**Distinction in the Major Thinking Paper**

The Honors College offers students the opportunity to graduate with Distinction in their academic major by completing a senior distinction project that explores a significant intellectual question in the student’s area of expertise. Students pursuing this opportunity will prepare and submit a formal plan of study that includes 12 honors credit hours in the major and establishes the foundation for the execution of the senior distinction project.

The first step in preparing the formal proposal is the completion of a Thinking Paper. The objective of this exercise is to help you to identify an area of research interest, clearly articulate your thoughts in writing, and to begin to narrow your area of interest into a specific research question.

You will identify a topic of interest to you that is based upon your studies in your major. For example, you might select Congressional funding for international refugee resettlement or the experience of international refugees in Kansas City. You are encouraged to select a research topic that is related to your larger academic interests (examples might include marketing to immigrant communities or the challenges of educating immigrants in primary school).

The purpose of the Thinking Paper is to help you to identify this research project, explain why you are interested in exploring it, and to begin to move from a broad area of inquiry (refugees from Africa) to a specific question that can be effectively researched (Are early childhood vaccination programs for Congolese refugees in Chicago effective?).

Your paper should begin with the statement “I am interested in learning more about …” Explain why you are interested in this subject. What do you already know? What questions do you have about this subject? What are you hoping to learn as you explore this topic further? Are you beginning with any basic assumptions or predictions? What do you think you will discover as you begin to read more? Your paper should be at least one page in length and not more than two pages.

Envision this paper as a conversation with yourself. Your goal is to think on paper about your interests, where they come from, and where they might lead you. Ask yourself lots of questions. As you begin your work, you will discover that you don’t know all of the answers and that there are gaps in your knowledge. Thinking through these questions will help you to focus and establish specific objectives for your upcoming research work (What do you need to learn? Where can you look to find this information?).

Remember that this is the first step in a series of steps that will culminate in the formal presentation of your senior distinction project. Most of you probably won’t identify a concise thesis statement by the end of this exercise, but you should identify a clear path that will ultimately lead you to your destination. Think creatively, challenge yourself, and enjoy the journey.

When your Thinking Paper is complete, discuss it with your major advisor and the Director of the Honors College. We will offer you feedback and help you prepare for the next steps in your journey.