

HONORS 491/INDEPENDENT STUDY

Students who plan to graduate With University Honors must complete an Honors Independent Study (thesis) project; this project will count as three of the required 21 Honors hours. Ordinarily, students fulfill this requirement by registering for HNRS 491/Honors Independent Study for one semester late in their undergraduate career. Note, however, that the proposal for the Honors Independent Study thesis requirement must have already been submitted and approved the semester before (see “Timeline,” below).

Students may substitute HNRS 491/Independent Study with a specific course in their major—for instance BIO 497/Special Studies, PRS 499/Advanced Study, PSYCH 470/Senior Research, or Nursing 445/Guided Nursing Elective—and receive Honors credit upon the successful completion of their projects. Honors Education majors, having successfully proposed an Honors thesis topic the semester before, may count 3 of the 9 hours earned in Education 490/Directed Teaching as Honors hours during their final semester. The thesis will be graded separately (P/F) by the student’s thesis committee; that grade will not apply toward the grade the student earns in Education 490. Students who successfully complete the Washington Semester Program may count 3 of the 15 Honors credits earned in place of 491.

Most students complete their thesis projects on a topic in their major, with a faculty mentor from that discipline, though doing so is not required. In addition to the faculty mentor, thesis projects require second and third readers, one of whom must be from a different discipline.

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

If a student does not complete his/her Honors thesis project during the chosen semester, he/she may request a grade of CO (Carry-Over) and complete it the following semester, without penalty, provided he/she has not already graduated.

Successful completion of an Honors Independent Study thesis 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.

THESIS PROPOSAL: A TIMELINE & SOME GUIDELINES

The deadline for thesis proposals to be submitted to the Honors Director is three weeks before the end of the previous semester. For instance, students intending to write a thesis in the spring must successfully propose it no later than about November 1 the prior fall. Late proposals will not ordinarily be considered, and a student who has pre-registered for HNRS 491 but has not submitted an acceptable proposal will be withdrawn from the course.

Upon receipt of completed proposals, the Honors Director will forward them to the Honors Committee for review. The Honors Committee may (and frequently does) ask for clarifications, expansion, or other revisions of the proposal before offering its approval.

Students who'd like guidance and support in preparing the Honors thesis proposal may take HNRS 391/Honors Independent Study Workshop the semester before beginning the project. For instance, students wishing to write an Honors thesis in the fall semester may take HNRS 391 the previous spring. In HNRS 391, students will select a thesis topic, a faculty mentor and other readers, and compose the complete proposal prior to the deadline.

A hard copy of the completed project must be delivered to the Honors Director as soon as possible before graduation (or, if necessary, after) for binding and cataloging in the Rogers Library.

Projects must be of such scope and substance as to warrant three hours of 400-level Honors credit. They are not, in other words, standard research papers. While no standard length is required, theses in the humanities and social sciences are ordinarily 75-100 pages. Theses in the sciences, particularly those that involve laboratory experimentation, a reliance on equations or data analysis, etc., are typically shorter.

Some projects, particularly those in the sciences, may be undertaken by teams of two Honors students. Under these circumstances the project must be of sufficient scope and substance as to warrant six hours of 400-level Honors credit.

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

PROPOSALS

Again, thesis proposals must be submitted three weeks prior to the end of the semester before the thesis project is to be undertaken. The proposal must be written by the student, in consultation with the faculty mentor.

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 faculty mentor, the second and third Readers, and the department chairman from the appropriate academic area. The proposal also includes a detailed description of the project and a letter of support from the faculty mentor.

The proposal must be detailed and clearly-enough written to be understood by a persons from different disciplines. It may therefore be appropriate to define or explain specialized terminology.

The proposal should be typed 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 and what in your background or career plans 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 into his proposal before submitting it. This absolutely includes grammatically clear and closely-edited writing: the Honors Director will not edit thesis proposals before forwarding them to the Honors Committee.

Once the 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 faculty mentor, in consultation with the other two readers.

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 faculty mentor, a secondary reader in the applicable discipline, and a tertiary reader in a different but 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. Faculty mentors 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 committee.
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 solely 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 faculty 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 solely 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.
6. The faculty mentor/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.
7. 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 a C will not receive Honors credit, but will receive 3-hours of elective credit.
8. The assignment of a grade is ultimately the responsibility of the faculty mentor. Typically, the mentor will consult with the other two readers about the appropriate 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.
9. 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.

10. 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.