



HONORS 491/ INDEPENDENT STUDY GUIDELINES

Students who plan to graduate With University Honors must complete an Honors Independent Study project (HNRS 491, or an acceptable substitute) as 3 of the 21 hours of Honors credit required.

PROCEDURE & PERAMETERS

The deadline for 491 proposals to be submitted to the Honors Director is three weeks before the last class meeting in the prior semester. Late proposals will not ordinarily be considered, and a student who has pre-registered for 491 but has not submitted an acceptable proposal will be withdrawn from the course.

Although a 491 Honors thesis usually takes the form of an advanced research project or thesis, creative work in the arts is also possible.

Because 491 earns 3 hours of 400-level Honors credit, projects must represent substantive work beyond what would be expected of a term paper or project earning partial credit in a 400-level course. No standard length is required, given the differences between research methods and papers in various disciplines, but straight research papers (a project that does not involve laboratory experimentation, a reliance on equations, survey instruments, performance or exhibition) are ordinarily 50-75 pages.

Students who want additional guidance and support in preparing for HNRS 491 may take HNRS 391, the Honors Independent Study Workshop, the semester before beginning the project. HNRS 391 is assessed as S [Satisfactory] or U [Unsatisfactory] and earns one hour Honors credit.

Most students complete their HNRS 491 project in their major field, with a Study Director from that discipline, though doing so is not required. A student can complete a second 491 in a second discipline for honors credit.

In addition to the Study Director, HNRS 491 projects require designated second and third readers, one of whom must be from a different discipline.

The Study Director determines and assigns the final grade, in consultation with the second and third readers. A grade below “B” does not count for Honors credit Honors, though it does carry elective credit towards regular degree requirements.

If any special funding (for materials, mailings, travel, etc.) is necessary to complete the project, students can apply for such support, available from the Honors Director and/or Provost.

A hard copy of the completed project must be delivered to the Honors Director as soon as possible before graduation for binding and cataloguing in the Rogers Library.

Successful completion of 491 is an excellent indicator that the student has mastered the rigorous self-discipline required by graduate and professional programs and is typically what separates those who graduate “With University Honors” from those who do not. That’s why it’s valuable.

ALTERNATIVES

Students have the option of registering and receiving 3 hours of Honors credit for 497 Special Studies (or its equivalent), typically in their major discipline, rather than for HNRS 491.

Students who successfully complete the Washington Semester Program may count 3 of the 15 Honors credits earned in place of 491. Students must register for HNRS 491 for the semester during which they intend to begin the project.

PROPOSALS

The formal proposal includes a completed Approval Form (available from the Honors Director). The student is responsible for completing the form, including obtaining the signatures of the Study Director, the Second and Third Readers, and the Department Chairman or School Dean from the appropriate academic area.

The proposal includes a detailed description of the project and a letter of support from the Study Director. The letter of support should indicate the Study Director's willingness to undertake this responsibility, his/her familiarity with the proposed project, his/her knowledge of the student's capabilities, his/her confidence that the project is achievable and worth doing, and that the student is up to the task.

The proposal must be written by the student, in consultation with the Study Director.

Even if the student's research is part of a larger team project (as might be true in the natural sciences), the Committee expects the student to be able to articulate his/her understanding of the work in his/her own words.

Because members of the Honors Committee come from various academic disciplines, the proposal must be detailed enough and clearly-enough written to be understood by a person from a different discipline. It may, therefore, be appropriate to define or explain specialized terminology.

Students must submit final drafts of their proposals to the Honors Director three weeks before the last class meeting of the semester prior to the thesis semester. For instance, students wishing to register for Honors 491/Independent Study in the spring must have had their proposal approved in early November.

The proposal should be word-processed in a standard 12-point font. At least a paragraph should be included under each of the following headings:

Statement of Intent

Describe the project you propose. It may be appropriate to consider this section as an abstract, or to articulate the hypothesis you hope to support. You should indicate the form in which you plan to present your work (research paper, lab reports, exhibition or performance, etc.).

Theory / Background / Introduction / History

As appropriate, articulate the relevant theory underlying the project. Briefly indicate what work may already have been done in this field by other scholars. Explain why you have chosen this project; what in your background and previous work makes this an appropriate and interesting choice for you? You might indicate how your work on this project might relate to your future academic or professional plans.

Process / Method

Describe the experimental equipment and procedures, if applicable. Indicate what resources and methods you believe will be necessary to complete the project. Indicate whether you will need to request funding to support your work.

Preliminary Bibliography

List some of the sources that you plan to use (library or internet materials). These should be listed in the documentation format appropriate to the academic discipline.

Timetable

You and your Study Director should discuss the timeline you feel will be necessary to complete the project. Indicating particular due-dates for research, first drafts, second drafts, etc., is essential.

The members of the Honors Committee understand that scientific, scholarly, and creative projects change and develop as the work progresses, and that the final product may be somewhat different from the initial proposal. Nevertheless, the Committee expects that the proposal will indicate that the student has put serious thought and effort into his proposal before submitting it. This includes grammatically clear and closely-edited writing.

The Committee may ask for clarifications, expansion, or other revisions before approving it.

Once the HNRS 491 proposal has been approved, the members of the Honors Committee have no further formal role in facilitating or assessing the project.

Grades are assigned by the Study Director, in consultation with the thesis committee

EXPECTATIONS

In undertaking to write an Honors Independent Study or to serve on a thesis committee, students and mentors/readers stipulate to the following. Individual thesis committees may expand on these according to their own best practices or preferences. “Thesis committee” in this case typically means the primary reader (or “faculty mentor”), a secondary reader in the applicable discipline, and a tertiary reader in a different and appropriate discipline.

1. There is no formal compensation for faculty readers of Honors theses.
2. Approval of a thesis proposal by the Honors Committee requires a letter from the Study Director (or Mentor) indicating his/her willingness to undertake this responsibility, his/her confidence in the student’s ability to complete the project, and his/her assurance that the project is of sufficient rigor in the discipline and ultimately worth doing. Study Directors are encouraged not to submit such a letter if the project proposed falls short of any of these criteria.
3. A Thesis Committee is distinct from the Honors Committee, whose charges include approving (or not) Honors thesis proposals already vetted by individual Thesis Committees. After the Honors Committee has approved a proposal, it has no further involvement with the thesis project; the Thesis Committee assumes the responsibility for guiding and assessing the project.
4. The entire thesis project is driven by the student. It is conceived of and formally proposed by the student, typically in consultation with faculty. The responsibility for proposing the thesis project and assembling the Thesis Committee resides with the student; likewise the responsibility for completing the Thesis project. Thesis Committee members are not responsible for establishing or enforcing timelines or due dates.
5. The thesis project should equate, in terms of rigor, with a 3-hour, upper-division (400-level) course. The Thesis Committee’s first task is to establish

that the proposed project meets that criterion, that the student is up to the project, and that the project is worth undertaking.

6. The mentor is not a content provider; the mentor does not teach a course; nor do the other two readers. The responsibility for compiling data, conducting research and writing the thesis falls to the student. The student is responsible for sticking to the timeline in his/her proposal and for providing to readers first and subsequent drafts of the thesis.
7. The faculty readers act first as consultants, then as evaluators. During the research/drafting phases, faculty readers may offer suggestions for reading/research or point out problems with methodology or content. During the revision process, faculty readers may suggest (or require) changes in format or corrections of surface-level problems, etc. Once the final draft is turned in, faculty readers assign it a grade.
8. That a thesis is completed does not necessarily mean that it warrants an A or a B. If a thesis project is in the opinion of the Thesis Committee not worthy of a 400-level 3-hour project, it may award a lower grade. A thesis project earning lower than a B will not receive Honors credit, but will receive 3-hours of elective credit.
9. The assignment of a grade is ultimately the responsibility of the primary reader/mentor. Typically, the faculty mentor will consult with the other two readers about the appropriate final grade, and then assign the grade he/she thinks appropriate. If the mentor is the instructor of record, he/she will record that grade on his own grade report. If the Honors Director is the instructor of record (i.e., if the student is enrolled in Honors 491), the mentor will report the grade to the Honors Director, who will then record it on his grade report.
10. The student may appeal any grade assigned per the usual avenues stipulated in the FMU Catalog and Student Handbook, beginning with the instructor of record. The Honors Director is not empowered to change a grade without permission of the faculty mentor.

11. Funding may be procured for thesis projects requiring particular apparatus, travel, etc. Funding is secured through the completion of the applicable form, which is returned to the Honors Director, who will then attempt to procure those funds through his own or other applicable budgets.