

# The Thesis

## University Honors College

### 2017-18

#### Introduction

Students in the University Honors College are required to complete a thesis as the culmination of the undergraduate University Honors College experience. By “thesis”, we mean either a formal research paper which contain an appropriate element of original research, or a comparable creative project suitable to your academic discipline or area of expertise. Students may pursue a research-oriented internship that provides the basis (data, experience, etc.) for then completing the written thesis. Whatever the option, a thesis is a tangible document based on research or creative adaptation that is defended before a faculty committee for a grade.

A thesis may take a different shape and form, depending on your discipline and specialty, but theses share at least three elements in common:

- 1) original research,
- 2) clear methodology, and
- 3) scholarly creativity.

Undergraduate students in the humanities and sciences usually complete a written research paper, but it is conceivable for students in the fine and performing arts to engage in an appropriate alternative experience. The thesis document itself serves as a summing up of research, methodology, and findings OR a summing up of the creative project. In talking about a thesis, we need to distinguish between the *process* and the final *product*, which is always defended before a faculty thesis committee (that is determined early in the process).

There is considerable confusion about what the thesis requirement entails and the process for completing the requirement. This document is meant to help clarify the important issues related to a thesis or creative project. It is not meant to substitute for the Honors College advising system. **At each step, discuss your thesis project and expectations with your thesis advisor. Share this document with your thesis advisor.**

#### Why do a thesis?

The simple reason is because the thesis is required to graduate from the Honors College and earn University Honors. But, in a larger sense, the thesis should be the culmination of the undergraduate academic experience. To use a well worn phrase, it is a “capstone” experience that allows you to put into practice the intellectual and academic skills you have mastered throughout your college career. In the best sense, the thesis is a chance for you to shine and to demonstrate what you have learned in a chosen field of study. It is a chance to go more deeply into a subject and to demonstrate originality and creativity in research, methodology in a written or visual medium.

## **Is the Honors College thesis the same as Departmental Honors?**

The Honors College thesis is a requirement of the Honors College, but it is most often fulfilled within the student's major subject area. (While most students will do so, you are not required to pursue thesis research in your major department.) Students completing the Honors College thesis do not automatically earn Departmental Honors, but students are encouraged to pursue Departmental Honors while they are completing their Honors College requirement. Think of it as two for one: most often you will earn both Departmental and University Honors. However, it is important to realize from the start that departments may have their own separate protocols for earning their Departmental Honors, and students have to be aware of the complete range of expectations if they are pursuing both University and Departmental Honors. The Honors College encourages its students to pursue Departmental Honors whenever possible.

## **Do I have to register for thesis credits? When and how do I do this?**

Yes. Honors College students traditionally earn three credits for thesis work. Most often these credits are divided over two semesters, with one credit (HNRS 489) devoted to initial exploration, research and consultation, and two credits (HNRS 499) for completing the project. Although it is not recommended, students may complete all three credits in a single semester. Students usually enroll for thesis credits during their junior or senior years, depending on other academic circumstances. Studying abroad, student teaching and other demands will influence when you register for thesis credits. Please note: you must receive the final grade of B- or higher on your thesis credits.

## **Do I go it alone?**

In a word, "no". Students work closely with a faculty thesis advisor and with a thesis committee. The Director of the University Honors College is also an important advisor in the thesis process. Good communication is the key to good advisement. Remember, you have colleagues in the Honors College who are also working on theses. You are not alone.

## **How do I choose a thesis advisor?**

A good thesis advisor is a faculty member who has the necessary scholarly expertise and a familiarity with the thesis process. Ability and willingness to direct a thesis is every bit as important as scholarly expertise, and students should choose wisely. Knowledge of a subject is no guarantee that a faculty member will be a good thesis director. It is equally important for the faculty advisor to appreciate what is involved in the process of researching and refining the final product, and giving good advice to assure completion in a timely manner. Your advisor is the person you will work with most closely, and it is vital to have good rapport and mutual respect.

Honors College students are required to attend the Thesis Workshop in their sophomore year, and they are encouraged to meet with the Director prior to commencing any

discussion with faculty members about directing a thesis. These simple steps can save you potential headaches and heartache as you go along. The Honors College Director is the person most familiar with Honors College expectations and requirements. This troubleshooting will prove indispensable in the process. In consultation with the Director, students can then approach an appropriate faculty member with a proposal to direct a thesis. In consultation with the Director and the faculty advisor, the student can then make decisions about who else should serve on the thesis committee. Remember that one member of the committee must be a member of the Honors faculty.

### **How do I decide on an appropriate topic?**

Like choosing an advisor, identifying an appropriate topic is critical to completing the thesis requirement. Students should pursue research that will sustain their interest. They should also be confident that they have adequate preparation to succeed in the project. The thesis is a culminating experience, and it is an intellectual enterprise that provides an opportunity for sustained and original work that makes a contribution to the discipline. Identifying a manageable topic and defining a reasonable research agenda is critical to success. The thesis advisor plays an important role in helping the individual student achieve these goals. The Director of the Honors College also plays an important support role in the process.

### **What is the role of the Thesis Committee?**

There are usually three faculty members who serve on a thesis committee, one of whom is the thesis advisor. In the Honors College, we require that one of the faculty members represent the Honors College to assure that standards are maintained. Like your thesis advisor, the other committee members can be an important resource in completing your work. As with everything else, good communication is a key to success in working with your committee. In consultation with your advisor, you should choose committee members who have the scholarly expertise that is appropriate to the subject. They will offer comment and critique your work along the way, in advance of the final copy. Your committee will sit as a panel at your thesis defense to assess whether you have successfully met the expectations for University Honors. After a successful defense, the committee members must sign off on your thesis. The advisor, as the instructor of record, will assign the final grade for HNRS 489 and 499 credits.

### **Must I take Advanced Composition?**

Successful completion of the thesis substitutes for the Advanced Writing Requirement.

English Department Writing Learning Outcomes:

<http://www.millersville.edu/english/faculty/Competencies/writing-sequence-learning-outcomes.php>

**Note: Review writing learning outcomes with your thesis advisor.**

## What should I do and when?

### Freshman Year

- \* Excel in your courses. Get to know your professors. Find out which faculty in your department are working on research or special projects. You might want to volunteer as an assistant to start getting experience and even contribute to a research project in your department. You do not necessarily need to think specifically about the thesis requirement until the Sophomore Year, but it's never too early to start laying the foundation.

### Sophomore Year

- \*Attend the Sophomore Thesis Workshop (**mandatory**).
- \*Begin thinking about a general subject area you might want to research.
- \*Meet individually with the Director of the University Honors College (**mandatory**).

### Junior Year

- \*Identify a faculty advisor and discuss potential topics.
- \*In consultation with your faculty advisor, choose a subject area and define your work.
- \*Submit a Thesis Prospectus/ Statement of Intent to the University Honors College (**mandatory**).
- \*As you are ready, register for thesis credit and begin work under faculty direction (HNRS or Departmental 489/499=3 credits total).
- \*Begin writing a thesis proposal.
- \*In consultation with the thesis advisor and the Director of the University Honors College, choose a faculty committee (usually two other members in addition to your thesis advisor; one member represents University Honors College). It is necessary to identify your committee early in the process so they can give feedback on your thesis proposal.
- \*Attend an Honors College Thesis Jam Session.

### Senior Year

- \*If you have not done so, register for thesis credit and continue (or begin) your work under faculty direction.
- \*Meet individually with the Director of the University Honors College, as needed.
- \*(If not completed in the junior year: In consultation with the thesis advisor and the Director of the University Honors College, choose a faculty committee for your thesis defense (usually two other members in addition to your thesis advisor; one member represents University Honors College).
- \*Work closely with your thesis advisor and committee members.
- \*Attend an Honors College Thesis Jam Session.
- \*Defend your thesis and submit two final signed copies of your thesis to the University Honors College.
- \*Submit the original signed copy of the Signature Page (committee members signatures).
- \*With all University Honors College requirements completed, GRADUATE WITH UNIVERSITY HONORS!!