



## ● HONORS THESIS GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY THESIS MENTORS ●

### ● 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 a closely related discipline. 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 are strongly recommended to identify their thesis mentor and begin preparatory work for the thesis in the beginning of their junior year. Students complete the Honors thesis during their undergraduate senior year. Students present their work in the HNRS 4970 course through an oral presentation and at the Cal State LA Honors Symposium at the end of the academic year; they generate a written thesis that is archived in the [Honors College Thesis Library](#).

### ● What coursework is required to complete an Honors Thesis?

1. During fall of the senior year, students take an Honors Contract/Major-Based course (a course within their major or closely related discipline) in which the work done or skills learned may be extended and applied as their Honors thesis project. These major courses may include capstone or upper-division independent study/elective courses, and are chosen through consultation with their thesis mentor. Students 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 enroll in HNRS 4970 (Honors College Senior Forum) in the spring semester of their senior year.
  - Students have one thesis reader: the student's Thesis Mentor, who is a faculty member in the student's major department.

### ● What are the responsibilities and roles of the Student and Mentor during the Thesis Process?

The Thesis Mentor 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.

#### *The Student:*

- Takes primary responsibility for the successful completion of his/her major program (including maintaining good standing in the Honors College before starting and during completion of the thesis, and meeting all Honors College and thesis requirements), Honors College research activity requirements, and proactively pursuing appropriate professional development opportunities.
- Works collaboratively with the faculty thesis advisor, who assists the student in developing project and writing goals and timeline (see below).

- Takes the initiative to arrange regular meetings with the thesis advisor to keep the advisor informed of the results of ongoing research or project progress, and any factors that might affect the ability to meet project or writing goals in the planned timeframe.
- 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.
- 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 related to their thesis project, as appropriate.

*The Faculty Thesis Mentor/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 presentation to a general audience, 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, or other appropriate professional development activities.
- Acknowledges student contributions to research presented at conferences, in professional publications, or in applications for copyrights and patents.
- Reviews assignments the student is required to submit to the Honors College. See Honors Thesis Timelines & Assignments for full details.

*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.
- Schedules thesis defenses during class time where possible, inviting thesis mentors and Honors College Leadership.
- Assesses the student's work and assigns a final grade each semester.

*The Honors College Director/Associate Director:*

- Reviews and approves the final submitted thesis.

### ● **What is the difference between a literature review and an Honors College thesis?**

A literature review is a required component of the Honors College thesis, and it is used to create a context for the student's thesis project or identify a gap in understanding or a problem to be solved. In addition to a literature review, an original contribution by the student must also be part of the thesis. The scope of this original contribution will be dictated by a variety of factors (including constraints due to remote instruction and research requirements), and Honors College defers to the thesis mentor/advisor as disciplinary expert to set reasonable expectations for the scope of that part of the undergraduate Honors thesis. This additional contribution by the student may take a variety of forms, including, but not limited to the following:

- 1) Bring different sets of published data together in a way that has not been done before; looking for new trends in the data that ideally may be used to support or refute a theoretical/conceptual framework or hypothesis or paradigm; make specific recommendations for future work based on the trend
- 2) Organize the literature into major themes/subcategories relating to the thesis project's overarching question (via a coding and analysis process, for example). What gaps/deficiencies are there in answering the overarching question or in each theme (knowledge, conceptual, methodological)? Propose/design a study to address the gap(s)
- 3) Combine the findings from the analysis of the literature with other available data (government databases; google maps; organization meeting minutes; survey responses; prior research results; needs analysis) to make targeted and detailed recommendations for changes to practice and/or policy.

### ● **What is covered in the Honors thesis course HNRS 4970, and why do students take this course?**

In HNRS 4970, students (who are in a wide variety of majors) learn how to prepare a very brief oral project presentation for a general audience (a "flash talk" or "elevator pitch"). They learn how to present the results of their thesis in an oral "defense" in front of their peers. This course also provides students with opportunities for peer-reviewing of writing samples.

### ● **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 & ASSIGNMENTS ●

Assignment deadlines may be altered only with prior approval of the Honors College Thesis Coordinator and your thesis advisor.

Junior Year: Fall	Students attend their <b>first Thesis Preparation Session (Mandatory Junior Advising 1)</b> to learn about Honors Thesis eligibility and the overall thesis preparation timeline and general expectations. Students think about potential thesis advisors and topics, and begin contacting faculty
Junior Year: Early Spring	Faculty agree to serve as Honors thesis advisors, and assist students with selecting a research topic. Thesis advisors begin presenting information on important questions and challenges in the field, and introducing students to the key scholarship in the field. Students attend their <b>second Thesis Preparation Session (Mandatory Junior Advising 2)</b> and begin exploring readings related to their potential research topic. Students and their mentors discuss the selection of the required thesis contract/major-based course to be taken in Fall.  ✓ <b>Student Assignment 1: Letter of Understanding: Thesis Contract/Major Based Course Identification &amp; Relation to Thesis Project, with Reading List (requires thesis mentor signature, due approximately week 10 of Spring semester)</b>
Junior Year: End of Spring	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. Thesis advisors recommend readings of primary importance to the research topic. Students begin literature research, continue reading, and begin work on a Reading List. IRB applications/processes are planned/submitted as needed. Students, in consultation with their thesis advisors, complete the Student Assignment 1: Letter of Understanding, and submit it to the Honors College by approximately week 10.  Students attend their <b>third Thesis Preparation Session (Mandatory Junior Advising 3) in May.</b>
Junior Year: Summer	Students continue identifying and reading scholarly sources and submit an <b>Annotated Bibliography</b> early in the Fall.  ✓ <b>Announcement Reminder for Thesis Student &amp; Advisors: Annotated Bibliography (Due in Early Fall- Week 03)</b>
Senior Year: Early Fall	No later than the end of the third week of classes, students submit the Annotated Bibliography.  ✓ <b>Student Assignment 2: Annotated Bibliography (requires the faculty mentor/advisor's signature, due Week 03)</b>

Senior Year: Fall	<p>Students receive permits from the Honors College staff to enroll in HNRS 4970 for the Spring semester. (Early October)</p> <p>Thesis Advisors help students develop and submit a thesis prospectus by the end of the semester. This includes a narrative, a literature review, and a project timeline.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Student Assignment 3: Thesis Prospectus &amp; Timeline (Week 14)</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Thesis Advisors submit</b> Thesis Student Progress Report (<b>Finals week</b>)</li> </ul>
Senior Year: Early Spring	<p>Students begin HNRS 4970 course. Work continues with the Thesis Mentor and HNRS 4970 instructor. Students complete their thesis research and drafts of their written thesis, and obtain thesis mentor feedback throughout semester. Number of drafts may vary by HNRS 4970 instructor and thesis mentor.</p>
Senior Year: Mid-Spring	<p>Thesis advisors review the students' drafts of the thesis, and provide feedback. Students continue to revise their written theses. Number of drafts may vary by HNRS 4970 instructor and thesis mentor.</p>
Senior Year: Spring	<p>Thesis advisors help students prepare a presentation for the Cal State LA Honors Symposium; students also present their oral defense/presentation at the end of this semester within HNRS 4970, and submit a final written thesis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Students submit final "print ready" version of <b>Honors Thesis</b>, as instructed in HNRS 4970. (End of Spring)</li> <li>✓ <b>Thesis Advisors submit</b> Honors College Thesis/Project Evaluation Form for Departmental Advisors (not part of the HNRS 4970 student grade)</li> </ul>

● **KEY CONTACTS FOR HONORS THESIS POLICIES AND PAPERWORK** ●

Honors Thesis paperwork and advisement is handled by the Honors Advisement Office in KH D145 (basement).

The two primary contacts within this office are:

**Dr. Andrea Arias**  
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**Sonia Cruz Magaña**  
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