In the Classroom: A Look at the Honors Think Tank

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Beginning in Spring 2016, the USU Honors Program will pilot its first Honors Think Tank in collaboration with the Center for Civic Engagement and Service-Learning. The Think Tank is a unique General Education Citizen Scholar experience that focuses the Honors classroom on Cache Valley issues: this year’s topic is local food and water sustainability in a global context. Complementing the Honors Program’s introductory First Year Seminars, which fulfill General Education Breadth requirements, the Think Tank is designed for sophomores and juniors and fulfills USU’s General Education Depth requirements. The Think Tank groups three parallel sections that examine the same topic through different disciplinary lenses.

With a student-to-teacher ratio of 15:1, the Honors Think Tank offers students in-depth understanding of various approaches to the problem of creating sustainable agricultural solutions in Cache Valley. Team-taught by three top professors from the humanities (Dr. Joyce Kinkead, English), the sciences (Dr. Ryan Dupont, Civil and Environmental Engineering), and the social sciences (Dr. Doug Jackson-Smith, Sociology), the Think Tank sections meet at the same time, together and separately, to enhance collaboration and sharing of knowledge. Students have the opportunity to learn both in and outside of the classroom. They will read and discuss extensively and then engage in hands-on experiences, including field trips, service projects, museum work, presentations to legislators, community events, and field research. Each student will be part of a small group that researches and publishes its findings on a particular topic related to food and water sustainability in Cache Valley.

The Honors Think Tank is central to the Honors Program’s mission of placing the university’s most ambitious students at the heart of a dynamic intellectual community. As a university-wide program, Honors draws together students and faculty across disciplines and thus exemplifies the best that USU has to offer. The Think Tank is especially important to USU’s land-grant mission because it integrates faculty and student expertise into the local community and showcases the real impact that our students can and do make on the world around them.