

HONORS THESIS INFORMATION

The senior thesis is the culmination of the University Honors Program experience. The thesis emphasizes critical thinking, high-quality research, top-flight writing, and independent, creative work. *The goal is to produce a work of publishable or exhibitable quality.*

Work on the thesis should be academically and personally rewarding. The thesis may relate to your major, but this is not a requirement. A good way to get started is to glance through the thesis archive in the Honors seminar room on the second floor of the Snell House.

A thesis may take many forms. It may be traditional, as an in-depth critical analysis of imaginative literature, or the discussion and results of a student-designed experiment in the natural or social sciences. You may produce a critical analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation of an existing body of knowledge. A thesis might entail composing, designing, and staging a theater piece, writing a book of poetry, mounting a photography exhibit, preparing a collection of short stories, or crafting a graphic novel. When the thesis is a creative work, a substantive essay is required as well in which you will reflect upon the substance as well as the creative process involved in your project.

In preparing your Honors thesis, you will register for two semesters of IDH 4970 (Honors Thesis). This is not a “class” as such, and does not have regular meeting days/times. You should plan to attend the thesis meeting that is offered at the beginning of each semester. You will also stay in contact with the Honors Program director periodically during the course of the semester.

There is no requirement as to the length or magnitude of the thesis. Quality is of greater concern. It is important that the product reflects six semester hours of work and is approved by your thesis committee and the Honors Program. It should reflect a significant time commitment, be of high quality, and demonstrate personal intellectual growth. A research project should adhere consistently and correctly to a documentation style appropriate for the field of study following, for example, such style manuals as those of the MLA, APA, or the University of Chicago. You must include a bibliography or a works cited page for any type of research project - not just for a traditional research paper, but also such projects such as a unit of lesson plans, handbook, publicity campaign, feasibility study, or any other project which incorporates material drawn from outside sources.

Please adhere to the process outlined below. Plan to work on the thesis for two full semesters. It is your responsibility to ensure timely completion of all thesis requirements.

Semester I – Preparing the Prospectus

This is your first semester of IDH 4970 (Honors Thesis). You should consult with the Honors Program director and attend the thesis meeting before beginning work to learn about general procedures. You will choose and contact a potential director and one or two committee members. It is your responsibility to contact potential directors and committee members, though the Honors Program will be happy to assist you.

In general, any regularly appointed faculty member in the USF system may direct the thesis. In most cases, St. Petersburg Honors theses are directed by St. Petersburg faculty members. The committee member(s) must be approved by the thesis director. You will establish the specific nature

of the thesis with the thesis director, if necessary in consultation with the director of the Honors Program.

At least three weeks prior to the end of the semester, please submit to the Honors Program director both a Prospectus and a Prospectus Approval Form signed by the thesis director. Please drop off these materials at the Snell House.

The Prospectus shall include (Please use the prospectus approval form on page 27):

1. Your name and e-mail address.
2. Thesis director's name and the names of the one or two committee members who have agreed to serve.
3. A statement of the work to be undertaken and its importance.
4. A statement of anticipated results (if appropriate).
5. A proposed work schedule and preliminary bibliography.
6. 12-15 pages of actual writing (or the beginnings of your creative product if you're doing a more artistic project). This could take the form of a literature review, a first chapter, the first short story in your collection, etc. The important thing is to begin putting ink to paper.

Semester II – Writing the Thesis

This will be your second semester of IDH 4970 (Honors Thesis). Please follow these writing directions (or their equivalent if you're preparing a more creative project):

- Begin writing (or undertaking your creative activity) in earnest immediately following the approval of your prospectus. If you put off the bulk of the work until late in the semester the result will probably not be suitable as an Honors-level thesis.
- Work on your thesis every day, if only for an hour or two. This is the best way to keep the ideas flowing and you will quickly see progress.
- Think in terms of chapters; the project will seem more manageable this way. Set a timetable and stick to it.
- Stay in touch with your director and committee! Send your committee weekly or bi-weekly updates. Submit sections or chapters and then follow up (politely but persistently) with requests for comments. This way, if you get off track or if your arguments aren't panning out, the committee will know it as soon as possible and will be able to help steer you back on course. The most serious thesis problems we have encountered have occurred when students drop out of sight for much of the semester. Do not let this happen.
- Your thesis will be graded for organization and quality of writing, as well as content. (Different standards may apply for creative work.) Your argument must be convincing and coherent. Remember that quality is more important than quantity. Be as concise and precise as possible.
- Your first chapter – probably your first paragraph – should state clearly the question or problem your thesis explores.
- Good writing helps you express your ideas and advance your argument. Use interesting, precise, active verbs. Avoid the verb “to be.”
- Proofread, proofread, proofread. Edit, edit, edit.
- Remember that only in rare cases will a grade of “Incomplete” be assigned.

The Thesis Defense

At least three weeks prior to the end of the second semester, inform the Honors Program director about the thesis defense date. The thesis must be delivered in typewritten form to the thesis committee well in advance of the defense. The defense must occur on or before the last day of class for that semester. Defenses are usually held in the Honors seminar room in the Snell House. Please check with Greta Scheid-Wells for availability of the room. Your thesis director will host the defense. Typically, the defense begins with the student presenting an overview of his or her main findings or main creative achievement. The committee will then pose questions, probe arguments, and offer assessment of the work. Defenses usually last about an hour.

Following the defense, the thesis director will submit the grade to the Honors Program director. You will also be given binding instructions (see "Thesis Binding Procedures" on page 25)

Prospecti and finalized theses are graded on this scale:

"A" - Superior performance;

"B" - Excellent performance;

"C" - Passing but not suitable for Honors Program work (students earning a "C" will not graduate with the Honors Program distinction);

"D" or "F" - Unacceptable.

HONORS THESIS CHECKLIST

- Register for IDH 4970 (3 hours each semester) (prior to the registration period you will be issued a permit to register for the class).
- Look at sample theses in Honors Lounge in the Snell House.
- Find a thesis director and one or two committee members.
- Narrow thesis topic.
- Finalize your topic with your director and committee.
- Complete prospectus three weeks before the end of the first semester.
- Turn in completed Prospectus Approval Form and one copy of prospectus to Honors director.
- Continue work and register for the second semester of IDH 4970.
- Stay in close contact with your director and committee throughout the process.
- Present thesis by the last day of the semester (Friday prior to finals week).
- Submit copies of thesis (including abstract) to your thesis director, committee member(s), and Honors Program director two weeks prior to presentation.
- Have Thesis Approval Form signed by your director and committee member(s).
- Bring three copies of the thesis plus one additional copy for each committee member and the director to the Snell House for binding. Please see "Thesis Binding Procedures" on page 31 for more information.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE THESIS

When should I sign up for Thesis (IDH 4970)?

Most students sign up for IDH 4970 at the beginning of their senior year. If, however, your senior year will include an off-campus internship, student teaching, or some other activity which will alter your normal routine, you will want to begin planning earlier, develop a topic, and find a director. Even if you plan a “normal” senior year, starting early is to your advantage. Recent graduates have repeatedly stressed the importance of allowing plenty of time for the thesis. Several said they found it helpful to begin work the summer before their senior year, or even during spring semester of their junior year.

How do I find a topic?

When you look at examples of recent theses/creative projects, you will see that many possibilities exist. Topics/projects often come from within the student's major area, but this is not a requirement. In some theses or projects, students combine majors or use internships or study abroad experiences. If you finished a favorite course feeling that you would have liked more time for a particular aspect of that course, you may be able to turn that observation into an idea for a topic. If you have only a vague sense of what your topic might be, but definitely know whom you would like as a director, make an appointment to talk to your prospective director who may be able to suggest areas for you to consider. The Honors Program director is always available to help you sound out ideas.

Is it OK to rework an old paper/project?

A thesis which builds on work already done can be a fine piece of work. An article or presentation that analyzes internship experiences, a presentation based on some aspect of work or study abroad, an article developed from research from a previous class, a video for classroom use which grew out of practice teaching – these kinds of projects represent legitimate development of work already undertaken into a new and more complex form. What is not legitimate is simply to recycle, with minor additions or changes, a paper or papers already submitted. Remember: the Honors thesis is intended to be the capstone of your Honors education.

How do I find a director?

If possible, select someone with whom you feel comfortable. If you can't think of someone in that category whose expertise seems to fit with the kind of topic you're considering, ask for suggestions from the Honors Program staff or from other professors whose judgment you trust.

What if I want to change directors?

Changing directors may become necessary in some situations. Talk with the Honors Program director before making the change and make sure all appropriate paperwork is complete.

May I work with more than one faculty member?

Yes! In fact, you must have one director and *at least one* other committee member. You should have more than one person evaluating your work in progress and offering suggestions. You must, however, designate only one professor as the director.

What if I don't finish in a year?

If for medical, family, or personal reasons you are unable to complete your thesis during the two semesters in which you are enrolled in IDH 4970, your director may submit a grade of "Incomplete." However, bear in mind that an "I" will be assigned only in the rarest of cases; don't count on taking an incomplete. This will be carried on the record until the thesis is completed and the "I" will be replaced with a permanent letter grade. According to USF policy, an "I" will become an "IF" after two academic semesters. An "IF" counts as an "F" in calculating your cumulative GPA. If you graduate with an unresolved "IF" it will become a permanent part of your transcript and academic record. Please see the undergraduate catalog for more information. It is your responsibility to ensure that a grade of "I" is replaced with a letter grade in a timely manner.

Will Honors IDH 4970 count toward my major or minor?

Credit for the thesis, along with Honors Seminar: Major Works/Major Issues fulfills the exit requirements at USF. The work may be counted toward your major with approval from your academic department.

How often will I meet with my director?

Although the number of meetings will vary depending on the nature of your project, you and your director should agree on a mutually satisfactory schedule of appointments at which you can discuss your work in progress. Keep in mind that courtesy dictates that you submit your completed thesis to your director at least two to three weeks before finals week of the semester in which you are to receive your grade. Remember, too, that directing Honors theses is not part of your professor's regular teaching assignment but is extra work which he or she undertakes as a favor to you. Therefore, try to be considerate about sticking to your agreed schedule and consulting him or her if you need to make changes.

Is there a proper format for the thesis?

The "rule of thumb" is that the faculty mentor will be the arbiter of the final product's form. The format of a thesis is generally determined by the discipline's conventions. For example, a thesis in psychology will generally follow APA style recommendations while a thesis in English will follow MLA guidelines. Please review past theses for a clear idea of expectations. Guidelines for a creative project may be more fluid.

THESIS DIRECTOR INFORMATION (Student: Please copy for your director)

Faculty are asked to approach this task assuming that Honors Program students are mature and of superior academic ability, and are capable of serious independent work. Your student will be required to make a public defense of his/her research on or before the last day of the semester (the Friday prior to finals week) in which the work is to be completed. Students need careful direction in the choosing, planning, execution and writing of their theses. Faculty are asked to undertake the direction of a thesis only if they can devote the time necessary to ensure that a high quality thesis is produced. Thesis directors should consult the Honors Program director when questions arise concerning this work, especially if there is any risk that the student will not complete the thesis as scheduled. The director and the student will make decisions together regarding the scope of the project, meeting to discuss work in progress, format, documentation, and so on. We offer the following advice, compiled from the comments of recent thesis directors:

1. As you talk with your student about the scope of the project, you may want to chart middle path between the conventional research paper and the M.A. thesis. Although the senior Honors thesis probably will not be as extensive a project as a Master's thesis, it should represent more expense of time and talent than an ordinary term paper. Remember that your student will receive six hours of 4000-level credit for the work he or she does on the thesis.
2. Early on, get a clear indication from your student of just what he or she is proposing. The prospectus requirement will help here.
3. When meeting to discuss work in progress, make clear that you also want to see work that has been done, drafts of written texts, collected data, and results of surveys, preliminary sketches, photographs, or whatever relevant material you need to examine in order to make sure the project is on track. Doing so will help to protect you and your student from the unpleasant discovery, near the end of the term, that the work which has been done is unacceptable.
4. For a research paper, specify the documentation style you require and be prepared to offer examples of correct form. Remind the student that a bibliography, reference list, or works cited page must accompany a research paper.
5. As you check work in progress, evaluate both content and form, and don't hesitate to ask for revisions in either area. We expect Honors students to be excellent writers, whatever discipline they are in. Let the student know early in the process that completed theses must be free of errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
6. You may want to remind the student that he or she will be responsible for making more than one copy of the completed thesis or creative project. The copy which has your comments and the grade you have assigned will be for the student to keep. The Honors Program receives additional unmarked copies, from which any errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation have been eliminated.
7. As a thesis/creative project advisor, you will sign the final product to signal your approval. You may be reluctant to sign a thesis that represents merely passing work. This is another reason for the importance of regular meetings with your student and careful checking of work in progress. Using this approach, you should be able, early on, to redirect a thesis or project which has taken a wrong turn and save yourself and your student from end-of-term difficulties.
8. Thank you for serving as an Honors thesis director. As a token of our appreciation, the Honors Program will provide you with a modest honorarium to be used for research or classroom expenses.
9. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Honors Program director, Thomas Smith, by e-mail at twsmith@stpt.usf.edu or by phone at 873-4583.

THESIS BINDING PROCEDURES

After your thesis defense, please make any corrections or revisions suggested by your committee. Thoroughly proofread the entire thesis. When complete, submit the final copies to the Honors Program Assistant in the Snell House; make sure the title page and signature page (with committee members' signatures!) are included.

The student provides copies of the thesis to be bound (on 24 lb. paper) and the Honors Program pays for the binding. Students should provide two copies for the Poynter Library, one for the Honors Program, and one for each committee member and the director. Provide the copies as soon as possible following your defense (within two weeks, please) and they will be submitted for binding.

If you would like personal copies to be bound, provide those directly to the bookstore (Barnes and Noble, on campus) and pay for them there. The binding process takes approximately one to two months.

SAMPLE THESIS COVER PAGE AND CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

*Located on the following pages.

HONORS PROGRAM PROSPECTUS APPROVAL FORM

PLEASE TYPE/PRINT THE INFORMATION REQUESTED ON THIS FORM.

Student Name: _____

USF ID: _____

Student E-mail address: _____

Title of Thesis: _____

Semester in which work is to be started: _____

Semester in which work is to be completed: _____

When do you plan to graduate? (Month & Year) _____

Thesis Committee Members:

Director Name: _____

E-Mail: _____

Committee Member: _____

Committee Member: _____

"I understand that by registering for Honors Thesis, I am registering for a 3-hour course, which is equal to 9 hours of effort each week."

Student Signature

Prospectus approved by:

Thesis Director

Date

Honors Program Director

Date

Date Prospectus submitted: _____

ATTACH:

- A statement of the work to be undertaken and its importance.
- A statement of anticipated results (if appropriate).
- A proposed work schedule and preliminary bibliography.
- 12-15 pages of actual writing (or the beginnings of your creative product if you're doing a more artistic project).

HONORS PROGRAM THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Student Name: _____

USF ID: _____

I plan to graduate (*Month/Year*): _____

All thesis defenses will take place on or before the last day of the semester (Friday prior to final exam week).

1. Title of thesis: _____

2. Thesis approved (following presentation/defense):

_____/_____
Thesis Director - Print & Sign Date

_____/_____
Committee Member - Print & Sign Date

_____/_____
Committee Member - Print & Sign Date

_____/_____
Director of Honors Program - Print & Sign Date

3. Grade: _____

A = Superior

B = Excellent

C = Passing but NOT Honors

D or F = Unacceptable

4. Acknowledgment of receipt of thesis in final form

_____/_____
Thesis Director (for entire Committee) Date

5. Copies submitted to Honors Program: _____
Date