HONORS THESIS GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY ADVISORS
Cal State LA Honors College

What is an Honors Thesis?
The Honors College Academic Plan culminates in the thesis, a required advanced research or creative project completed either in the student’s undergraduate degree program or in the Honors College. The thesis project will promote focus, depth, and independence and will develop creativity, resiliency, and patience. By completing the thesis, students will be demonstrating the ability to become producers of knowledge, and will create thoughtful and impactful interpretations of provocative questions in their disciplines.

When do students undertake an Honors Thesis?
Students undertake the Honors thesis during their undergraduate senior year, with preparation work starting the beginning of their junior year. Students present their work at a defense and at the CSU Honors Conference at the end of the academic year, and also generate a written thesis that is archived in the Honors College Thesis Library.

What options do students have for their Honors thesis coursework?
1. During fall, students complete an Honors Contract course to supplement their first thesis requirement. These major courses may include capstone or upper-division independent study/elective courses, and are chosen through consultation with a major advisor. In this instance, students still demonstrate that their research, scholarly, or creative project addresses a guiding research question/issue/creative challenge with clearly defined goals/objectives/hypothesis, and includes a significant literature review component as well as a timeline for completion of work.
2. Students will enroll in HNRS 4970 in the spring semester.
   • Students who complete this option have one thesis reader: the student’s Thesis Advisor, who is a faculty member in the student’s major department.

What role does each person involved in the Honors thesis perform?
The Thesis Advisor and the Student work closely to develop the Honors thesis. For this reason, an understanding of roles and responsibilities, and a conscious effort to communicate frequently about these elements of the student/advisor relationship, are critical. For students enrolled in the Honors thesis course sequence, the Course Instructor additionally provides students guidance with understanding the concept of research from multiple perspectives, and with the development and completion of their theses. For students utilizing an Honors Contract, the Thesis Advisor usually doubles as the Course Instructor, and therefore provides students with additional assistance in developing their written thesis and their defense.

The Student:
• Takes primary responsibility for the successful completion of his/her degree (including maintaining good standing in the Honors College before starting and during completion of the thesis, and meeting all Honors College and thesis requirements), research activities, and professional development, but realizes that the faculty advisor is responsible for assisting the student in developing research goals, and a timeline to complete each phase of work.
• Takes the initiative to arrange regular meetings with the thesis advisor to keep the advisor informed of the results of ongoing research, and any factors that might affect the progress of his/her research.
• Shares all drafts and final versions of thesis documents, including prospecti and reports, with his/her advisor(s), and gains the advisor’s approval before submitting any documents to the Honors College.
• Takes responsibility for completing required paperwork, including Honors Prospectus/Contract forms.
• Informs himself/herself of the regulations, policies, and practices governing degree and course requirements, and research activities (including IRB requirements).
• Adheres to agreed deadlines for work to be completed.

September 12, 2016. Adapted from “Guidelines for Faculty Advisors of the Senior Honors Thesis at Tufts University,” “Guidelines for Advising Relationships Between Faculty Advisors and Graduate Students” at Stanford University, and “Toward Best Practices for Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors” at the University of Iowa.

Revised: Jan 2020
- Maintains absolute integrity in collecting, analyzing, and presenting research data.
- Recognizes that the thesis advisor monitors the accuracy, validity, and integrity of the student’s research, and ensures that the contributions of all participants in the research are properly acknowledged in any publications.
- Attends and participates in meetings, seminars, journal clubs, and conferences.
- Explores career pathways by seeking guidance from advisors, career counseling services, and other mentors and career resources.

The Thesis Advisor:
- Oversees the student's progress, and helps the student resolve issues of research focus, content, and form.
- Helps the student develop an understanding of the challenges and important questions in his/her field of study, and the significance of his/her work in the context of these driving challenges and questions.
- Helps the student set reasonable and attainable goals, and a timeline for completion of work.
- Meets regularly with the student, and provides the student with evaluation of his/her progress and performance in regular and informative ways.
- Defines the length of, and reads and comments on the various drafts of the written thesis that the student submits, responding to questions promptly.
- Assists students in preparing for their thesis defense, and their presentation at the Cal State LA Honors College Symposium in Spring.
- Informs the student about authorship, environmental health and safety, and intellectual property practices.
- Encourages the student to participate in professional meetings, perform or display his/her work in public settings, and publish the results of his/her research.
- Acknowledges student contributions to research presented at conferences, in professional publications, or in applications for copyrights and patents.

The Thesis Course Instructor (HNRS 4970):
- Provides the student with guidance to help keep the progress of written document on track, and provides students feedback on the oral presentation/thesis defense they will be developing. In all cases, the disciplinary mentor (thesis advisor) is the expert who clarifies expectations of form, content, and process consistent with the norms of the discipline.
- Coordinates the student’s thesis defense. In cases where the department requires an oral defense, it is hoped that the student would not have to do the defense two times.
- Assesses the student’s work and assigns a final grade each semester.

The Director/Associate Director:
- Reviews and approves the final project.

What is covered in the Honors thesis course HNRS 4970, and why do students take this course?
- In HNRS 4970, students learn how to prepare an oral research presentation, how to defend their research results in a public forum, and how to present the results of their thesis in an oral talk in front of a critical audience.

How extensive is the Honors Thesis?
- Projects can vary tremendously by discipline and by department, but a typical Honors thesis at Cal State LA will be 25-50 pages in length, or the length of a peer-reviewed journal article in the discipline. Some seniors choose to do a creative project in the arts, such as creating an original collection of poems, a documentary film, writing and directing a play, or another form of artistic expression.
### HONORS THESIS TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior Year: Fall</td>
<td>Students attend their first Thesis Preparation Session to learn about the overall thesis preparation timeline and general expectations. Students think about potential thesis advisors and topics, and begin contacting faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Year: Early Spring</td>
<td>Faculty agree to serve as Honors thesis advisors, and assist students with selecting a research topic. Faculty begin presenting information on important questions and challenges in the field, and introducing students to the top peer-reviewed journals in the field. Students attend their second Thesis Preparation Session and begin exploring readings related to their potential research topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Year: Mid-Spring</td>
<td>All thesis advisors, the thesis course instructor, and the Director and Associate Director meet to discuss the timeline for the upcoming year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Year: Spring</td>
<td>Thesis advisors assist students in developing a provocative guiding research question, and understanding the impact addressing this question will have on their disciplinary field of knowledge. Faculty recommend readings of primary importance to the research topic. Students begin literature research, continue reading, and begin work on a literature review. IRB applications are submitted as needed. Students attend their third Thesis Preparation Session. Students, in conjunction with their advisors, complete the Letter of Understanding and submit it to the Honors College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Year: Summer</td>
<td>Students work on their reading list and submit before the beginning of Fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Year: Early Fall</td>
<td>No later than the end of the third week of classes, students submit the Honors Contract cover page and supplementary documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Year: Fall</td>
<td>Faculty help students develop and submit a research prospectus by the end of the semester. This includes a narrative, their annotated bibliography, and a project timeline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Year: Early Spring</td>
<td>Students complete their thesis research and their first draft of their written thesis, and obtain faculty feedback by the end of Week 5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Senior Year: Mid-Spring | -Faculty review the students’ second draft of the thesis, and provide feedback. Students continue to revise their written theses.  
-Faculty may nominate and submit Outstanding Thesis Award nomination for their student. Email with nomination form will be shared by Honors College. |
| Senior Year: Spring | Faculty help students prepare a presentation for the Cal State LA Honors Symposium; students also present their defense at the end of this semester, and submit a final written thesis. Faculty submit final thesis assessment rubric. |

### KEY CONTACTS FOR HONORS THESIS POLICIES AND PAPERWORK

Honors Thesis paperwork and advisement is handled by the Honors Advisement Office in KH D145. The two primary contacts within this office are:

**Dr. Alison McCurdy**  
Honors College Associate Director  
[amccurd@exchange.calstatela.edu](mailto:amccurd@exchange.calstatela.edu), ext. 3-5963

**Jessica Rodriguez**  
Honors College Thesis Coordinator  
[Jrodr179@calstatela.edu](mailto:Jrodr179@calstatela.edu), ext. 3-5964