school and immediately upon coming to college, I looked for organizations and committees to join. I distinctly remember telling my sister that I was excited to join the Honors Program because of the number of committees available to me. To me, Honors was a place I could be involved in extracurricular activities, yet not be considered a "geek" for still caring passionately about my school work.

I felt instantly at home in the program.

—Katy Long (WCB/Germ '09)

Before I entered the Honors Program and college, I had really never been instructed how to ask the question "why." From my former experience, answers to such questions as "who," "what," "when," and "how" were satisfactory. Yet, while in Honors, I was forced in many of my classes to ask the more imperative question of "why." By learning to ask why instead of simply settling for the norm, I have developed the wisdom that events and traditions and procedures do not always have to be executed in the same methodical way. I now always contemplate views on different controversial subjects. When we ask "why," innumerable doors open to the imagination. The moment we begin to ask "why" creates an incessant chain reaction of analysis. This capability I've truly seen throughout the Honors Program more than any other segment of the university.

—Kellie Melton Rowland (Acct '04)

I've learned that I shouldn't judge myself by what I'm not. It doesn't matter if I'm not a computer whiz, or a great public speaker, or really popular. It doesn't matter what people think should be and am not. What I'm not isn't important. What is important is what I am. I'm alive. Everything else is negotiable.

—Cheryl Lowe (Hist '04)

I would love to believe that I would have been motivated enough on my own to participate in all the organizations I have been involved in and serve the community like I have, but I sincerely doubt any involvement without the requirements of HPEO. Like the average college student, I believe I would have enjoyed occasionally skipping out on classes and focusing on social activities. However, I cannot express how grateful I am for the opportunities the HPEO Program provided me directly and indirectly. I came to college knowing exactly what I wanted; I am leaving with the same passions, only strengthened and a broadened view of potential future careers. I cannot pinpoint when the shift occurred from participating because I had to and participating because I wanted to. Maybe it was gradual or maybe it was because I felt passionately about what I became involved with. Either way, I leave Tech with a strong sense of academic achievement, a commitment to serving my community, and a drive to become a professional leader in my field.

—Brooke Mayo (EXPW '11)