



GUIDE FOR HONORS THESIS ADVISORS & THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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For more information on the Honors thesis, please go to:
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/>

I. What is an Honors Thesis?

At the University of Maine (UMaine), there are two kinds of Honors theses: *academic theses* and *creative theses*. An academic thesis can be creative. And a creative thesis can be academic. But they take different forms with different expectations.

Many theses are academic works. These are typically modeled on the research expectations of your advisee's discipline, though interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary work is also welcome. They are expected to include (1) a thorough investigation of research relevant to your advisee's topic, along with (2) their contributions to the topic as an outgrowth of their critical engagement with (1).

Other theses emphasize creative work over engagement with academic disciplines, often leading to a less conventional product. Students in art, music, new media, theatre, dance, and creative writing might find this more in-line with their interests and aptitudes. Students completing a creative thesis must also produce a Disquisition: an essay that formally presents and critically analyzes their creative work, in context of their influences, process, and journey. See [the guidelines document](#) on our website for more details.

Your advisee is responsible for submitting a project proposal using Thesis Form 1, accessible through [the Honors website](#). This includes a 250-word prospectus describing the project's scope and basic methodology. You will receive a request for approval upon your student's submission of Thesis Form 1.

II. The Honors Thesis Process

The UMaine Honors thesis is a year-long process. Students take part by enrolling in a two-semester sequence of independent study courses, HON 498 & 499 (3 credits each). For many majors, a thesis can take the place of a capstone. For others, however, the goals of the capstone are sufficiently different from those of an Honors thesis that students may be required to complete both.

We have experience making the thesis process work for any and all students. Please encourage your advisee to touch base if there are apparent conflicts or difficulties in making it all fit together. The following bullets summarize important elements of the process:

- Students outline a project and scope of work the semester before they take HON 498. They are required to submit Thesis Form 1, which includes an overview of the project and its scope, prior to beginning HON 498.
- Effective August 1, 2022, thesis committees must be comprised of a minimum of three UMaine faculty members (including the thesis advisor), up to a maximum of five. The total number of committee members is decided between the advisor and advisee. All members must should be full-time members of the UMaine faculty*—though the Honors dean and/or associate dean may also serve.

* *Rare exceptions may be granted by the dean of the Honors College, pending available funding. Requests for exceptions must be made in writing to the dean. Click [here for the advisor exception form](#) and [here for the committee member exemption form](#).*

- o The committee *may* include 1 external member (e.g. a faculty member at another institution, a researcher affiliated with a lab outside of UMaine, or a community partner); the external member may not serve as the thesis advisor. The external member would constitute a fourth member of the committee.
- o If the thesis is meeting the capstone requirements for double majors, the committee may need to include members from both disciplines. Ask your student to consult with the chairs/directors of their departments to make this determination.
- o If necessary, one committee member can be designated as the advisor, while the other acts as a *co-advisor*. Students may request a co-advisor by contacting the associate dean of the Honors College.
- In addition to the thesis research and written thesis, Honors students are required to prepare a Reading List (described below). This is a reflection on works that influenced their growth, as a person and a scholar, throughout their UMaine / Honors College experience.
- The student will prepare for an oral defense of the thesis and Reading List before graduation. Students and advisors will be notified ahead of time about the deadlines for final submission of the thesis. (Other deadlines are listed below.)
 - o Students must send their committee copies of their thesis and Reading List two weeks prior to the scheduled defense. The thesis document does not need to be finalized, but it should be complete and correctly formatted. It must include all required sections (title page, table of contents, citations, author’s biography, etc.) and be stored as a Word document (unless required to be in a specialized file format such as LaTeX). A [thesis template and formatting guide](#) and a [formatting checklist](#) are available for students on the Honors website.
- The thesis process is monitored through a series of electronic forms (1-7). Thesis Form 1 is submitted by the student, which will send automatic requests for approval to the advisor, the department chair (if applicable), and the Associate Dean of the Honors College. This and the rest of the forms are available [on the Honors website](#).

Thesis Form Due Dates (by semesters of enrollment in HON 498 and HON 499):

	<i>498 Fall, 499 Spring</i>	<i>498 Spring, 499 Fall</i>	<i>498 Spring, 499 Summer</i>	<i>498 Summer, 499 Fall</i>
<i>Form 1</i>	May 1	December 1	December 1	May 1
<i>Form 2</i>	September 1	February 1	February 1	June 1
<i>Form 3</i>	November 1	March 1	March 1	August 1
<i>Form 4</i>	March 1	October 1	June 1	October 1
<i>Form 5</i>	April 1	November 1	August 1	November 1
<i>Form 6</i>	May 1	December 1	September 1	December 1
<i>Form 7</i>	June 1	January 1	October 1	January 1

- The content of the thesis is developed with guidance from the advisor and committee members, who also serve as evaluators of the thesis at the defense. The committee decides (by majority) the level of honors awarded to the student.

III. Expectations of Honors Thesis Advisor

As a thesis advisor, I am agreeing to:

- Work with the student to refine and focus the student's interests into a suitable thesis project;
- Provide clear expectations for the thesis/project, addressing length, assessment, and other aspects germane to scholarship in the particular discipline;
- Help identify appropriate thesis committee members;
- Help student prepare a thesis proposal to be circulated to the committee one week in advance of the first committee meeting;
 - Specific guidelines for this thesis proposal and meeting can be found on the Honors website ([Committee Meeting Proposal Guidelines](#)).
- Help the student to convene a committee meeting in which the student will present the thesis proposal and receive feedback;
 - See specific guidelines for this meeting in the following sections of the [Student Handbook](#) (as of April 6, 2023):
 - "Holding a Committee Meeting", p. 13;
 - Appendix B, p. 22.
- Be prepared to meet with the student regularly (at least biweekly, but we encourage weekly meetings) throughout the duration of the project;
- Read and comment on drafts of the thesis as it develops;
- Chair the student's thesis & Reading List defense;
- Chair the thesis committee's deliberation on the level of honors to be awarded;
- Grade the student in HON 498 and HON 499; and
- Participate in the year-end Honors Celebration, if possible.

Remember: Your ADVISEE is responsible for the timely and successful completion of their thesis. It is this independence and commitment that separates thesis work from normal coursework. But please also keep in mind that this is their first time doing a thesis and your guidance and mentoring through that process is critical.

Please also note that while the Honors Associates are available to provide information to the students in their thesis work and coordinate the form submission process, the Honors Associates **do not edit theses, help with writing issues, or fix formatting.**

IV. Expectations of Honors Committee Members

As an Honors Committee member, I am agreeing to:

- Work within the committee structure to help the student refine the scope of the project;
- Recommend literature relevant to the project;
- Read and comment on the final thesis; and may read drafts of chapters if invited to do so by the student and have the opportunity to do so;
- Attend the thesis and Reading List defense and contribute to the evaluation of the project.

V. Honors Reading List

The student will also create a Reading List of books and, sometimes, a few “texts” such as movies, artwork, musical selections, or even a significant experience such as study abroad or an internship. This list is 12 to 15 texts long, can be in the form of annotations or an essay, and is intended to represent the breadth of experience of the student in college and in Honors. The main goal of the Reading List is for the student to relate the texts to their growth as a scholar and as a person through college and their Honors journey. Thus the texts should be works that are meaningful to the student and each text's meaning and impact (intellectual and personal) should be the focus of the annotation. Examples of past narrative and annotated Reading Lists are available [here](#), on our website.

The annotation may take either a traditional annotative structure or a narrative structure. Its content, rather than its format, is of the utmost importance. This is one of the key areas where the Honors Thesis process differs from a graduate thesis. As described by one former Honors College Associate, “[the] Reading List should draw a picture of [your advisee] as an undergraduate.”

At most 3-4 texts may be drawn from the Honors Civilizations sequence. Typically members of the thesis committee who are Honors faculty are consulted about the Reading List, along with the advisor. If no committee members are Honors faculty, the Honors College will offer a representative to assist with the Reading List.

VI. Thesis Defense and Guidelines for Evaluation

At the end of the Honors thesis defense, the committee meets to evaluate the student’s work and award a level of honors, which include: No Honors, Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors. The Honors College recognizes both the autonomy of thesis committees formed under its auspices and the subjective nature of any evaluation process. The intent of the principles described here is to aid each committee as it endeavors to fulfill its role in coming to an appropriate decision on the level of honors based upon commonly held values within the discipline, the Honors College, and the University.

Elements to be evaluated

The decision on the level (No Honors, Honors, High Honors, and Highest Honors) to be awarded to the Honors candidate should include assessments of the following components:

1. The thesis or project
2. The presentation of the thesis/project
3. The discussion with the committee of the thesis/project
4. The Reading List
5. The discussion with the committee of the Reading List

Without question, the actual thesis work or project should carry the most weight, as it is the physical evidence presented by the candidate to represent the entirety of the thesis experience. However, each of the other facets is crucial to a successful final Honors exercise, and the components may reinforce or explicate each other. For example, the student’s command of the

material occasionally becomes more evident through the presentation and discussion at the defense than it was in the written project.

Moreover, as the mission of the Honors College is to both broaden and deepen the student's education, a Reading List and subsequent discussion that speaks to the breadth of the candidate's undergraduate experience is of paramount importance. A fundamental goal of Honors education is for students to think seriously about a wide range of subjects and ideas and to speak cogently about them.

The Evaluation and Thesis Rubrics

The evaluation of the thesis/project should include assessment of originality of thought evidenced in the process and the product, independence and self-direction of the student, creativity, command of the material and the subject, understanding of the importance and context of the work, appropriateness of the methodologies employed, and written and oral expression. Individual thesis work may involve other significant facets as well, related to the discipline or particular project.

Evaluation of the Reading List and discussion should focus on breadth of ideas and works, clear expression of the influence of the texts on the student and their education, ability to make connections among the texts and to other areas of discourse, depth of analysis, and ability to engage in thoughtful dialogue.

A set of rubrics has been developed to help committees deliberate effectively and help normalize decisions across the wide range of disciplines and kinds of theses. The rubrics can be found on the Honors website.

The Deliberation

Determining the Honors level is often challenging. Thesis committees are charged with evaluating students based on the quality of the thesis and their commitment while ensuring the continuing integrity of the individual decisions. Disciplinary differences preclude standardization of specifics indicating Honors levels; the intent of having a broadly based thesis committee, with experience both in the discipline and in Honors education, is to provide a basis for deliberations that will yield an appropriate result.

There are four possible outcomes: No Honors, Honors, High Honors, and Highest Honors. A student who completes the project, as laid out by the advisor and student, in a competent and complete manner is awarded (at least) Honors. The Honors College encourages advisors to be honest with Honors students if this seems to be an unlikely conclusion, understanding that the student may still elect to bring the thesis to the full committee. The advisor should consult with the Honors College staff if they feel like the thesis should not go to defense.

A decision of No Honors does not necessarily mean that the student has not fulfilled the capstone requirement. This is a departmental decision, usually depending on the advisor's assessment of the work completed.

High Honors and Highest Honors are awarded to students who perform, in all or most of the facets discussed above, at an unusual or outstanding level; all components should play a role in this assessment. A student whose work is unusually strong in all the components will often receive High Honors as will one whose work is outstanding in a few of them.

Highest Honors should be reserved for the small percentage of Honors students whose work is exceptional, indicated by an outstanding performance in all of the components. Various benchmarks are occasionally used, e.g. favorable comparison to Master's work in the discipline, publishable research, a mastery of subject and context far exceeding all expectations coupled with exceptional presentation of both thesis and Reading List.

The committee may determine that a level of honors will be granted only after the candidate completes specific revisions (more extensive than are typically required for final submission of a thesis) or additions. They may assign evaluation of this additional work to the thesis advisor, or they may ask that they see the final version either individually or as a group.

It is customary for committees to try to reach consensus during their deliberations. To this end, members of the committee may first sequentially express their analyses of the thesis defense. Due to the primacy of the advisor's position, both in terms of working with the student and, typically, expertise in the subject area, we recommend that the advisor presents their comments after the other members of the committee have done so. We recognize that often the advisor can provide important insight to set the thesis work in context within the discipline or subdiscipline. After these initial expressions, it is common for deliberations to continue in an informal manner working toward the final decision. However, if the committee believes a vote is the best way to determine the outcome, that is acceptable.

VII. Grading the Honors Thesis Courses

While the evaluation of the Honors thesis, Reading List, and their presentation by the student is the province of the thesis committee, the HON 498 and 499 courses are to be graded by the thesis advisor as instructor of record. Some guidance is outlined below.

Grading HON 498

The following deadlines and guidelines are designed to help students succeed in a process which takes them out of the comfortable world of well-defined course assignments to the self-paced arena of independent, but guided, study. HON 498 should be graded with traditional letter grades (A, B, C, D, F, I, L) as it allows the student to receive a clear assessment of progress. The guidelines and expectations should be discussed with the advisee at the outset of HON 498. Please consult with the HC Associate Dean before using an incomplete grade (I) or a non-participation grade (L).

The Honors faculty has discussed and approved the following guidelines for thinking about the grade of HON 498; the responsibility for determining the grade rests with the Honors thesis advisor who is the instructor of record. C is the minimum grade required to enroll in HON 499.

*Suggested guidelines for HON 498
(See page 3 for deadlines)*

1. Thesis Form 1 has been submitted the semester prior to taking HON 498.
2. Thesis proposal, approved by the advisor, is sent to committee for review one week before the first committee meeting. See Student Handbook for more details and guidelines.
3. The student submits all Thesis forms in a timely manner and meets all deadlines listed on the Honors website.
4. Student must schedule and attend all meetings with advisor, the minimum being bi-monthly.
5. Attendance at these meetings is required and will be taken into consideration in the final grade.
6. Student has met goals set by the student and advisor.
7. A working draft of the Reading List must be submitted by the end of the HON 498 semester.

A possible way to weigh the elements above in awarding a grade
A= successful completion of 1-7; C= successful completion of 1-3.

Grading HON 499

These guidelines will help the thesis student succeed in HON 499, an independent-study course. They will also help the thesis advisor guide and evaluate the student's performance in the course.

HON 499 should NOT be assigned a letter grade until AFTER the thesis defense has taken place and the final thesis is submitted along with the advisor's submission of Thesis Form 7. After the advisor has submitted Thesis Form 7, a grade should be given for HON 499 (A, B, C, D, F). Please note that students cannot graduate without a grade for HON 499.

If the student does not finish the research or defend the thesis before the grading deadline of the term, the student can continue working on the project without needing to enroll in HON 499 again. In that case, **please assign the student a TH grade for HON 499.** Once the thesis is completed, the advisor will submit a change of grade.

If the student does not successfully complete the thesis in the time frame planned, and does not wish to extend the thesis work into an additional semester, the student may still receive a passing grade in HON 499 based on the effort invested, communication maintained, and work accomplished throughout the thesis process.

Suggested guidelines for grading HON 499:

1. Student schedules and attends all meetings with their advisor throughout the semester, the minimum being every 2 weeks. Attendance at these meetings is required.
2. Student communicates regularly with the advisor on thesis progress.
3. Student shares drafts of their thesis and Reading List in a timely manner.
4. Student submits the Reading List document to the Honors College by the indicated deadline.
5. Student meets the deadline for scheduling the date, time, and format of defense (whether online or in person).
6. Student sends an advisor-approved version of the thesis and Reading List to the committee for review two weeks before the thesis defense.
7. Student meets the goals — created mutually by the student and the advisor — for submitting work and completing the thesis.

A possible way to weigh the elements above in awarding a grade

A= successful completion of 1-7

C= successful completion of 1-4

Please contact the Honors College Associate Dean with any questions

VIII. Support for Honors Thesis Work

The Honors College can help support student research work and thesis work through some fellowships in particular disciplines and through the Slavin Research Fund which provides support for materials and supplies. Other sources of support include the Center for Undergraduate Research (CUGR), CLAS, and individual investigator or research center grants and contracts. Click [here](#) for a link to thesis funding opportunities.

IX. Contacting the Honors College

If you have any questions about the contents of this guide or the thesis process, contact (us):

Melissa Ladenheim, Associate Dean
581-3264 melissa.ladenheim@maine.edu
Colvin Hall, Room 102

Spencer Ward '20, Honors College Associate
spencer.ward@maine.edu
Colvin Hall, Room 106b

Other questions may be directed to:

Ellen Weinauer, Dean
581-3262 ellen.weinauer@maine.edu
Colvin Hall, Room 100

X. Appendix: Links to Honors Thesis Resources

- **Rubrics:**
 - **For the written thesis**
<https://honors.umaine.edu/resource/rubric-for-the-written-thesis/>
 - **For the thesis and Reading List oral defense**
<https://honors.umaine.edu/resource/rubric-for-the-thesis-and-reading-list-or-al-defense/>
 - **For the thesis advisor's assessment**
<https://honors.umaine.edu/resource/rubric-for-the-thesis-advisors-assessment/>
- **Grading guidelines:**
<https://honors.umaine.edu/resource/grading-guidelines-for-hon498-hon499/>
- **More on the Reading List:**
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/reading-lists/>
- **Detailed deadlines**
<https://honors.umaine.edu/resource/honors-thesis-form-due-dates/>
- **Other thesis resources:**
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/>