

THE HONORS THESIS

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This document supersedes all previous documents and catalogue material pertaining to honors theses for candidates for degrees with scholarly honors. These rules and guidelines apply to all undergraduates, with variations that apply to students majoring in Business, Biomedical Engineering, and Architecture (more details below).

All students who wish to receive scholarly honors in a major must write an Honors Thesis in their senior year. The term “Honors Thesis” here includes all varieties of theses and equivalent projects undertaken by a senior as one of the requirements for a degree with departmental honors. The specific form of the Honors Thesis or project depends on the disciplinary expectations of a student’s major department or school. For more specific guidance students should see their thesis advisors or the undergraduate advisors of their majors or schools.

EXPECTATIONS

An Honors Thesis should demonstrate the student’s capacity for quality research and should give evidence of mastery of the material in a field. Topics should be framed in terms of a question to be asked, a problem to be explored, or a hypothesis to be tested. This is required as part of the Prospectus that all students submit, and faculty readers review and sign. (Please see the Prospectus form.) The thesis should show comprehensive awareness of what scholars or relevant experts are saying and have said about the subject. The Honors Thesis is the culminating experience for Honors students, and as such we expect students to aim high in formulating thesis proposals.

It is impossible to give a fixed rule about the length of an Honors Thesis, since modes of discourse vary from discipline to discipline. Students should discuss the expected length of a thesis with their first and second readers. To give some idea of what is expected, in the more discursive fields (in the humanities, for instance), a reasonable length for an Honors Thesis is 50-60 pages, exclusive of notes and bibliography. An Honors Thesis should demonstrate in a manner appropriate to its field the equivalent of roughly two semesters’ worth of major course projects.

PROCEDURES

To be eligible to write an Honors Thesis, students are generally expected to have an overall GPA of 3.4, and a GPA of 3.5 in the major for which the student is writing for honors. Departments may make exceptions to the GPA threshold on a case-by-case basis where warranted.

Students are responsible for forming a thesis committee, which will consist of two to three readers. Normally, all readers should be full-time faculty (rank of Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, or Professor of Practice) at Tulane University. Exceptions to this rule must be cleared with the Director of the Honors Thesis Program.

Readers

- **First and Second Readers** must normally be full-time faculty members in the major department in which the student is writing the thesis. Exceptions will be allowed for academically cogent reasons, with the permission of the chair of the relevant department and the approval of the Director of the Honors Thesis Program.

The first reader will be the instructor of record for the thesis, and responsible for assigning a grade (in consultation with the other readers). Usually, the first reader serves as director of the thesis committee.

A student who is writing a thesis for honors in two majors must have a first reader from one major and a second reader from the other. In this case, each reader is, in effect, “first reader” for the major they represent.

- **The Third Reader** must be a full-time faculty member who is not a member of the department or departments for which the student is writing the thesis. It is not necessary that the third reader be able to make a substantial contribution to the thesis, but only that they be able to report to the Director of the Honors Thesis Program about the student’s progress. The necessity of the third reader is at the discretion of the Thesis Director. All theses must have two readers, but they need not include three.

Registration

Students register for the Honors Theses through the administrative secretary in their major department, using course number 4990 in the fall and 5000 in the spring. While students may register for the thesis when registration opens for each semester, they need not do so until the start of the semester in question. Some departments may prefer that students submit the prospectus before registering for the thesis. Students who are writing theses in two major departments register for 4990 in one department and 5000 in the other.

Schedule of Completion

Honors Thesis forms are submitted digitally via forms.tulane.edu, which uses the Frevvo platform. Readers will be given a grace period to sign off on forms after the deadline, but students should submit their work to readers for review in advance of the deadline.

- **Last Wednesday of August.** Deadline to submit Honors Thesis Prospectus.
- **Last Wednesday of November.** First chapter and progress report form due. (See instructions on first progress report form.) The writing completed by this deadline need not be Chapter One of the eventual thesis, but should be equivalent to a chapter of significant length (for example, in humanities theses, around 10-15 pages), or of an equivalent portion of the final product. The thesis director will determine what constitutes an appropriate submission at this stage, which will vary by discipline.
- **Last Monday in January.** Second progress report form due. (See instructions on second progress report form.) With this submission, it is expected that at least 1/3 of the thesis be complete in draft form. The thesis director will determine what constitutes an appropriate submission at this stage.
- **March-April.** Students should work with their thesis committee to schedule a date for submission of a complete preliminary version of the thesis to readers, and schedule a date for the oral exam. In general, students should allow at least two weeks and possibly as much as a month (depending on the readers' preferences) between the submission of the thesis and the oral exam.
- **Third Friday in April.** The final date for oral examinations and deadline to submit the Oral Defense form.
- **First Friday in May.** Final date for the submission of the final copy of the thesis via Canvas. See the Honors Thesis Style Sheet for detailed information concerning the preparation and formatting of theses. It is strongly suggested that students communicate early on with the Director of the Honors Thesis Program about any questions or points of confusion regarding the format of the thesis.

Beyond this schedule, it is the responsibility of the student to keep in touch with readers and present them with work-in-progress in a timely fashion. Students are strongly urged to arrange with their thesis advisor a regular schedule of meetings, submission of work-in-progress, and the expected date for the submission of the near final copy of the thesis. This helps ensure the continued progress of the research and prevents misunderstandings about the scope and direction of the study. It is recommended that students discuss with

all readers the criteria that will be used to evaluate interim papers and the completed thesis.

Please note that while it is the nature of extended research projects to have periods of greater and lesser activity, students may not choose to defer all the work on the thesis to the second semester. The Honors Thesis is a two-semester graded course and student should normally aim to do roughly the same amount of work on their projects in each semester. Also, students writing theses in two majors should think of their projects as one project for two majors and so should assume that work in each semester is fulfilling the expectations of both semesters. For example, a student writing in Economics and Math should NOT plan to work on the Economics side of the thesis in one semester, and the Math side in the other: the student should work with readers from both majors throughout the academic year.

Assessment of the Honors Thesis and the Oral Defense

The members of the student's Honors Thesis committee vote whether to “Pass” or “Fail” the thesis at the time of the oral defense. Two or three negative votes by members of the committee will fail the thesis; in this case there is no basis for appeal except on procedural grounds. If there is a single negative vote among the three members of the student’s committee, the following procedures will be followed:

- If the first or the second reader casts the negative vote, the matter will be referred first to the chair of the student’s major department, and then to the Director of the Honors Thesis Program. If the reader casting the negative vote is serving as the chair of the department, the matter will be referred to the Director of the Honors Thesis Program. In the case of a student writing for two majors, if one of the first two readers casts a negative vote, the matter will be referred to the Director of the Honors Thesis Program
- If the third reader casts the negative vote, the matter will be referred to the Director of the Honors Thesis Program.

The thesis committee may also (and often do) vote to pass a student provisionally, with instructions to the student to revise the thesis. In any case, revisions required of the student at the time of the oral defense must be completed for the thesis committee to sign the final thesis title page and ultimately pass the thesis.

The committee will report the results of the oral exam via the Oral Defense form, as well as the nature of the revisions required (if any) before the thesis is to be considered final.

Variations on the Standard Honors Thesis Expectations/Process

- **Business Majors:** Students in the School of Business have the option of either writing a research-based thesis through Newcomb-Tulane College, following the guidelines laid out in this document, or writing a business case study honors project directed by the School of Business. Students interested in the business case study option should consult with their advisors in the School of Business as to specific requirements and deadlines, in addition to the schedule of completion laid out above. Business case study projects only require two faculty readers.
- **Biomedical Engineering and Architecture majors:** The Honors Theses in these two majors exceed the scholarly expectations of the senior project required normally by these majors. Students should consult their major advisors for more information about the expectations and the registration process for Honors Theses in these majors. Students writing theses in BMEN and Architecture are required to submit prospectuses to Newcomb-Tulane College by the prospectus deadline given above. In their prospectuses, students should explain how their theses exceed the usual expectations—in other words, what makes them Honors Thesis projects as opposed to regular thesis projects. Students in both majors are required to submit completed theses, formatted according to the Honors Thesis Style Sheet, to Newcomb-Tulane College by the deadline given above. Students in these departments will not register separately for the 4990/5000 Honors Thesis course, but will register for the standard thesis/capstone sequence through their department.

Grading of the Honors Thesis

After the oral examination is held and the thesis is completed, the thesis first reader awards a letter grade that takes into account the full year's work. The minimum passing grade for an Honors Thesis is A-. (Exceptions to this rule require the approval of the Director of the Honors Thesis Program.) The first reader is expected to consult with the second reader regarding the grade, and may also consult with the third reader. The initial grade for the first semester of Honors Thesis registration will be "IP," but this will be changed to the final letter grade that the student earns for the project.

Honors Theses that Are Not Completed

At the request of the thesis writer or the thesis director, an Honors Thesis may be discontinued and the credits converted to an Independent Study at any time prior to graduation. In such cases, the Honors Thesis credits will be dropped without record and replaced by equivalent Independent Study credits with the same prefix. The student and the independent study supervisor must establish a written plan outlining the expectations for evaluating the newly created independent study.

Students must take care to discuss the impact of this course of action on their graduation requirements with their academic adviser. In some major departments, the Honors Thesis coursework takes the place of necessary capstone study that cannot be substituted with independent study coursework.

Honors Theses or Oral Examinations that receive “Fail”

If the student completes the Honors Thesis and receives a “fail” from the thesis committee at the time of the oral defense or when the student submits the revised final version of the thesis, the usual practice is for the student to have the thesis transformed into a two-semester independent study project, and the readers to grade it on that basis.

Submitting the Thesis

Each Honors Thesis must be prepared in conformity with the Tulane University Honors Thesis Style Sheet, available at <https://uraf.tulane.edu/honors-thesis>. Theses will be submitted in digital format via Canvas.

Effective May 2021, Honors Theses will no longer be submitted in hard copy to the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library physical archives. NTC will upload all completed Honors Theses to the NTC Senior Theses and Projects digital repository in the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library digital archives. If you have any questions about this policy, please contact the Honors Thesis Program at ntcthesis@tulane.edu.

[All Honors Theses are submitted to Tulane University Libraries](#) upon their successful completion. Once a thesis is archived in the repository, there are strict guidelines related to removing it. [Please consult the Library's deaccession policy for more information.](#)