

University Honors
College
Senior Thesis
Handbook



University at Buffalo

University Honors College

Introduction

The senior Honors thesis is the culmination of a student's experience in the Advanced Honors Program at the University at Buffalo. It is an opportunity to work closely with a member of the faculty on an independent research or creative project that brings to a conclusion the student's undergraduate academic career. The thesis provides the student with an opportunity to pursue a topic of interest, usually within one's major, and make an independent contribution to human knowledge. It allows each student to bring together the information, ideas and research of his or her major or minor with the critical thinking, reading and writing skills they have developed in their required coursework. The senior thesis is not only a graduation requirement for the Advanced Honors College but it also provides excellent preparation for graduate work and is a solid career credential as well. Moreover, it is often regarded as the most challenging and rewarding part of the Honors student's academic career. The following guidelines will aid Advanced Honors students throughout their senior thesis experience.

What is a Senior Thesis?

A senior thesis is a piece of written work that presents a particular argument, hypothesis, or creative idea using the tools of one's major discipline. It is a more substantial piece of work in terms of effort and length than a typical in-course research paper, but something less than a Master's thesis. What distinguishes a senior thesis from a research paper is the necessity for the student to go beyond what others have written and to think critically, incorporate his or her own ideas, and to reflect on the topic in his or her own way. Students must venture outside of the classroom and assume the responsibilities associated with a commitment to independent scholarship. The senior thesis can be pursued successfully in two-to-three semesters as part of a normal undergraduate course load.

The senior thesis should be original in its conception and analysis. Originality, however, need not mean the discovery of new knowledge, but can be reflected in the questions posed, the synthesis formed, or the organization and presentation of data. Theses should be the result of serious research, original thinking, and a clear understanding of the issues surrounding a topic. Since in-depth, comprehensive studies are usually preferable to broad surveys, topics should be feasible in terms of the student's competencies and the time available. The final paper should place the specific topic in a broader scholarly context by exhibiting familiarity with other literature on the subject.

What if I am majoring in the Performing & Creative Arts?

Students in majors such as music, art, theatre, dance, media study or English may have as the basis of their thesis a work in a medium appropriate for their major. For example, a theatre major might direct a play, an art student might create an exhibition of original works, or an English major might write a short story. Although such a project can form the basis of a thesis, it is not a thesis in and of itself. To be acceptable as a thesis, a creative work must be accompanied by a written explanation of the work and its scholarly context, which includes (but is not limited to) an evaluation of the performance/exhibition/story/etc., addressing such questions as why the student took the approach he or she did, why he or she selected the particular work or works to be performed, what would he or she do differently the next time, and so on. Students should also demonstrate their familiarity with similar work in their field by discussing its historical and/or cultural context. As with a traditional academic thesis, the format of the body should follow the conventions of the student's discipline. Final submissions of a creative thesis must include an appropriate hardcopy record of the project, such as a portfolio, audiotape, videotape, or manuscript.

How long should the Senior Thesis be?

There is no standard length for the thesis, as length should be determined by what is appropriate for the particular subject. Theses written in the Natural/Mathematical Sciences and Engineering typically range from approximately 20 - 40 typed and double-spaced pages, not counting references. In the Humanities and Social Sciences theses are longer, approximately 50 - 75 pages. The explanatory paper written by a student doing a "creative" thesis will be approximately 10 - 20 pages. These lengths are only a guide and the real test of a thesis is if it adequately and appropriately answers the research question.

How do I begin?

The answer to this question varies for each student. Some students already know the focus of their thesis and set out to find a primary advisor to direct their research. Alternatively, others may not have a topic but a particular professor in mind with whom they would like to work. Either way, you begin the thesis process by selecting your topic and advisors.

Selecting a Topic

The thesis topic should permit the student to make an original contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the chosen subject. When selecting a topic, the primary consideration is that the subject be one that will sustain the student's interest through the completion of the project. Nothing will hamper a student's progress more than working on a thesis that does not interest him or her. Students should select a topic that interests them, possibly something learned in an earlier course, or something they've read, and then consult faculty members of the relevant departments who specialize in that area. These faculty can advise students on the feasibility of doing research on the topic. If a student does not have any particular thesis topic in mind, it is useful for the student to approach a faculty member whose course interested them and then work out a topic together.

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 temptation to choose too broad or too ambitious a subject. The more carefully the topic is defined, the more intensively the students can examine available materials and the easier it will be to do an outstanding piece of work in the limited time available. It is also recommended that the Honors College approve the thesis topic by the end of the junior year so that preliminary reading, research and writing can be started as early as possible.

Selecting a Faculty Advisor

All students must work under the direction of two faculty advisors. The primary advisor must be a full-time member of the University at Buffalo faculty in a department relevant to the thesis topic and someone with whom the student feels comfortable working. Students usually choose a topic first and then find an advisor who has expertise and an interest in their topic. However, often selecting the advisor is a more critical choice than the thesis topic itself. Students should ask a faculty member whose class has been of special interest to them or whose field of specialization coincides with their own interests. Students should not be reluctant to approach faculty about thesis supervision.

Once selected, it is important that the primary advisor be accessible to guide, support and encourage students throughout the entire thesis process. The student should meet with his or her primary advisor on a regular basis to develop strategies and timetables for the work's successful completion. The primary advisor reads drafts of the thesis, monitors the student's progress, and provides detailed feedback. Typically, the thesis goes through a number of iterations. The student is expected to give the primary advisor ample time to read and comment on each revision. Additionally, the primary advisor often assists the student in the selection of a secondary thesis advisor.

Role of the Primary Advisor

It is important that students understand the responsibilities of the primary thesis advisor, but it is even more important to remember that each student is responsible for the timely and successful completion of his or her own senior thesis. It is this independence and commitment that separates thesis work from normal coursework.

The primary thesis advisor agrees to:

- Work with the student to refine and focus the student's interests into a suitable thesis.
- Provide clear expectations for the thesis/project, addressing length, assessment, and other aspects germane to scholarship in the particular discipline.
- Help the student identify an academically appropriate secondary advisor.
- Meet with the student regularly throughout the duration of the project to provide direction, support and encouragement.
- Read and comment on drafts of the thesis as it develops.
- Sign off on the final draft of the thesis.

Role of the Secondary Advisor

The secondary advisor must be a member of the UB faculty, but may be from a department different than the student's major. This person's main responsibilities are to provide advice, support and encouragement, and to read drafts and provide feedback. The secondary advisor usually provides another voice and perspective to the thesis and balances the virtues of the primary advisor.

The secondary thesis advisor agrees to:

- Provide informed guidance to the thesis student where appropriate.
- Be willing to meet occasionally with the student.
- Read and comment on drafts of the thesis in later stages of its development where appropriate.
- Sign off on the final draft of the thesis.

The Honors Thesis Proposal

Once the thesis topic and the primary and secondary advisors are selected, the student must submit a 1-2 page thesis proposal along with the [Honors Thesis Proposal Form](#) for Honors College approval. The proposal should include a statement of the student's general theme or topic, the goal(s) of the research or creative activity, and the research methodology that will be used to complete the project. Once the Honors College has approved the proposal the student will be notified via email. Students should plan to submit their thesis proposals no later than the end of their junior year.

Human Subjects Review

University policy requires prior review by the [Institutional Review Board](#) (IRB) of all research involving the use of human subjects to assure that the rights of the subjects are protected. This includes not only actual testing, but also written surveys and personal interviews. If a student's thesis project involves the use of human subjects, the research must receive the approval of the Institutional Review Board prior to the student conducting his or her research. [UB's Office of Research Compliance](#) oversees the University's review boards. If applicable, the student should discuss the IRB process with the primary advisor before submitting the thesis proposal.

Writing the Thesis

The core of every thesis is the thesis body, the student's critical judgment about the subject, evaluation of the material being analyzed, and interpretation of the data presented. The format for the body of a traditional academic, research-based thesis should follow the conventions of the student's discipline. The body will generally include a statement of the problem, a survey of the existing literature, the student's argument (hypothesis), a statement of methodology, the student's findings, and his or her conclusions. Here, powers of criticism, of honest skepticism, and of enthusiastic determination to justify the validity of a position are essential.

Students must save time and energy for the writing process or else their research will have been wasted. The task of writing is often difficult to begin without a clear indication of how the thesis is going to develop, but it is important to begin drafting the report as soon as possible without giving any consideration to style or length. Many students need two to three drafts before getting their ideas and conclusions properly organized. Students should work closely with their advisors through the drafting process and submit completed sections for detailed feedback. It is recommended that students give the next-to-last version of their thesis to both advisors by April 1 for May graduates and November 1 for December graduates. These

deadlines allow the use of the month of April and November to confer with the thesis advisors to agree on and make the necessary revisions for the final version.

For a creative or performance-based thesis, the student's creation must be described in a thorough essay. The essay should describe the medium, discuss why the student chose this medium and this particular subject, describe in detail the process that led to this creation, and self-critique the student's success in reaching his or her creative goals. Students should also demonstrate their familiarity with similar work in their field by discussing its historical and/or cultural context. As with a traditional academic thesis, the format of the body should follow the conventions of the student's discipline.

Thesis Format

All Honors theses submitted for evaluation must follow the same format and include signed [Thesis Approval Form](#). In addition, all theses must have the following components:

- *Title Page*: The title page is best explained by the sample below. Be sure to use your department's official name and your full legal name. The title for your work should be a meaningful description of your manuscript.
- *Table of Contents*: A table of contents is required and may follow any format acceptable to your advisor. Be sure to include all main divisions and subdivisions within your text, and to double-space. These pages are to be numbered with Roman numerals.
- *Abstract*: It is to be a succinct narrative description of your work, double-spaced. The abstract should begin with a definitive statement of the problem or project treated by the thesis. The purpose, scope, and limits of the thesis should be clearly delineated. Then, as concisely as possible, describe research methods and design, major findings, the significance of your work, and conclusions.
- *Text*: The text of your research has been the focus of your attention, as well as that of your advisor from the beginning of your work. The style should be appropriate to your subject and discipline and should consistently follow acceptable standards of punctuation, spelling, and format. Check with your advisor and department for their recommendation. The text must be double-spaced and each page must be numbered beginning with the number 1. The text must be printed on only one side of each page.
- *Bibliography and/or references*: This is the last section of your document. Use the format that is consistent with the format style approved by your advisor. These pages should be numbered, and double-spaced.

In addition to the above, students may also choose to include dedication/acknowledgement pages, copy right pages, figures, tables, and illustrations, footnotes/endnotes, and appendices in their theses.

Thesis Physical Specifications

Students should adhere to the following physical specifications when writing their theses:

- Paper: Use only one side of high-quality, plain white (unlined in any way) bond paper, minimum 20-lb weight, and 8-1/2" x 11" in size.
- Type size: Select fonts of 10 or 12 characters per inch.
- Pagination: Number all of the pages of your document, including not only the principal text, but also all tables, diagrams, maps, and so on. (Certain pages may be unnumbered but counted, such as the title page. Check your choice of style manuals for further clarification.) Roman numerals are used on the preliminary pages (pages up to the first page of text) and Arabic numerals are used on the text pages. The numbers themselves can be placed anywhere on the page, however they should be consistent.
- Spacing: Use double-spacing except for long quotations, footnotes, and endnotes, which are single-spaced.
- Margins: The left-hand margin should be 1.25" to allow for binding, all other should be 1.0". Diagrams, photographs, or tables in any form should be a standard page size, or if larger, folded so that a free left-hand margin of 1.25" remains and the folded sheet is not larger than the standard page.

Sample Title Page Format:

FULL TITLE OF THESIS IN CAPITAL LETTERS
(centered in top quarter of page)

By

(Full name of Author)
Conferral Date if copyrighting

A thesis submitted to the
University Honors College
Of the State University of New York At Buffalo in partial
fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of

(Bachelor of Arts)
(Bachelor of Science)

Department of _____

Documentation

The thesis must be the student's own work. To take data, knowledge, interpretations, or phraseology from another without full acknowledgement is common theft and a punishable act of plagiarism. All ideas and data that are not common knowledge must be appropriately cited. Students may use whatever forms of bibliographic and footnote/endnote citation is required by their discipline. The thesis advisor will provide students with the appropriate citation format.

Style Manuals

Confer with your advisor and/or department about which style manual is most appropriate to your subject and discipline. Be sure to follow the chosen style. Listed below are several recognized style manuals.

[American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 5th ed. Washington DC: The American Psychological Association, 2001.](#)

[Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 2003.](#)

[Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*. 2nd ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 1998.](#)

[Strunk Jr., William and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style: with Index*. 3rd ed. New York: MacMillian Publishing Co., 1995.](#)

[Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.](#)

[University of Chicago Press. *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 15th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.](#)

Helpful Reading Resources

[Luey, Beth. *Revising Your Dissertation: Advice From Leading Editors*. Berkely: University of California Press, 2004.](#)

Public Presentation Requirement

An important part of engaging in a scholarly or creative endeavor is sharing it with others. In addition to completing the Honors thesis, all students are required to present their thesis research to a larger academic community (i.e. [Celebration of Academic Excellence](#), a departmental presentation, a professional conference, UB's Spring Open House for Accepted Students, etc.). The presentation, which may be in any form appropriate to the student's discipline, typically lasts 15-20 minutes and can be done in any academic setting where a faculty or staff member is present to witness the presentation. For creative or performance-based thesis projects, in addition to the public presentation the student should make appropriate arrangements to exhibit or perform the work on a separate date. In general, most students present in one of their classes, a department meeting, or at a meeting of a student academic

organization. At the conclusion of the presentation, the faculty or staff member on hand signs off on the [Thesis Approval Form](#) that the student completed the presentation requirement.

Final Submission

The Honors thesis is required to be in final form and submitted either bound or electronically for final approval by the Honors College. In addition to the actual thesis, students must also submit the [Thesis Approval Form](#) signed by the primary and secondary advisors. The Director of the Honors College issues final approval for all Honors theses. A copy of each thesis is kept in the Honors College and may be made available for viewing by other Honors Scholars.

Academic Credit for the Honors Thesis

All students have the option of registering for up to 6 credit hours (3 credit hours each semester) of independent study (499), research (498) or thesis credit (497) during the senior year while working on the Honors thesis. Students in majors that offer departmental honors programs may have the option to register for their department's Honors thesis course instead of the independent study. In either case, the student should register under the primary advisor's individual registration number to receive academic credit.

Honors College [Research and Creativity Fund](#)

The Honors College Research and Creativity Fund is intended to enable undergraduate students to receive grants that defray expenses directly related to research and other creative activities. This program is supported through funds from the Office of the Provost and administered by the [Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities](#). The research grants are available only for University at Buffalo students participating in the Honors College. The maximum funding available is \$5,000 per grant (applicants should not request funding beyond this limit). Amounts may be less depending upon availability of funds.

[Honors College Academic Enrichment Fund](#)

The Honors College Academic Enrichment Fund provides Honors Scholars with the opportunity to offset some of the costs of participating in valuable co-curriculum opportunities. The Fund can be used for any number of endeavors including attending or presenting at a professional conference, supplies for new and innovative research or creative activities, attending summer dance intensives or field schools, or any other possibility that might come up.

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. They are reviewed by the Honors College at the end of each month. Funded applications typically receive up to \$500, though larger awards are possible if warranted.

Further Information

For further information regarding the requirements for the Senior Honors thesis contact:

University Honors College
106 Capen Hall
Buffalo, NY 14260
(716) 645-3020

Recommended Schedule for Completing the Senior Honors Thesis	
Select topic	1 st -2 nd semester junior year
Select primary advisor	
Choose secondary advisor	
Begin Library research	
Prepare thesis proposal	2 nd semester junior year
Begin thesis research or creative work	Start 2 nd semester junior year, continue into senior year
Register for Independent Study (Optional)	1 st and 2 nd semester senior year (3 cr. hr. each for most students)
Write first draft of thesis	2 nd semester senior year
Submit next-to-last draft of thesis to both Advisors	By April 1 st for May graduates By November 1 st for December graduates
Public presentation of thesis	By May 1 st for May graduates By November 1 st for December graduates
Confer with advisors and prepare final version of thesis	During April for may graduates During November for December graduates
Obtain advisors' signatures on completed thesis	Late April or early May for May graduates Late November or early December for December graduates
Submit electronically or bound one copy of the completed, signed thesis to the University Honors College	No later than May 30 (spring graduates) or December 30 (fall graduates).