



GUIDE FOR  
HONORS THESIS ADVISORS &  
THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

AY 2022-2023

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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?

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. Students completing a creative thesis must also produce a *Disquisition*, a formal inquiry into, or discussion of, a subject in the form of an essay – see the guidelines document linked [here](#) or in the Appendix for more details.

Your advisee is responsible for submitting Thesis Form 1 (Project proposal), via the digital form on the Honors website. Thesis Form 1 requires the submission of a 250-word prospectus describing the project's scope and basic methodology. If you approve to serve as the student's thesis advisor for their proposed project, you must submit Thesis Form 1A (Advisor Approval).

## II. The Honors Thesis Process

The Honors thesis at the University of Maine encompasses a yearlong project undertaken through a two-semester sequence of independent study courses, HON 498 & 499 (3 credits each). For many majors, the thesis can take the place of the capstone--see a list of those majors [here](#) or linked in the Appendix. In some majors, the Honors thesis does not replace the capstone requirement, 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:

- Students should have a thesis project and scope of work outlined in the semester before HON 498 is taken. The student should submit Thesis Form 1 with an overview of the project and its scope prior to beginning HON 498.
- The student's thesis committee is to be composed of a minimum of three UMaine faculty members (full-time or part-time), including the thesis advisor; the committee may include a *maximum of five* total members. The number of committee members and their expertise will be determined by the advisor and student.
  - The committee *must* include one Honors College representative\*; that representative may also serve as the advisor.
  - The committee *may* include 1 external member; the external member may not serve as the thesis advisor. The external member would constitute a fourth member of the committee. If the thesis is a capstone for double majors, the committee may need to have advisors or members from both disciplines. Please consult with the chairs/directors of your departments to make this determination.

- 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 university/Honors College experience.
- The student will prepare for an oral defense of the thesis and the reading list in time for graduation. Students and advisors will be notified ahead of time about the deadlines for final submission of the thesis along with Thesis Form 6.
  - Students must submit the thesis and the reading list documents to their committee two weeks prior to the scheduled defense. The thesis document should be the full document, including all required sections (including title page, table of contents, citations, author's biography, etc.) and should be correctly formatted as a Word doc (unless otherwise required to be in a specialized program such as LaTeX). A guide to these required sections and in-depth formatting resources are available for students on the Honors website, linked [here](#) and in the Appendix.
- The Honors thesis process is monitored through a series of virtual forms (1-6) and a well-defined timeline. Thesis Forms are available on our website, linked [here](#) and in the Appendix. Thesis Form 1 is submitted by the student, followed by approval by the thesis advisor, confirming their position, through submission of Thesis Form 1A. If the student's thesis is replacing their major capstone, the home program's chair, director, or Associate Dean must also submit Thesis Form 1B, approving and confirming that the thesis project will satisfy the capstone requirement. Thesis Forms 2-6 are submitted by the advisor however, it is primarily the student's responsibility to see that the forms are submitted on time. Please also see the calendar of thesis form deadlines on the Honors thesis website, linked [here](#) and in the Appendix.
- The content of the thesis is developed with the guidance of 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 thesis proposal to be circulated to the committee one week in advance of the first committee meeting. See specific guidelines for this thesis proposal and meeting in the Guidelines for Honors Thesis Committee Meeting Student Proposal (linked [here](#) and in the Appendix).
- Help the student to convene a committee meeting, no later than eight weeks into the HON 498 semester, in which the student will present the thesis proposal and receive feedback. See specific guidelines for this thesis proposal and meeting in the Student Handbook Part II (linked [here](#) and in the Appendix).
- 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 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, 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.

**Please note:** all thesis committee meetings and thesis defenses will follow CDC and UMaine guidelines. If needed, guidelines for remote defenses from previous semesters are available on the Honors website [here](#) and linked in the Appendix.

### *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 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. A link to these rubrics on our website is available [here](#) and in the Appendix of this document.

### ***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 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 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.

### *Required deadlines and suggested guidelines for HON 498*

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 Part II (linked in the Appendix) for more details and guidelines.
3. First committee meeting must take place by Friday of week 8 of HON 498. Confirm that all committee members agree to serving on the committee, and you as the thesis advisor submit Thesis Form 2 online. Please note: the thesis advisor's submission of Form 2 informs the Honors College of the thesis committee's collective decision, and obviates the need to gather individual committee member signatures.
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 signature on Thesis Form 6.** After the advisor has signed Thesis Form 6, a grade for HON 499 should be given (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.

### *Required deadlines and 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 week four of the HON 499 semester, and the advisor submits Thesis Form 3 online.
5. Student meets the deadline for scheduling the date, time, and format of defense (whether online or in person), and the advisor submits Thesis Form 4 online.
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](#) or in the appendix 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 (148 Estabrooke Hall)  
581-3264 melissa.ladenheim@maine.edu

Kelsey Davis '21, Honors College Associate (145.1 Estabrooke Hall)  
581-3285 kelsey.e.davis@maine.edu

Katie Tims '21, Honors College Associate (145.1 Estabrooke Hall)  
581-3201 kathleen.tims@maine.edu

Other questions may be directed to:

Ellen Weinauer, Dean (145 Estabrooke Hall)  
581-3262 ellen.weinauer@maine.edu

Kristin Beebe, Administrative Specialist (146 Estabrooke Hall)  
581-3263 kristin.beebe@maine.edu

Katie Kurz, Finance and Personnel Manager (143 Estabrooke Hall)  
581-3308 kkurz@maine.edu

## X. Appendix: Links to Thesis Resources

- **All Honors Thesis resources:**  
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/>
- Creative Thesis & Disquisition Guidelines:  
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/forms/#disquisition>
- Remote Thesis Defense Guidelines for 2021-2022:  
<https://honors.umaine.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/184/2021/10/Remote-Honors-Thesis-Defense-Guidelines-2021-22-20.pdf>
- Student Thesis Formatting Resources:  
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/forms/#guide>
- Student Thesis Handbook:  
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/forms/#handbook>
- Thesis Forms:  
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/forms/#forms>
- Thesis Funding Opportunities:  
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/honors-fellowship-opportunities/>
- Thesis Rubrics:  
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/forms/#rubrics>
- Thesis Writing Calendars:  
<https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/forms/#calendar>