

Insignis Program for Honors Students  
Student Handbook

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Insignis Program was founded in 1985 to be an academic and social enrichment program for high-achieving students. Through special seminars, honors-only sections of General Education courses, and activities, the Insignis Program hopes to enhance the college experience of outstanding undergraduates.

Academic excellence, as reflected in grade point averages, is only a portion of the formation of a complete individual. Part of the Aquinas College mission is to help students develop emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually. The Insignis program hopes to participate in this mission by addressing the special academic and personal needs of high-achieving students. Through Insignis seminars and social activities, students of proven ability get an opportunity to interact with their peers in academic and social settings and to share knowledge and experiences together.

The word *Insignis* is a Latin word which means a mark of distinction, and the Insignis Program for honors students is meant to help students achieve excellence in all their pursuits. The ancient Greek idea of *arete*, or excellence, is an ideal offered to Insignis students. To the Greeks, *arete* meant not only excellence in a particular field of endeavor, but also wholeness and balance in one's personal life, combined with a sense of grace, style, and comfort with oneself and one's world. In the Renaissance, this ideal was revived in the idea of the "universal man" or woman, a person who smoothly blended together competence in his or her main life's work, accomplishment in other fields, and a sense of life as a work of art which is to be made as beautiful and refined as possible. Add to all of this the Christian ideal of service, and you will have some sense of what Insignis is ideally all about.

Insignis graduates have gone on to distinguished careers in education, law, medicine, business, and many other fields. As a member of the Insignis Program for Honors Students at Aquinas College, you become part of a proud tradition that is a mark of your dedication to learning and to excellence.

Welcome to the Insignis Program.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in the Insignis Program for Honors Students is generally by invitation or nomination only.

### **Incoming Freshman:**

Qualified high school students who have applied to Aquinas College and who meet the ACT and GPA requirements (25+ ACT and 3.5+ GPA) are sent a brochure and application form by the Admissions Department and are invited to join in their freshman year. The Insignis Program Review Board officially admits applicants based on their ACT scores, GPA from high school, the recommendation of two high school teachers or counselors, and a personal essay.

**Spectrum Winners:**

The five winners of the annual Spectrum scholarship competition automatically become members of Insignis and are expected to fulfill the Insignis requirements as a condition of their scholarship.

**Admission of Current Aquinas Students:**

Each year the Insignis director asks faculty to nominate outstanding undergraduates for admission to the Insignis program. Generally, these students will be freshmen or sophomores. Because of the academic requirements, students are generally not admitted after the first full semester of their sophomore year. Exceptions may be made by the Review Board.

Students may also nominate themselves by seeing the Insignis director who will conduct a personal interview. Qualified students will then apply to the Review Board using the usual application form.

In the case of current students, the applicant must have a 3.5 cumulative GPA and only one letter of nomination or reference from an Aquinas faculty member.

**PROFILE OF AN HONORS STUDENT**

(Adapted from Central Michigan University Honors and Centralis Programs)

**An honors student is likely to**

Seek knowledge for its own sake rather than simply for a grade, though s/he will be very concerned about grades

Enjoy classroom moments in which the instructor relates the material to issues beyond the boundaries of the classroom

Perform optional assignments even if they won't affect the final grade

Enjoy discussing class ideas with the instructor during office hours or after class

Share new ideas gleaned in class with friends and family members

Participate in out-of-class activities, even when they do not gain extra-credit for doing so

Want to understand mistakes made on tests and papers in order to avoid repeating them

Have a low tolerance for busy work and for class sessions that merely repeat what the reading material contained

Consider any grade of *B* or lower a poor performance

Appreciate extensive feedback on assignments

Be a very efficient time manager

**ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS**

The academic requirements for Insignis students were designed in compliance with the guidelines established by the National Collegiate Honors Council. Membership in the Insignis Program for Honors Students is defined by progress toward completion of the requirements in each academic year (with honors work in a minimum of 3 credit hours per academic year) and the maintenance of a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or above.

**Overview of Academic Requirements:**

To graduate with Insignis honors, a student must complete honors work in a minimum of 20% of the coursework required for graduation, or in 24 credit hours. Most students will complete Honors I&E (3 credits), Honors Humanities (6 credits), and

several honors sections of General Education requirements. Additionally, each student is required to complete both IN 350, the junior Insignis seminar designed by the Insignis students themselves and taught by a student-selected instructor, **and** a senior project or assistantship. In this independent study project or undergraduate assistantship, students work closely with a faculty mentor in their major field either to probe more deeply into specialized areas of their major or to assist a professor in professional research. They may contract for 3-6 credit hours for this senior-level requirement. Students must earn a B or higher in each class in order to receive honors credit for it.

For students who transfer to Aquinas after their first year, who test out of I&E, or who can't fit an honors section into their schedule for a particular semester, an interview with the Director of the Program is recommended. In this interview, the student and the Director will determine the most beneficial way for the student to complete honors work. Some options include taking Insignis 350 more than once, performing honors work in a class for a minor or double major, working as an honors assistant for one of the student's professors, or completing departmental honors requirements, if available.

Throughout their years in the Insignis Program, students must complete fifteen contact hours of community service work per semester and report these hours to the Insignis Director at the end of each term.

For more complete descriptions of the academic requirements, see the honors contract for honors work in a non-honors class and the senior project and undergraduate assistantship forms included in this handbook. For more information on the Service Learning component, see the service learning section of this handbook.

### **Exceptions and Waivers:**

Membership in the Insignis Program is defined progress toward the completion of the requirements and by the maintenance of a 3.5 cumulative GPA (see below). If a student will be unable to complete 3 credit hours with honors work in any given academic year but wishes to remain a member in good standing, he/she must apply for a waiver of the requirement to the Insignis Program Review Board the semester **before** he/she wishes the waiver to be in effect.

### **HONORS WORK WITHIN A NON-HONORS CLASS**

Honors work is not necessarily **more** work for a course; rather, it is **different** work. Honors students can be expected to be reasonably independent learners, capable of probing course content more deeply, perhaps, than their non-honors peers; of applying course content to issues outside the normal boundaries of discussion; or of presenting their knowledge to their classmates in a productive way.

Honors work may therefore include (but is not limited to)

- \*reading and/or researching primary rather than secondary sources for a research paper or project;
- \*applying course materials to the latest developments in the field, perhaps even too recent to be included in course text books;
- \*setting up independent tests, studies, or surveys to verify or challenge theories in the course;
- \*tackling a more difficult subject for papers, projects, or tests than non-honors students attempt;
- \*even serving as a research assistant for the professor if appropriate.

Specific requirements are negotiable between the student and the professor, but the Insignis Honors Program recommends

- \*that the work benefit the student, the professor, and the class (if possible);
- \*that at least two conferences be held between the student and the professor—one to determine the requirements and another later conference to chart progress toward those requirements;
- \*that an opportunity for the work to be shared with the class be integrated into the contract (either via a special presentation, web posting, class handout);
- \*and that the work be qualitatively distinctive, worthy of earning honors credits.

#### **Procedure for Contracting for Honors Work in a Non-honors Class:**

Students are strongly encouraged to contact the professor in whose class they wish to perform honors work when they register for the class; in a 16-week course, this contact must occur within the first two weeks of class. The student must then submit a proposal to that professor in the third week, and fill out a contract to be filed with the Director of the Insignis Program no later than one month after the start of the semester (see Forms section of this handbook). For classes in the DSP format, the student must contact the professor during the first week of class and have all paperwork filed before the second class meeting. For quads, the professor must be contacted the first week of class and all paperwork must be filed by the third week. The Insignis Director will contact the professor at the close of the term to verify that the work was completed and mark it as such in the student's file.

### **DEPARTMENTAL HONORS**

Some departments may wish to formulate their own requirements for graduation with Insignis honors; the Director of the Insignis Program encourages each department to formulate such a plan. It is recommended that any department that wishes to develop departmental honors work require the equivalent time commitment of one additional 3-

credit class over the course of a student's tenure as a major. Some honors work and activities that may be part of departmental honors work include

- \*Participation (and officer-holding) in the departmental honors club
- \*Participation at and/or planning of colloquia, special departmental events, or readings and lectures
- \*Fulfilling an independent reading program
- \*Peer tutoring
- \*Research assistance for an individual professor or the department as a whole
- \*Completion of the capstone class or research project with distinction
- \*Subscription to a current respected journal in the field with informal discussion of its articles on a regular (though not necessarily frequent) basis

This honors work does not replace the senior thesis or assistantship required by the Insignis honors program already.

The purpose of departmental honors work is not to exploit the students, obtain free assistants, or supply a requisite number of hours' "busy work," but to best prepare Insignis students for their futures, in graduate school or in the profession. Each department knows best what kinds of activities and experiences are most valued in its field and should use departmental honors work to encourage its own students to prepare as fully as possible for work in that field.

The Director will keep copies of Departmental Honors requirements in her office as they become available.

### **OTHER REQUIREMENTS:**

#### **Grade Points Average:**

Students must maintain a 3.5 cumulative grade point average to remain in the Insignis Program.

#### **Probation:**

If a student's cumulative grade point average (GPA) falls below 3.5, the student will be considered on academic probation from the Insignis Program. The student will receive a letter from the Insignis Director informing him/her of his/her probationary status and the student will have one semester to raise his/her GPA back to 3.5 or above. While the student is on academic probation, he/she is still expected to fulfill all academic and service requirements of the program, including completion of service learning requirements.

#### **Exit from Insignis Program:**

A student will be asked to leave the Insignis Program if:

- \*His/her GPA falls below 3.5 for two semesters in a row. The Director will send student a letter requesting him/her to exit the program and the student will no longer be expected to fulfill the program academic requirements.
- \*Similarly, if a student fails to complete the service learning component of the program and/or report service learning activities to the Director two semesters in a row, he/she will be asked to exit the program.

It is understood that any member of the Insignis Program, with the exception of Spectrum Scholarship winners, may voluntarily exit the program at any time by informing the Director in writing.

## **INSIGNIS SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM**

To be complete, a college education should develop all of a student's capacities--academic, social, spiritual, and personal. The Insignis service learning program offers students an opportunity to get involved in the life of the Aquinas and greater communities through serving those communities. The idea for a service component in the Insignis Program originated with the students and was developed by the students and the Insignis director. Service learning has been a part of Insignis since 1993 when the Committee on Studies of the Academic Assembly approved the service learning component.

### **Definition of Service:**

For purposes of the Insignis Program requirement, *service* is defined as any non-curricular activity engaged in by the student which benefits other people, either directly or indirectly, and for which the student does not receive any compensation either in the form of money or college credit.

This definition is purposely broad. Some people function very well in inner city soup kitchens; others find work with children more congenial. Some have a natural talent for working directly with people, while others may prefer more solitary volunteering. Students should attempt to find a type of service that is something they can do well and that will encourage their personal growth and benefit others at the same time. Many service opportunities are available on campus through CAVA/SAC and Campus Ministry. Off-campus opportunities are available in the Grand Rapids and Kent County area, or students may complete their service learning in their home communities. The service component of Insignis may be completed all at once (e.g. a service learning trip, a day or two of activity totaling 15 contact hours), or through the semester (e.g. one hour per week each week).

### **Procedure:**

At the beginning of each semester, students will receive a service learning log on which they should keep track of their service activities (see Forms). At the end of each semester, students should return their service learning logs to the Director via campus mail. Students may also submit a record of their service via e-mail to the Insignis Director. The Director notes the student's activities in the student's permanent file.

## **THE SENIOR PROJECT**

The Senior Project is an independent study project, usually in the student's major area of study. It is usually conducted during the student's senior year, but students may begin work on the project any time after the first complete semester of their junior year.

### **Goals:**

To allow the student to pursue an area of special interest in some depth under the direction of a faculty member, and/or

To provide the student with a chance at the end of his/her academic career to develop a "capstone" project which will synthesize several areas of his/her learning.

**Guidelines:**

The senior project or undergraduate assistantship will generally be in the area of the student's major, but interdisciplinary projects and projects outside the major are also encouraged. The senior project may be conducted on campus or off, but it must be contracted with an Aquinas faculty member, unless a special waiver is granted.

**Procedure:**

1. In their **junior** year, students should discuss the proposed project with the Insignis Director who will help them develop their proposals for presentation to specific faculty members. Students should then discuss the project with the faculty with whom they wish to work;
2. Students should fill out the Application Form for Insignis Senior Project and submit the complete form to the Insignis Program Director who will take it to the Review Board for approval;
3. If the project is approved, students will then contract with faculty members for an independent study course (using the number IN 398 for 3-6 credits), and will provide the Insignis Director with one copy of the independent study contract for the student's permanent file;
4. At the end of the project, the student will submit proofs of performance to the Insignis Director. Generally, these will be copies of whatever proofs were provided to the instructor, including such evidence as papers, video tapes, slides of art work created, etc.
5. Approval of submitted materials for Insignis Senior Project credit will be made by the Insignis Program Review Board;
6. Seniors who have completed their projects in a given year will present the results of their work on the day of the annual Insignis Symposium.

**UNDERGRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS:**

The Undergraduate Assistantship is modeled on a graduate assistantship and is different from a senior project in that the student works as a direct research assistant with a faculty member on a project the faculty member is engaged in. There is a separate application process for undergraduate assistantships. Students desiring to explore this option should see the Insignis Director in their Junior year. From time to time, the director will also make assistantship opportunities known and will attempt to link students with specific faculty members who are seeking assistants in particular fields.

**Goals:**

In addition to the goals mentioned on the page dealing with Senior Projects, the Undergraduate Assistantship also has the following goals:

To provide students who are thinking about graduate school with a research assistant opportunity modeled on graduate school assistantships

To aid Aquinas faculty in their ongoing scholarly research by providing assistance by upper-division undergraduates.

## EXCEPTIONS

Because certain majors may already require a senior independent study project or thesis which fulfills the goals of the Insignis Senior Project or Undergraduate Assistantship, the Insignis Program Review Board in 1999 provided for certain exceptions and accommodations to be made to the Senior Project requirement.

In the case of **Biology, Chemistry, and Geography** majors, where a 2-credit sequence of Independent study is already required, Insignis students should contract for **an additional 1-credit hour of independent study**. This 1-credit of Insignis independent study credit may be related to the student's science major requirement or may be a separate area of study, but approval for the independent study course must be made by the Insignis Program Review Board, using the usual form. A copy of the independent study contract and proof of completion should be provided to the Insignis Program Director. Students will be expected to present the results of their work at the Symposium.

In the case of social science majors (**Psychology, Sociology**) whose program requires an independent study project of 3 or more credit hours, students should fill out the **Senior Project** form, listing the independent study project as their Senior Project, and should submit the completed form to the Insignis Director who will present it to the Insignis Program Review Board.

It is understood that in both of the above cases, Insignis students will perform honors-level work in these projects, and their professors may assign additional components of the study projects to Insignis students (such as a conference presentation, original research, or other components at the discretion of the faculty member in order to ensure honors-level work).

Other exceptions may be made by application to the Insignis Program Review board.

## THE REVIEW BOARD

The operations of the Insignis Program for Honors Students are overseen by the Insignis Program Review Board.

### **Membership:**

The membership of the Insignis Program Review Board consists of:

- \*The Director of the Insignis Program
- \*Two faculty representatives, recommended by the Director and appointed by the Provost
- \*One representative from the Admissions Department appointed by the Director of Admissions
- \*Two student representatives, generally the junior and senior year officers or others chosen by the members of the program.

### **Duties:**

The duties of the Review Board are:

- \*To approve or reject applications from potential students
- \*To approve or reject proposals for senior projects and undergraduate assistantships
- \*To approve or reject appeals from students on questions of probation or dismissal

\*To approve or reject requests for any waivers from academic or other requirements of the program as described in this handbook

\*To advise the Director of the Insignis Program on administration of the program

\*To recommend changes in program policies and procedures

### **SYMPOSIUM**

The Symposium is an annual dinner, held in the spring, at which special recognition is given to graduating seniors who have participated in the Insignis Program. At this event, seniors who have completed or are completing their senior projects or undergraduate assistantships will be called upon to make short presentations on their work. Other activities, events, speakers, etc. may be included in this annual event. The Symposium will generally be organized by the officers and members of the senior class working within a budget approved by the Director.

### **OFFICERS**

The officers of the Insignis Program shall be:

\*A Senior class representative

\*A Junior class representative

\*A Sophomore class representative

(Two students may be elected as class representatives)

These officers shall be chosen each year in a special election held for the purpose and officers for the coming year will be announced at the annual Symposium. Unless other arrangements are made with the Director, the Senior and Junior year representatives will serve on the Insignis Program Review Board. The class representatives will be responsible for communicating information to and from the members of the group, the officers and the Director. All officers will be expected to fulfill the requirements of the Student Activities Office regarding training and liaison as with other student activity groups.

**FORMS**

Students may use the forms on the following pages as worksheets, or they may remove them from the handbook and use them to submit their senior project or undergraduate assistantship proposal. These forms must be submitted to the Insignis Director who will present them to the Insignis program Review Board.

**APPLICATION FORM FOR INSIGNIS SENIOR PROJECT**

[Note: See the guidelines in the Insignis Program Student Handbook before filing out this form. This form must be approved by the Insignis Program Review board *before* you fill out an independent study contract with a faculty member.]

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAJOR:** 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **MINOR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE OF PROPOSED PROJECT:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT:**

Project to be completed by : \_\_\_\_\_ (date)

Supervising faculty member's name and department: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervising faculty member's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by Insignis Program Review Board: \_\_\_\_\_

After you receive word that this project has been approved for an Insignis Senior Project, fill out the standard Independent Study contract from the Registrar's office, using the number IN 398, and give one copy, with appropriate signatures, to the Insignis program Director for your file.

I have read the guidelines for the Insignis Senior Project and I understand the requirements of the project:

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### **APPLICATION FOR INSIGNIS UNDERGRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP**

The Undergraduate Assistantship is modeled on a graduate assistantship and is different from a senior project in that the student works as a direct research assistant with a faculty member on a project the faculty member is engaged in. There is a separate application process for undergraduate assistantships. Students desiring to explore this option should see the Insignis Director in their Junior year. From time to time, the director will also make assistantship opportunities known and will attempt to link students with specific faculty members who are seeking assistants in particular fields.

Students wishing to apply for undergraduate assistantships should submit this form, completed, to the Insignis Director no less than eight weeks before the semester in which the assistantship will be conducted.

#### **PART I: INFORMATION:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Local/on-campus address: \_\_\_\_\_

Local/on-campus phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Major(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Minor(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Current GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Applying for Fall \_\_\_\_ Spring \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_ (year)

Brief description of this project:

Name and Department of faculty member with whom you will be working:

\_\_\_\_\_ (print)

Signature of faculty member who agrees to supervise the assistantship:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II:** [Answer the following questions on separate sheets:]

1. How may credit hours will you be taking while working on this assistantship? (include the hours for assistantship in total credit hour load).
2. How many hours will you earn for this assistantship?
3. Describe any outside employment or major non-academic commitments during the assistantship period.
4. Briefly describe your current plans for graduate study, if any, and career, and whether/how this assistantship is relevant to your plans.

**PART III: Narrative:**

[Provide answers to the following questions in typed form. This section should be filled out by the student and the faculty member in collaboration.]

1. State the type of assistantship you are seeking (research, creative activity), and define your learning objectives in undertaking this assistantship;
2. State the nature and scope of the project. If you are working on a creative activity, what will be the final product? If you are assisting on a research project, what are the anticipated outcomes? What will be the assistant's specific contributions to the faculty mentor's work?
3. Show how the assistant's experience during the assistantship will fulfill one or more of the following major goals of the program:
  - a. prepare our most able students for graduate or professional school;
  - b. provide valuable nontraditional learning experiences in scholarly research, artistic creation or performance, writing for publication and/or participation in professional conferences or activities;
  - c. Support faculty in their teaching, research, and creative endeavors, and encourage them to integrate their professional development with their roles as teachers;
  - d. Foster a mentoring relationship between an undergraduate student and a member of the faculty.
4. Describe any special qualifications the student may have (courses taken, honors, awards, employment, special learning experiences or other background) for the proposed activity;

Both student and faculty members should sign and date the proposal, and the student should return it with the application form to the Insignis Program Director.



**HONORS CONTRACT FOR HONORS WORK IN A  
NON-HONORS CLASS**

(Please make three copies of completed contract: one for the student, one for the instructor, and one for the Director of the Insignis Program)

STUDENT\_NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Local address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone & email: \_\_\_\_\_

Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Cumulative gpa: \_\_\_\_\_

Course number and section: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

Requirement for honors work:

Special or different reading, research, and/or activities:

Special or different writing:

Venue for sharing work:

**Signatures**

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Director, upon completion \_\_\_\_\_