

FIN-399: Honors Prospectus Guidelines

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I want to express my gratitude to the Director of the broader Roosevelt University Honors program, Dr. Marjorie Jolles, for generously sharing her years of experience in successfully guiding undergraduate students through their honors thesis projects. She has written most all of this document. - Justin M. Shea

What is a Thesis Prospectus?

A formal proposal of your Honors Senior Thesis project, your Thesis Prospectus provides insight into the goals and plans for your research. It explains the research question you're asking and the theories and methods you're using to answer it. More importantly, the Prospectus helps you imagine the eventual argument you will make and say how it contributes to ongoing research and scholarly conversations on a topic within your area of study. The Prospectus helps you narrow your ideas, focus your attention on existing research, and map the steps of your research activity. It's a forward-looking plan.

A prospectus is a form of technical, formatted writing. The audience for your Thesis Prospectus includes those from whom you're seeking approval and support to guide your research and argument. Your primary goals are to identify an issue or problem that needs exploration, demonstrate that you have done significant preliminary research into it that informs your understanding and your question, explain how you intend to get answers to your question, and explain why and to whom your exploration matters.

What is a Thesis?

A thesis is a well-constructed, developed, original argument on a precise issue that uses and responds to other scholarship in your field of study. It is a capstone project and should reflect that you have become learned in a specific discipline with its own conceptual frameworks, foci, methods, and debates. The thesis relies on the use of research methods that promote synthesis and analysis to support and explain your argument. Thesis projects range in size and methods, depending on discipline; consult with your mentor and Honors Program staff about the acceptable length and scope for your project. Your thesis emerges from your Prospectus.

Most people **across disciplines** should be able to read your Honors thesis and understand your argument. People in your area or discipline will be able to more closely attend to strengths and gaps in your argument and research. Your thesis must be completed in your major or minor (or a synthesis of the two); your Prospectus must be, too.

At RU, Honors Thesis projects indicate your readiness to complete your degree and the Honors Program. As you complete both your Prospectus and Thesis, you will demonstrate your ability to:

- Compose a focused research question
- Summarize key and nuanced ideas about a narrow topic framed within your discipline
- Use discipline-specific methods of research and analysis
- Draft, revise, and edit a written work that effectively synthesizes and analyzes a well-developed and insightful academic argument consistent with disciplinary conventions, under a mentor's close guidance
- Demonstrate gained mastery of knowledge and skills, and articulate areas of potential ongoing inquiry for current and future professional goals

Content and Formatting Requirements

Please follow the guidelines below, indicating each section in your Prospectus. By the end, your Prospectus should be final-draft quality: carefully edited, correctly formatted, and well-written.

Formatting Requirements

- Approval cover page (with approval signatures; electronic signatures are permitted in remote semesters)
- Section headings that match those listed in the Prospectus Guidelines
- Page numbers
- Standard font (Times New Roman, Arial, etc.), 11 or 12 point
- Style guide formatting (APA, MLA, Chicago Manual) according to discipline

Prospectus Sections

Section	Include
Approval Cover Page	Thesis title, your name, mentor's name, signatures, etc. Use the form provided (electronic signatures are permitted)
Heading: You	Your Name, Major(s) and Minor(s), Email address, Semester of Hon 399 Enrollment
Heading: Thesis Project	Thesis Title, Faculty Mentor Name and Title, Faculty Mentor Email, Faculty Mentor's Department
Introduction & Explanation of Project	An explanation or statement of the issue or problem you're exploring, in a narrow and concise way. Summarize the issue or problem and explain why it's important to explore. Open your explanation with an introduction to the project. A good way to do this is to explain the relevance and motivation for your research, possibly with an anecdote that illustrates its relevance.
Discussion of Relevant Research	Identify the key theories, theorists, scholarship, presumptions, debates, and data that constitute the "conversation" you're entering around the issue or problem of the project. Carefully summarize these arguments: how they're made, who makes them (which disciplines are most represented in the "conversation," and which are absent?), which issues are agreed upon, debated, and/or unresolved, and how they contribute to and contextualize the issue or problem your project explores.
Research Question	Articulate your precise research question and provide a rationale for it, following the 3-step model described in <i>The Craft of Research</i> , pp. 44-46.

Section	Include
Significance of the Research	Why is your research question important? How will it make a meaningful contribution to the “conversation” on the topic? What might the possible uses of the eventual argument you’ll construct be? To whom does this project matter, and why?
Methods and Research Plan	Identify the specific methods you will use to answer your question. Examples: comparative analysis; rhetorical analysis; form and content analysis; theme and pattern identification and analysis; case studies; observational studies; surveys; media analysis; narrative inquiry; indexing; action research; statistical analysis; etc. (Be sure you know and identify the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods, if that’s relevant to your project!) Note: Direct human subjects research is not permitted for your thesis, as it requires approval by the university’s Institutional Review Board—a lengthy process that exceeds the time you have. Instead, work with existing human research data sets if your project calls for human subjects research. (Expect to consult with your mentor on this! Your methodologies should be consistent with those of your major discipline.) Explain why answering your research question requires using the specific methods you have chosen. Explain your research plan: How, specifically, will you conduct your research? How will you present it in the thesis? How will you use and build on the relevant research of the “conversation” and the conventions of your discipline?
Bibliography	List 10-15 scholarly sources (books or peer reviewed journal articles ONLY; no websites or pages). These sources represent some of the “conversation” around your topic and question, including debates and differing perspectives. These are the sources you summarize and engage in your “Discussion of Relevant Research” section. These should be primary and secondary sources (not tertiary). If you need help determining what scholarly sources are, make sure to visit Barb Anderson in the library! And of course, contact Justin too! Use proper formatting for your discipline (APA, MLA...).

Drafting, Revising, and Submitting Your Prospectus

In this module, you'll draft, discuss, get feedback on, and revise sections of your prospectus in a series of mentor meetings, workshops, and assignments.

Your Prospectus will be evaluated in the following phases.

First Draft of your Prospectus:

- Thesis Title
- Introduction and Explanation of the Project
- Discussion of Relevant Research
- Minimal bibliography
- Your Research Question
- List possible data sets & initial findings

Submit your First Draft Prospectus by Monday Morning on 10/12

Second Draft of your Prospectus:

- Everything in 1st draft
- Discussion of Relevant Research
- Bibliography (at least 10 scholarly sources, primary and secondary only)
- Research Question
- Significance of the Research
- Methods and Research Plan
- Identify specific data sets, discuss issues

Submit your Second Draft Prospectus by Monday Morning on 10/26

Final Draft of your Thesis Prospectus

All required sections and completed approval cover page, is due by Monday Morning on 11/16.

You will be assessed on the quality and thoroughness of these assignments in meeting the criteria indicated in the Prospectus Guidelines and the degree to which you demonstrate significant revision from drafts to final version. Your final, complete version of your Thesis Prospectus will be evaluated according to the rubric below

Honors Thesis Prospectus Evaluation Rubric

Quality	Exceeds Expectations (A to A-)	Meets Expectations (B+ to B-)	Needs Improvement (C+ and below)
Introduction and Explanation of topic	Topic is identified with clarity, precision and nuance; introduces detailed and specific background information.	Topic is identified with clarity and precision; introduces general background information.	Topic is generally identified; introduces basic background information.
Discussion of Relevant Research	Based on substantial background exploration of relevant scholarship; invites multiple questions.	Based on substantial background exploration of relevant scholarship.	Based on some background exploration of relevant scholarship.
Research Question	Question is nuanced, open-ended, focused, feasible to answer, provides a path and clear motivation for an arguable thesis.	Question is open-ended, focused, feasible to answer, provides a path to an arguable thesis.	Question is general and possibly not feasible to answer.
Methods and Research Plan	Identifies, explains, justifies, and synthesizes appropriate methods and methodologies with the content. Provides correlation between content and execution.	Identifies, explains and justifies appropriate methods and methodologies consistent with disciplinary practice.	Identifies and explains choice of methods and methodologies consistent with disciplinary practice.
Significance of Research	Consequences and relevance are explicitly stated.	Consequences and relevance are evident.	Consequences and relevance are not evident.
Bibliography	Includes more than 15 scholarly sources (primary and secondary only) representing the “conversation” around your topic and question from a wide range. All citations are accurate, according to your discipline’s style guide.	Includes 10-15 scholarly sources (primary and secondary only) representing the “conversation” around your topic and question. All citations are accurate, according to your discipline’s style guide.	Includes a basic range of sources; may include non-scholarly sources; tertiary sources; or sources not germane to the “conversation” around your topic and question. Citations may be inaccurate and/or not conform to your discipline’s style guide.

Helpful hints

Prospectus

- Re-read “Quick Tips” from *The Craft of Research*. They will hearten you.
- Re-read *The Craft of Research* for guidance on developing research questions, working with sources, and building arguments.
- Consult *They Say / I Say* for guidance on engaging with and responding to existing scholarship.
- A research question should be open enough to allow for exploration but focused enough to prevent you from moving in too many directions. A research question must also be answerable through research and analysis.

Writing

For writing tips, consult

- *Economical Writing* section titled **House Rules: Teaching Materials** pg 127-134.
- *Economical Writing* APPENDIX **Applying Economical Writing to Become Your Own Best Editor** pg 135-140.

Thesis

- After completing your prospectus, create an annotated bibliography and/or a literature review. This will allow you, in the process of summarizing and synthesizing the arguments of other authors, to have a foundational understanding of how you want to represent the conversation you’re entering, and the kind of argument you wish to make.
- A thesis is a constructed argument, not just a gathering of information for a report or summary. For your thesis defense, the same holds true. By the time you defend, you should have a full-length working draft of your project, and your defense is a defense of your argument, which emerges from your research. It’s where you test it out!
- While writers have different approaches to the business of writing, keep in mind that this is a big project that you’ll need to work on daily (9 -12 hours weekly, at least). You’ll need to set and acknowledge goals and use deadlines to help your progress. We recommend the simple and remarkably effective practice of committing to at least 15 minutes a day, every day. Use a timer to discipline yourself!
- Check out these resources for Purdue’s Online Writing Lab on [Outlines](#), [Drafting](#), and [literature](#) review.
- Make arrangements with other thesis writers to hold each other accountable. Make plans to frequently meet and research/write together—this is extremely helpful to keeping the process engaging, even via Zoom. And celebrate your successes with each other!