



USU HONORS

**DARE TO  
KNOW**

— SAPERE AUDE —

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
**HONORS PROGRAM**

2021-2024 Strategic Plan

# THE UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM’S

administration, staff, and faculty advisory board have developed this strategic plan to guide programmatic decision-making and resource allocation over the next three years.

September 2021



UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

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# OVERVIEW

## Our Mission

**The University Honors Program trains a diverse community of tomorrow’s leaders by engaging them in civil discourse, research and creative projects, and local and global humanitarian work.** The program embodies Utah State University’s land-grant mission to prioritize academics, foster diversity of thought and culture, and serve the public through learning, discovery, and engagement. The university therefore guarantees the program adequate infrastructure and resources, including an appropriate budget and faculty, staff, and administrative support, and commits to building and sustaining a robust Honors Program at the heart of the USU Aggie experience.

## Our Vision

**In keeping with USU’s land-grant mission,** the program aims to recognize and develop the potential of students to become future change agents, even when students do not yet see that potential in themselves. Our vision is to build an increasingly rich and diverse community of students, faculty, alumni, staff, and stakeholders who represent the best that Utah State University has to offer.

## Our Goals

- 1. Assessment, Review, and Planning:** We will identify the strengths, challenges, value, and impact of USU Honors through self-study and external review, resulting in a clear articulation of long-term goals, direction, and required resources in alignment with institutional goals and priorities.
- 2. Access and Inclusion:** We will begin to diversify Honors recruiting, build foundational support structures for students from underrepresented groups, assess changes in applicant pools and incoming cohorts, and identify next steps based on this assessment.
- 3. Structured Retention:** We will assess student and faculty perceptions of Honors value and impact and build appropriate advising and retention strategies based on that data, with the goal of maximizing Honors impact on USU students with available resources and thus supporting institutional priorities for persistence and retention.
- 4. Community Engagement:** We will take steps toward two related goals: understanding and improving alumni connections to Honors and building a plan for continued development as a Community Engaged Program by assessing current work in both of these areas.





Building the Future of USU Honors:

# STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

Beginning with internal and external assessment, this three-year plan sets goals for supporting access and inclusion, increasing retention, and deepening community connections for the University Honors Program.

## 1 Goal 1: Assessment, Review, and Planning

**Since its establishment as a university-wide program in 2014**, the Utah State University Honors Program has grown to reflect the disciplinary diversity of the institution, collaborate with a range of institutional partners, and serve the entire USU community as a testing ground and role model for innovative programming, high-impact educational practices, and interdisciplinary and experiential learning. The program has gained increasing national attention through the publications, leadership in the National Collegiate Honors Council, and conference presentations of its executive director and staff. As a successful, stable, resilient, and mature program, USU Honors is ready to engage in substantive internal and external assessment, institutional dialogue, and resource

evaluation, with the goal of building a long-term plan for the future that aligns with institutional goals and priorities.

### Top Priority:

**Complete self-study and external program review to establish the student impact and value of USU Honors, initiate institutional dialogue about that value, and begin building long-term goals and priorities that align with those of the institution and are feasible given available resources.**



## Goal 2: Access and Inclusion

**The University Honors Program** has developed a comprehensive and holistic admissions process that assesses each applicant’s potential to bring curiosity, creativity, courage, and collaboration into the USU community on the Logan campus. Keeping with USU’s land-grant mission, the program’s goal is to honor and foster those capacities in all bright, promising undergraduates, recognizing and valuing important differences in background, self-perception, and demographics. Honors aims to include students with different perspectives and experiences and to improve access to its skill- and confidence-building programming. Recent Honors recruiting efforts have begun to yield increased numbers of applications from students in underrepresented groups, particularly first-generation students. It is now time to develop targeted recruiting of first-generation and marginalized racial and ethnic groups of students, particularly in Utah. On the recommendation of a Statewide USU Honors Task Force formed in 2020, the program plans to pilot Honors

programming on three statewide USU campuses in 2021, with the goal of reaching non-traditional, rural, first-generation, and Native American students. Recognizing that the task of building an accessible and inclusive Honors program requires both a broader pool of students who might benefit from Honors programming and the support structures to help those students succeed, the USU Honors Program commits to extend its reach, create scaffolding for student success, and assess the impact of these changes, particularly on students from underrepresented and marginalized groups. This process will help the program to identify best practices and the resources required to implement them at USU.

**Top Priority:**  
**Build, integrate, and begin to evaluate support structures for USU Honors cohorts on statewide campuses.**

## Goal 3: Structured Retention

**The move to a university-wide Honors Program in 2014** required broad changes in curriculum and approach to standardize Honors requirements across all USU disciplines. Working with student and faculty advisory boards, the program established a flexible, practice-based curriculum grounded in mentored experiential learning and regular reflection. Honors also hired a dedicated Honors Academic Advisor in 2017 and increased peer advising to ensure student understanding of and progress through this new curriculum. Since 2014, the program’s

annual rate of full completion (25-35% of Honors students in each cohort complete all program requirements and earn the University Honors transcript designation) aligns with national averages. Significantly, the high-impact experiential learning and reflection at the heart of USU Honors programming and curriculum shapes students’ lives well beyond the outcome of this transcript designation: 92% of students who participate in USU Honors for any length of time ultimately earn a degree (85% of them from USU). It is now time

to assess student and faculty understanding of the value and impact of a USU Honors education from start to completion of all requirements. In response to this qualitative data, the program can begin to explore and implement appropriate student-support structures, proactive advising strategies, and flexible graduation pathways. This work will maximize Honors impact on USU

students with available resources and thus support institutional priorities for persistence and retention.

**Top Priority:**  
**Define, design, promote, and implement multiple pathways to Honors graduation.**

## Goal 4: Community Engagement

**Honors has built a core group of active, engaged alumni** who connect regularly with current students in structured mentoring programs. With the establishment of an alumni task force in 2021-22, the program will explore the expansion of virtual and in-person networking opportunities for students and alumni, the feasibility of establishing an alumni advisory board, and the possibilities for future alumni communication and continued engagement. More broadly, Honors commits to building collaborative partnerships across USU campuses and within corresponding local communities and to facilitating engagement of our students, faculty, alumni, and staff in these partnerships. As a key contributor

to USU’s successful application for the Carnegie Community-Engaged Institution distinction (2020) and one of only five Community-Engaged Departments/Programs at USU (2019), Honors will assess its work to date in this area and identify next steps toward continued development and leadership in community engagement.

**Top Priority:**  
**Create an Honors alumni task force to explore the expansion of networking opportunities, the creation of an alumni advisory board, and alumni communication strategies.**





Building the Future of USU Honors:

# ACTION PLAN

The University Honors Program has identified a series of key actions to advance each part of the 2021-2024 strategic plan. The following overview charts a three-year plan of action for each of these four goals.

## 1 Goal 1: Assessment, Review, and Planning

- **2021-22:** Complete a self-study in collaboration with institutional partners and stakeholders.
- **2022-23:** Plan and arrange for an external review.
- **2023:** Complete an external review and use report to update SWOT.
- **2023-24:** Meet with USU administrators and other stakeholders to discuss the findings of the review report, focusing especially on the value of USU Honors for students, the impact of the program on their undergraduate experience, and the resources needed to sustain or improve that impact.
- **2023-24:** Articulate a series of long-term goals and priorities that align with those of the institution and are feasible given available resources.
- **2024:** Begin drafting a five-year 2025-30 strategic plan that works toward the goals and priorities that emerged from self-study, external review, resource assessment, and institutional dialogue about the impact and value of USU Honors.



## Goal 2: Access and Inclusion

- **2021:** Revise application and admissions process to emphasize curiosity, creativity, courage, and community engagement over GPA and test scores with the aim of diversifying the applicant pool and identifying students likely to benefit from USU Honors programming.
- **2021:** Establish faculty cohorts on the three pilot campuses for Statewide USU Honors (Brigham City, USU Eastern in Price, and Uintah Basin) and begin recruiting students with the capacity to grow within and contribute to the Honors community.
- **2021-22:** Pilot Statewide USU Honors courses and Honors Book Labs.
- **2021-22:** Develop support structures for first-generation and URM students in Honors (e.g., Honors First Aggies peer mentoring program for first-generation Honors students, targeted internship programs, “Introduction to College” course and/or programming).
- **2022-23:** Adapt or extend existing Logan-campus Honors opportunities to a Statewide USU Honors audience.
- **2022-24:** Assess diversity within the USU Honors applicant and admissions pools and incoming cohort and set goals for improvement in the coming year.
- **2022-24:** Expand Statewide USU Honors campus involvement, as possible and advisable, based on pilot experience, with a goal of diversifying the Honors applicant and admissions pools.
- **2023-24:** Establish scholarships to support access and inclusion in USU Honors.
- **2023-24:** Partner with local high schools and various USU groups (MESAS, Latinos in Action, SACNAS, the Latinx Cultural Center, and/or AISES) to communicate the benefits and opportunities of USU Honors.

## Goal 3: Structured Retention

- **2021:** Begin regularly and systematically showcasing outstanding individual student projects (short- and long-term) on social media, in weekly *Honors in the Know* messaging, and at in-person/virtual events to demonstrate the value of Honors work and the pride students take in that work, with the goal of retaining featured students in Honors and inspiring others to engage.
- **2021:** Define the parameters of an experiential Honors Portfolio Capstone pathway to graduation, as an alternative option to the existing Honors Capstone Project path.
- **2021-22:** Assess student and faculty understanding of the value and impact of a USU Honors education.
- **2021-22:** Revise Honors Leadership Academy assignments to develop a team of peer mentors who are prepared to guide incoming students.
- **2022:** Use qualitative data from student and faculty assessment to identify specific areas for improved communication and education, inform institutional dialogue about the value and impact of USU Honors, and adjust programmatic recruiting and retention strategies.

- **2022-23:** Implement the Honors Portfolio Capstone pathway and begin educating first-year students about the process of building work toward this option.
- **2022-23:** Create cohort advising modules for students in each year of the program and deliver information in Canvas and/or through in-person or virtual meetings.
- **2022-24:** Develop templates, archives, and hubs for Honors Mentoring Agreements (HMA) to guide students who need

some direction toward examples of completed or in-progress work before they begin to shape their own independent projects.

- **2023-24:** Create Advisor/Faculty Honors training and AIS professional development/teaching badges to build skilled support teams for Honors students.

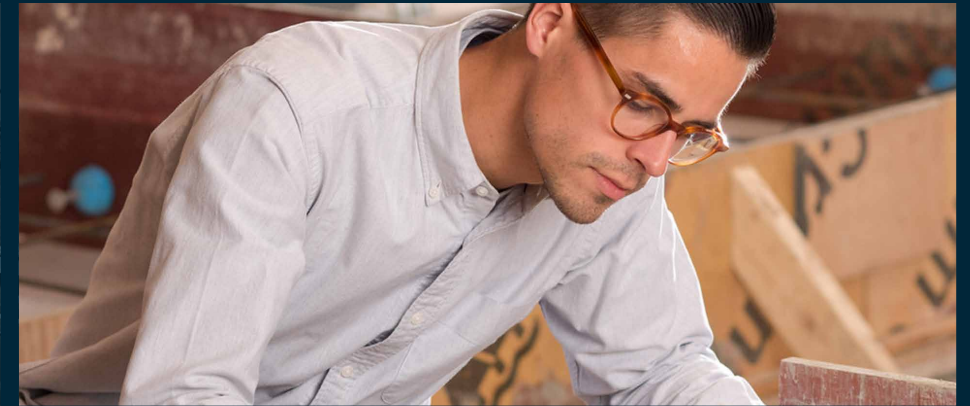
## Goal 4: Community Engagement

- **2021:** Establish a focused Honors Alumni Task Force to explore the expansion of virtual and in-person networking opportunities, the feasibility of an Honors Alumni Advisory Board, and possibilities for future alumni communication and engagement.
- **2021:** Expand the junior-senior Honors Alumni Mentoring Program with a series of gateway experiences designed to introduce first- and second-year students to the value of alumni mentoring and to involve more alumni directly with Honors students.
- **2021:** Create an annual end-of-year networking event to celebrate Honors student-alumni connections at all levels of the program.
- **2021-22:** Assess current work and communicate priorities and opportunities as a Community-Engaged Program to students, faculty, alumni, and community partners.
- **2021-22:** Develop use of AggiePulse to connect Honors requirements and initiatives with requirements for USU’s Community-Engaged Scholars.

- **2022-23:** Build plans to address recommendations of Honors Alumni Task Force.
- **2022-23:** Partner with statewide campus community-engaged project organizers to engage Honors students and faculty across Utah.
- **2022-24:** Identify adequate physical space for Honors community building on each Honors-engaged campus.
- **2023-24:** Create an annual Honors in the Community showcase featuring student projects from around the state (rotating location).







USU HONORS

# DARE TO KNOW

— SAPERE AUDE —



**The University Honors Program** is home to Aggies working together to accept Horace's ancient challenge:

***“Sapere Aude” — or “Dare to Know.”***

Honors creates a community of curious, brave, creative, and engaged students who want to put their learning into practice and prepare for the future as they earn a USU degree. Honors students think critically and ask questions, find and share answers, take risks and support their peers in doing so, and engage with their communities. Our students are committed to building a life-changing experience for themselves and others: they want to — and will — change the world.



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