GUIDE FOR
HONORS THESIS ADVISORS
AND
THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

AY 2017-2018

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For more information, please go to:

https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/
I. What is an Honors Thesis?
The majority of Honors Theses are academic works, though a thesis is not just another research paper, not even a very, very long research paper. In addition to being more substantial, a thesis will thoroughly investigate the previous research on a topic, and it will also include your advisee’s own contributions to the topic, an outgrowth of their critical engagement in the process.

Other theses take a “creative” (of course, all theses are creative!) approach and may result in a less traditional product. Students in art, music, new media, theatre, dance, and creative writing might find this more in line with their interests and aptitudes.

Yet other theses involve, to a great extent, a product which might be a disciplinary conference, a new periodical, an invention, or something we might not even be able to imagine; the options are almost endless!

In all of these cases, we ask that your advisee provide a written statement or prospectus which contextualizes the work and describes its scholarly content. You will need to sign and approve this prospectus (using Form 1) after your advisee completes it before they can submit it to the Honors College. Form 1 also outlines the responsibilities and expectations of both advisee and advisor.

II. The Honors Thesis Process
The Honors thesis at the University of Maine encompasses a yearlong project through the two-semester sequence of independent study courses, Honors 498 & 499 (3 credits each). For most majors, the thesis can take the place of the capstone. In some majors the capstone course is not waived if a student does a thesis and, most notably in pre-professional programs like nursing, engineering, and education, the goals of the capstone are sufficiently different from the Honors thesis that both may be required. However, in all cases, we have experience in making the thesis process work for the student. 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:

- Student should have thesis project outline and scope of work outlined in the semester before HON 498 is taken.
- The student’s thesis committee is to be composed of 5 faculty members, including the advisor and a member of the Honors faculty who teaches in the Civilizations sequence. The other three members are typically chosen by the student in consultation with the advisor in order to meet departmental requirements and to provide additional technical expertise and advice.
- In addition to the thesis research and written thesis, Honors students are required to prepare a Reading List of works that represent their growth as a scholar and as a person through the college/honors experience.
- The student will prepare for an oral defense of the thesis and the reading list in time for graduation.
- The Honors thesis process is monitored through a series of forms (1-6) and well-defined timeline. Please see the updated calendar on the Honors thesis website given on the cover
The content of the thesis is developed with the advice of the advisor and committee members who also serve as evaluators of the thesis and defense and award a level of honors 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 the student to convene a committee meeting, no later than eight weeks into the Honors 498 semester, in which the student will present the thesis proposal and receive feedback.
• 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.

IV. Expectations of Honors Committee Members
As an Honors Committee member, I am agreeing to:
• Work within the committee structure to help the student to refine the scope of the project;
• Provide appropriate entries into the literature relevant to the project;
• Read and comment on the final thesis; and
• Attend the thesis and reading list and contribute to the evaluation of the project.

V. Honors Reading List
The student will also complete an annotated reading list of books and, sometimes, a few “texts” such as movies, artwork, musical selections, or even a significant experience like study-abroad. The reading list is intended to represent the breadth of experience of the student in college and in Honors. The annotation may take either a traditional annotative system or a narrative structure. The importance is its annotation, rather than its format. 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 three texts may be drawn from the Honors Civilizations sequence. Typically the Honors member of the thesis committee is consulted about the reading list along with the advisor.
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: 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 Honors decision 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 speak 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 her/his 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 Deliberation

Determining the Honors level is often challenging. Thesis committees are charged with rewarding the thesis students for their hard work and 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. 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.

N.B. 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 her/his 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 sub-discipline. After these initial expressions, it is common for deliberations to continue in an informal manner working toward the final decision. However, there if the committee believes a vote is the best way to determine the outcome, that is acceptable.
VII. 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. See https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/honors-fellowship-opportunities/

VIII. Contacting the Honors College
If you have any questions, please contact the Honors College staff, and we will do our best to help!

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