

HONORS COLLEGE THESIS: HANDBOOK AND GUIDELINES

Revised Fall 2016

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What is the Honors Thesis and why do I have to complete one?

Completing this Honors requirement provides you an opportunity to design a unique project that will challenge you to reflect upon your Honors education and to present your work to a group of faculty and your peers. Your thesis will be the culmination of your undergraduate work and a bridge to your future career or academic life. Completion of the senior thesis is one of the hallmarks of a quality Honors education.

The thesis also provides an opportunity for undergraduate students to work closely with faculty members on campus who share similar research or creative interests. Your thesis can provide entrée to academic and professional research. It can lead to a publication and/or a conference presentation. Furthermore, faculty members who serve as thesis advisors are in a position to write very strong letters for graduate/professional schools or positions in the labor force. Prospective employers and graduate school admissions committees are impressed by the dedication and discipline required to write a thesis.

A thesis is not just another research or term paper. A thesis will thoroughly investigate previous research on a topic and will include your own insights and contributions to the topic. Many theses attempt to answer an academic question or test a hypothesis. Students in art, music, creative writing, or film studies, for example, may choose to complete a “creative project.” In this case, your written paper would be a contextual analysis of the work that you completed and would provide a lens for an audience to evaluate your work. See “Formatting Your Thesis Proposal” and “Formatting Your Completed Thesis.”

The information provided here will help you complete your Honors thesis and will answer basic questions about the process. The advisors in the Honors College are available to talk with you further about this requirement and to help you successfully complete it.

What do I do first?

Before you begin writing your thesis, it is highly recommended that you enroll in and complete HONORS 398, an optional one-unit “Thesis Proposal” class. HONORS 398 should be taken in your sophomore or junior year. The goals of this class are to identify an appropriate advisor, develop a research activity or creative project, and prepare your proposal. In conjunction with your thesis advisor, you will develop a proposal that will be submitted to the Honors College for approval. The required format for the proposal is outlined below in this handbook, and the cover form, which your advisor must sign, is available here.

Once the proposal is approved by the Thesis Review Committee, you will complete your project under the supervision of your thesis advisor, and you may plan to present your final thesis as soon as the following semester.

Note: Students in the College of Engineering should check their schedules of studies to see which course satisfies the Honors College thesis requirement.

Thesis Timeline

1. Sophomore year or when you have earned 45 credits: Sign up for HONORS 398, the Thesis Proposal Course.
2. Sophomore/Junior year: Select a faculty member who will serve as your thesis advisor during your thesis. Begin literature review.
3. Sophomore/Junior/Senior year: With your advisor, agree on a schedule of meetings to plan and discuss your progress. It is critical that you act professionally and maintain regular contact with your advisor.
4. Junior year: Submit a written proposal to the Honors Thesis Proposal Committee by the semester before you plan to complete your work.
5. Junior/Senior year: Ensure that the Honors College has enrolled you in HONORS 450 for the correct semester and the correct number of credits. You will need to repeat this step if you split your credits between semesters.
6. Senior year, first semester: Be certain you will complete all your research, writing, and course requirements by the last semester of your academic program.
7. Senior year, first semester: Work with your thesis advisor to find a thesis evaluator from your discipline.
8. Senior year, first semester (preferred): Contact the Honors College and arrange a presentation time for the semester you will be presenting.
9. Senior year: Submit one copy of your completed thesis to your thesis advisor, and an electronic copy to the Honors College before the appropriate deadline for the week in which you are presenting.
10. Senior year: If you are required to revise your thesis after you have given your oral presentation, submit an electronic copy of the revised work within the deadline given to you during the discussion of your presentation.
11. Senior year: If you received "Pass with Distinction" on your thesis, please consider signing an approval form allowing the Honors College to publish your thesis on its web page, and to the Research Exchange Project of the WSU Libraries. Your thesis advisor will also have to approve publication.

Formatting your thesis proposal

Thesis proposals are typically 5 pages long and are double-spaced in a 12-point font. Please paginate your proposal and be sure to attach the required "Thesis Proposal Form" to the front of your proposal. The guidelines below indicate the sections required.

I. Introduction/Literature Review

Your introduction or literature review provides specific background information or the "body of knowledge" relevant to your Honors thesis. The literature you cite should draw on both earlier and current scholarly work. For proposals in the arts and humanities, include several journal sources and academic book(s). For proposals in the social sciences and sciences, include primary sources, review articles, and academic book(s).

This section should be written such that your research question or hypothesis or creative activity flows logically from it.

II. Proposed Activity

Depending upon your academic discipline, you may present your proposed activity as a research question, hypothesis(es), or creative activity with a stated goal or outcome(s). The proposed activity that forms the basis of your Honors thesis must be tied to an existing body of knowledge. This section of your thesis proposal should be clear and concise - e.g., two sentences in length.

III. Methodology

All disciplines lend themselves to research and creativity; all work is conducted using some methodology. Your methodology determines the rigor and validity of your work. This section of your thesis proposal should present all the methods (i.e., scholarly approaches) you will use in your thesis. Your advisor will be well-versed in methodologies.

Your methodology may depend on your field. For example ...

- If you plan to create original artistic work or other creative work, provide a scholarly "lens" through which an audience may perceive it (e.g., analyze the work of artists who influenced your own work and how your work differs from/is similar to theirs). Discuss any challenges to be overcome and give a timeline you will follow to complete your project. Be specific about what you plan to create. Articulate your creative goals.
- If you plan to conduct literature research (whether in the liberal arts and humanities, sciences, social sciences, business, or communications), indicate how you will select and examine your sources (e.g., date range of journals to be searched, data base(s) to utilize), what guidelines you will use to interpret them, and how you plan to analyze and synthesize your findings.
- If you plan to perform scientific research in a lab or the field, provide information on materials and methods including controls, replicates, and statistical analyses.

- If you plan to conduct a meta-analysis in the social sciences, indicate the criteria to be used to select the publications for your analysis as well as the statistics you will apply.
- If your research involves the use of humans, including surveys and/or questionnaires, you must obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through the Office of Research Assurances (www.irb.wsu.edu). *This approval is absolutely necessary before you interview one person or send out a single survey to be completed.*
- If you are doing a survey or interviews, include the full survey instrument and/or the complete interview questions to the Appendix section. Further, if data collection is involved, describe how the data will be collected and analyzed and what materials will be used.

IV. Expected Results and/or Potential Conclusions

In *no more than one or two paragraphs*, describe the results you expect from your thesis and what those results will mean in the greater context of knowledge in the field. If you complete a creative project, discuss the implications of your project in terms of a larger context of your discipline.

V. Annotated Bibliography

This is a preliminary list of the "body of knowledge" that was cited in your Introduction/Literature Review (above). Your annotated bibliography section will begin on a new sheet of paper and contain at least five annotated sources. Select recent journal articles, review articles, and scholarly books that address your topic. After each source, write an annotation, i.e. a 3- to 4-sentence statement explaining what information is included in the source. (See example below.) Include specific facts rather than vague generalizations (e.g., instead of saying, "This journal article talks about Beethoven's 9th symphony," say "This journal article analyzes the form, instrumentation, and re-orchestration by Mahler of Beethoven's 9th symphony"). If it is not obvious, explain how the source will be useful to the development of your thesis. For the citation, follow the approved style for your field (i.e. APA, MLA, Chicago Style Manual, etc.). Single-space each citation and its corresponding annotation and leave a blank line between entries:

Portes A. 1998. Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 24:1-24.

This review article discusses the origins and definitions of social capital in the writings of several scholars in the field. The author identifies four sources of social capital and examines their dynamics. He also gives examples of both positive functions and negative consequences of social capital. It is fundamental for my thesis hypothesis.

Powell W.W. and Snellman K. 2004. The knowledge economy. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 30:199-220.

This review article uses evidence from patent data and discusses the debate on whether technological advances have generated more or less worker autonomy.

It is useful for my research because it defines the knowledge economy and provides both sides of the debate.

VI. Appendix

This optional section will contain your complete survey instruments and full range of interview questions, or any other information you and your advisor deem essential for readers and reviewers.

Thesis proposal review process

If your thesis proposal is electronically submitted by the fifth day of a month, you will receive approval—or a request for revision—by the last working day of that month. A faculty committee will evaluate your thesis proposal. All notifications to you and your advisor will be made using WSU's email system.

Formatting your completed thesis

All Honors College theses include these sections, *arranged in the following order*:

Title Page

The title page will include the following: thesis title, your name, the semester in which you are giving your oral presentation, and your advisor's name, department, and college.

Advisor Signature Approval Page

Your advisor must indicate that he/she agrees that your thesis is complete and ready to submit. This page should be placed directly after your Title Page, and include the following:

- As thesis advisor for (your name), I have read this paper and find it satisfactory.
- Thesis Advisor signature
- Date of signature

Précis

The précis represents an informative, concise summary of your thesis that is free from jargon and written in language that an academic reader outside your discipline can understand. (Note: A précis differs from an abstract, which is written for professionals in the discipline.) The précis should be no more than two pages long, double-spaced. Develop your précis after you complete the body of your Honors thesis, and place it directly after the Advisor Signature Approval Page. Include the problem, question, or hypothesis examined, an explanation of why you decided to study this problem or issue or to pursue this creative project, the approach you took, what you discovered, and avenues others might pursue in this area in the future.

Table of Contents

Include a table of contents that guides the reader to the various sections of your paper.

List of Figures and Tables

If two or more figures or tables appear in the main body of your paper, include a list of figures/tables after the Table of Contents.

Main Body of Paper

This section of your thesis should be approximately 20 pages long, double-spaced, with page numbers at the bottom of each page. If you have chosen a creative project, your paper may be 10-12 pages long. It should be double-spaced, have page numbers at the bottom of each page, be written in English unless specific arrangements have been made in advance, and contain no spelling or grammatical errors. In all cases, the style should be appropriate for the discipline.

For organizational purposes, you may wish to use headings and sections (see below) for the main body of your thesis as they appear in your Table of Contents. Discuss the organization of your thesis with your advisor and follow a format that is typical of writing in your discipline. However, your thesis must include a Title Page, Advisor Signature Approval Page, Précis, and References Cited section. In addition, the main body of your thesis must provide the reader with a logical introduction to your project (explaining how it fits within a larger context and what your focus is), what you did for your thesis, how you conducted your work, and the significance of your work to your field of endeavor.

If you have chosen to complete a creative project, you may submit a shorter written document in which you should answer the following questions:

- What are the artistic aims of your project?
- What or who are the key influences on your work, i.e., current or historical artists with similar creative ideas?
- Is your work similar to or different from these artists?
- What methods or techniques did you use?
- Did you follow a disciplinary tradition?
- What issues and obstacles did you encounter?
- What did you learn? What are the next steps?
- What further work is needed related to your project?

Optional Headings and Sections

I. Introduction or Literature Review

This section sets the stage for your work. It gives the reader a view of the framework for your project – the particular field in which you are working – and brings the reader logically to the project at hand.

The introduction should **answer two questions**:

1. What is the larger context (body of knowledge) for your topic?
2. What is the significance of your particular topic?

The **introduction or literature review** should lead logically and clearly to your research question or hypothesis.

II. Thesis Activity or Creative Project

State your thesis activity/creative project succinctly in one or two sentences.

III. Methodology (Materials and Methods)

Describe the approaches you employed, and cite any relevant literature. Readers should be able to understand clearly the procedural and analytical steps you undertook.

IV. Results and Discussion

This is the real heart of your project and contains your original contribution of new knowledge in your field.

What did you discover, learn, create, or uncover? Present, interpret, and discuss the data or ideas you have collected or generated. Describe your findings in a precise and well-supported manner, as this is primarily where you can persuade your readers to adopt your perspective on the subject. Relate your work to the larger field. Cite any relevant bibliographic sources within your discussion.

The ability to view one's own work critically and objectively is essential for all fields of scholarly research, and a thorough discussion of your findings demonstrates your potential as a scholar.

Because all projects are by their very nature limited in scope, an essential part of fully analyzing your work is to understand its limits. Think about the robustness of what you have done:

- If you had collected your materials or data differently, could you still expect to replicate your findings?
- Could you have approached your project in a different way?
- Did your assumptions lead to a certain bias that had implications for your conclusions?
- Do your findings corroborate those in the published literature?

V. Conclusions

What, briefly, did you learn or discover? What are the larger ramifications of your work?

VI. References Cited

VII. Appendix (optional)

Supplemental material such as pictures, figures, survey instruments, interview questions, and tables should be included in the Appendix.

Who will evaluate my thesis and oral presentations?

Your thesis will be evaluated by your thesis advisor and a thesis evaluator selected by you and your advisor. An Honors host will guide the deliberations and provide context. The evaluator may or may not be from your discipline, so critical factors for your success are a very clear précis, a well-written introduction and discussion of

your work, and an oral presentation that explains to an educated audience the significance of your thesis.

The reviewers will use two rubrics – one for the written thesis and one for the oral presentation - to evaluate your thesis. Review each rubric and become aware of how your work will be evaluated. For more information see 'Honors Thesis Evaluation Guidelines.'

How will my thesis be graded?

Your Honors thesis is graded as "excellent," "satisfactory/pass," "needs revisions in order to pass," "fail" – or your thesis may be nominated for "Pass with Distinction."

Students whose thesis is judged to be of outstanding quality may have their theses nominated for the "Pass with Distinction" designation. This is a nomination. At the end of the semester the Honors Council convenes and determines which nominations will receive "Pass with Distinction" which will be listed on the student's WSU transcript.

A thesis that merit "Pass with Distinction" reflects scholarly writing that is couched in the relevant literature and is analytical, synthetic, well-argued, well-written, and possibly publishable. Members of the Honors Council make the final determination on this designation.

If the thesis advisor and evaluator agree to nominate a thesis for "Pass with Distinction," the thesis advisor formally nominates the thesis in a written letter submitted to the Honors College. The letter must state why, in specific terms, the advisor believes the work deserves this designation.

If your thesis is nominated for Pass with Distinction, you may be asked permission to publish your paper on the Honors College website and in the Library's Research Exchange Project. You and your advisor must both sign approval forms.

A thesis graded "needs revisions in order to pass" will have two-three weeks to make all corrections, get approval of the changes, and resubmit a new electronic copy of the thesis. The student will not have to present the thesis again. A thesis graded "fail" must be rewritten, resubmitted, and presented at a later date.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Exceptions to regularly scheduled thesis weeks will be considered on a case-by-case basis. No thesis may be presented in the same semester in which the proposal was submitted and approved.

What is pass with distinction and will I be eligible?

Exemplary theses may be nominated for "Pass with Distinction."

Papers that merit "Pass with Distinction" reflect scholarly writing that is couched in the relevant literature and is analytical, synthetic, well-argued, well-written, and possibly publishable. Members of the Honors Council make the final determination on this designation.

The thesis advisor and both evaluators must be in agreement before a thesis can receive a "Pass with Distinction" designation. The thesis advisor then formally nominates the thesis in a written letter submitted to the Honors College. The letter must state why, in specific terms, the advisor believes the work deserves this designation.

If your thesis is nominated for Pass with Distinction, you will be asked permission to publish your paper on the Honors College website and in the Library's Research Exchange Project. You and your advisor must both sign approval forms.

Important Note: Exceptions to regularly scheduled thesis weeks will be considered on a case-by-case basis and require a written petition from the student and confirmation from the thesis advisor. *No thesis may be presented in the same semester in which the proposal was submitted and approved.* Students presenting during the scheduled periods may be eligible to receive a nomination for Pass with Distinction which will be reflected on their WSU transcript.

FAQS

Most of the Frequently Asked Questions below will be answered during the 1-unit HONORS 398 course, the Thesis Preparation Course. The Honors College encourages you to take this class as soon as you have earned 45 units.

When do I do my thesis?

You should plan to initiate your thesis work as early in your academic career as you can. Thesis proposals should be submitted no later than the second semester of your junior year.

Can I do a thesis while studying abroad?

Yes, a thesis can be either initiated or completed during your time studying abroad. In this case you might wish to complete your Certificate of Global Competencies as well. Meet with an Honors College advisor to discuss your options.

How do I find an academic advisor?

An academic advisor is chosen by you. The request to advise may be based on your positive interaction with a specific professor, the professor's expertise in the area of your research, or your interest in a professor's teaching. You and your advisor will also pick a thesis reviewer from your department or a similar field of research. Please direct your advisor to online information "For Thesis Advisors" on the Honors College website.

Does the advisor need to be from WSU?

Yes, the principal advisor needs to be a tenure-track faculty member or senior instructor at WSU, but a co-advisor from another academic institution or the world at large can be arranged with the agreement of the WSU Honors College.

How do I choose an academic question for my thesis?

Your academic question or hypothesis should reflect your interest or major field of study. The question may be one to which you have always wanted to know the answer, or it may reflect a question you identified from one of your classes or discussions with a professor. Ultimately you should have a passion or deep interest in the question you research. You may also choose to complete a creative project, such as creation of an art piece or musical composition, a short story, or a film. However, your thesis must include a relevant scholarly examination of its context as described above.

What is an academic question?

An academic question is one which asks the "how" or the "why" of some topic. It invites further research and deeper curiosity about an answer by engaging the relevant scholarly literature.

What is a thesis proposal?

A thesis proposal is a document that provides the necessary background and scholarly literature for your topic. It clearly identifies the question being asked, the hypothesis being tested, or the creative project to be completed. It provides the methodology you will use to answer that question or complete the project, notes what the expected results

might be and what these results mean within the context of what is known. An annotated scholarly bibliography of five or six key references is needed. An appendix is required if you have human or animal studies approval, graphs, figures or charts of preliminary data, or rubrics that you will use for analysis, questionnaires or interview questions you will use. Annotating a bibliography means preparing a short commentary on each reference you use in the proposal. If you complete a creative project, your proposal will describe your work, explain how you will execute your project, the time you expect it to take, and you will place your effort in the larger context of others who have completed similar work. It will also have an annotated bibliography.

How long must the thesis proposal be?

Normally, the body of the proposal, including the literature review, the question being asked, the methodology and the expected results and conclusion sections, will not exceed five, double-spaced typewritten pages. The thesis proposal should be long enough to clearly explain what you wish to do, in language that an educated academic can understand, even if the proposal is not in his or her academic discipline.

When should the thesis proposal be completed and submitted to the Honors College for review and approval?

An electronic thesis proposal submitted by the 5th day of any month will be reviewed and the status communicated to the student via email by the last working day of that month. Reviews of proposals submitted after the 5th day of the month may take until the last working day of the following month.

Can I start my thesis research before the proposal is approved? The thesis proposal can be turned in to the Honors College whenever it is ready, but must be approved by the Honors College before you begin the main focus of your research, and before you will be officially enrolled in HONORS 450 (Honors Thesis or Project).

Who evaluates the proposal?

The Honors Thesis Proposal Committee will review all proposals.

Are proposals accepted without alteration?

Yes, many proposals are accepted without alteration, while others may require further explanation and revision. If revision is required, the Thesis Director will inform you of specific changes or clarifications they would like to see in the revised proposal.

Are any proposals rejected? If so, why are they rejected and what does this mean?

Yes, a proposal can be rejected, but that is rare. It is much more likely that a proposal will be returned to a student for revision and explanation of critical points identified by the Proposal Committee. When the student responds to those questions with cogent answers, the revised submitted proposal will be approved and the research can begin.

May I do my research in collaboration with a fellow Honors student?

Yes, but each student's contribution to the thesis must be stated in the proposal and be very clear to all reviewers of the thesis.

May I compile a journal and use that for my thesis?

Yes, you may compile a journal of your experiences, but you must ask and answer an academic question to fulfill the Honors Thesis requirement.

When is my completed thesis due in Honors?

There are numerous opportunities to present each semester. An electronic copy of your thesis (including the Thesis Advisor Signature Page), will be due on the Monday of the week prior to your presentation date.

When will I give my oral presentation?

Oral presentations are held during various weeks through the fall and spring semesters. You will choose a date that works for you, your thesis advisor, your chosen discipline evaluator, and the Honors College. Dates will be advertised each semester. Summer presentations are scheduled only in exceptional cases depending on the availability of the Honors faculty and WSU faculty who serve as evaluators.

What style and format do I use for my thesis?

The style (e.g. APA, MLA) should reflect that used by the major academic journals in your disciplinary area. You and your advisor will agree on which style you will follow. However, all theses must follow a specific format. See "Formatting Your Completed Thesis" on this website.

Who will attend my thesis presentation?

Anyone may attend your presentation. We encourage you to invite your family and/or friends, but that is up to you. Your thesis advisor and your chosen thesis evaluator, and you are required to attend your presentation. You must prepare an oral presentation that is accessible to the whole academic community.

How will I know if I have passed?

At the end of your 20-minute oral presentation, you can be asked questions by anyone present. When there are no more questions, you will be asked to step outside the room. Only an Honors representative, your thesis advisor, your discipline thesis evaluator, and the Honors-chosen evaluator will stay to discuss your thesis. In five to ten minutes, you will be invited to return to the room and be told whether you have passed. The total time allotted for each presentation is one hour.

What if I receive a pass contingent upon making revisions?

You will have two to three weeks to make all corrections, get your thesis advisor's approval of the changes, and submit one new, corrected, electronic copy to the Honors College.

What if I do not pass?

All students must complete the thesis to the satisfaction of their thesis advisor and the Honors College. A "do not pass" rating may reflect a lack of effort, content, or overall performance. Each case will be dealt with on an individual basis. A completely revised thesis must be submitted electronically to the Honors College. In the case of a satisfactorily revised thesis, another oral presentation is not required. An altogether different thesis will require a new oral presentation.

What is "Pass with Distinction?"

A "Pass with Distinction" designation is considered when the major professor and the evaluator believe the thesis and oral presentation breaks significant new ground or represents an unusual amount of care and effort by the student. A nomination letter from the advisor is forwarded to the Honors Council for final review and determination of this award by the Honors Council (a council of WSU professors).