

Honors College Thesis Handbook

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE HONORS THESIS

Why a Thesis Handbook?

This Honors Thesis Handbook was developed to encourage students to write an Honors thesis that extends students' work in a specific research project or creative endeavor. This handbook is designed to provide you with helpful information and pointers that will simplify – and de-mystify – the process of writing an Honors thesis. The answer to virtually every question ever asked about an Honors thesis can be found in this Handbook. You should read this information carefully before you begin the process of developing an idea for your Honors thesis. Keep it handy between now and your thesis completion. If you have a question about the Honors thesis – how to register, what the deadlines are, what the thesis should look like, what you can do if something goes wrong – look back through the Handbook. Chances are the answer to all your questions are in here! However, if you have a question that is not answered in this Handbook, please contact the Honors College Academic Counselor responsible for thesis (see Honors page for identification, if unsure: <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/counselors>)

The Thesis Handbook should also be helpful to your thesis advisor and your thesis readers, as the Handbook contains information about the expectations not only for students, but also for thesis advisors and readers. We encourage you to share the handbook with your thesis advisor and readers.

Why Write an Honors Thesis?

For students who are intent on making the most of their Honors education, the Honors thesis serves as an academic capstone experience. An Honors thesis offers the following benefits:

- 1) An opportunity to work one-on-one with a faculty mentor in your major on a project that will enhance your research, creative, and writing skills.
- 2) Integration of knowledge in a project of your own choice.
- 3) Self-awareness, as you engage in an independent project that can help clarify your academic interests and career goals.
- 4) The reward of rising to a unique, intellectual challenge.
- 5) Recognition on your official transcript and diploma and at the Honors Commencement Ceremony.
- 6) Enhancement of graduate school and employment opportunities.
- 7) The satisfaction that comes from working through a project on your own.

Who Writes an Honors Thesis?

Students who are the most gifted and dedicated scholars typically write an Honors thesis. In addition, students who wish to get the most out of their education or who wish to personalize a component of their education will opt to write an Honors thesis. It is strongly recommended that students who are interested in attending graduate school to earn a Ph.D. write an Honors thesis.

Basic Requirements for the Honors Thesis

Listed below you will find the essential elements involved in writing an Honors thesis. While most thesis students register for six (6) hours of credit for their work on the Honors thesis (in either HON 4993, “Honors Capstone Project,” or a 4993 Honors Thesis course in their academic discipline – e.g., BIO 4993, EGR 4993, PSY 4993), you do not *have* to register in an Honors Thesis/Capstone Project (4993) course. Each of the essential elements listed here is described in greater detail later in this handbook.

1. You must have a thesis advisor.

The thesis advisor should have a terminal degree in his/her field (usually a Ph.D., although possibly an M.D., J.D. or M.F.A.). While most thesis advisors come from the faculty at UTSA, many students have asked faculty members from the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSC- SA) to serve as their thesis advisor and several have asked researchers at other institutions to serve as their advisors.

2. You must have two thesis readers.

Like thesis advisors, thesis readers should have a terminal degree in their field. Your readers should be familiar with the Honors Thesis process and agree to the timeline. It is your responsibility to provide them with the handbook/link and to discuss requirements and timelines with them. Exceptions to this requirement will be made on a case-by-case basis with demonstrated need and the approval of an Academic Counselor (i.e., a specialized area of study for which no available faculty are available to serve as a reader.)

3. You must have your thesis proposal approved by your three-member Thesis Committee prior to beginning data collection.

You should never begin data collection without verifying that all three members of your committee are comfortable with your plan of action. The best way to ensure that your committee is comfortable with your plan is to have your committee members approve the thesis proposal (as indicated by their signatures on the Thesis Proposal Approval Form). Students who register for two semesters of an Honors Thesis/Capstone Project (4993) course should obtain their committee members’ approval of the proposal during the first semester in which they are registered for a 4993 course. The thesis proposal must be approved and the Thesis Proposal Approval Form must be signed by the thesis advisor and both readers before it can be submitted to the Honors College.

4. Students must submit their completed thesis according to the deadlines in order for the thesis to count toward Honors graduation requirements.

5. Students who are registered in a 4993 course must present their thesis proposal (semester one) and completed thesis (semester two). In the Fall, students will produce a three-minute video about their research and in the Spring, students will present a formal research poster at the Research and Creative Inquiry Showcase sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Research. Students who plan to graduate with Highest Honors but do not register for a 4993 course must present their results in the term in which they are graduating.

6. The thesis proposal and the thesis must follow format/style guidelines described in the Honors Thesis Manual of Style at the back of this Handbook.

II. WHAT IS AN HONORS THESIS?

The Honors thesis is a respected hallmark of an Honors degree. The thesis project provides the opportunity for a student – in close consultation with an expert member of the faculty – to define and carry through a line of research or a creative enterprise appropriate to the conclusion of a serious and substantial undergraduate program of study.

The most common type of Honors thesis project is executed entirely as a written piece of work. Within the category of written projects, the most common type is an academic or scholarly work that reports on the results of the student's original research. ***But writing a thesis is different from writing just another research paper.*** First, it is a more substantial piece of work, both in terms of effort and length. Second, writing the thesis involves a cycle of writing, receiving feedback, and rewriting, etc. Students who write an Honors thesis never turn in a single draft and have it approved by all their committee members. Instead, they work as apprentices through the process of writing scholarly work and write multiple drafts. The ultimate goal is to do excellent work and write an excellent (and original) paper.

Third, the thesis represents ORIGINAL work. A research thesis tackles a problem or part of a problem that others have not yet addressed adequately or completely or it approaches the problem in a new way. Library research into what others have done is an essential first step, but a research-based Honors thesis goes beyond this to include your own insights, ideas, and/or collection of data. What distinguishes an Honors thesis from a research paper that might be written for a regular, upper-division, 3-credit course is the necessity for you to go beyond what others have written and to think critically about the topic at hand, to bring your own ideas to bear on the topic, and/or to collect and report on new information that expands knowledge in your academic discipline. An Honors thesis is not, however, a Master's thesis or a Ph.D. dissertation and should be, correspondingly, smaller in scope. The Honors thesis is a large research (or creative) project that can be pursued successfully in two to three semesters as part of a normal undergraduate course load. We expect that the Honors thesis will exemplify the highest undergraduate standard in its ideas, methodology, accuracy, clarity, reasoning, and presentation.

Examples of topics that have been addressed in research-based Honors theses include: (1) the effects of two types of diet on the growth and development of members of different types of fire ant colonies; (2) testing the hypothesis that members of a collectivist culture access memories about others more quickly than can members of an individualist culture; (3) an analysis of the issues involved in a current policy debate; (4) a discussion of the legal implications of developments in reproductive technology (including taking a position on that debate); (5) an analysis of Dorothy Sayers' perspective on the place of intellectual women in early twentieth century society; (6) identifying the electronic architecture of developing granule cells in the rat dentate gyrus; (7) an analysis of the historical change in the celebration of *El Dia de los Muertos* in San Antonio; or (8) a theoretical investigation of the unusual reactivity of 1-methoxy-1,3-cyclohexadine with methanol.

While there are creative elements to the standard written research thesis, ***a second type of Honors thesis is primarily a creative work.*** For an English major, the thesis might involve creative writing – the preparation of a novella or play or a collection of short stories or poetry. Students in majors such as art, music, or architecture may produce a work in a medium appropriate for their major. An art student might paint or sculpt a series of original works. An architecture major might design a building. A music major might write one or more musical compositions or learn to perform a work or set of works that he or she might not have to learn as part of the standard curriculum. Students in a variety of fields might produce a video documentary as part of their thesis. Students may also write curriculum or business plans, develop a website, or plan and evaluate some type of event (e.g., a fund-raiser). ***It is the responsibility of the student's thesis committee to judge if the creative work deserves to be considered a capstone experience to a student's academic program.***

While the majority of students who have produced creative Honors theses have written novellas or collections of short stories or poetry, other examples of creative Honors thesis projects include: (1) casting bronze sculptures in the method of the ancients (an art major); (2) writing a lab manual for a course in Developmental Biology (a biology major); (3) writing a manual to prepare voice majors for the opera audition process (a music major); (4) learning and performing a variety of pieces by two Spanish composers and placing the work in the context of their times (a music major); (5) designing a mural to represent the history of the planet for the Science Building (a multidisciplinary sciences major); and (6) creating a sculpture for the Texas Sustainable Research Institute (an art major). ***Honors students are encouraged to think creatively in designing a project that fits what they want to learn!***

Although a creative project can form the basis of a thesis, it is not the complete thesis! To be accepted as an Honors thesis, ***A CREATIVE WORK MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A WRITTEN ANALYSIS!*** This written analysis should include: (1) an introduction in which the student explains what s/he chose to do and what his/her

personal and academic goals were in attempting the project; (2) the creative work itself or a brief written description of the creative piece (if it is not in text form); and (3) *a reflective evaluative section* in which the student evaluates the results of the project. The introduction should address questions such as why the student chose the particular approach used, why the student selected the particular work or works to be performed or created, and what the student hoped to gain or learn in doing the project. The evaluative discussion should address how the student met or failed to meet the original goals of the project and what the student would do differently (or the same) if s/he were to attempt the project again.

A third type of thesis might be called the Problem-Solving thesis. Examples of this type of thesis, which may be completed by students in any major, include the development and (pilot) implementation of educational materials or a training program (possibly with an assessment of the program's effectiveness), the preparation of a public awareness campaign, the design of an advertising campaign, the development of a business plan, an engineering design project, the creation of a computer program or a website, or an extensive study for a community client. Again, *a problem-solving thesis must include a written analysis, as described for creative projects, as well as appropriate documentation of the product.*

Additional examples of creative projects and problem-solving theses include: (1) creating, implementing, and evaluating a small group discussion unit on cancer for use in an Honors biology course; (2) learning to perform a Schubert song cycle and producing a written document on Schubert's compositional techniques, a translation of the text, and development of publicity materials; (3) writing a children's book that addresses prejudice with an accompanying text that describes the development of the book and explains its elements and objectives; (4) creating a manual of environmental science projects for use in an elementary school; or (5) developing a plan for opening a business called "Just Imagine," where children come and engage in pretend play.

Most students employ an approach to the Honors thesis that is appropriate to their particular field of study. For example, a student in the sciences is most often does a project that involves laboratory research; a student in the humanities most often does library research, combined with critical analysis; a student in the social sciences might conduct survey research, a laboratory study, a case study, or content analysis; a student in the fine and performing arts typically produces a creative work. No particular approach is required. *You and your committee determine the methods and approach to the project.* It is difficult to anticipate all the variations of projects that may be undertaken to qualify as an Honors thesis. If you and your advisor are unsure whether your project is acceptable, you or s/he should contact the Honors College Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects. Whatever type of thesis you choose to do, it is essential that you select a topic that truly interests you. A topic that does not engage you will quickly become boring and onerous, a task unpleasant to both you and your advisor—a task soon avoided and unlikely to be completed.

Examples of thesis students' Honors theses are available on under "Thesis Examples" in our Honors College website: <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/forms>.

III. GETTING STARTED

When Should I Start My Thesis?

The sooner you start, the better off you will be. In most cases, however, students are not ready to start their Honors thesis until they have completed at least 60 hours. Students in highly technical fields may need additional coursework before they have enough background to do a thesis in their field.

Students should begin planning for the thesis no later than the beginning of their junior year (four semesters before graduation) and should ideally begin their thesis by the middle of their junior year (with three semesters left before graduation). Students in the sciences and social sciences typically need to start earlier than students in the arts, business, education, and humanities, as they often have to master experimental techniques before they can begin their own project. One problem with waiting to begin in the senior year is that you run the risk of delaying your graduation if problems arise with the completion of your thesis.

Finding a Thesis Topic and a Thesis Advisor

The biggest fear most students have when they consider doing a thesis is that they will be unable to find a topic. While finding a topic can be difficult, the more research you do and the more you talk to others, the more

likely you are to find a topic that suits you. Keep in mind that ***you do not have to develop the topic all on your own!*** Doing a thesis is similar to finding a position as an apprentice. Your thesis advisor has a great deal more experience in developing new research ideas than you do. **Make sure to use your thesis advisor and other faculty members as a resource!** It may be helpful to keep in mind something that Dr. David Senseman, a former Honors faculty member, is fond of saying:

“Dumb students do a project that their professor recommends. Smart students do a project that they think up themselves. *Really* smart students do a project that their professor recommends.”

Selecting a topic and selecting a thesis advisor are inextricably linked. Some students identify a topic first and then use that to help guide them to an advisor. Others identify an advisor first – a faculty member with whom they have a good relationship – and then use that relationship to guide them to a topic.

Ideally, your topic will be something that interests you already – perhaps something you have learned about in a course, something you have read, or even a hobby. When you have an idea for a project that interests you, then you should find an advisor with interest and expertise in that area. If you are not familiar with the specialties of faculty in your discipline, you can contact the Honors College Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects and request assistance in how to identify a faculty member whose interests match or overlap with yours. While identifying a topic on your own is wonderful, you should be prepared for faculty members to tell you that your understanding of the field is naïve or that your topic is too broad or unmanageable. You should also be prepared for some faculty members to tell you that, while your idea is very interesting, they cannot serve as your advisor because your project is not closely related to their research specialty. When you develop a topic completely on your own, you may have difficulty finding an advisor who is willing to work with you.

Not having a topic in mind does not mean that you cannot do a thesis. Students who do not have a topic in mind have one advantage: they will not have their ideas rejected – although they may be more likely to end up with a project that is not as interesting to them. If you do not have a topic in mind, it can be useful to find an advisor first. You can approach a faculty member whose course interested you and ask him or her for assistance in developing a topic. Often, that faculty member will help you develop a project that fits with his or her line of research. If you have a general subject area in mind (e.g., social psychology, physiology, modern literature, business ethics), you can ask the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects to help you identify faculty members who have interests in those areas. You can then approach those faculty members to ask for assistance in developing a topic.

Another good way to identify a potential thesis advisor is to make use of the internet. Websites for most departments at UTSA list faculty research interests. Even if you have no idea what specific sub-field of your discipline is most interesting to you, you can find out a lot about what topics might be of interest to you by reading about faculty members in your discipline on the website. If you have interests in science or health, you can also make use of the website for the University of Texas Health - San Antonio (UTHealth-SA).

It is often easier to choose an advisor than it is to choose a topic. You should choose your advisor by taking into consideration both the faculty member's expertise in an area that interests you and the potential for you to develop a close working relationship with that faculty member. One of the most rewarding aspects of completing the thesis is developing a personal and intellectual relationship with your thesis advisor. Think about a professor whose classes you have particularly enjoyed or a professor you have gotten to know during office hours or in other contexts outside the classroom. Even if that professor turns out not to be the right advisor because his or her research area does not match your interests, s/he can often help direct you to an appropriate advisor. In addition, the original faculty member will be someone whom you want to consider asking to serve as a reader on your thesis.

A thesis topic should be neither too broad nor too narrow. A topic that is too broad, such as "Juvenile Delinquency," is simply not manageable. What do you want to know about juvenile delinquency? Juvenile delinquency where or among whom? A topic that is too narrow, such as "Police Response to Juvenile Delinquency in Seguin, Texas: May 1997," may not yield enough results for a meaningful analysis. You need to work with your advisor to select a topic that will result in a thoughtful, credible, high-quality thesis within a time frame of two to possibly three semesters.

It will probably take time for you to cut the problem down to feasible proportions. Keep in mind that this project will not be the last word on your topic. Either you or others will follow up on the ideas you address in your thesis. Most original thesis topics need to be scaled down before they become manageable and you can make

adjustments at any point in the process. ***It is up to you and your thesis committee to set the boundaries for your project.*** You and your committee will need to agree on everything from the number of books you will read, the number of participants or observations, the expected length of the finished work, etc. You may change your mind on these points as the project progresses, but it is helpful to begin by defining these items in advance.

As you explore options for thesis topics, keep in mind that ***the most important factor in completing an Honors thesis is your interest.*** You need to enjoy what you propose to study. You need to take ownership of the project. Nothing will cripple your progress more than working on a thesis that does not interest you. How do students get into that situation? Often by having a professor persuade them to do something that does not really interest them. ***Thus, we strongly advise you to pick a topic that interests you.***

Note: If you will be working in a research lab, you will want to ask questions about when work needs to be completed. In some cases, you may be expected to show up to the lab on evenings or weekends. For example, if your lab runs experiments on the ninth day of a tadpole's life, you are going to have to be available no matter when the ninth day of that tadpole's life falls – and you will not be able to control when that tadpole is born.

Does My Thesis Advisor Have to Be a Member of the UTSA Faculty?

Your thesis advisor does not have to be a member of the UTSA faculty. In fact, numerous UTSA Honors students have completed their Honors thesis with an advisor who was a member of the faculty at UTHealth- SA or other individuals in the community. If a potential thesis advisor leaves UTSA and takes a position at another college or university, you may continue to work with him or her. You may also find a faculty member at another institution (e.g., Trinity University or St. Mary's University) to serve as your thesis advisor. ***The only rule is that a thesis advisor who is not a member of the UTSA faculty must hold a terminal degree in his or her field (e.g., a PhD, MD, JD, or MFA).***

What If the Person Who Knows Most about My Topic Does Not Have a Terminal Degree?

In some very rare instances, students have received approval to work with a thesis advisor (or reader) who does not have a terminal degree (e.g., a PhD, JD, or MD). If you believe that there is an ideal thesis advisor (or reader) for you but that individual does not hold a terminal degree, you can request permission to work with that individual from the Honors College Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects. To receive this approval, the person whom you want as your thesis advisor (or reader) must be a member of the UTSA faculty (not a graduate student) and you must be able to demonstrate that this individual has special expertise that others at UTSA do not have.

How Do I Approach a Potential Thesis Advisor?

Approach potential thesis advisors with as much confidence as you can muster and as much information as you can gather. How you approach a potential thesis advisor may depend on how certain you are that the professor in question is the right advisor for you. If you are certain you want that individual for an advisor and know what topic you want to pursue, you can go in, introduce yourself as a member of the Honors College, explain that you want to complete an Honors thesis, and explain what topic or topics interest you. If you think you might want that professor for an advisor but are not certain what topic you wish to pursue, you can introduce yourself as a member of the Honors College, explain that you wish to complete an Honors thesis, indicate that you would be interested in working with him or her, and ask the professor if s/he has a project that you might be able to work on. Flattery can be useful (e.g., "I decided to approach you because I really enjoyed your Physiology class and I felt that I would be interested in research in physiology and would enjoy and benefit from the opportunity to work with you."). If you do not have a personal acquaintance with the potential thesis advisor, you may also ask the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects to contact the faculty member for you.

When you approach a potential thesis advisor, be as prepared and informed as possible, both about the thesis experience and your potential advisor. If your potential advisor has no experience mentoring an Honors student, be prepared to refer him/her to this Handbook. You want to appear organized, responsible, and thoughtful. ***You should always do as much research as possible on a potential thesis advisor's line of research!*** Go to the library or look on the internet and read several of the potential advisor's most recent papers. Not only will you look more intelligent and more professional if you have read several of your potential advisor's

papers, but reading the papers is a good way for you to find out if you find the work interesting. You will impress a potential advisor if you come in and say, "I decided to approach you because I read your article *The Ironic Effects of Thought Suppression* and I was intrigued that research on thought suppression might help us identify individuals who are at risk for depression." It would, of course, be more impressive – but not essential – to use what you read to pose a new question (e.g., "The paper made me wonder whether people who are at risk for depression try to endorse positive feelings, but are less certain about those feelings.").

Keep in mind that finding a thesis advisor may take time. You may need to approach many different individuals to discuss their work before you find both a topic and an advisor that feel right to you.

Do I Have to Do the Thesis in My Major?

You do not have to complete the thesis in your major or with a faculty member from your academic discipline. Honors students sometimes complete their thesis in the field of their minor. A few have chosen to do a thesis in a field in which they have taken several courses. Examples of students who have crossed disciplinary lines to work on a thesis include: (1) an accounting major who wrote a novella that focused on a businessman's ethical challenges; (2) an English major who wrote a plan for an after-school program for at-risk youth in a small town; (3) a communication major who developed a proposal for preventing HIV/AIDS among inner-city, homosexual males; (4) an economics major who wrote about the myth of the hero's journey, as depicted in comic books; or (5) a chemistry major who wrote a paper in which he analyzed the scientific claims of Holocaust deniers.

Keep in mind, however, that faculty are more likely to agree to work with a student who is majoring in their own academic discipline. In particular, students who are not English majors pursuing a concentration in creative writing often have difficulty finding a faculty member willing to supervise them through a creative project. Typically, you need to "speak" the language of the discipline to do work in that discipline.

Is it Okay to Re-work an Old Paper or Project?

A thesis that builds on and further develops work you have already done can be a fine piece of work. Many students have developed thesis topics out of papers they completed for Honors Contracts or for upper-division courses. *What is not legitimate is simply to recycle, with minor additions or changes, a paper or papers already completed and submitted for a grade.* A student who proposes to add a different introduction or a longer conclusion or more examples or illustrations to an already existing paper is certainly not proposing anything that can be considered the capstone of an Honors education.

How Do I Find My Thesis Readers?

Once you and your thesis advisor settle on a topic, you will need to select two additional readers for your thesis committee – with your advisor's help. If your advisor is not a member of the Honors Faculty, one of the two additional readers will need to be a member. The two readers should be individuals who can help you in the completion of your project. It is best to choose readers whose expertise adds to the knowledge that your thesis advisor provides. You can also choose someone whom you know will nurture you and help you deal with the stress involved in doing a complex project. While it is okay for you to suggest your own readers (e.g., a faculty member with whom you have a good relationship), you should always ask your thesis advisor how s/he feels about specific readers – and monitor your thesis advisor's response closely. ***You do not want to choose a reader who does not get along with your thesis advisor!***

Like the thesis advisor, ***readers should hold a terminal degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D., M.F.A.)*** in their field of expertise – unless they have unusual expertise in a field. If you or your advisor feels someone without a terminal degree is an ideal candidate for your thesis committee, you may contact the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects to argue your case.

How Do I Approach Potential Thesis Readers?

Although your thesis advisor should help you identify your readers, ***it is your responsibility to ask the readers if they are willing to serve on your thesis committee.*** Unless your thesis advisor offers to do so on your behalf, you will be expected to approach your potential readers to ask them to serve on your committee. Once again, ***you should be prepared before you approach your potential readers.*** It is a good idea to write up a one-page description of your topic and approach (like the paragraph you will need to submit with the Thesis

Information Form by census date of the first term in which you register for a 4993 course). You can then email this description to your potential readers or drop it off to them along with a request to serve as a reader on your thesis committee and a time-line that specifies when you plan to complete the written portions of your thesis. Explain to the potential readers that you value their input and assistance.

Responsibilities Involved in the Thesis Advisor/Student Relationship

Your thesis advisor should be willing to meet with you on a regular basis. As soon as your thesis advisor has agreed to work with you, these meetings should begin and should continue at **weekly intervals** until the thesis is complete. The purpose of these meetings is for you to ask questions and seek advice and for the advisor to give advice, direction, and encouragement. ***One of the major mistakes students make is not meeting often enough with their thesis advisor!!*** Let the regularly scheduled meetings help you meet your deadlines!

Your advisor should help you refine and focus your interests into a manageable project and should help you develop a strategy and a timetable for the work's successful completion. Your advisor will read ***several drafts*** of your thesis proposal and thesis, and will provide you with detailed feedback on the drafts (as well as on other activities you engage in as part of your research). ***An Honors thesis should always go through multiple revisions. You are expected to give your advisor ample time to read/view and comment on each version/revision!!*** You are also responsible for making the appointments with your advisor and making sure to show up for each of those appointments. Keep in mind that you will want to ask your thesis advisor to write letters of recommendation or serve as a reference for you in the future. The responsibility and dedication you demonstrate in working on your thesis will be important factors in your advisor's willingness to recommend you.

In summary, your thesis advisor should be willing to:

- meet with you on a regular and frequent basis (ideally at least once per week)
- help you define an appropriate scope for the project
- set forth clear expectations for the length of your thesis
- read your work in a timely fashion
- help you identify readers
- help you identify the resources necessary to complete the project
- communicate with your readers to ensure common understanding of project length, criteria for assessment, and other conditions and assumptions involving the project.

In response, you must be willing to:

- meet with your thesis advisor on a regular and frequent basis (and not chronically cancel, arrive late, or miss appointments)
- take responsibility for arranging meeting dates
- meet all deadlines that you and your thesis advisor set together and notify your thesis advisor if you are having problems that interfere with your ability to meet deadlines or attend appointments
- work in the lab when you have committed to do so.

Lab research (especially in the sciences) often requires that you become a dedicated member of a research TEAM, which means that you may sometimes be expected to help your lab mates with their research and, in turn, may receive their help on your project.

Responsibilities Involved in the Reader/Student Relationship

While you will work most closely with your thesis advisor, ***you are also expected to work closely with your readers as you develop your ideas, plan your method of doing the project, and write the thesis.*** You should anticipate that your readers will have their own suggestions that they will want you to act on and changes and revisions that they will want you to make. You need to address these suggestions and revisions. ***Readers do not have to accept (and sign) the thesis until they are satisfied that the work is of Honors quality.*** Creating a thesis is not an assignment that you simply hand in at the end of the semester and receive a grade for it.

It is an ongoing collaborative process among you, your advisor, and your readers. Sometimes readers can seem to be more demanding than your thesis advisor!

If your thesis project involves data collection (as most work in the sciences and social sciences does), **you MUST make sure your readers approve of your methods before you begin collecting data!** It is neither appropriate nor wise to find your thesis readers after you have already begun (or finished) collecting your data. Your readers may be frustrated if they have not had the opportunity to provide input or feedback into the design of the study. In the worst-case scenario, they may refuse to approve and sign off on your completed thesis because they believe you should have approached the study differently. ***You are also likely to be more satisfied with your project if you give your full committee a chance to provide you with input at all stages of the process.***

Your readers should be willing to meet with you on a regular basis from the time you begin your thesis until you complete it. Those regular meetings should take place no less often than once a month and, ideally, every two to three weeks. ***It is your responsibility to keep your readers apprised of your progress! A major mistake students make is not giving their advisors and, especially, readers, enough time to read and comment on their drafts and request revisions!!*** You will not be able to turn your thesis in to the Honors College when you expect to unless you have given your thesis advisor and readers ample time to demand revisions (see the section on Deadlines in this Handbook). You always need to ask your advisor and readers how much time they need to read and respond to drafts of your work and when they expect to see a first draft of various sections of the thesis proposal and thesis.

In summary, your thesis readers should be willing to:

- meet with you on a regular basis (no less than once per month)
- help you define an appropriate scope for the project
- set forth clear expectations for the length of your thesis
- read your work in a timely fashion
- help you identify the necessary resources to complete the project.

In response, you must be willing to:

- keep in touch with your readers on a regular basis (and not cancel or miss appointments or arrive late)
- involve your readers in all decisions relating to the content of your thesis
- inform your readers of the deadlines that you and your thesis advisor have set together and meet those deadlines
- notify your readers if you are having problems that interfere with your ability to meet deadlines or attend appointments.

Keep in mind that your thesis is not complete until it is approved by your full thesis committee – your thesis advisor and your two readers. Members of your thesis committee signal their approval of your thesis work by signing the Thesis Proposal Approval Form or the signature page for your completed thesis, linked on <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>. Members of your thesis committee should not sign the Thesis Proposal Approval Form or signature page unless and until they believe the work is of the quality expected of a UTSA Honors student. The Thesis Proposal Approval Form and template for the signature page are available at the end of this document.

Do My Thesis Advisor and Readers Have to Meet?

Whether your thesis advisor and readers choose to meet is up to them. Most students work separately with their advisor and readers, with each individual providing independent feedback. It can be a good idea, however, to schedule at least one meeting with your thesis advisor and readers early in the process so that all parties are clear on what the expectations are and so that problems originating from different perspectives can be ironed out in advance. Keep in mind, however, that members of the faculty are typically very busy people and it may be difficult to schedule a meeting of your full committee.

Can I Have More Than Two Readers?

You are required to have at least a three-person committee – your advisor and two readers. Beyond that, you can have as many readers as you choose. Keep in mind, however, that the larger your thesis committee is, the more people you have to please. Thus, it may be wisest to keep to a three-person committee. On some occasions, however, students want to ask someone who does not have a terminal degree to serve on their thesis committee. For example, students in the sciences often believe they need assistance with writing and, hence, wish to have a former English instructor serve on their committee. In most cases, however, the English instructors whom students know – their instructors for WRC 1013 or 1023 – do not hold a terminal degree. In such cases, students are welcome to invite an English instructor to serve as a third reader (and fourth committee member).

When Do I Have to Identify the Members of my Thesis Committee?

The thesis advisor must be identified before a student can register for a 4993 course, as the thesis advisor has to sign the Honors Thesis Proposal/Thesis Registration Form, linked on <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>. Readers should be identified no later than two weeks into the first term in which the student begins work on the Honors thesis proposal or thesis.

Research (and Projects) Involving Human Subjects

If you plan to conduct research involving human participants, you have an additional step to take in completing your thesis: **You MUST obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for any research involving human participants.** If your thesis advisor has already obtained approval from the IRB for the study you are conducting, s/he can submit a revision, adding you as an approved undergraduate researcher. If your thesis advisor has not yet obtained approval for the study, you will need to submit a proposal to the IRB. ***You may NOT involve human subjects in any research activity until you have obtained IRB approval!*** **The process of obtaining IRB approval to conduct research involving human subjects can be extremely time-consuming!** Therefore, you must plan ahead – especially if you will be working with participants in protected classes, such as prisoners or children. Your thesis advisor should be able to guide you through the process of obtaining IRB approval. You can also find instructions on the Research Office's website (<http://research.utsa.edu/oric/irb/>).

If you plan to film or photograph human subjects, you typically only need to obtain a video release from the individuals whose images will be captured in your thesis work. If your thesis advisor cannot provide you with a video release form, you should consult with the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects to help obtain one.

Can I Ever Change the Members of my Thesis Committee?

You are expected to keep the same committee members throughout the process of completing the thesis. We recognize, however, that, in some cases, the composition of a thesis committee must change. While committee members, once approved, are allowed to continue serving as a thesis advisor or a thesis reader even if they leave UTSA, some may not agree to do so. Or, if a committee member goes on leave, it may be difficult or impossible for a student to continue working with that individual.

Students who wish to change the composition of their thesis committee after the Honors College has approved the committee must request permission to do so from the Honors Academic Counselor in writing. While there may be a variety of circumstances that warrant a change in the composition of a student's thesis committee, students should be forewarned that an individual committee member's belief that the work is not Honors quality is not one of those circumstances.

How Can I Find Financial Support for My Thesis Research?

Most Honors thesis projects are not costly to the student, but some do involve travel, materials, and supplies that students cannot easily afford. In many cases, especially if your project addresses the same line of research as your advisor's does, your advisor (especially one in the sciences) will use his or her own research funds to pay for materials and equipment necessary for your project. See the Development Award page for possible funding: <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/scholarships/development-award>.

IV. THE MECHANICS

Registering for an Honors Thesis/Honors Capstone Project (4993) Course

Students who wish to graduate with Highest Honors are not required to register for an Honors Thesis/Capstone Project course, but most students choose to do so. An Honors Thesis course is any course with the number 4993. That includes HON 4993 as well as courses in various majors (BIO 4993, CS 4993, EGR 4993, PSY 4993, etc.). ***Most students register for an Honors Thesis/Capstone Project (4993) course for two semesters*** since an Honors thesis should reflect a minimum of six (6) credits of work. You may, however, choose to complete only three (3) hours in a 4993 course or 0 hours of 4993. If you do not need additional hours and do not wish to pay for them, you may complete the Honors thesis on your own time. ***You should keep in mind, however, that your Honors thesis is still expected to reflect a minimum of 300 hours of work (the equivalent of 6 credit hours), even if you do not register for a 4993 course.***

To register for a 4993 course in any academic discipline, you must complete an Honors Thesis Proposal/Thesis Registration Form, linked on <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>. The form requires you to identify your thesis advisor and a topic area (in one to two sentences). It also requires you to specify your expected date of graduation. The Honors College will determine whether you should register in HON 4993 or a 4993 course in a specific academic discipline. HON 4993 is typically reserved for students whose thesis advisor is not on the faculty at UTSA, whose thesis advisor is a faculty member in the Honors College, or whose major does not offer a 4993 course. **You will need a new Honors College Capstone Project Thesis Registration Form in EACH term in which you register for a 4993 course.**

Your thesis advisor must sign the Honors Thesis Course Registration Form before the Honors College will register you for a 4993 course! You cannot register for a 4993 course without a thesis advisor. Students may complete the form and register for a 4993 course at any time during the registration period, although it is best if they do so before the start of the term – and before payment deadline.

Registering for an Independent Study Course before Beginning the Thesis

If you expect your project to be unusually ambitious or if you need a semester to learn laboratory techniques and do background reading, you may register for an Independent Study Course *before* you register for a 4993 course. In most cases, the Independent Study course, which always has the course number 4913, will be in the UTSA advisor's academic discipline (e.g., BIO 4913, PSY 4913, ENG 4913). If your thesis advisor is not a UTSA faculty member or has his/her primary appointment in the Honors College, you will register for HON 4913. All 4913 courses, regardless of discipline, count toward the number of Honors hours required for graduation. You may wish to consult with Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects of the Honors College to determine whether you should take an Independent Study course before beginning the thesis.

You are encouraged to begin your thesis early in this manner! Students in STEM fields and psychology almost always need an Independent Study semester before their two semesters of Honors thesis course work (4993). The sooner you begin your thesis, the more likely you are to complete it on time. A handful of students have also used an Independent Study course – inserted between two semesters of Honors thesis (4993) course work – to earn credit when their project turns out to be larger than they expected. Registering for a semester of Independent Study in addition to two semesters of 4993 can give you an extra semester in which to complete the work (since students in most majors can only earn 6 credits through 4993 courses).

Registering for a 4913 Independent Study course requires the completion of an Independent Study Course form (<http://utsa.edu/registrar/forms/independentstudy.pdf>), which must be signed by your thesis advisor, your Honors academic advisor, the Department Chair for the Thesis advisor's Department, and the Associate Dean of the College overseeing that academic discipline. Once you obtain all the signatures, you then turn the form in to Enrollment Services for enrollment.

Deadlines and Requirements for Students Registered in an Honors Thesis Course

Students who plan to register for six (6) hours of an Honors Thesis/Capstone Project (4993) course must meet the following deadlines IN THE FIRST SEMESTER:

1. The Honors Thesis Proposal/Thesis Registration Form (linked on <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>) must be submitted to the Honors College by second week of the semester (see UTSA [Academic Calendar](#) for date) in the term in the student is registered.
2. A complete draft of the thesis proposal must be submitted to the thesis advisor by November 1 in a fall term, April 1 in a spring term, or July 5 in a summer term.
3. A complete draft of the thesis proposal must be submitted to the thesis readers by November 15 in a fall term, April 15 in a spring term, or July 20 in a summer term.
4. If in the Fall term, the proposal must be presented in a three -minute video. Details and training will be provided through the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects. If in the Spring term, the proposal must be presented in professional research in poster format at the Office of Undergraduate Research's Undergraduate Research & Creative Inquiry Showcase in mid-April. See website for details: <http://research.utsa.edu/academic-research/undergraduate/showcase/>.
5. The APPROVED completed thesis with signature page (template linked on <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>) must be submitted via email in one PDF file to honors@utsa.edu by 5:00 p.m. on December 15 in the fall term, April 15 in the spring term, or July 20 in the summer term. [NOTE: Committee members who are unavailable to sign the Thesis Proposal Approval Form may send an electronic signature via email to the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects.]

Students who are registered for their SECOND semester of an Honors Thesis (4993) course must meet the following deadlines:

1. The Honors Thesis Proposal/Thesis Registration Form (linked on <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>) must be submitted to the Honors College by second week of the semester (see UTSA [Academic Calendar](#) for date) in the term in the student is registered.
2. A complete draft of the thesis must be submitted to the thesis advisor by November 1 in a fall term, April 1 in a spring term, or July 5 in a summer term.
3. A complete draft of the thesis must be submitted to the thesis readers by November 15 in a fall term, April 15 in a spring term, or July 20 in a summer term.
4. If in the Fall term, the thesis must be presented in a 3 minute video. Details and training will be provided through the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects. If in the Spring term, the thesis must be presented in professional research poster format at the Office of Undergraduate Research's Undergraduate Research and Creative Inquiry Showcase in mid-April. See website for details. <http://research.utsa.edu/academic-research/undergraduate/showcase/>.
5. The APPROVED completed thesis with signature page (template linked on <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>) must be submitted via email in one PDF file to honors@utsa.edu by 5:00 p.m. on December 15 in the fall term, April 15 in the spring term, or July 20 in the summer term. [NOTE: Committee members who are unavailable to sign the Thesis Proposal Approval Form may send an electronic signature via email to the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects.]

Students who complete an Honors thesis in a SINGLE SEMESTER while enrolled in an Honors Thesis/Capstone Project (4993) course must meet the following deadlines:

1. The Honors Thesis Proposal/Thesis Registration Form (linked on <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>) must be submitted to the Honors College by second week of the semester (see UTSA [Academic Calendar](#) for date) in the term in the student is registered.
2. A complete draft of the thesis must be submitted to the thesis advisor by November 1 in a fall term, April 1 in a spring term, or July 5 in a summer term.
3. A complete draft of the thesis must be submitted to the readers by November 15 in a fall term, April 15 in a spring term, or July 20 in a summer term.

4. If in the Fall term, the thesis must be presented in a 3 minute video. Details and training will be provided through the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects. If in the spring term, the thesis must be presented in professional research in poster format at the Office of Undergraduate Research's Undergraduate Research & Creative Inquiry Showcase in mid-April. See website for details: <http://research.utsa.edu/academic-research/undergraduate/showcase/>.
5. The APPROVED completed thesis with signature page (template linked on <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>) must be submitted via email in one PDF file to honors@utsa.edu by 5:00 p.m. on December 15 in the fall term, April 15 in the spring term, or July 20 in the summer term. [NOTE: Committee members who are unavailable to sign the Thesis Proposal Approval Form may send an electronic signature via email to the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects.]

Students who complete an Honors thesis WITHOUT REGISTERING for a 4993 course must follow the same deadlines as if they were enrolled.

Failure to meet these deadlines will affect your grade for the Honors Thesis (4993) course and may delay your graduation! Members of your thesis committee are under no obligation to rush to read or approve your thesis if you do not turn in the required materials by the deadlines indicated. These deadlines were selected to allow students ample time to revise their thesis proposal and full thesis so that the final version of the thesis meets the standards of the thesis committee and the Honors College. The deadlines were also selected to ensure that faculty have ample time in which to read and comment on the work.

These deadlines protect you as well: If you can demonstrate that you met all deadlines in a timely fashion and one of your committee members fails to provide you with feedback in a timely fashion, you can appeal to the Honors College to have your thesis accepted and approved without the signature of one of your committee members.

Grading the Honors Thesis Course

Because an Honors Thesis committee is not supposed to sign off on any thesis work the committee members believe deserves less than a grade of "A," the typical grade for an Honors Thesis/Capstone Project (4993) course is an "A." ***If a student fails to meet the deadlines specified above, however, the student does not automatically receive an "A,"*** even if he or she manages to submit a signed thesis to the Office of the Honors College. In addition, regardless of any policy set by the Honors College, the instructor of record/thesis advisor can issue any grade he or she believes the student has earned.

The deadline for submitting a thesis proposal or a completed thesis is the last day of the final exam period in a given semester. ***Students who register for just one semester of a 4993 course receive a grade for that course only when they complete the full thesis (and have it signed by all three members of their committee) by the deadline – so you should register in the final term in which you expect to complete the work.*** The Office of the Honors College will notify thesis advisors as to whether students are registered for a first, second, or single semester of Honors Thesis at the time grades are due.

Students who register for two semesters of a 4993 course must work out an agreement with their thesis advisor as to how much work must be completed in the first semester to earn them a grade for that first semester. ***Students who plan to take two semesters of 4993 must complete at least their thesis proposal (and have it signed by their full committee) by the end of the first semester in order to earn a grade for the first semester.*** The thesis advisor may also stipulate that a portion of the actual thesis should also be completed before he or she will issue a grade for the first semester of a 4993 course. Typically, thesis advisors in the sciences and social sciences grant a grade for the first semester of 4993 once the thesis proposal is approved and submitted to the Office of the Honors College because the proposal represents a substantial portion of the eventual thesis. Since thesis proposals in the fine arts and humanities and thesis proposals for creative projects typically represent substantially less than half the work, ***thesis advisors who are supervising projects in the fine arts and humanities and creative endeavors are encouraged not to issue a grade for the first semester of a 4993 course unless the student has completed substantial work in addition to the thesis proposal.*** If students do not meet the last-day-of-finals deadline for turning in the thesis or thesis proposal (and any additional work the thesis advisor specifies), then the thesis advisor can either post a grade lower than an "A" or may issue a grade of Incomplete ("IN"). ***The student must directly ask the instructor to post the grade of Incomplete (IN) and must have a good explanation of the***

delay. In addition, University policy requires that the student have already completed at least 75% of the work to be awarded a grade of "IN."

The grade of "IN" will not be removed and replaced with a grade until the student files the signed thesis or thesis proposal (and any additional work) with the Office of the Honors College. **Grades of Incomplete automatically turn into an "F" on the last day of classes a year after the end of the semester in which the grade of "IN" was issued. In addition, students cannot graduate with a grade of "IN" on their record, so the "IN" must be replaced with a grade prior to Commencement.**

What Happens to My Grade if I Fail to Complete the Thesis?

Grading is more complicated for students who fail to complete their Honors thesis (or thesis proposal) prior to graduation. Failure to complete the Honors thesis automatically means, of course, that you will not graduate with Highest Honors. In addition, students who enroll in an Honors Thesis (4993) course and fail to complete the thesis (or thesis proposal) never receive a grade of "A," as that grade is reserved for completion of the work the student contracted to do in registering for a 4993 course – that is, the thesis or thesis proposal.

If you decide not to complete the thesis, you should contact the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects *as soon as you make the decision not to continue the thesis work.* The Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects will consult with your thesis advisor to determine what grade you deserve. If you fail to complete the project that you and your thesis advisor outlined, your thesis advisor will need to determine what alternative efforts (usually a paper) deserve a grade of "B," "C," and so on. He or she will also have to agree to a timeline for your completion of that remaining work.

Can I Use Honors Thesis Work to Meet Degree Requirements?

Students in most academic disciplines can use one or both semesters of their Honors thesis (4993) course work to meet upper-division, elective requirements in the major – as long as they do a thesis with a faculty major from their own academic discipline, so that the class falls in the students' major (e.g., BIO or CS 4993). Even HON 4993 can often be substituted for upper-division electives in the student's academic discipline (e.g., Biology when the student works with an advisor from the UTHSCSA). In History, students can request permission to substitute the Honors thesis course for the Senior Seminar. Some majors limit students to using only 3 hours of a 4993 course to meet upper-division degree requirements in the major and some majors do not have elective requirements within the major. ***Honors thesis (4993) hours can only be applied toward undergraduate degree requirements with the approval of your academic department. The guidelines listed above must be addressed on a case-by-case basis.*** You will need to discuss your own case with your Honors College advisor.

Students in disciplines, such as Music, Architecture, and Engineering, which require a capstone project may choose to expand their capstone project into their Honors thesis. Typically, the Honors thesis has a larger written component than does the capstone project. While students pursuing majors with capstone projects may complete the creative project for a course in their major, ***they must still follow Honors College requirements concerning the written portion of the project.*** That is, their thesis must include a written explanation and evaluation of the creative project.

Submitting Your Honors Thesis

The steps involved in filing your thesis are:

1. Re-write the thesis until your thesis advisor and two readers agree it is of Honors quality.
2. Complete the signature page with your committee.
3. Email the completed, approved Thesis with completed signature page to honors@utsa.edu by the last day of finals.

What If a Committee Member is Unavailable to Sign?

On some occasions, students complete their thesis and receive approval from their full committee, but an individual committee member is unavailable to sign the Thesis Proposal Approval Form or Thesis signature page. This occurs most frequently when a committee member works at an institution outside of San Antonio or when a committee member leaves town shortly before the end of the term. If a committee member has approved the

thesis, but is unable to sign the form when the thesis is due, that committee member may email the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects to state that he or she would sign if he or she were present at UTSA. The email notification can then count as a signature.

V. CONTENT OF THE HONORS THESIS PROPOSAL

Writing the Thesis Proposal

Your thesis proposal serves several purposes. Writing the proposal helps you organize your thoughts and determine exactly what you want to accomplish. While you are working on your project, your proposal will serve as a road map that will help keep you focused on your goals. Your proposal serves as a contract between you and your thesis committee. That is, it specifies what you need to do to complete the Honors thesis and earn the distinction of graduating with Highest Honors through the Honors College. Having all parties agree in advance on the nature of your project minimizes the chance of later misunderstandings.

Your proposal must explain why your project is worthwhile. How will it add to the body of knowledge that already exists in your field of study? You should outline not only the specific questions you hope to answer (e.g., whether 9-year-old children are more aware of their mothers' than their fathers' emotions), but also the larger questions that your project addresses (e.g., how gender differences in emotional expression develop). If you are doing a creative or problem-solving project, you should explain how and why the endeavor will be worthwhile for you to complete. The thesis proposal should present your case for your ideas.

In the sciences and social sciences, the thesis proposal typically contains the Introduction, Background, and Methods sections of the thesis itself. As a result, a proposal in these fields is usually fairly lengthy – perhaps 15 to 20 pages long. Essentially, your proposal should answer the following questions: (1) What is the point of the study? That is, what hypotheses will it test? What questions will it answer? (2) How does the study you propose relate to other work that has been done in the past? (3) How will the methods, design, and analysis you plan to use help you test your hypotheses and answer your questions? If you have difficulty addressing any of these questions, you probably need to question what you are doing. If you complete a good and detailed proposal for a project in the sciences and social sciences, the actual writing of your thesis will probably only entail adding two more sections – the Results and Discussion sections.

Proposals in the humanities and fine arts and proposals for creative or problem-solving projects are typically not as long as they are in the sciences and social sciences because more of the work is done *after* the proposal stage. Because of this, however, students working on creative or problem-solving projects or projects in the Humanities should plan to complete their thesis proposal well before the middle of the first semester in which they enroll in an Honors thesis (4993) course. The proposal for a project in the Humanities should still contain Introduction and Methods sections. Your Introduction should state your thesis (e.g., that post-modernism is a feminine aesthetic or that the works of Joaquin Turina have been incorrectly characterized as Spanish nationalism). It should also explain how your perspective, viewpoint, or argument differs from other researchers' analysis of the same material. Your Methods section should explain what primary and secondary sources you will examine and what you will be looking for as you examine these materials and argue your case.

If you are planning a creative or problem-solving project, your thesis proposal should define what the project will consist of (e.g., 6 poems and 4 short stories, a unit on cancer for use in an Honors Biology course, a plan for developing a new not-for-profit agency). It should explain the value of the product that you will produce. If your product will be a work of creative writing or some other artistic product, your proposal will also need to describe previous similar work you have produced or training you have in the area and explain how the proposed thesis project will extend that work along new lines. You will need to describe the themes you plan to address in this new work and how they connect to the themes addressed in your earlier work or other issues of concern for you. The thesis proposal should also place your proposed creative work in a larger context that is defined by the creative works of other individuals in your field. That is, how will your work relate to the works of other artists, authors, poets, musicians, etc.? You will also need to explain the medium or genre in which you plan to work and the artistic statement you expect to make with your work. Finally, you will want to explain what you personally hope to learn or gain from doing this project. The thesis proposal for a creative or problem-solving project that does not involve written work should also detail how you will document the product – i.e., through film, photographs, slides, etc.

Your thesis advisor and your readers should help you define the appropriate structure, content, and length for your thesis proposal! Since the thesis proposal is supposed to be written at a point when you have not yet done the research, you should be writing in the future tense – e.g., “I will...” or “The participants in the study will...”

Is it Possible to See Examples of Other Students' Thesis Proposals and Theses?

Examples of previous Honors College student theses can be found under “Examples” in the “Thesis” section on our webpage: <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/forms>.

What Happens If I Can't Do Everything I Planned in My Proposal?

As you work on your project, you may find that you will not be able to do exactly what you said you would do in your thesis proposal. This is a common occurrence and should not be a cause of major concern. Typically, the student and his or her thesis committee agree that the proposed project was too large or too broad, and the student and committee members come to an agreement on ways to narrow the focus of the project. Sometimes the student and his or her advisor discover that necessary materials or equipment are unavailable. They then consult with the other committee members and agree on ways to modify the project in light of that new information. It is also okay to change the focus of the project *as long as the full thesis committee agrees to changes in the focus!*

If you and your committee members cannot come to an agreement on how the project can be modified, you or your advisor may need to consult with the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects to find a solution. In addition, if you plan to make major changes from what you proposed, ***your thesis advisor should contact*** the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects to ***explain the circumstances and the changes.***

What Happens if I Don't Finish on Time?

If you do not file your completed thesis with the Office of the Honors College by the last day of finals week in the semester in which you intend to graduate, you will not be able to graduate with Honors in that semester. You will need to contact the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects to discuss your options. One option is to delay your Honors graduation until the next semester – which will give you time to complete and file the thesis. A second option is to choose not to graduate with Honors. Because you cannot graduate with a grade of Incomplete (“IN”) on your record, if you choose this second option, the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects and your thesis advisor will have to discuss what grade you should earn for the work you have completed. Keep in mind, though, that, if the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects and your thesis advisor believe you deserve a grade of “F” for your Honors Thesis (4993) course, ***you still may not be able to graduate if you need that course for your total number of degree hours or for a requirement in your major.*** If you plan to use the Honors Thesis (4993) course to meet major requirements in the College of Sciences or College of Engineering, you will not be able to graduate if you earn a grade of “D,” either, as all major and support work courses in those Colleges must be completed with a grade of “C” or higher.

If you are not graduating in the term in which you were supposed to complete your thesis, you should ask your thesis advisor to give you a grade of IN for your 4993 course. Once you receive the grade of IN, you have until the last day of classes in the term in which you graduate OR the last day of classes in the term one year after you were enrolled in the 4993 course – ***whichever comes FIRST*** – to complete the thesis and have the grade of IN removed. Keep in mind, however, that you will then need to complete the work on your thesis while you are also completing the work for the classes in which you are enrolled in that final term (or two). The quicker you complete the thesis, the better off you will be.

Under no circumstances will a student be allowed to complete a thesis or change the grade for a 4993 course once that grade of “IN” has rolled to an “F.”

VI. WRITING THE HONORS THESIS

The Order of the Thesis Components

Your Honors thesis should consist of the following sections:

1. Title Page
2. Signature page
3. Abstract (a 150-300 word summary of your thesis)
4. Acknowledgements (optional, but encouraged)
5. Table of Contents
6. The Thesis Body
7. References
8. Appendices (if applicable)

These sections are described in greater detail in the Honors Thesis Manual of Style at the end of this handbook.

The general rule is that you should follow the conventions of your academic discipline in preparing your thesis document, so the information below is provided as guidelines, rather than absolute rules. You and your thesis advisor may modify the structure of the thesis to fit your discipline and your goals.

Text of a Research-Based Thesis in the Sciences and Social Sciences

Typically, the body of a standard, research-based thesis will include the following sections:

- 1. Chapter 1: Introduction/Background:** The Introduction/Background should include a clear statement of the subject under investigation, the questions the thesis will attempt to answer, definitions of important terms, and a rationale for the study and the structure of the thesis. The Background section should also include a review of previous work on the topic and any sources that helped you develop your question or hypotheses. This section should explain how previous work led to the questions addressed in your thesis and the methods for answering them. In some cases, students will include the Introduction and Background in one chapter. [NOTE: This section could also be called the Literature Review.] If you are testing hypotheses, those hypotheses should be clearly stated (and numbered), typically toward the end of the Introduction. An Introduction also typically includes a brief summary of how the study will be conducted.

In the sciences and social sciences, the Introduction to the thesis may be essentially the same as the introduction to the thesis proposal. Although the two Introduction sections may be identical, keep in mind that you will need to change the tense from future tense (e.g., “The participants will answer...” or “The data will be collected...”) in the proposal to past tense (e.g., “The participants answered...” or “The data were collected...”) in the actual thesis.

- 2. Chapter 2: Materials and Methods:** This should include a detailed description of the materials and methods – the theoretical approach, instruments used, data collection and analysis, performance principles, etc. Again, as with the Introduction, if you plan to use essentially the same Methods section for your thesis as you did for your proposal, you will have to remember to change from future tense to past tense when you complete the thesis, and you will have to check to see if additional details need to be specified. For example, in your proposal, you may have said you would include 100 participants or 12 mice, but you ended up only including 96 participants or 10 mice. Now that you know who your participants were, you may also need to include additional information about them (their age, ethnicity, etc.). Also, you may have changed your procedures from your original proposal. Each of these changes and all this additional information needs to be documented.

This section often has subsections with sub-headers. For example, the **Methods** section may have subsections, such as **Participants, Procedures, Materials, Equipment**, etc. You and your thesis advisor should determine what the appropriate sub-sections are. If you will be using statistical analyses to interpret your results, your proposal should include a **Plan for Analysis** section as part of the **Materials and Methods** section, but when you complete the thesis, that Plan for Analysis should be incorporated into the **Results** section (see below).

- 3. Chapter 3: Presentation of Findings or Results:** This section of the thesis must provide a careful analysis of results with convincing evidence to support the main thesis presented in the introduction, along with an analysis of the results of testing the hypotheses presented in the introduction. Charts, tables, and figures or other graphic aids may be used in the presentation of results and should be incorporated into the text, rather than appended at the end of the thesis.
- 4. Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusions:** This section will summarize the results and significance of your research, attempt to explain any unexpected findings, discuss the limitations of the project, and address directions that future work in the area should take.

Text of a Thesis in the Humanities and Related Disciplines

Scholars from the humanities and related disciplines do not typically write a thesis that is a report on some type of data collection they conducted or gained access to (e.g., with human or animal subjects). Instead, they write a thesis that builds an argument. That argument or thesis statement should be a unique take on work in the field. An argument is a statement that can be supported or contradicted with evidence. For example, an art history student could decide s/he wants to make the argument that Paul Cézanne should be considered the Father of Modern Painting. S/he would then need to demonstrate why Cézanne deserves the title the Father of Modern Painting as well as why other artists (e.g., Picasso, Manet, Titian) should not be given that title. The goal is to convince the reader that the writer's perspective is substantial, relevant to the field, and reasonable through the use of argument.

This kind of thesis might resemble a long research paper in form, but it is different from a class paper. It tackles a problem that others have not yet addressed adequately or it approaches the problem from a new angle. Research into what others have said and done is the essential first step, but your thesis should go beyond prior work to include your own insights and critical thinking. You should have an acquaintance with the relevant scholarship and display originality in the formulation of your arguments.

A thesis in the humanities will always have an introductory chapter (Chapter 1) that presents this new argument and relates it to previous work, but the structure of the rest of the text is determined by the argument that the writer is attempting to present and by the writer and advisor's sense of what sub-arguments need to be developed to make the writer's case. The final chapter will always be the Conclusion, but the number of that Chapter may vary from thesis to thesis.

A thesis in non-scientific fields should have at least three chapters and will often have more:

- 1. Chapter 1: Introduction/Background/Literature Review.** The Introduction will have the thesis statement – that is, what you intend to argue in the thesis – as its centerpiece. A **thesis statement** is a short statement that summarizes the main point or claim of an essay, research paper, etc., and is developed, supported, and explained in the text by means of examples and evidence. Thus, your subsequent chapters will flesh out the argument.
- 2. Chapters 2+:** The middle chapters in this type of thesis address various aspects of the topic necessary to build the overall argument. There must be at least one chapter in between the Introduction and Discussion and most Honors theses will have at least two chapters in between the Introduction and Discussion, but you and your Committee are responsible for deciding how many chapters are necessary.
- 3. Chapter 3+: Conclusion.** In this final chapter of the Honors thesis, you sum everything up. Just as your introduction acts as a bridge that transports your readers into the “place” of your analysis, your conclusion should help them see why all your analysis and information should matter to them after they put the paper down. Your conclusion is your chance to have the last word on the subject. The conclusion allows you to have the final say on the issues you have raised in your paper, to summarize your thoughts, to demonstrate the importance of your ideas, and to propel your reader to a new view of the subject. It is also your opportunity to make a good final impression and to end on a positive note. Your conclusion goes beyond the assignment and allows you to consider broader issues, make new connections, and elaborate on the significance of your findings. Your conclusion gives your reader something to take away that will help them see things differently or appreciate your topic in personally

relevant ways. It can suggest broader implications that will not only interest your reader, but also enrich your reader's life in some way.

Text of a Creative Thesis

A creative thesis should ***never*** consist of just the creative work itself. In addition to whatever creative product a student decides to prepare, the creative thesis needs at a minimum two additional written sections – a proposal piece that explains the goals of the project and an evaluative piece that assesses whether and to what extent the student reached his or her goals. Thus, an Honors thesis that involves a creative presentation or a problem-solving project should contain the following sections:

- 1. Chapter 1: Introduction/Background/Plan.** This Introduction will describe what you were attempting to accomplish in preparing the creative work, what goals you set for yourself, and why you set those goals. It should also typically contain a discussion of the historical and cultural context of the work and should explain how your work is influenced by the work of other artists, writers, musicians, etc., in your field. If you are developing a manual, website, or curriculum, you should explain why you believe the project is necessary and valuable. The introduction should also describe how you approached the production of your creative work and the steps you took as you developed your work. It should explain why you chose the medium you chose (e.g., poetry, prose, sculpture, etc.) and the advantages and disadvantages of working in that medium. Your original thesis proposal may form a portion of or most of this section of your completed thesis. Keep in mind, however, that you should have written your thesis proposal in either the future or present tense (e.g., “My goal in doing this thesis will be/is to...”). Thus, if you are using your thesis proposal for Chapter 1 of the final thesis, then you will need to go back through the proposal and change to the past tense (e.g., “My goal in doing this thesis was to...”).
- 2. Chapter 2: The Creative Product.** This section will contain the actual creative work that you produced. If the product involved creative writing, then the text should appear here. If the product was a website, you should include printed copies of the various pages of the website. If the product is no written, you should refer the reader to the creative piece that is attached to the text – e.g., a CD, DVD, photographs, etc. If the product is a performance, the student should aim to video record the performance, although audio recording is acceptable. If the product is a visual one – e.g., sculptures or paintings – slides of the work should be included in this section.
- 3. Part 3: Evaluation.** This section should address a variety of issues, including whether or not you accomplished what you set out to accomplish, what problems you encountered that led you to modify the product, etc. You may also wish to describe the creative process you went through as you worked on the product – e.g., what changed for you, what did you learn as you worked? This section should also address your own feelings about the work you developed, what you might have done differently or would do differently the next time, etc.

While there may be more variation in the organization of the description of a creative work than there is in a standard research thesis, the written portion of the project should tell the reader exactly what you did, why you did it, how well (in your opinion) it turned out, and what you would do the same or differently if you did it again.

These sections of the thesis are further described in the Honors Thesis Style, available at the end of this Handbook. If you look for samples of creative works that are on file in the Thesis Archive, you should look for ones produced in the last few years, as some earlier creative thesis projects did not include the Plan and Evaluation sections that are described above. Even though not all students who have produced creative theses in the past have included these sections, ***current students who plan to use a creative work to earn the appropriate Honors distinction in the Honors College MUST include Plan and Evaluation sections with their creative products.***

How Long Should My Thesis Be?

While this is the most frequent question that students ask, there is no easy answer to this question. There is no set minimum or maximum length for an Honors thesis. The correct answer is, "However long it takes to cover your topic adequately." *Your thesis advisor and readers should help you determine how many pages it will take to do that and should give you some guidelines concerning the length of thesis they expect to see.* Keep in mind, though, that an Honors thesis is a major undertaking, so it is reasonable to expect the work to be longer than a paper for an individual class, although, in the sciences and social sciences, much of the time involved in writing a thesis goes into data collection, rather than writing. A look at the Thesis Archive indicates that papers in biology, chemistry, and psychology are typically 20-25 pages with a few as short as 15 pages and a few as long as 30 pages. Papers in mathematics and computer science have been as short as 10-15 pages and are rarely longer than 25 pages. In contrast, papers in history, sociology, English, and political science are more varied in length, ranging from 25 or 30 to as many as 75 or 80 pages, with most between 35 and 50 pages. Those figures for the length of the thesis refer to text *only* and not to references or bibliography sections and appendices. The Introduction and Evaluation section for a creative project should each probably be at least 5-8 pages in length.

What Special Stylistic Requirements Does my Thesis Have to Meet?

Stylistic requirements and guidelines are specified in the Honors Thesis Manual of Style, available at the end of this Handbook. You should follow specifications for footnotes and references or bibliography that are appropriate to your academic field. *Your thesis advisor and other committee members also may set any stylistic requirements they choose to set.*

Research and Note-Taking

Whatever the nature of the research you are conducting, you will be taking a lot of notes, so you should reflect on how you plan to do that. Too many students assume that the research phase of a project involves very little writing. Sitting down with your research materials and exploring them for basic facts and useful quotations is important, but you also need to engage in a more thoughtful type of writing and analytic thinking. Here are some general guidelines for note-taking:

- 1. Develop a research system.** There are lots of ways to take and organize your notes. You can use note cards, computer databases, notebooks, etc.
- 2. Make careful distinctions between direct quotations and paraphrasing!** It is critical to mark direct quotations so that you can avoid accidentally plagiarizing someone's work. For more on plagiarism, see: <http://lib.utsa.edu/general/Plagiarism-4/>.
- 3. Record full citations** for each source. Don't get lazy! It is far more difficult to find the proper citation later than to write it down now. Microsoft Word References is an easy and efficient way to embed your citations.

However you decide to make and store your notes, your notes should include the following information for each of your sources:

1. An abbreviated subject heading – two or three words to remind you what this source is about
2. The complete bibliographic citation
3. Basic notes – facts, quotations, and arguments
4. Your interpretation of the source: This is the most important part of note-taking. Don't just record facts. Take a stab at *interpreting* those facts. Ask yourself questions about the **context of the source**: Who wrote or created it? When and under what circumstances was it written or created? Why was it written or created and what was the agenda behind the source? How does it speak to other scholarship in the field? Ask yourself questions about the **significance of the source**: How does this source address (or complicate) my

research questions? Does it pose new questions for my project and, if so, what are they? Does it challenge my fundamental argument and, if so, how? How reliable is the source?

You do not need to answer all of these questions for each source, but you should engage in at least one or two sentences of thoughtful, interpretative writing for each source. Doing so will make it easier to begin writing your first draft.

Writing the First Draft

If you have been taking thoughtful notes during the research phase of your project, then beginning to draft the actual paper should be less painful. Here are some tips on how to get started:

1) **Sort your evidence or research into analytical categories.**

If you have been putting subject headings on your notes as you go along, you will have generated a number of important analytical categories. Now you need to refine those categories and sort your evidence. You can file note cards into categories, use a computer database program that has built-in sorting mechanisms, cut and paste evidence on the computer, or stack notes or articles into topically- arranged piles. The important thing is to find a system that works for you. 2) **Formulate working arguments for your entire thesis and individual chapters or sub-sections.**

Once you sort your evidence, you need to spend some time thinking about your project's "big picture." You need to be able to answer two questions in specific terms: (1) What is the overall argument of my thesis? and (2) What are the sub-arguments and how do they relate to my main argument?

Keep in mind that arguments may change after you start writing. But an Honors thesis is big and can become unwieldy. If you do not carefully sort out your arguments, you may end up with a tangled mess of ideas.

3) **Divide your thesis into manageable chunks.**

The surest road to frustration is becoming obsessed with the big picture. While you do need to focus on the big picture to gain a conceptual handle on your project, you also need to break your project down into manageable chunks of writing. Make an outline of your sections and then write one small section. Those small bits of writing will add up quickly.

4) **Just start! And remember that you don't have to start at the beginning.**

Sometimes the introduction is the toughest place to start. If you are having trouble working out the argument for your introduction, begin with your methods section – or just the participants sub- section of your methods section. Sometimes it can be easier to start writing in the middle of a main chapter. Grab hold where your evidence is strongest and your ideas are clearest.

5) **Keep up the momentum!**

Since you can be sure your first draft will not be your final draft, get your thoughts on paper without spending too much time fussing over minor stylistic details. At the drafting stage, the important thing is to get your ideas on paper. Once that task is done, you can turn your attention to revising.

Revising Your Thesis

"Rewriting is the essence of writing well – where the game is lost or won." – William Zinsser

“Revision” literally means “to see again” – that is, to look at something from a fresh, critical perspective. Revising is the ongoing process of rethinking the paper – reconsidering your arguments, reviewing your evidence, refining your purpose, reorganizing your presentation, and reviving stale prose. Revision is different from **proofreading**, which involves fixing punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Proofreading is an important step, too, but if your argument is weak or your organization is a mess, then proofreading is like putting a Band-Aid on a bullet wound.

Revision is also different from **editing**, which involved looking for better words, avoiding repetition, eliminating passive voice, and make sentences clearer and more direct. Editing is another important final step, but again, if you have not completely thought through your ideas and your argument, then rephrasing them will not make a difference.

Revision is an opportunity for you to look critically at what you have written to see: (1) if it is really worth saying; (2) if you said what you meant to say; and (3) if a reader will understand what you mean to say. You will probably want to wait a while – a few hours or a day or two – before you begin revising so that you really do have fresh eyes. You also have to be honest with yourself and you cannot be lazy. Ask yourself what you really think about the paper. At all times, you need to keep your reader in mind. It is helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) Will someone who knows less about the topic than you do clearly understand what you are saying?
- 2) Are your aims clear to your reader?
- 3) Does your paper follow a pattern that makes sense?
- 4) Do the transitions between paragraphs and sections help move your reader smoothly from one point to the next?
- 5) Does each paragraph begin with a topic sentence that appropriately introduces what the paragraph is about?
- 6) Would your paper work better if you moved sections around?

Keep in mind that **revising takes time**. Revising does not mean rewriting the whole paper, but it does sometimes mean coming up with stronger arguments or more evidence or vivid examples to support your point. Sometimes it means shifting the order of the paper to help your reader follow the argument or to change your emphasis. Sometimes it means adding or deleting information. And sometimes, sadly, revising does mean throwing out a first draft and starting from scratch.

Keep in mind as well that **your committee is supposed to help you with revision**. You will be submitting your thesis to your committee for their feedback and should expect and be prepared for them to provide you with detailed critiques. If a thesis committee is doing its job, the critique is likely to be unlike any feedback you have ever received in a class. One major reason that students often do not become better writers in college is that professors rarely take the time to provide students with detailed and specific feedback. ***Do not become discouraged if your thesis comes back to you full of red marks and comments*** (in Track Changes and Comments functions in Word or on the hard copy). The purpose of the feedback is not to say that you are “stupid” or that you cannot write well. Once you calm down, if you look closely, you will see that the feedback is designed to help you figure out what you need to change and how you can change it.

Revising an Honors thesis does, however, add another level of difficulty: You do not just have to please one faculty member (your thesis advisor); you have to please *three* of them. Incorporating all the advice may feel overwhelming. Keep in mind that some advice is better than others. You will probably want to take your thesis advisor’s advice most seriously because s/he carries the most weight in giving your project the stamp of approval. Sometimes, though, your thesis advisor may give you more advice that you can digest. If so, approach him/her and ask for help in prioritizing that advice.

Where Can I Get Help if I am Having Trouble with Writing?

There are a number of sources of help if you are having trouble with writing. An obvious choice is to go to your thesis advisor and explain your problem. He or she may be able to sit down with you and get you started. A lot of faculty members are pressed for time, however, and may not be able to give you all the support you need. If you have maintained a relationship with your instructor for one of your Freshman Composition courses, he or she may be willing to give you some assistance. You can also go to the Writing Center in the UTSA Library and ask for assistance. If all else fails, talk to the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects about your difficulties.

VII. PRESENTING THE HONORS THESIS

The On-Campus Presentation Requirement: Poster and Video

During the spring and fall semesters, *students registered for a 4993 course (and students who have never registered for a 4993 course and are about to graduate with Honors) must present their Honors thesis work. Students will present their work in two different formats:*

- 1) **produce a three-minute video on their research in the Fall and**
- 2) **present a traditional research poster in the Spring semester at the Research and Creative Inquiry Showcase through the Office of Undergraduate Research.**

The requirement means that students who register for a 4993 course in two separate semesters present their work TWICE – once at the proposal stage and again when they complete the full thesis. Why these two formats and presentation contents? You have to be able to explain why your research/creative work matters to your discipline (the research poster in the Spring) and why it matters to society (the video presentation in the Fall). These are the two cornerstones of research justification, notably for future funding for research/creative work, e.g., the National Science Foundation's two major criteria for assessment.

Students at the proposal stage will talk about their PLANS for research and, naturally, are not expected to have results, a completely supported argument, or all of their creative product completed.

Research Video, Fall Semester: Details TBD but students will produce a three-minute video on their research that will be available for viewing by the Honors College community at minimum. Training will be provided. The Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects will be in touch with you early in the Fall semester about workshops, details, and suggested timelines.

Research Poster, Spring Semester: Thesis students will present their research in the Spring semester in professional research in poster format at the Office of Undergraduate Research's Undergraduate Research & Creative Inquiry Showcase in mid-April. See website for details on registration, deadlines, and poster printing information, including templates: <http://research.utsa.edu/academic-research/undergraduate/showcase/>.

You are expected to be present and available to answer questions at your poster FOR THE DURATION OF THE EVENT. Guests will pass by to read your materials and ask questions.

It is highly encouraged that you work with your thesis advisor in the outline for both your video and your research poster. For the research poster, you might also want to practice giving a 3- to 5-minute overview of your work in case you are asked to "tell me what you did." While students are often nervous about the thesis presentation, it is helpful to think of it as an opportunity to share the fruits of your labor with others. Remember that you know more about your thesis than anyone else does. The students and faculty who attend are interested in your work and want to know what you have been doing. **Dress up, look like a professional, stand tall, and speak up!** Above all, relax! It is okay if someone asks a question you cannot answer. You do not need to bluff your way through. Just say, "That's an interesting question. I would have to think about it, but right now, I don't

know the answer." Most guests have not read your thesis. If they ask questions that have nothing to do with your project, just politely indicate to them that you were not addressing that issue in your thesis.

The Off-Campus Presentation Option

Students also frequently have the opportunity to travel to conferences to present their thesis research and funding is available to support these opportunities. In many cases, your thesis advisor will suggest that you submit your work to a professional conference in your field. If you have that opportunity, meet with the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects to discuss funding and logistic considerations before committing.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS CONCERNS

What If I Want to Change Advisors?

If you find you cannot work with your thesis advisor in a satisfactory fashion or if you change the focus of your topic and realize that another professor would be a more appropriate advisor for your new topic, you do have the option of changing your advisor. If you wish to change advisors, you *must* submit a request for a change in advisors to Office of the Honors College *in a formal email* to the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects. Include your rationale and indication that you have met with all parties involved (current/potential advisors/readers) to discuss the changes.

In general, however, *it is not a good idea to change advisors* and, in fact, you may encounter some problems – particularly with the grading of your Honors Thesis (4993) course – if you choose to do so. In most cases, your thesis advisor serves as the official Instructor of Record for your Honors Thesis (4993) course. This means that your original thesis advisor will receive the grade roster and will be expected to turn in the grade for your thesis work. Unless you change your advisor prior to Census Date, your original thesis advisor will continue to be responsible for your grade. Thus, even if you decide to complete your thesis with a new advisor, once you have enrolled in an Honors Thesis (4993) course past Census Date, your original thesis advisor will have control over your course grade. Thus, you will have to negotiate with him or her to determine what grade you should receive for the Honors Thesis (4993) course. *Just because you complete a signed thesis proposal or thesis with another instructor does not obligate your original thesis advisor to give you an “A” – or any other grade.* If you want help and suggestions of how to address this issue with your original thesis advisor, you should see the Honors Academic Counselor responsible for thesis projects for assistance.

What Happens If I Do Not Have “Good” Results?

Students who write research-based theses often worry that their thesis projects will not work out. That is, they are concerned that the data they collect will be unable to support their hypotheses or meet their objectives, so that they will essentially have “no” results. You should not be overly concerned with this issue. Failure to support hypotheses is a common result of research in the sciences and social sciences.

While graduate students typically cannot submit a thesis that yields no significant results to earn a Ph.D. or Master’s degree, being unable to support your hypotheses is not a problem in an undergraduate Honors thesis. The goal of conducting a research-based thesis is for you to learn about the process of conceptualizing a study and collecting and analyzing the data. As long as you followed the procedures laid out in your thesis proposal, the actual results of that process are unimportant. Instead of having to redo the study or give up on your thesis, your job in the Discussion or Conclusion section of your paper will be to explain what you think went wrong. Was something wrong with your methods that may have kept you from supporting your hypotheses? Do you think your theory and, hence, your hypotheses were wrong?

Final Words of Wisdom

1. **Get an early start in identifying a topic.** If you are beginning your last year at UTSA when you read this handbook, you are at a disadvantage already. You will be most successful in completing your thesis on time if you have already identified a topic and a thesis advisor well before your final year of college begins. If you plan to work on your thesis in consecutive fall and spring terms, you should have a topic and advisor identified by the end of the spring semester before you begin. If you plan to work on (and register for) your thesis in consecutive spring and fall terms, you should identify your thesis advisor and topic by the previous

November. If you are in STEM fields or psychology, you will probably need THREE terms to complete the project.

2. **Begin writing early in the process!!!** As soon as you complete your preliminary research, start writing!! Write even if what you write seems flimsy and superficial. The biggest mistake you can make is to keep putting off writing. The longer you wait to start writing, the bigger and bigger the task will seem.
3. **Avoid thinking of your thesis as of monumental significance in the grand scheme of things.** This project is not your life's work. It will certainly not be the definitive statement on the topic, either. The more you inflate the importance of the work, the more you will be intimidated and overwhelmed by the prospect of researching and writing a thesis. Remember to narrow down your topic sufficiently. Many thesis students try to accomplish too much. It is better for your thesis to be narrow and deep, rather than very broad and very superficial.
4. **Decide at the start of your project how many hours per week you will work on the project and STICK TO THAT COMMITMENT!!** Working at a steady pace will produce much better results than trying to do the whole project in two weeks. For many students, working on the thesis is the first occasion where they need to set their own deadlines. Because there are few externally established deadlines, students are often tempted to do other things first (e.g., their work for other courses).
5. **Set small, easily realizable weekly goals.** Your grand aim is the production of an acceptable thesis, but if you set your eye only on that goal, you will find it difficult to reach. Writing your thesis is best accomplished by taking a series of small steps. Block out time on your calendar for reading, library research, time in the lab, writing, and editing.
6. **Schedule frequent (preferably weekly) meetings with your thesis advisor** to discuss your progress and then ATTEND THEM! If you see your advisor once a week, you will feel pressed to accomplish something each week. Remember also that your advisor has the primary responsibility for approving your project. He or she may decide not to approve your project if you have not had regular contact. Once you miss one meeting, it becomes easier to miss a second. And then a third.
7. **Do not expect your thesis advisor to come looking for you.** It is your responsibility to set up appointments and to find out what you need to do to accomplish your goals. If you send one email and get no response, send another. If you still get no response, go to your thesis advisor's office. If your thesis advisor says, "I'll send you some things to read" or "I'll let you know when the materials are in," and then you don't hear from him or her for several days, FOLLOW UP.
8. **Don't ignore the deadlines set out in this handbook!** These deadlines may seem unrealistic, but if you finish a full draft of your thesis proposal or thesis by these deadlines, you will have adequate time for editing and polishing your work. Members of your thesis committee will also have adequate time to read your work and provide you with feedback. Spending the last week of the semester getting two hours of sleep a night and hovering on the brink of hysteria during your waking moments accomplishes nothing. It certainly does not improve the final product and it does not endear you to your thesis committee! The deadlines are set to protect BOTH the student and the faculty members involved in the project. If you miss deadlines, you cannot expect your committee to read your work on your timeline. On the other hand, if you meet all the deadlines and one of your committee members fails to read and provide feedback on your work, the Honors College will accept your work without the signature of that committee member.
9. **When you are setting up a timetable for your project, remember that it often takes longer than expected to complete a task.** A good rule of thumb is to estimate the maximum amount of time you believe it will take to complete a task in the worst possible case – then double your estimate.

IX. WHAT HONORS STUDENTS SAY ABOUT THE THESIS

Why did you decide to do a thesis?

“I had very high aspirations concerning graduate school. Therefore, I had to do more than just take classes if I wanted to overcome this disability. I need to distinguish myself from all the other GPAs out there, demonstrate my initiative and excitement for geology, and conduct a research project to develop some advanced skills. It worked; here I am!” (Aaron Kullman, Geology)

“Because I wanted to graduate with Honors. Looking back on it, though, I see that it has been the single greatest piece of work that I have ever accomplished.” (Duane Miller, Philosophy)

“Frankly, I wanted to receive Honors. Secondly, I believed the freedom of a creative writing project could only be fully appreciated in the Honors Program.” (Jeff Jaeckle, English)

“At first, it was because I wanted to graduate with Honors, but by the time I truly made the decision, it was because I was excited about having the chance to spend the kind of graduate-level time and research on a topic that really excited/intrigued me. I realized early on that the thesis would be a huge challenge, but would be the kind of ‘epic’ intellectual opportunity that I was really hungry for.... Being able to do my thesis on 1960’s American Art was like a dream. It seemed more like a reward than a task!” (Arend Zwartjes, Humanities)

“To make myself more competitive for the [medical] schools I was applying to.” (Carlo Martinez, Biology)

How did you identify your thesis topic?

“I knew I wanted to do something in genetics and, with a lot of help from Dr. Eisenberg, I was able to find a lab to work in [at UTHSC-SA] and a doctor interested in the same area of research that I was.” (Cynthia Davis, Biology)

“I tried to find a topic that I had a little experience with. I also wanted a topic that would not offer a purely academic thesis. This might be more of a personal preference, though. I wrote a thesis that a person with a good vocabulary and a decent education would be able to understand.” (Duane Miller, Philosophy)

“I first did an Independent Study and the topic just evolved. Some of my readers and I discussed some things we found lacking in the existing literature.” (Anne Turner, Psychology)

“The topic was a synthesis of my personal interest in *curanderismo* and from conversations with my advisor on similar traditions and practices among Comanches.” (Liz de la Portilla, Anthropology)

“I went to each of the five Geology professors and told them that I wanted to do an Honors thesis and asked them if they had any projects.... I basically decided on my project based on my interests, the ability to work with the advisor, the project, and the small need for funding – in that order.” (Aaron Kullman, Geology)

“I simply examined several of my recent ideas and current projects [in creative writing]. I chose the most interesting and extensive topic to base my thesis on.” (Jeff Jaeckle, English)

“Based on topics we had glazed over in class, but which I felt warranted special attention. Also, my thesis advisor took my initial ideas and really helped me focus them through further research.” (Arend Zwartjes, Humanities)

“My thesis advisor helped me identify my thesis topic. He had been working on a project before approached him and my thesis continued on the same trail.” (Ankur Kohli, Computer Science)

How did you find a thesis advisor?

“Finding a thesis advisor was not easy and I suggest to all of you to start early. If you are not already ‘in good’ with any of your professors, I suggest reviewing UTSA’s web page to read up on some of the great research that lots of professors are doing here. Then talk with the ones whose interests match up with you to see if any are interested in also working with you. I suggest that you think about your approach in how you bring up the subject.” (Cynthia Davis, Biology)

“I looked at all the professors’ past and current research to see if there was any overlap with my interests. I was able to find a pretty close match.” (Patricia Tenorio, Psychology)

“I knew Dr. Flannagan from classes and from being her SI leader, so we had already cultivated a relationship.” (Anne Turner, Psychology)

“I had already had one class with Dr. Bernstein and I was talking to him on the phone one night and I just asked. He had written his MA thesis on philosophy of science so he was familiar with the topic. Also, I know that he and I have different views on things and I wanted to make sure my arguments were sufficiently strong to stand up to his criticism.” (Duane Miller, Philosophy)

“I made sure to work with professors I had had numerous classes with. Dr. Caver and I had a history of three classes together and hours of conversation outside of class.” (Jeff Jaeckle, English)

What did you gain from doing a thesis?

“Above all, I was able to develop a working relationship with people in the field of my interest. This is invaluable.” (Cynthia Davis, Biology)

“A greater knowledge of how to research topics, but most importantly, once you have written a 32-page thesis, it doesn't seem so daunting to write a 101-page book or something like that.” (Duane Miller, Philosophy)

“I now have a small, but polished body of poetry and prose, which I can use to apply to graduate schools, for various scholarships, and even paid positions. My writing has expanded and improved. Furthermore, I have developed meaningful relationships with three intelligent and influential professors in my degree program.” (Jeff Jaeckle, English) “The interaction with my thesis advisor was by far the greatest benefit that I came away with. Her professionalism, insight, and incredible support, attention, and ability truly helped me improve so many aspects of my intellectual capacity.... Doing the thesis taught me intellectual rigor and truly advanced my critical analysis skills.” (Arend Zwartjes, Humanities)

“I would not have my current job if I hadn't taken on the Honors thesis. I also got an opportunity to work on exciting subject matter outside the realm of the basic Computer Science curriculum.” (Ankur Kohli, Computer Science)

“I have become more critical of my writing, as well as of others’. I learned how to break down a question or problem and find the best way to answer it.” (Carlo Martinez, Biology)

“All the practical stuff that goes into producing such a work has come in handy in graduate school.” (Liz de la Portilla, Anthropology)

“I learned more about research methodology and statistical analyses than any classroom course could have taught me.” (Patricia Tenorio, Psychology)

“I feel much more prepared for graduate school since I've gone through the process. It made me more competitive and I ended up with various offers to graduate school. It strengthened my presentation skills and

my self-confidence, except when I got a draft back from Dr. Eisenberg :). I also developed close relationships with my readers.” (Anne Turner, Psychology).

What advice would you give to students considering doing an Honors thesis?

“Start early!!!! Also, make sure you meet your own deadlines!” (Cynthia Davis, Biology)

“I would tell them to make a plan about how and where they will work and also I would suggest that they organize their photocopies in as orderly a manner as possible! I ended up with a stack of photocopies from tons of books and magazines, all unlabeled and a mess! Eventually, I learned to label and file everything, but they should do this from the beginning!” (Arend Zwartjes, Humanities)

“I wish I had started thinking seriously about the thesis in my freshman or sophomore years, instead of in my senior year.” (Ankur Kohli, Computer Science)

“Maintain close communication with [your] readers. Though I kept [mine] informed of my progress, the updates were sporadic and, in the end, many of them had very good advice to give.” (Carlo Martinez, Biology)

“Pick something that is doable, but challenging. There can be a great sense of accomplishment in the end.” (Liz de la Portilla, Anthropology)

“My advice would be to start early!! Take extra courses that appeal to you. Get INVOLVED in research that professors are doing as soon as possible. I can't stress that enough.” (Patricia Tenorio, Psychology)

“I wish I had read everything pertaining to my thesis and my thesis proposition before even starting. Don't procrastinate. With my thesis proposal, I procrastinated and it was extremely stressful. With my actual thesis, I did not procrastinate and it was generally an enjoyable experience. Also, don't expect your readers to contact you – they won't. Contact them, drop off chapters and chapter revisions at their offices, make sure you know their e-mails, phone #s, office hours, home phone #s, etc.” (Duane Miller, Philosophy)

“Decide what topic you want to pursue, and then do it. Don't waste half the semester with it in your head; put it down on paper and distribute it to your advisor and readers. The sooner you receive their opinions, the sooner you can revise and improve your thesis. What I should do differently is complete my project sooner to allow more time for revision and feedback.” (Jeff Jaeckle, English)

“Involve your advisor and committee – a lot! Someone told me once, 'If you show your science to more people, you will become a better scientist.' It's true for many different reasons. The more you talk about your work, the better you understand its strengths and weaknesses, the better a presenter you become, you learn new applications and insights that you may never have thought of or just a new way of looking at things, and your committee is interested in helping you!” (Aaron Kullman, Geology)

“Go for it. The pain is worth it.” (Anne Turner, Psychology)

X. HONORS THESIS MANUAL OF STYLE

Thesis Format

An Honors thesis must include the following sections, in the order listed below. Each section should begin on a new page.

Title Page

All information on the title page should be centered. See “Template” under “Thesis” at <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/forms> for formatting.

Acknowledgements (optional, but encouraged)

In this section, you have an opportunity to express your appreciation to those who have helped you with your thesis or who have contributed to your academic and personal growth while you have been a student at UTSA. While an Acknowledgements section is not required, it is encouraged. This is your chance to let the people who have helped you know how much you value their support!

Abstract

Each thesis proposal and thesis must include an abstract of between 150 and 300 words. The abstract is a summary of the thesis. For a traditional academic thesis, the abstract should generally include a statement of the problem, your argument or hypotheses, a brief description of your methodology, and a summary of your findings and conclusions. For a thesis project executed in a non-written medium, the abstract should typically include a statement of the creative goal or problem, the historical and/or cultural context of the work, a discussion of the medium/processes used in the project's creation, and the student's conclusions. An abstract for a proposal should be written in the future tense. The abstract for the finished thesis should, however, be written in the past tense.

An example of an abstract for a traditional academic thesis is as follows:

“This study examined children's perceptions of their parents' experiences with negative emotions and the relationship between those perceptions and parents' reports of their willingness to display negative emotions. It tested three hypotheses: (1) that children would be more aware of mothers' than father's emotions; (2) that older children would be more aware of parents' negative emotions than younger children; and (3) that children whose parents reported expressing more negative emotions would be more aware of their parents' negative emotions. To test the hypotheses, 48 children, ages 6 to 10, were asked to answer questions about their fathers' and mothers' negative emotions. The children's parents completed a questionnaire that concerning the likelihood that they would share their negative emotions with their child. Major findings were that age, gender of parent, and the specific emotion influenced children's perceptions of their parents' emotions and that fathers' (but not mothers') reports of their own expressiveness were related to how much the children could say about their parent's emotional experiences. Unlike previous studies, age did not influence the extent to which children cited themselves as the cause of parents' emotions. The discussion addresses implications for the development of gender stereotypes about emotion.”

An example of an abstract for a creative thesis is as follows:

“The goal of this project was to explore the process of using poetic themes as inspiration for the creation of several pieces of visual art. This has been done a number of times in the past; for example, Monet's paintings based on the poetry of Rimbaud. However, I could find no examples of this in the area of print-making. I was inspired by the work of poet Charles Bukowski. After obtaining his permission to use three of his poems, I decided that his ideas could best be expressed visually using the intaglio medium, incorporating the techniques of etching, aquatint, mezzotint, and drypoint. While on the whole, I was pleased with the outcome, it would have been beneficial to have had more contact with the poet, so that I could be clearer about his intentions.”

Thesis Body

The format for the thesis body should follow the conventions of your academic discipline. The body of the thesis will generally include a statement of the problem, a survey of existing literature, your argument (hypotheses), a description of your methods, your findings or results, and your conclusions (often including directions future work might take).

For a thesis project completed in a non-written medium, the creation itself (or, as appropriate, its photographic, video, or audio representation) is the heart of the thesis. However, ***the creative product is not the entire thesis!*** You must describe the creative product in a thorough essay, usually preceding the creation (or its representation) in the body. The essay should describe the medium, discuss why you chose this medium

(including the advantages and disadvantages of the medium) and this particular subject, describe in some detail the process that led to this creation, and self-critique your success in achieving your creative goals. In other words, the reader should learn exactly what you did, why and how you did it, how well – in your opinion – it turned out, and what you would do the same or differently if you did it again. This additional, written piece of your thesis should also demonstrate your familiarity with similar work in your field by discussing its historical and/or cultural context. As with a traditional academic thesis, the format of the body should follow the conventions of your discipline.

Footnotes/Endnotes (if applicable)

You should use whatever form of citation that is dictated by the discipline in which you are writing. Your thesis advisor is the appropriate source for advice on documenting your sources. Footnotes can appear at the bottom of the page where the footnoted material appears or at the end of the text.

Bibliography/References

The Honors thesis must include a list of all sources cited in the text. You should use whatever form of bibliographic citation is required for your discipline. Your thesis advisor should provide you with the appropriate citation format.

Appendices (if applicable)

Any supplemental data, such as tables, graphs, illustrations, photos, or other material (e.g., survey/research instruments) that you refer to in the thesis, but do not include in the body of the thesis, should be included as appendices, following the conventions of your academic discipline. As with all other parts of the thesis, your appendices must have 1-inch margins on all sides.

Thesis Format

You will submit your Honors Thesis Proposal and Honors Thesis to the Honors College electronically. The format of the electronic copy and printed title page must adhere to the following standards:

1. **The Title** page
2. **Signature page:** template can be found on the Deadlines table at <http://honors.utsa.edu/students/thesis>
3. **Margins:** You must use 1” margins throughout your thesis document. This applies to the entire thesis, including the title page and all appendices, diagrams, and figures.
4. **Type:** The thesis must be typed in 11.5 or 12-point font. The text must be justified on the left side. It is up to you and your thesis advisor whether you use full justification. If you justify the right-hand margin, you must do so consistently throughout the entire document (except for figures, tables, and appendices).
5. **Line Spacing:** The ENTIRE BODY OF THE THESIS, including the abstract, table of contents, acknowledgements, and text must be double-spaced. Footnotes/endnotes and the bibliography/references may be either single-spaced within each entry and double-spaced between entries or double-spaced throughout. Appendices must adhere to margin requirements, but they do not have to conform to spacing requirements, except in the labeling and titling of each appendix.
6. **Page Numbering:** Page numbers must appear either at the top or the bottom of the thesis/thesis proposal and must be either centered or right-justified. The page numbers are placed 0.5 inches from the page margin. Use Arabic numerals and begin with the Title Page as page 1, the Acknowledgements as page 2, the Abstract as page 3, etc. Continue with numeric symbols throughout the document.
7. **Direct Quotations:** Direct quotations of up to five lines in length should be included as part of the body of the text and enclosed by quotation marks. Longer quotations should be indented and set off from the main flow of the text. All quotations should be referenced appropriately.
8. **Documentation:** You may use any form of bibliographic and footnote/endnote citation required by your discipline. Your thesis advisor should provide you with the appropriate citation format.
9. **Insert all Figures and Tables** directly into the body of the text.
10. **Other Formatting Instructions.** If a single line of text appears either at the top or bottom of a page, a page break should be inserted so that no line of text stands alone.

Chapter titles must be numbered and expressed as Headings (e.g., **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**) in the document. Chapter titles must be written in all capitals and 14-point boldface font, centered on the page. Chapters may also have sub-headings (e.g., **Data Collection**) that are written in progressively smaller font sizes. Such divisions should be parallel and consistent between sections and must be included in the Table of Contents. For more information on chapter titles and the use of headings in the document, see the electronic Thesis Proposal Template and Thesis Template.

You should avoid auto-hyphenation programs. When it is necessary to hyphenate, you should make sure the reader will not be confused or inconvenienced.

Mathematical or chemical equations should be set off from the text in the same manner as a long quotation. Equations that will be referred to again in the text should be numbered or lettered in a consistent style and the label placed in parentheses or brackets. Equation editors and Greek alphabet fonts are available in most word processors.

Foreign language phrases, including genus and species names, should be italicized in the same font as the text. A species name should be spelled out completely, with the genus capitalized and the specific name in lower case, the first time it appears and anytime it begins a sentence. Subsequent occurrences may abbreviate the genus (e.g., *E. coli*).