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?

Students may choose one of two options, with approval from the Honors College and their major departments as necessary:

1. Complete the HNRS 4950/4960 sequence, and submit an Honors thesis prospectus by the end of week 11 of the fall semester. This is the default and recommended option for students.
   - Students who complete this option have two thesis readers: 1) the student’s Thesis Advisor, who is a faculty member in the student’s major department; and 2) the Instructor of the Honors thesis course sequence, who also helps students structure and prepare their thesis.

2. Employ an Honors Contract, submitted no later than the end of the second week of fall semester, to request that the requirements for HNRS 4950 and HNRS 4960 be met by another senior-level course in the major. 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. 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.
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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. This includes completing a thesis assessment rubric at the end of each semester, and providing copies to the student and to the Honors College, so that both the student and Honors College can track progress and address any challenges identified.
- Assigns deadlines for bibliographies, drafts of chapters, presentations, and posters, and revisions.
- 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 CSU Honors Conference.
- 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:

- Provides the student with guidance on issues of structure and methodology relevant to the student’s thesis, and provides students feedback on their thesis.
- Coordinates the student’s thesis defense.
- Assesses the student’s work and assigns a final grade each semester.

The Director/Associate Director:

- Reviews and approves the final project.

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.
What is covered in the Honors thesis course sequence, and why do we encourage students to take these courses?

The Honors College encourages students to enroll in the HNRS 4950/4960 sequence rather than complete an Honors Contract since students who participate in this course sequence learn about research methods and philosophy in a broader sense, remain a part of an interdisciplinary and supportive peer network, and receive regular feedback from the course instructor to supplement the experience students gain with their research advisors.

- HNRS 4950 is a practicum that emphasizes writing and revision in collaboration with all participants in the course. This course provides a foundation in advanced interdisciplinary research and writing that is necessary for the completion of the senior capstone thesis. Students will make significant progress on their projects with the development of the prospectus and related items such as the literature review and timeline. Students will submit regular short assignments and complete readings about writing practice and research methods to improve their skills.

- In HNRS 4960, students learn how to present partial or complete research results at informal meetings (i.e. research group-type meetings), how to organize their research results, how to prepare an oral research presentation, how to defend their research results in a public forum, how to present the results of their thesis in an oral talk in front of a critical audience, and ultimately how to write a complete thesis.

Students who do not complete the Honors thesis course sequence but instead use an Honors contract will be relying on their thesis advisor to address most of the skills and activities listed above. In the spring semester they will join other students of various disciplines in the 1-unit Honors College Senior Forum.

- 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

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<th>Junior Year: Fall</th>
<th>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. By the end of the semester, students submit a list of the advisors they have contacted to the Honors College.</th>
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<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>
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<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>
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<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...</td>
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Students work on their annotated bibliographies and submit just before fall semester begins.

Senior Year: Early Fall
No later than the end of the second week of classes, students who are using an Honors Contract for their coursework submit the Honors Contract cover page and supplementary documents.

Senior Year: Fall
Faculty help students develop and submit a research prospectus by the end of Week 11. This includes a narrative, their annotated bibliography, and a project timeline. **Faculty submit first thesis assessment rubric, and recommend any required corrective action.**

Senior Year: Early Spring
Students complete their thesis research and their first draft of their written thesis, and obtain faculty feedback by the end of Week 5.

Senior Year: Mid-Spring
Faculty review the students’ second draft of the thesis, and provide feedback. Students continue to revise their written theses.

Senior Year: Spring
Faculty help students prepare a presentation for the CSU Honors Conference; 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:

Scott Wells  
*Honors College Associate Director and Honors Thesis Coordinator*  
Swells2@exchange.calstatela.edu, 3-5963