

# 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 2 to 3 semesters prior to registering for the course:

- The preliminary research & literature review
- Formation of your thesis committee (chair and two readers)
- 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 to the Honors Program one year (2 semesters) before registering for HONR 495:

- the Proposal & bibliography are due **March 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

Ever since Freshman Seminar, the Honors Program has stressed that the best topics for the Senior Honors Thesis are those in which students already have previous knowledge and experience. Ideally, the 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.

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 2 to 3 semesters. You need to choose a topic that will sustain your *interest* and *motivation* throughout your junior and senior years.

## 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. 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 APA style at the end of your proposal.

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 2 to 3 semesters to your thesis project. Listed below are the requirements for selecting your committee:

- The committee consists of a thesis chair and 2 committee members
- Thesis chair and one other reader must be from the student's major
- One reader must be from outside of the student's school (i.e., Arts & Sciences, Religion, Business)
- Thesis chair must have a doctorate
- One of the other two readers must also have a doctorate

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.

## **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, 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 6 to 8 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 Program requires achieving a passing grade in Senior Honors Thesis. A well-written Senior Honors Thesis is often the ticket to propel our Honors students into the very best graduate, law, and medical schools. Honors Program alumni have entered Ivy League graduate schools, and they have testified that their thesis was an integral part of the application process.