

Proposal Guidelines for the Senior Honors Thesis

Timeline

While the Senior Honors Thesis class (HONR 495) is normally taken the last semester of college (or the semester *before* student teaching), several steps must be taken two to three semesters prior to registering for the course:

- The preliminary research & literature review
- Formation of your thesis committee (chair and one reader)
- Submission of the proposal paperwork
 - Thesis Proposal form with abstract and signatures
 - 3 to 5 page Thesis Proposal (typed & double spaced)
 - Submission of a 20-source bibliography

The above paperwork needs to be submitted as a hard copy to Honors College office (DeMoss 4382 (one year (2 semesters) before registering for HONR 495:

- the Proposal & bibliography are due **April 1** of the student's junior year (a year before graduation)
- or **October 1** of the junior year for those who are student teaching (a year before graduation)

Honors students with certain majors that require extensive experimentation or data collection (i.e., biology or psychology) may need to begin their preliminary research earlier, so please check with your department chair no later than early in the first semester of a student's junior year (August or September) to see if an extra semester of research is needed.

Topic

Ideally, your thesis topic should seek to investigate a "gap" in your field's research. There are likely topics within your field which have little to no scholarly research available on them. Your thesis should contribute to your field by filling that gap with scholarly research addressing the topic.

The Honors College has always stressed that the best topics for the Senior Honors Thesis are those in which students already have previous knowledge and experience. Ideally, your Honors Petition classes should have been used to build the groundwork for your thesis. If a previous research paper has been written for an upper-division class in your major, perhaps the topic of that paper could be expanded into your senior thesis.

For students who are struggling with choosing a thesis topic, the best advice is to check with the chair of your department or with a faculty member in your department that you know and trust: explain to them your difficulty in choosing a topic and see what advice they can give you in selecting a topic. It may also be worth visiting [Scholars Crossing](#) to peruse previous Honors theses in your field.

Remember, though, that the topic needs to be of *interest to you*, because you are the one who will be researching and writing on this topic for two to three semesters. You need to choose a topic that will sustain your *interest* and *motivation* throughout your junior and senior years.

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Length

One of the first questions students ask about the senior thesis is, “How long is it?”

The short answer is that the final draft of your thesis must be at least **25 pages** of text, not including your bibliography. Also, you should convey this length requirement to your committee members, so they know your Honors thesis is not supposed to be the length of master’s thesis or dissertation.

Due to the amount of revision and editing that normally takes place due to your committee members’ suggestions, an Honors student should try to write at least 30 pages for the first draft, in case certain parts of the thesis have to be deleted at the recommendation of your committee.

Contents of Proposal

The purpose of your thesis proposal is to give your committee members and Honors Director an *overview* of what your thesis will be about. It should explain your proposed topic, justify it, and sketch out a loose blueprint of what your research will entail (i.e., what specific research questions you have, where you plan to gather information, etc). Since the proposal is written as a third-person summary, no internal citations are necessary (unless required by the committee) but do include a 20-source bibliography in at the end of your proposal, written in the formatting style that your major/department recommends (APA, Turabian, MLA, SBL, Bluebook, etc.).

Normally, the 3- to 5-page proposal should be given to faculty members who are considering serving on your thesis committee, so that they can have a written record of your thesis topic and proposal.

The proposal, like the thesis itself, is a work in progress, so don’t be surprised if a thesis chair or committee member wants you to revise your thesis proposal before they will sign on as a chair or committee member.

Since the proposal is only 3 to 5 pages, you need to be succinct in your presentation, explaining what topic you propose to research and what outcomes or consequences you expect will result from your research.

Committee Selection

Besides choosing your thesis topic, no other decision is more important than selecting your thesis committee. You want to choose faculty who know you and your writing style and who are willing to devote two to three semesters to your thesis project. Listed below are the requirements for selecting your committee:

- The committee consists of a thesis chair and one committee member
- Thesis chair and one other reader must be from the student’s major
- Both committee members must have a doctorate or terminal degree (M.F.A.)

The department chair should know the areas of expertise of his or her faculty and may be able to recommend committee members to you who are most knowledgeable on your thesis topic. Also, please feel free to schedule an appointment with the Honors Director to discuss your thesis proposal and prospective committee members, if you need further advice.

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Closing Comments

Most of the writing of your thesis will be completed the semester *prior* to enrolling in HONR 495, so you will need to adjust your schedule in order to have enough time, motivation, and interest for completing the writing process; the HONR 495 semester is for revising and editing your thesis, with your committee's help.

Often the most difficult part of the thesis is the *revision process*. Most Honors students are used to writing a paper, getting a good grade, and filing the paper away. With writing your thesis, however, your writing will undergo a series of drafts: it is not uncommon for a thesis to undergo three to four different revisions. You also need to understand that the final product may be very different from the proposal or even the first draft submitted to your thesis chair.

Graduation from the Honors College requires achieving a passing grade in HONR 495-Senior Honors Thesis. A well-written thesis is often the writing sample needed for Honors students to be accepted into the very best graduate, law, and medical schools. Honors College alumni have been accepted into seven of the eight Ivy League graduate schools, and their Honors thesis was a significant factor in their acceptance.