If you have decided to take MCB 150 for Honors Credit, you must be able to answer “yes” to the following questions:

1. Are you a James Scholar at Illinois, or in the process of self-nominating?
2. Are you enrolled in a MCB 150 Discussion section other than the Honors section? (If you are enrolled in the Honors Discussion section, you will already be receiving Honors credit for the course and a separate HCLA is unnecessary.)

Now it is time for you to be as creative as you would like to be. I do not assign Honors projects for MCB 150; rather, I encourage you to identify a topic or project that interests you enough to complete a suitable project. These projects fall into one of two categories: research papers or “other.”

Keeping in mind that not every student enjoys the idea of writing a research paper, you may decide that you would like to do something different for your HCLA, and I welcome your suggestions. It may be that you have a creative outlet or outside interest that you would like to exploit for your project. For example, you may be a computer animation expert in your free time. Your project could be designing a new animated tutorial that demonstrates protein synthesis. Maybe statistics is a particular interest of yours. You could design your project around a survey you conduct and the data you then analyze. My only requirement for HCLA projects is that you find a way to relate the subject to molecular biology or cell biology. And if you are creative enough, almost anything can be made relevant to MCB!

Most students, however, choose to write a research paper, and this is perfectly acceptable. If you choose to write a paper, there are some additional guidelines beyond simply choosing a topic relevant to molecular or cellular biology. First, your topic should be significantly different than the topics addressed in lecture or discussion. Second, it has to be a topic that hasn't already been approved for the current term. And lastly, since I enjoy learning from your projects, I will be hesitant to approve a project that has been done multiple times in the past.

HCLA forms (for the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, anyway) should be submitted online through the electronic HCLA (eHCLA) system by the end of the sixth week of instruction. For students in the Division of General Studies (DGS) or other Colleges, there will either be an online or printed form to be filled out and submitted, and the deadline may or may not be different than the LAS deadline. Prior to this date, you should schedule a meeting with me to discuss your ideas for your project. If you choose to write a paper, select four or five different topics that might interest you. It may be that your ideal topic would be perfect for a paper that runs 20 pages, but could not be efficiently trimmed into a paper in the target range of 8-10 pages. Conversely, your topic may be so focused that you say everything there is to say in 5 pages. Having a list of topics will help us choose one that is most likely to work in our allotted space and time. In addition, since I will only accept one project per semester on a particular subject, if you are late discussing topics with me, your first choice may have already been taken by another student.
Once we decide on an appropriate topic, there are some checkpoints throughout the semester that must be met. This is for your benefit as well as mine. First, it allows me to monitor your progress and ensure that you turn in a project that we are both happy with. Second, it serves two purposes from your perspective. One is that you do not wait until the night before the project is due to begin working, and undoubtedly turn in a product for which I cannot grant Honors credit. The other is that it gives you the opportunity to change your mind regarding your topic. You may find during some of your initial project work that you no longer feel interested or confident in your topic. Provided this change is made prior to our final progress meeting (see below), I have no objections to choosing a different topic, and you will still have the time to produce a quality project. The checkpoints are as follows:

1. Approximately 2 weeks following the submission of your HCLA form, I expect an annotated bibliography that demonstrates at least 5 quality sources from a variety of formats. For example, all 5 should not be encyclopedia entries, or web sites, or textbooks, etc. More than 5 sources are fine, and others can of course be added as your investigation progresses. You do not have to include all of your initial sources in the finished project, however the ones you include in the annotated bibliography should mention what you expect or hope to gain from that particular source.

2. Approximately 2 weeks following the submission of your annotated bibliography, I expect to see a rough outline of your expected project. If your bibliography has changed significantly, it should be updated and resubmitted.

3. Your finished project is due by 5:00 PM on the last day of instruction. Approximately halfway between the date of submission of your outline and the last day of instruction, I expect you to schedule a progress meeting with me. This is likely to be a very brief meeting unless you are experiencing some trouble with your project, but it is important because it will be the last scheduled contact until the project due date unless additional appointments are requested (they are welcomed, by the way). No additional material is due at the progress meeting, unless a change in topic is requested. No changes in topics or projects will be allowed after the progress meeting.

4. If a change in project is requested at or prior to the progress meeting, an abbreviated version of the schedule of events listed above will be arranged within the remaining time during the semester.

Submitted materials, such as bibliographies and outlines, can be delivered to my office or presented electronically (e.g. as an email attachment). A research paper project should be submitted both in printed form and electronically by the project due date. Checkpoint dates are not absolute, but guidelines. For example, if you have an exam on the date we tentatively set for your progress meeting, that meeting can easily be rescheduled so that it falls within a few days before or after the tentative date. However, it is your responsibility to meet each of the checkpoints, and failure to do so will result in your final project not being considered for Honors credit.
Although the College’s deadline for submitting your Honors Credit Learning Agreement is approximately eight weeks into the semester, it is in your best interest to choose a project as soon as you can, because not only do topics disappear, but I only accept a maximum of 12 projects per semester. After the last HCLA is submitted, no further projects will be considered.

Lastly, I want to encourage you to visit with me at any point during the semester if you have questions or concerns about your project. You do not have to wait until your next checkpoint to arrange a visit, and these visits do not need to be scheduled during office hours. In fact, office hours are typically devoted to addressing lecture material, so outside appointments will ensure my undivided attention to your questions. Furthermore, if you would like to submit a rough draft of your project, I will gladly review it prior to the deadline and make some comments. This is not a requirement, but it will give you an idea if we are in agreement as to what constitutes Honors-quality work.

I look forward to meeting with you, discussing your ideas for projects, and working with you throughout the semester.

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