

# [The benefits and standards of honors program at brenau university](https://assignbuster.com/the-benefits-and-standards-of-honors-program-at-brenau-university/)

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Education has been taught in two varying ways: scholarship and project-based learning. Scholarship has been the tone for most innovative countries throughout history, as well as United States public school systems. The passing down of information through a teacher has become the winning equation for high-functioning, business oriented countries like China. Tracking student’s progress by regular standardized tests allows the teachers to be the scientists and formulate better programs based off of the numbers to keep up with the rest of the world. In a production-based society, this is a logical move; students with high test scores equals higher education equals higher paying jobs. However, as standardized testing has become more frequent, the use of critical thinking has declined. Students feel like memorizing facts have become the norm. On the other side of the spectrum, pure project-based learning programs have become somewhat taboo. Montessori schools have taken this style of teaching and have given students complete free reign. This, while giving students the utmost ability to use critical thinking and creativity, forms a vacuum as they progress from primary schooling to higher education. Eventually, students in the Montessori school will have to defer themselves to scholarly education. This is why we have formed the Goulash Honors education program. We believe that there are benefits to both scholarly learning and project-based learning, and the creators of the Goulash program wants to provide students with both opportunities for them to thrive and grow in their skills. With a slow integration from a scholarly based learning program to this hybrid, we are allowing students to cultivate their abilities to communicate and intake information without the shell-shock of a completely new system.

When forming a new education style for Brenau University’s Honors Program, we focused on how our main points of this education will benefit students in the long run, whether it be in their careers or in their personal lives. This is described in our Honors Program Mission Statement:

The mission of Brenau University’s Honors Program is to promote our students’ leadership in their community through service, experience, and scholarship. Numerous leadership and service learning opportunities create impactful connections with the local and global community. This program will enhance the educational experience through required hands-on programs, such as study abroad or internships, while providing students with a progression of learning ending in a cumulative project. The innovative and rigorous classes motivate students to think critically and apply their learned skills toward their current classes and the surrounding community.

Based off of the information acquired throughout this semester, we have concluded that our Honor’s Program here at Brenau should be based off of three Pillars of Excellence: Service, Experience, and Scholarship.

Service, our first Pillar of Excellence, emphasises that upon graduation, our program will develop motivated individuals and active leaders within their community through service projects and volunteer work. We believe that the Brenau woman, as stated in the third line of the Brenau Ideal: “ To be prepared for service thereby earning the right to be served,” should be involved in the community service projects of Gainesville as well as of Brenau University. We want the women in our Honors Program to gain “ critical-thinking, problem-solving, leadership, decision-making, collaboration, and communication [as well as a] deeper understanding of themselves and empathy and respect for others.” Service learning has been proven to “ offer students a chance to connect what they are learning with action, while at the same time helping to improve the lives of others around them.” With that in mind, we are proposing that there be a requirement for Honors Program students to complete 20 hours of community service for every academic year as well as involvement in at least one service project through Brenau University. This may be through their respective sororities, through other honors societies, or through outside community groups they are already involved with, but we highly recommend that Honors Program students show the support and assistance of their school and their community. That being said, we want to emphasise the importance of no “ double-dipping” in this area of program requirements. Service creates stronger character and creates a positive impact on a community; students should not be trying to cut corners, but really learning all the skills and experience gained from helping others.

Experience, our second Pillar of Excellence, emphasises that upon graduation, students will have exposure to cultural awareness through internships and study abroad opportunities that enhance the individual’s passion for higher education and the global community. We understand that first year students need to learn their bearings of a new school and surroundings before picking up and going someplace new, so we have decided to leave this section of our program to their final two years. During their junior or senior year, we are proposing that Honors Program students, as stated in the second line of the Brenau Ideal: “ To find joy in doing rather than in dreaming,” go through an internship or study abroad program by their class graduation. Dwyer Ph. D and Peters write in the article The Benefits of Study Abroad- in relation to personal growth in study abroad programs- that “ 97 percent said studying abroad served as a catalyst for increased maturity, 96 percent reported increased self-confidence, 89 percent said that it enabled them to tolerate ambiguity, and 95 percent stated that it has had a lasting impact on their world view.” Study abroad students break away from the “ Brenau Bubble” while forming a global citizen through communication and empathy. We understand that some students are not comfortable going away for a whole semester to a foreign country, so we are offering the opportunity to partake in an internship. Internships allow students to further their education in their field of study and create beneficial relationships with local companies. When discussing internships, Dwyer Ph. D and Peters wrote that “ 83 percent said that [ internships ] allowed them to acquire skill sets that influenced their career path, compared to 75 percent who did not intern.” Both study abroad programs and internships allow students a hands-on education that can be applicable in their later careers and lives. For the study abroad option, we propose that Honor’s Program students are able to go through a semester-long program (Fall or Spring) or through a summer semester program (May-August.) For the internship option, students may take an internship for a full semester (Fall or Spring) or for a full academic year. While we do not require that the study abroad program be through a major-focused program, we highly encourage students to have an internship related to their major to gain those advantageous relationships in the Gainesville/Atlanta area. Along with the Service Pillar of Excellence, we believe that Experience is the cornerstone of all education and should be taken advantage of when given the opportunity.

Scholarship, our third and final Pillar of Excellence, emphasises that upon graduation, students will become leaders through rigorous academics that have constructed strong critical thinking skills and beneficial knowledge for their major and character. We are proposing that, as stated in the seventh and eighth line of the Brenau Ideal: “ To be modestly conscious of the limitations of human knowledge and serenely confident of the limitless reaches of human endeavor,” Honors Program students go through four rigorous Honors classes by the completion of their sophomore year. According to Arum and Roska in their book Academically Adrift, high standards academically benefit students: “ Our findings provide clear empirical evidence that academically rigorous instruction is associated with improved performance on tasks requiring critical thinking, complex reasoning, and written communication.” Our goal is for Honors Program students to gain deeper, well-rounded knowledge through their college education rather than regurgitating facts, on subjects that will give students new perspectives on courses not readily available to non-major students. An art major should be able to learn and discuss scientific controversies next to a math major. A biology major should be able to dissect the meanings and intricacies of poetry next to a business major. Students should take those skills learned in high school and apply it to rigorous classes for any subject. As honors students ourselves, we believe that the Honors Program should benefit every student, despite their busy schedules. With the requirement of courses rather than hours, students may use the Honors Augmentation (an extension of a core class, with a project based focus) twice within their first two years of attendance to “ double dip” and fulfill their major requirements while fulfilling their Honors Program requirements. University, while fulfilling the knowledge requirements for a future career, should act as a way to broaden a person’s understanding of the world around them. Learning should not be a mandatory obstacle, which is why we believe that students should have the freedom to learn while pushing them to succeed.

A true hybrid of scholarship and project-based learning allows academically rigorous skills learned in high school to apply to our liberal arts university with project-based assessments. Any student that survived the United States public education system can testify to the negative effects of strict scholarship-based education. However, how do people feel about a strictly project-based learning education? Students at North Gwinnett High School from 2011-2013 were offered a project-based learning program called Studio. It fulfilled three credits within a two hour class period, covering AP Human (freshman year) or AP World (sophomore year) with a class-respective English credit and a Business Communication credit. When conducting a personal interview with three of its students, students of the Studio program felt like they were at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the North Gwinnett student population. Tanay Sheth, class of 2016, stated that “ most Studio kids failed or performed poorly on the respective AP exams compared to traditional classrooms. Since it was difficult to incorporate all the curriculum into the projects, often a lot of content points from a textbook would be left out or forgotten.” Alex Browning, class of 2016, felt that “ the issue with studio was they gave too much freedom to the freshman. We had no clue what we were doing and we weren’t educated enough to really take full advantage of the course and what it had to offer. All we could do was coast through the assignments with as little work as possible.” He added later that the transition from the scholarly education to project-based education was overwhelming: “ it was especially challenging coming from a completely mapped out, oddly militaristic middle school layout of classes and lesson plans, to being thrown into the mix.” This is why our proposal for a true integration of scholarly education and project-based education is so important, so that students may reap the benefits of both aspects of learning while cultivating strength in skills learned previously in high school.

To gain admission to the Brenau’s Honors Program, students will be assessed by their high school GPA and rigour of courses through the application, and through a second assessment by essay and interview. Standardized tests will not be taken account when considering candidates of the Honors Program due to statistics stating that “ 50-80% of year-over-year test score improvements were temporary and ‘ caused by fluctuations that had nothing to do with long-term changes in learning’” In addition to the immediate negative effects of standardized testing, authors of the book Deep Learning: Transforming Schools Using Common Core Standards, Project-Based Learning, and Performance Assessment discussed the longer effects of standardized tests on students’ education: “.. it almost goes without saying that what standardized testing has done to the two skills that have commanded its attention- numeracy and reading comprehension- has been to strip them of their creative potential.” We believe that an evaluation of their writing and oral presentations adequately describe their potential, rather than a test taken at 7: 00 in the morning. However, performance throughout their high school career will be taken into account. Due to the average of 3. 3375 GPA of the highest honors programs/colleges in the United States, we are proposing that the Honors Program entry GPA be a 3. 3 and above. Rigour of courses, such as AP courses and Honors classes, will be taken to account in admittance in the program, since Scholarship is held as one of our highest standards. Keeping the system for Brenau Scholar entry, we would require students to write two essays based off of two prompts; first essay is on the Brenau Ideal and the second essay is on who has influenced you in your life. First essay shows how the student’s values match with those of Brenau’s values, while the second essay shows what aspects motivate and inspire the student. In addition to the essay portion, the interview process gives the students and the Honors faculty a chance to interact personably, breaking the barrier from a name on a paper. The communication skills of each student will benefit their involvement in their community, aiding one-third of the objectives of the Honors Program: Service.

To maintain status in the Honors Program, we propose that students maintain all of the requirements stated previously in our Pillars of Excellence section, as well as: keep a 3. 3 GPA, take a separate First Year Seminar class (HN 100), and present a End-of-Semester project in place of a written final exam. A 3. 3 GPA is to uphold the Scholarship objective in our Mission as an Honors Program. After inquiring the present Freshman class at Brenau University, most felt like that the purpose of First Year Seminar was not fulfilled with the current FYS curriculum. By creating a separate First Year Seminar class for the Honors Program students, students may learn to integrate into the Honors Program’s standards as well as learn college skills beneficial to rest of their collegiate careers. In place of a written exam, we propose for students to be required to create an end of semester project to exhibit the skills and knowledge learned during the course. There will be a set rubric in place for all honors classes based off of the “ 8 Essential Elements of PBL.” The New Gold Standard of Project-Based Learning, represented by a circle, uses seven elements that all revolve around the eighth element of Key Knowledge, Understanding, & Success Skills. The seven revolving elements include Challenging Problem or Question, Sustained Inquiry, Authenticity, Student Voice & Choice, Reflection, Critique & Revision, Public Product. Each factor represents the deeper understanding of information, which is the purpose of project-based learning. The additional requirements of the project is open to the professor, but we encourage students to have the freedom to design their own project. These projects reflect all of the benefits we wanted from an honors program: rigor and a deeper understanding of content. Through these additional three requirements stated, we believe that the Honors students will have the skills to have an upper hand when finding careers after graduation.

All the benefits of the Honors Program will further students in their academic career by creating services- such as early registration, peer mentors, honors-specific professors, housing, scholarships, additional honors courses, and an honors board- to ease the stress of being in the Honors Program. Students in the honors program get to apply before regular non-honors students, as one of the Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program has stated: “ The program provides priority enrollment for active honors students in recognition of scheduling difficulties caused by the need to satisfy both honors and major program(s) requirements.” When it comes to living situations, it has been debated that separate living situations allow exclusivity and higher status for honors students, but we disagree with the basis of that thinking. We propose that honors students live in an honors hall but are still integrated with normal students, so that honors students are still interacting and learning from non-honors students in that building. By creating an honors hall, students are given the opportunity to create relationships between the fellow honors students and form study groups and aid each other in their academic responsibilities. With that being said, Honors students will be required to live on campus for four years to aid in their requirement of student leadership and service on campus. With all of these requirements, first year students will need some guidance. The Honors Program will have honors specific professors and a separate honors advisor, as one of the Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program has stated: “ Honors students receive honors-related academic advising from qualified faculty and/or staff.” In addition to honors professors and advisor, individuals in the program are assigned a peer mentor to keep honors students accountable in their academic responsibilities and act as guidance when school may become overwhelming. While faculty is described to exhibit “ intellectual leadership and mentoring for able students,” we feel as though peer mentors benefit students upon a deeper connected level. As explained earlier, more rigorous subjects will be available to be honors courses through augmentation, as well as broadening the number of honors courses available per semester. This allows students to “ experiment with new subjects, approaches, and pedagogies.” But where do the students have a say in all this? A board of honors students will be created to address the concerns of honors students as well as create a platform to enhance the Honors Program as well as the campus of Brenau University. Honors students should, as a Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program, have “ assured a voice in the governance and direction of the honors program.” Supplementary to our copious benefits, Honors Program students will receive additional financial aid through the Trustee Scholarship/Brenau Scholarship as well as scholarship opportunities for their study abroad program requirement. We believe that students should be rewarded for their hard work in a rigorous courses and should receive benefits from the University in any feasible way.

The Honors Program at Brenau University should be rigorous as its preceding educational programs, but should be more challenging for the growth of their students. Students entering university have been, notably, over prepared for their collegiate careers, but we should not view this as a waste of time. We should take advantage of their advancement of academic achievement and allow them the freedom of education through their creative interpretations of their learned information.