The Thesis
University Honors College

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 also have the option to pursue a research-oriented internship that provides the basis for completing the 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: original research, clear methodology, and 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. 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.

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.

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 fulfillment of the undergraduate academic experience. To use a well worn phrase, it is a "capstone" experience that allows a student 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 the student to shine, and to demonstrate what she or he has 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 and 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 distinction 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 devoted to initial exploration, research and consultation, and two credits for completing the project. Though it is discouraged 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 exigencies will influence when you register for thesis credit. Please note: you must receive a final grade of B or higher.

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 too that misery loves company—you have colleagues who are working on theses.

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. Directing a thesis is every bit as important as scholarly expertise, and students should choose wisely. However, knowledge of a subject is no guarantee that a faculty member will be a good thesis director. It is equally important 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 a 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. 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. These other committee members can be from your department, from another department, or even from outside the university. In consultation with your advisor, you should choose committee members who have the scholarly expertise that is appropriate to the subject. They can offer comment and critique your work in advance of the final copy, and they will sit as a panel 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.

Must I take Advanced Composition?

Successful completion of the thesis substitutes for the Advanced Writing Requirement

Honors Thesis Suggested Time Table - 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. Consider attending a Thesis Workshop.

Sophomore Year
*Attend the Thesis Workshop **(mandatory).**
*Meet individually with the Director of the University Honors College **(mandatory).**
*Begin thinking about a general subject area you might want to research and who your thesis advisor might be.

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 credits 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; one member from a different discipline). 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 during Junior year: Register for thesis credits and continue (or begin) your work under faculty direction. In consultation with the thesis advisor and the Director of the University Honors College, choose a faculty committee for your thesis.)
*Meet individually with the Director of the University Honors College, as needed.
*Work closely with your thesis advisor and committee members.
*Attend an Honors College Thesis Jam Session.
*Defend your thesis and submit two final copies of your thesis along with the original signed Signature page with all committee members' signatures to the University Honors College.
*With all University Honors College requirements completed, GRADUATE WITH UNIVERSITY HONORS!

Updated 4/2025

SENIOR THESIS GUIDELINES

The senior thesis is the culminating experience in the University Honors College. Written under the personal supervision of a faculty member of the student's choice, it can be the most challenging and rewarding part of the honors student's college career. The thesis provides the honors student with the opportunity to make an independent contribution to human knowledge. While the thesis is normally written about a topic relating to the student's major, it need not be written for the major department. Students who choose to go outside their major departments when writing their theses should realize that they will not be able to graduate with departmental honors.

Selecting a Topic

The primary consideration in selecting a thesis topic is that the subject be one, which will sustain the student's interest through a long period of hard work. In the preliminary stages, students should search for possible topics in broad fields that they have found appealing and then consult members of the relevant departments who specialize in these areas. These professors can advise students on the feasibility of doing research on the topic. When a thesis advisor is chosen, the student should work closely with this individual at all stages of research and writing. However, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the advisor will never take the initiative in actually producing the thesis.

The thesis subject should permit the student to make an original contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the chosen topic. Students should avoid subjects that are already covered adequately in available works, but they should not automatically reject subjects upon which research has already been done. It is possible to introduce an original interpretation of a previously studied topic. Students should also avoid the common temptation to choose too broad or too ambitious a subject. They should remember that the purpose of the thesis is to make some original and significant contribution of fact or interpretation. The more carefully the subject is defined, the more intensively the students can examine available materials and the easier it will be for them to do an outstanding piece of work in the limited time available. It is also recommended that the thesis topic be approved in the junior year so that the preliminary reading, research and writing can be started as early as possible.

Writing the Thesis

The essence of the thesis is the student's critical judgment about the subject, evaluation of the material being analyzed, and interpretation of the data presented. Here, powers of criticism, of honest skepticism, and of enthusiastic determination to justify the validity of a position are essential.

Organization of data is also of great importance in the development of the thesis. As soon as the outlines of a thesis begin to take form in the mind, the student should attempt to determine the logical divisions of the topic, deciding which elements should be given prominence, which should be placed in subordinate positions, and in what order the

various aspects should be treated. A tentative outline should be made in the early stages of research and should be tested and redrafted as research and writing progress.

Unless students save time and energy for writing, their research will have been wasted. The actual job of writing is often difficult to get underway without a clear view of how the thesis is going to develop. The best way for students to overcome this problem is for them to start writing without giving too much consideration to style or length. A preliminary draft of the entire thesis is absolutely essential, and most honors students find an intermediary draft helpful. Many students need a third draft before getting their ideas and conclusions properly organized and expressed. While the length of theses varies from discipline to discipline, most theses range between thirty and fifty pages. Students should try to keep their theses within those guidelines. In the first draft, they should strive to put facts and ideas on paper in a logical order as indicated by the outline. Often problems clarify themselves in the process of composition. If the introductory sections cause trouble, the student should put them aside and undertake the substance of the thesis. Only with a preliminary draft, no matter how awkward, can students achieve a clear, vigorous, objective, logically- argued, and well-written final version. Try to avoid the common error of substituting the rearrangement of existing material for the rethinking of the positions expressed in the paper. Make sure that you save your data, outlines, and drafts in multiple places (or at least back them up). You don’t want to lose all your hard-earned work to a faulty hard drive.

A final word of caution: the thesis must be the student's own work. To take data, knowledge, interpretations, organizations, or phraseology from another without full acknowledgement is common theft and a punishable act of plagiarism. All ideas and data which are not common knowledge must be appropriately cited. Each discipline has its own standard citation form, be it the MLA: Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, the Chicago Manual of Style, APA Style, or one of the forms of documentation preferred in the sciences. The paper's conclusion should synthesize the student's original contribution to existing knowledge in the field.

The text in the thesis must be double-spaced, and it must be carefully proofread for errors. The title page should include the title, the name of the author and the following statement: "A Senior Thesis Submitted to the (Department name) and the University Honors College in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the University Honors Baccalaureate." A second page should contain the signatures of the members of the faculty committee before whom the thesis was defended and by whom it was approved. Two copies of the thesis must be presented to the Honors College Office. One of these copies will be retained in the office. The other will be bound and added to the University library's permanent collection.

"Anatomy" of a Thesis

University Honors College
Millersville University

A thesis is NOT a term paper. In the process of completing a thesis, you will do a thorough investigation of background literature/research (referred to as a "Review of Literature," a "Bibliographic Essay," or simply "Background") related to your thesis question and to your mode of inquiry. This portion of your thesis is similar to what is typically thought of as a "term paper." However, a thesis goes far beyond the requirements of a term paper in that it involves original inquiry or creative activity of some kind.

In general, every thesis project requires that you

- **explain clearly what you are up to and why.**
- **review thoroughly the research/thinking that has already been done relative to your particular issue of interest.**
- **explain how you will conduct your inquiry or creative activity.**
- **carry out some inquiry or creative activity that has not been done before.**
- **publish the results of your inquiry or creative activity.**

All University Honors Theses require:

Title Page
Signature Page
[Table of Contents]
Abstract

Format for these items is specified by the Honors College and is available in Franklin House.

An Honors Thesis in a **science or social science field** will typically (though not always) consist of the following parts:

Introduction
Background/Review of Literature
Statement of the Problem/Hypothesis
Materials and Methods/Methodology
Data
Discussion
Conclusion
References/Works Cited

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Some fields (e.g. history, anthropology, literary studies) lend themselves to a more **narrative structure**:

For example, an historical thesis might include:

Introduction and statement of historical issue
Historical narrative
Bibliographic essay

A literary thesis might proceed through:

Introduction and statement of thesis focus
Description of analytic mode or framework
Preliminary review of relevant literature
Original literary analysis integrated with relevant literary criticism literature

An anthropological thesis typically includes:

Introduction and description of the study
Context

Descriptive/ethnographic essay
Interpretation

In some fields (particularly mathematics) and in some instances, a particular thesis problem or topic will dictate an even looser, more **problem-determined structure** for the written thesis.

Students in the **performing arts and in technical fields** (such as Industrial Technology and Computer Science) may choose to complete a thesis project that involves performance (e.g. a musical composition, the development of software, or a design/invention) to a greater degree than it involves a written record of inquiry. The Honors College encourages students to develop theses projects that match their interests, talents and field of study closely. In all cases, the results of the thesis inquiry must be "published." i.e. available to interested persons. This publication must include a written explanation of the intent of the project as well as a written description of the intellectual, practical and/or creative context for the work. It may include alternative media such as a musical score, video or audio files, website, or other types of video or audio media.

Students are urged to consult closely with their thesis advisor and the members of their committee regarding the "parts" appropriate to their particular thesis project. It is also helpful to take a look at theses completed by past Honors graduates. These are available in Franklin House, on D2L, and in McNairy Library in the Repository and Digital Archive.

SENIOR THESIS FORMAT GUIDELINES
UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE

Due to the library's requirement that senior theses be uniform in structure, the following guidelines must be followed when submitting the final draft of your thesis.

Title Page: Must include title, student's name, phrase indicating what it is submitted for (fulfillment of University Honors, Departmental Honors, etc.), Millersville University, and date it was successfully defended.

Second Page: List the thesis defense committee. You must have their signatures in order for the thesis to be placed in the University Archives. Also, please note the department for which the thesis was written on this page.

Abstract Page: Include title, name, department, and a brief summary of what the paper is about. Please underline keywords which best describe the subject of your thesis as they make cataloging the thesis easier.

Examples of how these pages are to be set up are listed below:

Title Page:

Millersville University

Josiah Strong:
Cultural Assimilation & The Immigrant Question

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the
Department of History & The University Honors College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the University & Departmental Honors Baccalaureate

By
Richard W. Schultz

Millersville, Pennsylvania
May 2000

Updated 4/2025

Committee Signature Page:

This Senior Thesis was completed in the Department of Psychology,
Defended before and approved by the following members of the Thesis Committee:

(Signature of Professor)

Susan P. Luek, Ph.D. (Thesis Advisor)
Professor of Psychology

(Signature of Professor)

Dorothee J. Blum, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Mathematics

(Signature of Professor)

Richard D. Clark, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Earth Science

Abstract Page:

The author examines three plays by the twentieth-century dramatist, Arthur Miller. Miller's use of the American Dream is analyzed in the American clock, Death of a Salesman, and A Memory of Two Mondays. These plays are connected by the Great Depression. Concludes that Miller shows true success is found not through the attainment of money, but through the intrinsic reward found in work.

*This abstract has been chosen because its brevity allowed it to fit on this page. Most abstracts are more detailed.