Honors College Thesis Manual

This manual is intended to help prepare students and thesis advisors for successful completion of the Honors thesis. It serves as both a guide to expectations and requirements and an informational resource for students, advisors, and school directors. Any questions regarding the manual should be directed to honors@usm.edu, or you may call the Honors College office, at telephone (601) 266-4533, and schedule an appointment.

To ensure compliance with Honors College deadlines and expectations, please refer to this manual throughout the writing process.

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I: The Honors Keystone Curriculum: An Overview

The Junior Year: HON 300/HON 301 (Developing the Honors Thesis I/II, 2 credit hours)

These interdisciplinary courses are designed to help Honors Scholars develop their research or creative activities and prepare them for their senior-year thesis projects. In HON 300, students are introduced to academic research across the disciplines, assess their mentoring needs, meet faculty in their discipline, and are guided towards identifying a thesis advisor. In HON 301, students define their research question, develop their working relationship with their thesis advisor, and prepare for and plan their senior-year thesis activities. At the end of the sequence, students be well-prepared for the senior year, with a thesis project plan (to include a completion timeline) in hand.

The Senior Year: Thesis Hours and the Honors Comprehensive Examination

Thesis Hours: (3 total credit hours): Honors Scholars enroll in three thesis hours (XXX 492H or the equivalent in the major), divided over two semesters (e.g. 2 hours in fall/1 in spring, or 1 hour in fall/2 in spring). Students should be enrolled in at least one thesis hour during any semester in which they are working on their project.

> *What to Expect from Thesis Hours*: Students are expected to treat thesis hours like any other course, determining specific times each week during which they will work on their thesis. Students should designate a minimum **three hours per week for each credit hour** in which they are enrolled (most will spend more than that). Students must use thesis hours to make consistent progress toward the completion of their thesis; thesis advisors will grade accordingly.

> *Grading Guidelines:* Thesis hours are graded on an A-F grading basis. The grade in research/thesis hours should accurately and honestly assess progress on the thesis, as stipulated in the Thesis Completion Timeline and in conversation between advisor and student. The Honors College will use these grades to assess whether a student is making satisfactory progress in the Honors curriculum. Please view the grading rubric [here](#).

> *Instructions on Enrolling in 492H:* Students should contact their thesis advisor and/or the administrative specialist in their major to open a section of the course, with the thesis advisor listed as the instructor of record. Some schools add students to the class directly; others give students permission to enroll. In any case, students should discuss with their advisor the number of credit hours in which they should enroll for each semester. NOTE: **it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the number of hours for which they are enrolled is accurate in SOAR.**

Enrolling in More Than 3 Credit Hours: Students may enroll in more than 3 thesis hours if their thesis project warrants additional time, but it is important to understand that the course should not be used as a schedule "filler." Students who seek to take additional thesis hours beyond the required 3 should (1) seek guidance from their thesis advisor and agree on how much time will be dedicated to the thesis project each semester and (2) confirm their plans with their Honors advisor.

The Honors Comprehensive Exam: All students must complete a comprehensive examination in their major. Students with multiple majors are only required to complete one examination, in the major of their choosing. See below for more information on the Comprehensive Examination.

II: The Honors Thesis

General Guidelines: Students and advisors should remember that the Honors thesis is the product of meaningful research and advanced investigation/creation over multiple semesters. The thesis manuscript is the culmination of a student's course of study and should be a document of pride for the student, the advisor, and the academic program. The Honors thesis should be substantial in scope and result in original findings, new creative work, or a new understanding of a problem or issue. Projects that resemble term papers, literature reviews without significant analysis and synthesis, or single-semester capstone projects will not satisfy Honors expectations.

Theses that are deemed to meet/exceed expectations will be deposited in the Aquila Digital Community, where they can be viewed by researchers and scholars from around the globe. Therefore, students should approach the development and execution of the thesis with utmost care and should be prepared for multiple rounds of revisions before submitting the manuscript to the Honors College to ensure that the final product meets the expectations of the advisor, the school director, and the Honors college.

While the thesis advisor will serve as the student's primary guide through the research and writing process, the Honors College has certain requirements with regard to responsible conduct of research, scope of project, and manuscript formatting. In addition to following their own disciplinary conventions, students and advisors should consult Award Winning Honors Theses for further guidance on Honors College expectations.

Responsible Conduct of Research: In the course of the junior year, all students will complete the CITI training (common course for students) and complete a form indicating whether IRB/IACUC approval is required for their projects.

IRB/IACUC Requirements:

- Students working with human and/or vertebrate animal subjects must apply for approval to do so to by a university review board. **No data may be collected until the respective board approval has been obtained**. Obtaining protocol approval is the responsibility of the student and the thesis advisor.

- **Students whose projects require IRB or IACUC approval must include the respective protocol approval letter as an appendix in their final thesis.**

- For more information about IRB/IACUC, see:
    - IRB Guide for research involving human subjects
    - IACUC Guide for vertebrate animal research

- Please contact Jo Ann Johnson in the Office of Research Integrity for IRB/IACUC-related questions.

Thesis Scope and Length: The Honors College considers the thesis to be a document that results from several semesters of research/investigation/writing—one worthy of Latin distinction, the highest academic honor offered to USM undergraduates. The thesis should thus be appropriately ambitious and significant in scope and should involve original research/creative discovery. As stated in the General Guidelines, "term-paper" style projects, literature reviews without significant analysis and synthesis, or single-semester capstone projects will not satisfy Honors expectations.

The Honors College does not establish specific length requirements, leaving it to the student and advisor to ensure that the thesis meets disciplinary expectations for scope and rigor. Given disciplinary variation, some projects have more body text (e.g. theses in the Humanities) while some have less text and more charts/graphs/figures (e.g. STEM and Social Sciences theses).

Thesis Organization: Recognizing that each discipline has its own peculiar approach to producing an effective scholarly/creative project, the Honors College does not prescribe what components should be included in the body of the thesis or how those components should be organized. Students and advisors should follow their own disciplinary expectations, using published literature and/or recent Award Winning Honors Theses to guide them.

Thesis Writing Style: As with organization, writing style will vary by discipline. Students should consult their advisors and published research/writing in their field to determine the style of academic writing that is appropriate to their discipline. However, while such conventions as use of active/passive voice, first/third person, etc., will vary, **academic writing in general is formal (non-colloquial) and requires meticulous proofreading with regard to grammar, spelling, and other mechanics**. Thus, students should build into their completion timeline a final stage of proofreading/revision. Theses that come to the Honors College with significant errors will be sent back immediately for editing, thus delaying review.

Documentation Style/Works Cited/References/Bibliography: Documentation styles are discipline specific; thus, students should consult with their thesis advisor regarding the method of documentation that is most appropriate for your discipline and your project. Note that, regardless of style, your documentation should be meticulous and inclusive of all sources used in the thesis.

The USM Library offers [general guidelines about a multitude of styles](#). Students can also consult [USM Libraries Citation Help](#) for a reference management software package like [Endnote](#), [Mendeley](#), or [Zotero](#).

Thesis Formatting: Use the **Honors thesis template** [under construction; will be available October, 2020] for basic formatting (pagination, margins, spacing, font size etc.) of the required preliminary thesis pages and of subsequent chapters. **

File Format and Size: The thesis must be submitted in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) ** and the file size should not exceed 41 MB. Please compress images if the file size is too large for submission.

> **Theses in Mathematics will use LaTex format (for details and further information, please contact Dr. James Lambers)
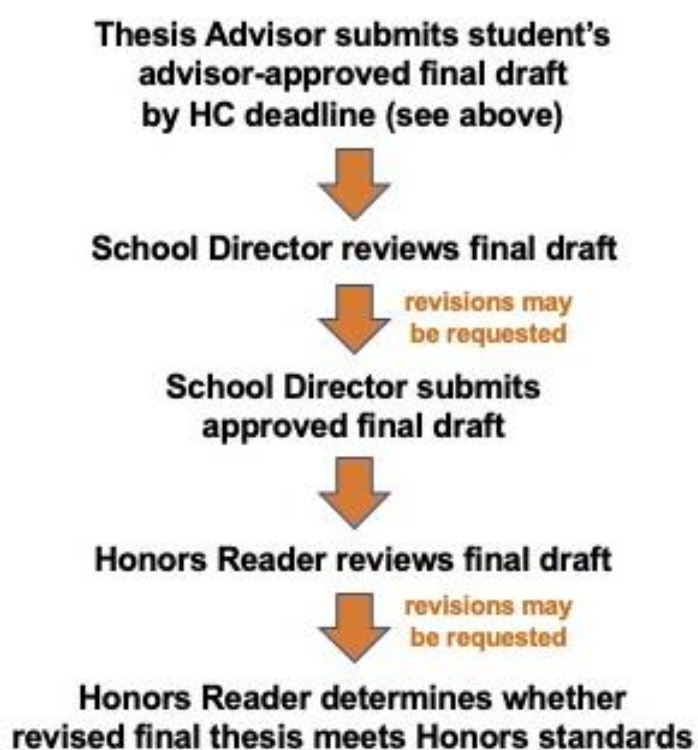
III: Thesis Submission and Approval Process

Deadlines: The dates by which the thesis advisor must submit the final, revised thesis to the school director for approval are:

<div align="center">

April 15 (Spring) | **July 15** (Summer) | **Nov. 15** (Fall)

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Note that students may (and in some cases, as with student teaching, are required to) submit their thesis the semester before their intended graduation.

Thesis Submission Workflow:

Thesis Advisor submits student's advisor-approved final draft by HC deadline (see above)

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School Director reviews final draft

↓ *revisions may be requested*

School Director submits approved final draft

↓

Honors Reader reviews final draft

↓ *revisions may be requested*

Honors Reader determines whether revised final thesis meets Honors standards

Students should send the thesis draft to the advisor for review well ahead of the Honors College deadline and be prepared for the draft to require multiple revisions before it is approved by the advisor.

Once the manuscript meets with the thesis advisor's approval, they will submit it to the school director using the [Thesis Approval and Submission Form](). The school director must approve the thesis, thereby indicating that it meets the standards of the discipline. Directors may return the thesis to student/advisor for further work at this stage. Once the director has approved the thesis, the Honors College will send it to an Honors

Reader for review. **By the time your thesis reaches the Honors College, it should be a carefully edited manuscript that student, advisor, and school would be proud to make available to the public in Aquila.**

Honors Reader Assessment: Upon receipt of the director-approved thesis, the Honors Reader will review the manuscript and will send any requests for revision back to the student and thesis advisor. Bear in mind that the Honors Reader receives dozens of manuscripts at the same time; the Honors College will return feedback to student and advisor as soon as possible.

Honors Readers are concerned primarily with matters of scope (appropriately ambitious for Latin Distinction), readability, and formatting. Honors Readers are not content experts; the Honors College relies on schools/programs to ensure that theses meet disciplinary standards. Nor should students and advisors expect the Honors Reader to serve as a copy editor or line-by-line proofreader. Please note that manuscripts with a significant number of mechanical/grammatical errors will be sent back immediately for editing before being submitted to a full review.

Students are allowed one opportunity to make revisions based on the Honors Reader's feedback. Once the revisions are returned and reviewed by the Honors Reader for a second time, the manuscript will receive one of the following designations:

- Exceeds expectations (approved)
- Meets expectations (approved)
- Minimally meets expectations (approved but will not be uploaded to Aquila);
- Fails to meet expectations (not approved; student will not graduate with Latin distinction)

Aquila: Should the approved Honors thesis be deemed to meet or exceed expectations, students will be asked to complete the [Aquila Research Taxonomy Form](#). This form grants the Honors College permission to upload the thesis to the Aquila Digital Community. Your thesis should be accessible in the repository approximately one month after your graduation. The Honors College has the right to withhold any thesis from publication in Aquila.

Thesis Embargo: Students and/or thesis advisors who do not want the manuscript available in Aquila at the time of graduation must make a formal request to embargo the thesis. The thesis advisor must complete and submit the [Embargo Request Form.](#) Embargoes are granted for a maximum of two years. If you have further questions about Aquila or the embargo process, please consult [Jessica Francis](#).

Extensions: A one-week grace period will be granted if deemed necessary and if the request is endorsed by the thesis advisor. After the extension period expires, the student must roll their graduation over to the next semester and enroll in 1 additional thesis hour. Students requesting additional time should contact [Amy Benoit-Warlick.](#)

Failure to Complete: Honors Scholars are expected to complete all requirements, including the thesis, by the established deadlines. Students who feel they are at risk for not completing the thesis should reach out to their Honors advisor and their thesis advisor to develop a completion plan. Note that in such cases the Honors College may hold scholarship funds until a completion plan is established. Students who do not complete their thesis will be suspended from the Honors College, will not graduate with Latin distinction, and may be asked to return a prorated share of their award to the University of Southern Mississippi. (For more information, see the Honors College [Student Handbook](#) and the appropriate scholarship stipulation agreement.)

IV: Thesis FAQs

Is funding available for Honors theses research? Yes. There are opportunities to apply for research funding in the [Honors College](#) and through the [Drapeau Center for Undergraduate Research](#).

Can I complete a thesis outside my major? Students may complete theses outside their major with approval from the HC dean. The required [form](#) is typically completed by student and advisor in HON 300 or 301, although if a student changes major or advisor, this issue may come up at a later time. The student must also upload the form to their e-portfolio.

What if I am a double major? You may choose to pursue a thesis in one of your majors or may decide on an interdisciplinary project (possibly with an advisor and a co-advisor from each area). You may choose in which program you will sit for your comprehensive exam.

I will be student teaching and completing an Honors thesis. What now? Students are typically expected to complete their thesis projects before they undertake student teaching. Students who are unable to complete the thesis project prior to and who thus seek permission to enroll in thesis hours while student teaching must request permission from (1) their thesis advisor and (2) the CAEP coordinator. The CAEP coordinator meets with the student, discusses expectations for both student teaching and the thesis, and has the student sign a contract agreeing to the arrangement.

I will be completing an internship and completing an Honors thesis. What now?
Students are typically expected to complete their thesis projects before they undertake internships required for their degrees (e.g. in kinesiology, social work). Students who are unable to complete the thesis project prior to and who thus seek permission to enroll in thesis hours while completing their internship must request permission from (1) their thesis advisor and (2) the director of the school.

V: The Honors Comprehensive Examination

Deadlines: The dates by which the Honors College must receive comprehensive examination results are as follows:

April 15 (Spring) | July 15 (Summer) | Nov. 15 (Fall)

Exam Format: The examination may be written or oral, at the discretion of the program/unit. Some areas choose to administer general content examinations; others define the examination as a defense or presentation of the Honors thesis. Although the exact nature of the examination will be determined by the school involved, there are general guidelines:

- Oral examinations are generally no more than one hour; written examinations should be designed so that they do not exceed three hours.

- Content exams should assess the student's general knowledge in the field rather than a specialized, narrow topic.

- The examination should be uniform for all candidates within a particular semester.

- Students with two or more majors must satisfy only one comprehensive exam and choose the exam they wish to take.

Exam Scheduling and Reporting: The Honors College will communicate with school directors regarding the comprehensive exam requirement, but students should consult with their school director regarding exam format, when it will be scheduled, etc.

Comprehensive Examination results should be reported using this form.

VI: Thesis Tips & Tricks: Advice for Writers

Getting Started:

- As you get started, consult the thesis completion timeline you and your advisor developed in HON 301. Using that timeline, and in conversation with your advisor, prepare a detailed schedule that identifies the research tasks and goals, and schedule regular meetings to discuss your research progress, the preferred organization of your thesis manuscript, and, eventually, draft versions of completed thesis sections.

- Organize your project in terms of small, achievable goals that you accomplish week by week and month by month. This approach will make it all seem less overwhelming and will ensure long-term success.

- Keep in mind that you may want or have to adjust the goals you established before undertaking the actual research once your project progresses. That is part of the joy of discovery! It is ok if your project changes in the course of your drafting and research process.

Before You Panic:

- Keep in mind that, once your project progresses, you may want or have to adjust the goals you established before undertaking the actual research. That is part of the joy of discovery! It is ok if your project changes in the course of your drafting and research process.

- If you are worried about your ability to write your thesis manuscript, it should be comforting to you to know that all of us –faculty, graduate students and undergraduates– are experiencing or have experienced the same feelings about our academic writing: angst, fear of failure and of peer criticism, and anxiety and self-doubt about the importance of our research and writing. To keep you from feeling stuck with writer's block and procrastinating to a point where you no longer have the time to write a quality Honors thesis, below are some hints and tips for goal setting/time management that you may find useful.

Goal Setting and Time Management:

- **Manage the many different demands on your time during your senior year as you prepare for graduation and your professional career beyond.**
  - Review and prioritize your main academic, professional and social life goals.

- Be realistic about what you can achieve each day and don't forget that you cannot be at two places at the same time.
- Adjust your daily routine to free up time for thesis writing.

- **Develop a plan and establish a <u>daily</u> thesis writing routine.**
  - Choose the time of day during which you think and write best (morning or evening) and set aside a block of 60-90 minutes on your daily calendar for thesis writing.
  - Choose a quiet location (e.g. a library carrel) and eliminate external distractions (turn off your cell phone, email, the Internet, and don't let your friends chat with you during your scheduled writing time).
  - Do not let internal distractions (worries about the thesis advisor's feedback, feeling overwhelmed, exam deadlines, etc.) keep you from writing.
  - Do not let other activities *("I'm too busy to write today")* interfere with your daily writing time, and do not wait until you are "in the mood" to write!
  - Use a kitchen timer to manage your writing time, if you think that may be helpful, and take a break every 30 minutes or once you have achieved a set writing target.

- **Set <u>daily</u> writing goals and hold yourself accountable.**
  - Set SMART goals (<u>s</u>pecific, <u>m</u>easurable, <u>a</u>ttainable, <u>r</u>elevant, <u>t</u>ime-bound) = small, manageable daily writing assignments.
  - Write a concrete, manageable portion of your thesis <u>every day</u> (e.g. a specific portion of the Results section, several paragraphs of your Introduction, etc.).
  - Measure the progress you have made on your goal by looking at the number of pages or words you have written, or which tasks you have completed already.
  - Assess how realistic (attainable) this goal was for the allotted time period and revise your goals, if necessary.
  - Assess if what you wrote that day furthered your goal and thesis progress (was relevant), or whether you simply got side-tracked.
  - Set specific deadlines for completing each writing goal (time-bound).

- Track your thesis writing progress regularly and send portions of your thesis to your advisor for feedback on time according to your thesis completion timeline.

- Reward yourself for meeting daily and weekly writing goals and thesis writing milestones by taking some time for yourself (take a walk, chat with a friend, have a coffee, etc.)!

- **Some reasons for procrastination and writer's block.**
  - You feel overwhelmed by how hard it is to write or even get started.
  - You are easily distracted from your writing routine and frequently engage in other activities *("This will only take a minute")*.
  - You worry about all the details you have to think about when writing the thesis (checking and ordering the sources, annotating and formatting figures and tables, etc.).
  - You have self-doubt about being able to produce a thesis of high quality and therefore consider writing a futile activity.
  - You are bored with and/or do not enjoy the writing process.
  - You are afraid of what your thesis advisor will say about your draft.

- **Some writing tips that may help you deal with procrastination and writer's block.**
  - Allow yourself plenty of thinking time (don't rush!), then put your thoughts on paper.
  - Do not strive to create perfect sentences, paragraphs and thesis sections, just write SOMETHING.
  - Allow yourself to make mistakes, take multiple (possibly wrong?) approaches to express your thoughts.
  - Talk about your ideas with a friend or your thesis advisor.
  - Trust yourself and don't worry if you do not see the "bends in the road" and the "light at the end of the tunnel" immediately.
  - It is normal to have to edit your first drafts (often several times) to develop what exactly you want to convey in the final version of your thesis.