

Honors Thesis Guidelines

General Timeline for Thesis Student

Spring Junior Year	Summer into Senior Year	Fall Senior Year	Spring Senior Year
Find a mentor; Pick a general topic	Review necessary and relevant literature; Consider IRB Implications http://www.sandiego.edu/irb/	Enroll in Independent Study (1-3 units), or discipline-specific senior project course; Narrow thesis; Finalize IRB Paperwork; Collect and analyze data; Produce rough draft	Take HNRS 495; Deliver 30-min. presentation to thesis class; Participate in Creative Collaborations; Turn in hard copy of final paper with signature page to Honors Office; Submit electronic copy to Copley Archives

The Nuts and Bolts of an Honors Thesis

Part I: Research Course

Often, the full extent of the thesis project is not known until the student and mentor are actively involved in the project development. Starting projects earlier is strongly encouraged and generally yields higher-quality work! In the fall semester of your fourth year, you are encouraged to enroll in either an Independent Study or a Capstone Course within your major field of study. You receive Honors credit for these research courses.

1) Independent Research/Study

Honors students can begin their thesis research with Independent Research (496H) or an Independent Study (499H) within their major. This study may be 1, 2, or 3 units of course work, which allows students to begin researching topics and discussing findings with their advisors. The independent study generally results in a draft of the final paper or project. These units typically satisfy both Honors and major requirements.

To sign up for 496 or 499, you should complete the 496/499 Research Form, signed by you, your Honors Advisor, and the Honors Director. The form allows your Honors Advisor to state the expectations (e.g., a draft of particular sections of the thesis) and the basis for your grade. In general, students should adhere to the following guidelines for 496H or 499H credit requirements: 1 credit: 40-50 hours of work per semester; 2 credits: 80-90; or 3 credits: 110-120.

2) Capstone Course

In some cases, students enroll in a Capstone Course in their major (e.g., ENGL 495, POLS 495). Like the Independent Study, the Capstone Course serves as research for the Honors thesis.

If starting with a capstone, you must go into greater depth on the subject and refine the written portion during the thesis seminar. You are also required to write 1-2 paragraphs to the Honors Director about how the Honors thesis will be different from the capstone paper.

- **Group Project**

Some capstone courses involve groups/teams. If starting with a group capstone project, you and your faculty advisor work together to determine what will constitute the individual extension of the group work. You must then provide a written explanation to the Honors Director about your individual contribution to the group project, as well as an explanation about how the Honors thesis serves as an extension of the group work.

Part II: Honors 495: Honors Thesis Seminar

In order to graduate from the Honors Program, you must complete HNRS 495: Honors Thesis Seminar. This course is offered in both the fall and spring semesters, TR 4-5:20 pm. You may take it for either 1 or 3 Honors units (same class regardless). At the beginning of the seminar, students submit a prospectus of their Honors thesis to the Director of the Honors Program. This includes an annotated bibliography, the name of the advisor, and a summary of the research and writing completed to date. At this point, students are expected to have devoted significant time to reading, thinking and (in most cases) writing about their topic.

- **The Thesis**

The Honors Thesis is a discipline-specific paper that describes an Honors student's project. In the past, theses have included scientific research published in peer-reviewed journals, a student's novel, and a video documentary. Each discipline has its own definitions of scholarly work, and most theses are papers prepared as if they were to be submitted to a scholarly journal. The Honors Advisor must make expectations clear and help the student meet them. All projects include original research, primary sources, an oral presentation, and considerable dedication and time.

In general, thesis papers are between 25-50 pages and accomplish the following:

- 1) Describe a question the student is trying to answer.
- 2) Present background material relevant to this question and explain how this material can direct the student toward an answer.
- 3) Describe the methods used to retrieve and analyze the student's data.
- 4) Reveal the results and how they answer the research question.

The above description is generic and should not be construed as the structure of every thesis! That's the beauty of the Honors Thesis Seminar. An English major analyzing the historical trends in Victorian era literature would not collect data, but would analyze writing styles, context, etc. However, another thesis might examine heavy metal impacts in crabs and be more

along the lines of a scientific paper. Your thesis mentor will teach you the appropriate rules and guidelines for your discipline.

All Honors theses are due at the end of the semester for students enrolled in the Spring seminar. For students in the Fall offering of HNRS 495, theses are due the first Thursday of December.

- **Presentation and Creative Collaborations**

As part of HNRS 495, Honors students present a summary of their thesis. Faculty Advisors are expected to help students develop 30-minute oral presentations that are accessible to an audience of Honors Program students, faculty, and guests. This presentation is to be targeted at a general, but educated audience. Students may have to spend time educating the audience on background material or the jargon of the field before discussing the heart of their research.

Students are also required to present their theses at Creative Collaborations: Undergraduate Research Conference in the Spring. This involves submitting an abstract and creating a poster or other display of their theses. Wide-format poster costs are covered by Undergraduate Research.