



**Honors Program**  
**Southern Virginia University**  
**Spring 2026**

# SPRING 2026 HONORS COURSES



## Honors Focus Courses

An **honors focus course** (HNR 219R) is a discussion-based course on a work of significance to world civilization. It meets once a week for seven weeks—a half-semester or “block”—before a final essay exam. All Southern Virginia students, whether in the Honors Program or not, are welcome to enroll in focus courses. There are no prerequisites. Sign up through mySVU. First-year students should email registrar@svu.edu or their academic advisor to add a focus course to their schedules.

### SPRING 2026 BLOCK I

#### HNR 219R 01 Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (0.5)

This course offers an intensive study of Toni Morrison’s novel, *The Bluest Eye*. We’ll explore the short but complex novel through critical lenses, examining themes such as race, class, gender, and the psychological impact of oppression. Through reading and discussion, students will analyze Morrison’s masterful use of language, symbolism, and narrative to explore the devastating effects of internalized racism and the elusive nature of identity. The course will consider the novel’s historical and social context and its enduring relevance in contemporary discussions of power and privilege.

Maitland, T 12:30pm–1:20pm

#### HNR 219R 02 Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning* (0.5)

During World War II, Viktor Frankl spent three years at Auschwitz, Dachau, and other concentration camps. Many of his experiences and his developing thoughts on life, love, and ultimate meaning are chronicled in his memoir, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, in which he examines Nietzsche’s maxim, “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.” We will explore Frankl’s ideas on how to instill life with meaning by examining his thoughts on courage, relationships, and creativity.

Gibbons, T 3:30pm–4:20pm

#### HNR 219R 03 Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness (0.5)

Ibn Fadlan was the 10th century emissary from the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad to the recently-converted king of the Volga Bulgars. For the educated and refined Muslims of Baghdad, the “land of darkness” of the Volga Bulgars was a frigid “landscape of fear,” where (some believed) the battle of the end of the world would one day begin. Ibn Fadlan’s mission was to support the king financially but also to teach him Islam. His record of his travels is partly a diplomatic journal, partly a kind of anthropology of religion. But it is also an honest account of his setbacks, surprises, and trials.

John, M 2:30pm–3:20pm

#### HNR 219R 04 The Poetry of Nikki Giovanni (0.5)

With Nikki Giovanni’s passing in December 2024, the world lost one of its preeminent poets and one of its best-known African American poets. She taught at Virginia Tech for 35 years and was recognized for her poem written following the mass shooting there in 2007. Her poem “We Are Virginia Tech” helped heal a campus in mourning and brought her newfound, though perhaps unwanted, attention. Her body of work spans questions of race, human relations and the struggles facing our modern society. My personal favorite, “Poetry is a Trestle,” begins with this stanza, emblematic of her evocative body of work: poetry is a trestle / spanning the distance between what i feel /and what i say

Bouchelle, M 3:30pm–4:20pm

### SPRING 2026 BLOCK II

#### HNR 219R 05 1960s Protest Music (0.5)

This course explores the pivotal role of music in the major American cultural and political movements of the 1960s. Each week we will delve into the music of artists who used their art to advocate for civil rights, peace, gender equality, poverty, the environment, and other transformative changes, examining how their songs became powerful tools for social awareness and action. Students will listen to and discuss a range of genres—folk, soul, rock, gospel—to understand the specific issues being protested and the cultural context in which this music was created and consumed. Learning the strategies used by these artists to create social awareness and mobilize audiences for change will help us discover the ways this musical heritage has carried over into today’s major issues of debate.

Mason, W 1:30pm–2:20pm

#### HNR 219R 06 Nobel Prizes in Science and Medicine (0.5)

Have you ever wondered about what scientific discoveries are worthy of a Nobel Prize? During this half-credit course, we will discuss various Nobel Prize winning discoveries such as genome editing, the development of in vitro fertilization, and biological regulation by reversible protein phosphorylation. We will examine the research behind the Nobel Prize, why it was chosen for the prize, and investigate the impact that the discovery has had on science and medicine.

Rawlins, W 8:00am–8:50am

#### HNR 219R 08 Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (0.5)

Why do scientific ideas sometimes shift so suddenly and dramatically? In this half-credit course we’ll dive into Thomas Kuhn’s famous book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which introduced the idea of “paradigm shifts.” We’ll explore how scientific change really happens—not as a steady march of progress, but through debates, crises, and revolutions that reshape entire fields. History, science, and philosophy will collide in a beautiful explosion on how knowledge changes, and why that matters for the things you care about.

Gessell, T 2:00pm–2:50pm



# SPRING 2026 HONORS COURSES



## Honors Seminars

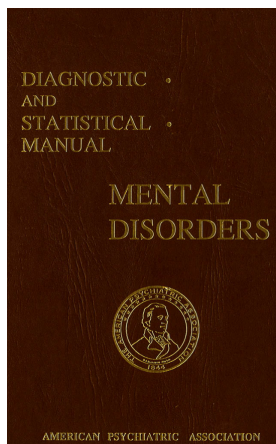
An **honors seminar** (HNR 395R) is a discussion-based course on an interdisciplinary topic. Honors students must complete at least one honors seminar for University Honors. All juniors and seniors can take honors seminars, and sophomores with appropriate background studies will be considered.

### SPRING 2026 SEMINAR #1

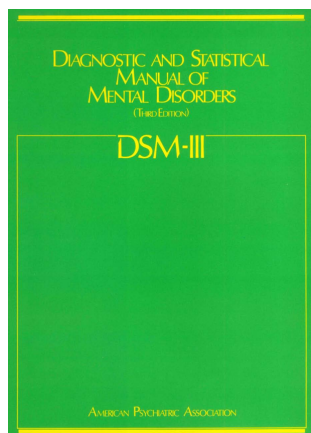
#### HNR 395R 01 The DSM: Its History and Development (3)

(Cross-listed as PHI 335 and PSY 375R.)

Why does it seem like more and more people are being diagnosed with conditions like ADHD or anxiety today? Are these disorders really on the rise, or has something else changed—like how we define them? This seminar will explore the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the book that sets the standard for psychiatric diagnoses of all kinds. We'll trace its history, revisions, and controversies to see how categories like autism, PTSD, and depression have been created, redefined, and debated, and what this all reveals about science, culture, and mental health. Caldwell-Andrews & Gessell, T/Th 11:00am–12:15pm



The first edition of the DSM, published in 1952.



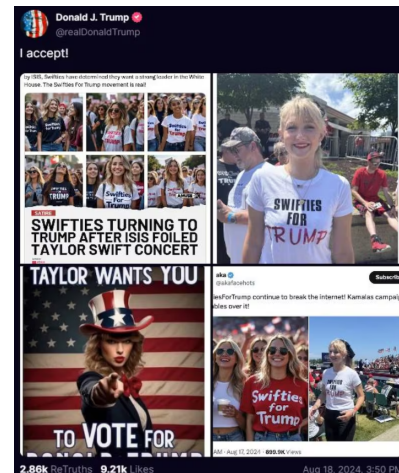
The third edition of the DSM, published in 1980.

### SPRING 2026 SEMINAR #2

#### HNR 395R 02 Media, Technology, and Politics (3)

(Cross-listed as POL 335R.)

From the printing press to TikTok, media and technology have always shaped the way politics works—but never more urgently than today. This seminar examines how communication tools influence power, public opinion, and democracy in the United States. We'll explore case studies ranging from television's role in civil rights to the rise of social media and AI in elections, and we'll ask what these changes mean for truth, trust, and the future of civic life. Students will engage with readings and debates that connect history to the pressing challenges of our current moment. John, MW 11:00am–12:15pm



President Donald Trump accepting the AI-generated “endorsement” of Taylor Swift.



Harry Truman defeated Thomas Dewey in the 1948 presidential election, contrary to what the *Chicago Tribune* said.

# SPRING 2026 HONORS COURSES



## Honors Thesis

An honors student researches and writes the honors thesis in the senior year under faculty supervision as an independent study or in an HNR 498 section that is cross-listed with another senior paper course, although an honors thesis is more in-depth and usually longer than a senior paper. The thesis proposal must be approved by the honors program director and the supervising faculty member prior to the semester in which HNR 498 is to be taken. If the student needs additional research time, HNR 497 may be taken before HNR 498.

### HONORS THESIS RESEARCH

**HNR 497R 01 Honors Thesis Research (2–3)**  
Supervising Faculty

### HONORS THESIS

**HNR 498 Honors Thesis (2–3)**  
Supervising Faculty

## Honors Requirements

The following are the requirements to graduate with University Honors. For questions about the requirements or your progress toward fulfilling them, speak with Professor Gessell.

1. **Complete at least six honors focus courses (HNR 219R).** These courses expose students to great works in the humanities, sciences, and fine and performing arts that students are unlikely to encounter in the Southern Virginia Core. Honors focus courses are open to all Southern Virginia students. Honors students are encouraged to average one honors focus course per semester during their first three years. 3 credit hours.
2. **Complete a course in calculus (MAT 241, 242, 341, or 344),** according to placement by the mathematics program coordinator, or **demonstrate intermediate ability in a second language** by completing a fourth-semester foreign language course such as FRE 202, GRK 202, LAT 202, or SPN 202 or by passing an examination. 3–12 credit hours.
3. **Complete at least one honors seminar (HNR 395R).** An honors seminar is an interdisciplinary course led by one or more faculty members. Honors students usually take an honors seminar in their junior year. 3 credit hours.
4. **Complete an honors thesis (HNR 498).** An honors student researches and writes the honors thesis in the senior year under faculty supervision as an independent study or in an HNR 498 section that is cross-listed with another senior paper course, although an honors thesis is more in-depth and usually longer than a senior paper. The thesis proposal must be approved by the honors program director and the supervising faculty member prior to the semester in which HNR 498 is to be taken. If the student needs additional research time, HNR 497 may be taken before HNR 498. 2–3 credit hours.
5. **Earn a grade of at least a B in all HNR courses to be counted toward University Honors.**
6. **Earn a cumulative GPA of at least 3.30 at the time of graduation.**

Title Image: Jacob Lawrence, *The migrants arrived in great numbers* (1940–41), *The Migration Series*.