

Pearl River Community College



DR. WILLIAM LEWIS HONORS INSTITUTE 2025 - 2026 HANDBOOK

A Guide for Students & Academic Advisors

Our Mission Statement

The Pearl River Community College Honors Institute aims to expand the College's base of intellectually gifted students, to provide these students with enriched and challenging curriculum, to foster individual scholarship and research, and to extend the spirit of academic enrichment beyond our campus and into our community.

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2025-2026 Academic Year

FOR THE STUDENT:

During your time in the Pearl River Community College Dr. William Lewis Honors Institute, you will be afforded tremendous opportunities— to participate in internships with leading organizations, to apply for prestigious scholarships and fellowships to advance your academic pursuits, and more.

These opportunities are balanced by responsibilities. The Honors Institute requires you to maintain a minimum 3.25 grade point average, to meet deadlines, and to conduct yourself with honor. Consider this handbook your roadmap to navigate your two years of honors at the River.

ABOUT THE HONORS INSTITUTE

The Dr. William Lewis Honors Institute at Pearl River Community College, Mississippi's first public two-year institution, was formally inaugurated in 2011 with a mission to expand the College's base of intellectually gifted students and to offer special opportunities to students who demonstrate high academic potential, as well as intellectual curiosity and ambition. Continuing the Pearl River tradition of leading Mississippi education into new arenas, our Honors Institute provides such students with enriched and challenging curriculum, fosters individual scholarship and research, offers experiential opportunities, and extends this spirit of academic enrichment beyond the campus and into the community at large.

While at Pearl River, Honors students follow the same general education curriculum as other students but have the advantage of small classes led by exceptional faculty. Field trips and educational visits form an integral part of the learning experience. In addition, students are afforded honors-related academic advising to assist in planning for future educational and leadership opportunities. Active Honors Institute students are provided opportunities to participate in regional and national conferences, paid internships, and community service.

Upon graduation, honors students who have completed at least 21 honors hours while maintaining a 3.4 or better GPA, will be designated as "medallion" scholars and receive a special honors medallion.

Those honors graduates with 11+ honors hours, who have maintained a minimum 3.25 GPA, will receive a special certificate. In addition, all Honors Institute students participate in the PRCC Honors Institute Lecture Series and the Honors Institute Seminar each semester. Articulation agreements with various four-year colleges and universities allow Honors Institute graduates to be accepted automatically into four-year Honors programs within Mississippi.

The Honors Institute has a standing council of faculty members and advisors who represent the departments served by the program, and who, along with the Deans of the Honors Institute, are involved in the Honors curriculum, governance, policy, development, and evaluation planning.

GOALS

1. To enhance the intellectual climate of the College and its leadership in the academic community.
2. To enrich Honors coursework with research, service, and other experiential opportunities in order to broaden students' perspectives and to challenge them to achieve their full potential as learners, leaders, and citizens.
3. To provide Honors Institute students with a broad interdisciplinary foundation and to allow students the opportunity to obtain collaborative faculty and staff mentoring.
4. To enhance the academic spirit of the community by promoting intellectual engagement in all its form among students, faculty, staff, and the public.

FACULTY SELECTION

The criteria for selection of the Honors Institute faculty include marked enthusiasm; exceptional teaching skills; the ability to provide intellectual leadership, stimulation, and mentoring for Honors scholars; and appreciation for the mission of Honors education. Pearl River Community College encourages faculty to develop innovative methods, approaches, and pedagogies. In addition, the faculty will provide Honors scholars with honors-related academic advising.

Interested faculty must submit a letter of interest along with a portfolio which highlights their potential talents as an Honors Institute instructor to the Deans of the Dr. William Lewis Honors Institute. The application should include a recommendation from their chair. Selection is decided by a committee comprised of the Honors director and two or more members of the Honors Institute Advisory Board.

ADMISSIONS

Admissions to the Honors Institute is determined on a competitive basis. Approximately thirty freshmen are awarded admission at both the Poplarville and Forrest County Campus each year. To be considered for admission as a freshman, students must have an ACT Composite score of 25 or higher and a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher. Special consideration may be given to non-traditional students entering without a conventional high school record (i.e., foreign students, home-schooled students, etc.). Moreover, a student may enter the program as a sophomore who has completed 24 semester hours of college work with a cumulative 3.4 GPA or better. Letters of recommendation, extracurricular activities, honors, awards, elected offices and other achievements, as well as a personal essay and interview are also considered in the admissions process.

Entering students in the Honors Institute are advised during a special orientation day for Honors freshmen in July/August. During this advisement, students see an Honors faculty advisor and draw up a schedule for their first semester.

HONOR COURSES

Honors institute scholars take the same general education curriculum as all other students in the college although a number of courses are specially designated as Honors sections. These Honors sections normally consist of 10-15 students and are taught by vetted and experienced Honors instructors. Honors faculty promote discussion and emphasize writing in order to train classes in communication skills. Also, they may incorporate active learning techniques into their teaching in order to involve students in their academic work.

The general education courses which may be considered for designation as an Honors course are:

College Algebra

Computer Concepts

General Biology I and II

English Composition I and II

World Civilization I and II

General Psychology

Introduction to Sociology

Music Appreciation

Pubic Speaking

Literature

Introduction to Philosophy

All courses designated Honors will include the general course objectives along with any honors activities/projects. Honors courses are subject to approval of the Executive Vice President for Instruction/Provost, department chair, and the instructor. This approval process will occur annually for any Honors designated classes prior to the course's start date.

Once enrolled in the Honors Institute, scholars must take the Honors Forum class (HON 1911/1921/2911/2921) which is offered every fall and spring.

In accordance with the National Collegiate Honors Council of which the PRCC Honors Institute is a contributing member, the Honors requirements constitute at least 15 percent of the total coursework of the participants and satisfy general education requirements.

CURRICULUM

Once admitted to the Honors Institute, students must remain full-time students at the College until graduation. Students who accept a scholarship to attend the Honors Institute are expected to fulfill the terms of that scholarship toward a timely graduation.

To graduate with medallion honors, honors students must complete 21 honor hours and maintain a 3.4 or better GPA. To graduate with a certificate in honors, honor students must complete a minimum of 11 honor hours and maintain at least a 3.25 GPA.

The required Honors Forum class consists of special events, including lectures by college faculty and visiting speakers, and is designed to broaden interests and provide intellectual stimulus in different formats.

Each semester, students in the Honors Institute must be enrolled in a minimum of one three-hour honors-designed course and the one-hour Honors Forum. Under unusual circumstances, this requirement may be waived on an individual basis for one semester by the Dean of the Honors Institute.

In addition to these honors courses, students will take courses as necessary to progress toward a degree from Pearl River Community College while still ensuring that their courses will be acceptable for transfer to a university. To help the students with this process, each semester the student will meet with an honors advisor who will help them with their schedule and with planning for their future academic career.

In order to remain in good standing in the Honors Institute, a student must be on track with the curriculum and must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.25. Students who fall below the required GPA are considered to be on probation and will be given the next semester to bring their overall GPA to 3.25 or above.

ADVISEMENT AND COUNSELING

Honors scholars are required to meet with Honors faculty for advisement during each term. Individual advisement, by appointment, takes place during the schedule advisement period each semester.

REQUIREMENTS FOR GOOD STANDING

Students in the Honors Institute are expected to recognize the implications of “honor” and take them seriously. They should serve as leaders and role models in the College community. They are expected to maintain high standards of academic integrity, personal conduct, and campus citizenship, at all times conforming to the College’s code of student conduct. They must attend class regularly, submit work timely, and exert sustained effort to succeed in their academic work. Honors Institute students should be good stewards of all College property. Students found guilty of plagiarism or any academic dishonesty will be expelled from the Honors Institute.

In addition, students who accept a scholarship to attend the Honors Institute are expected to fulfill the terms of that scholarship toward a timely graduation.

To be in good standing in the Honors Institute, a student must be on track with the curriculum and must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.25. Students who fall below the required 3.25 are considered to be on probation and will be given the next semester to bring the overall GPA to 3.25. Any probation status can only occur one time. Honors Institute grade replacement can occur with only another honors course.

It is expected that all Honors Institute students are full time students at the college.

The Honors Institute is in regular communication with students to ensure their success. Students are required to check for email communications from the Institute and to kindly respond as soon as possible to phone calls, texts, or email messages.

Honors Institute students should complete college core requirements for graduation.

PREVIOUS COLLEGE CREDIT

Freshmen entering the Honors Institute often gain credit from courses through the Advanced Placement (AP) Program, the International Baccalaureate Program or through the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). Although this credit may apply toward the academic degree, it will not be allowed to substitute for a student’s honors hours.

PROBATION

Students may be placed on probation within the Honors Institute if they fail to maintain the appropriate GPA, insufficient academic progress toward their degree, or for violations of the code of conduct. A student may only spend one semester on a probationary status during their time at Pearl River. Any circumstance which would result in a second semester of probation instead will result in removal from the Honors Institute.

LECTURE SERIES

The Honors Institute Lecture series is comprised of a variety of opportunities. The Honors Institute Lyceum Lecture Series charts a bold direction in intellectual discourse and academic inquiry at Pearl River, opening windows to today's biggest challenges, sharing the innovative ideas of movers and shakers who are anything but traditional. Reflecting the philosophy of the Dr. William Lewis Honors Institute, these speakers engage, challenge, provoke — and quite possibly change lives. Held each fall and spring semester these lectures take place in the Ethel Holden Brownstone Center for the Performing Arts on the Poplarville Campus. The Lyceum Lecture Series is primarily supported by the Lower Pearl River Valley Foundation, and are free and open to the public.

To further assure that students receive an education that both challenges and exercises their intellects, lectures are presented throughout the fall and spring semesters by individual PRCC faculty and staff as they showcase their own unique interests and scholarly pursuits. This in-house series brings together motivated students, faculty, and staff members to listen to and learn from our own.

DR. WILLIAM LEWIS

Dr. William Lewis is a native of Clinton, Mississippi. He earned a Bachelor's degree from Mississippi College as well as the Master's and Doctoral degrees from the University of Southern Mississippi. During his more than forty years of service to the state's public education system, his experiences as a professional educator have included teaching, coaching and administrative assignments in Mississippi's public schools, colleges and universities.

Serving as Superintendent of the Petal (MS) School District for eight years, Dr. Lewis led a school district that became widely recognized as one of Mississippi's top performing districts on statewide measurements of student achievement. During his tenure the school district achieved state, regional and national recognition for student achievement in the classroom, on the athletic fields, and in the fine arts. The school district under his leadership developed a model program in polymer technology that symbolized the district's commitment to technology and workforce education. In December 1997, the school district formally dedicated the Polymer Technology Building at Petal High School in honor of Dr. Lewis.

In January 1998, Dr. Lewis was named Executive Director of the Public Education Forum of Mississippi. In this role he was responsible for directing the activities of a highly visible business-support organization established to promote improvement in the state's public education system.

The Pearl River Community College Board of Trustees selected Dr. Lewis to become the college's tenth president on July 1, 2000. Since his appointment, Pearl River has experienced a significant growth in enrollment, developed a national reputation for excellence in teaching and learning, produced a national championship in football, and is highly recognized for the high quality of its arts programs.

Dr. Lewis has been recognized in 1998 by the Petal Chamber of Commerce as the recipient of the Bobby Runnels Community Leadership Award for outstanding service and leadership to the Petal community. During homecoming activities at Mississippi College in October 1999, Dr. Lewis was presented with the college's Distinguished Alumni Award from the Department of Teacher Education. In 2014, he was inducted into the Alumni Hall of Fame at the University of Southern Mississippi. In 2017, Dr. Lewis retired from Pearl River Community College after serving seventeen years as President.

He currently serves on the Board of Directors of the South Mississippi Planning and Development District, the Mississippi Enterprise for Technology and the Mississippi Humanities Council.

Dr. Lewis is married to the former Janet Ladner of Gulfport and has two grown children, Kelli and Jay. Dr. and Mrs. Lewis also have five grandchildren.