

Honors Thesis Guide

LSU | Roger Hadfield
Ogden Honors College

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About This Document

Researching and writing an Honors Thesis represents the culmination of an Ogden Honors student's achievement in a specific academic field; it is the apex of an honors education at LSU. The Thesis Guide informs students of what to expect when writing a thesis. This guide is intended to help students develop a schedule that will avoid a rush at the end of the senior year, while at the same time providing tips on how to organize the process of research and writing. It also provides advice and guidance for the Thesis Director, who is the principal source of guidance for the thesis writer.

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I. Senior Honors Distinctions

College Honors

Noted on both the diploma and the LSU transcript, College Honors is the highest undergraduate distinction of the Ogden Honors College and of LSU. To graduate with College Honors a student must meet the following requirements:

- at least 32 hours of Honors classes as follows:
- A minimum of six hours of HNRS course work
- 12 hours at 3000+ level in the major (including thesis hours), following upper division departmental honors programs, where they exist
- Honors Thesis, following thesis guidelines
- 3.5 GPA in cumulative, LSU, and Honors course work

College Honors recipients purchase and receive an Honors hood as well as Upper Division Honors cords at the Ogden Honors College Graduation Ceremony.

Upper Division Honors Distinction

Noted on their LSU transcript, Upper Division Honors Distinction requires the following accomplishments:

- 12 hours of honors courses in the major at the 3000 level or above, including three to six hours of thesis or project
- Honors Thesis, following thesis guidelines
- 3.5 GPA in both cumulative and LSU course work, and for all Honors courses used in the student's Upper Division Program

Upper Division Honors Distinction recipients receive Honors cords at the Ogden Honors College Graduation Ceremony.

Thesis Honors

Honors students in Good Standing but unable to achieve College Honors or Upper Division Honors Distinction may pursue a thesis-only track with the commitment of a faculty member to serve as Thesis Director. Thesis Honors students must also submit an online Declaration Form. The Honors College recognizes students graduating with Thesis Honors at the Honors Graduation Ceremony.

II. Upper Division Coursework

Declaration of Intent

When pursuing Upper Division Honors Distinction or College Honors, a student first declares their intention to participate in the Upper Division Program. Please take note of the following:

- The Upper Division Declaration Form is available at www.honors.lsu.edu/upperdivision
- Students should declare their intention by the end of the sophomore Spring semester. We also suggest that students schedule an advising session with the Honors College Upper Division Academic Adviser upon declaration.
- College of Science students must apply through their major department and college
- Upper Division Honors programs vary by major. Each student needs to understand the individual rules needed in that major department prior to beginning the program.

Honors Option

The Honors Option converts a standard 3000/4000 level course into an Honors course. The Honors Option is a crucial component of nearly all Upper Division programs. Important aspects to note about the Honors Option:

- The Honors Option includes an independent, Honors-level component (an exceptional paper, presentation, or project, for example), accomplished in addition to the standard coursework
- The Honors Option Agreement is a contract between student and professor, with terms designed and agreed upon by both parties; the student must initiate the Honors Option process
- The Honors Option Agreement must be turned in to the Honors College by the last day to add classes for the semester in which the course is taken
- To finalize the Honors credit, The Honors Option Report must be submitted at the end of that semester

Thesis Courses

We recommend that students enroll in thesis coursework for two semesters. Typically, this occurs in the Fall and Spring of the Senior year. Some Upper Division Programs have designated courses for thesis work. Students in these programs should register for the prescribed thesis course and use the Honors Option Form to earn Honors credit. Students whose programs do not require a thesis course, or for those students wishing to take more than two semesters of thesis work, may enroll in HNRS 4000. **Each student taking HNRS 4000 will have their own section of the course with their thesis director listed as the instructor of record, who evaluates the pass/fail credit.**

All students planning to enroll in thesis coursework must complete the Honors College **Thesis Enrollment Form**, which is available in the front desk in the main lobby, French House 101. For those students working on their thesis under the HNRS 4000 rubric, the Thesis Request Form will also serve as the official schedule request. Some departments may require additional paperwork for enrollment in their own thesis courses. Students are responsible for submitting all paperwork to their department and the Honors College by the appropriate deadline.

III. Thesis Rules and Regulations

Expectations for an Honors Thesis

The Honors Thesis Project should be appropriate, in both quality and content, to the conventions of its field of study. The Thesis Director and committee members should work with the thesis student to ensure this is the case, both in the conduct of research, and in terms of the style and format of the resulting documentation. The Honors College expects a thesis that displays originality and depth of research, based on a solid foundation of study in the major, with a clear and cohesive presentation in its final form.

Data and results presented should be the work of the student author. It is acceptable to include data, results, or figures from other researchers or publications that are needed to support or place the student's work in context, but such additions should be kept to a minimum and should be clearly indicated and attributed in the figure legends and text. Published first author scientific articles by the thesis author are allowable as independent chapters, but as in M.S. Theses or Ph.D. Dissertations, these should be clearly indicated as such. Published articles where the thesis author is not first author should typically be rewritten to focus on the specific accomplishments of the thesis author.

Thesis Formats

Scholarly Paper – May apply to all disciplines. The scholarly paper is based on original research and includes a consideration of secondary sources. The student will formulate an original question concerning his/her discipline and will investigate and analyze this question through a consideration of original and secondary sources. The resulting analysis should make a creative contribution to the relevant literature.

Research Paper – Applies to disciplines in which students conduct research that produces original data, including the physical, biological, or social sciences. The Research Paper is based on data from experiments, surveys, or scholarly research and includes treatment of relevant literature. It may include laboratory or field work.

Business Plan – Applies to disciplines in which the student is trained to work in business and may include disciplines outside the College of Business with the permission of the major department. The student conceptualizes a business and conducts relevant research to formulate a plan for marketing, finance, and implementation.

Field Report – This format may be used by students engaged in full-time experiential requirements in the major, such as those required by the College of Education. The thesis should place the experience in the context of discipline specific literature.

Portfolio – This format applies primarily to students in the arts. It includes a formal compilation of the student's artistic work as well as a written explanation of the work and relevant literature.

Performance – Students primarily in music and the dramatic arts may base their thesis on a presentation of creative artistry. This format will also include a written explanation of the work and relevant literature.

Design Project – Students in engineering will work in this format. The design project includes an analysis of a physical problem, the formulation of a design solution, and the production of the design. The thesis includes a written explanation of the work and the relevant literature.

Choosing a Thesis Topic

Determining an appropriate thesis topic involves collaboration between professor and student. Either one may first present an idea for a topic, or several topics may be considered, but in the end the chosen thesis topic should match up with the student's interest, the professor's expertise, and the degree being sought. The project can incorporate aspects of other fields, if it has an interdisciplinary focus by design. A few important points to keep in mind are:

- The thesis must be within the student's major
- The scope of the project should be limited to a manageable breadth
- A student already assisting a professor in research will likely find a topic within that specialized area
- Independent study courses can allow for the exploration of a topic prior to thesis enrollment
- Students may develop a thesis topic from internships they conduct in their area

Thesis Director

The Thesis Director serves as the student's guide to research methods, identifying and acquiring resources, time management, and document style. The Thesis Director also serves as the Defense Committee chair.

A student should secure a commitment with a potential Thesis Director no later than the junior year. The professor might be met in a number of ways, such as through HNRS special-topic seminars, Honors and upper level major courses, research assistantships, or research events; students are also encouraged to learn about professors' research activities via departmental web pages, professional journals, or LSU publications such as "LSU Research." The director should agree to serve as the Thesis Director by March of the junior spring semester, at which time the Thesis Enrollment Form may first be turned in for the following fall semester.

The thesis director must be:

- Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor*
- Faculty within the student's major department*
- Active in the semester(s) of enrollment (not away on a sabbatical or visiting professorship)

**Any exception to these rules requires written permission from the student's major department's Chair as well as the Honors Dean*

Thesis Committee

The thesis committee, the body that reviews the completed thesis prior to the defense and attends the defense, consists of:

- 1) The Thesis Director, who acts as the committee chair
- 2) One additional faculty member within the student's major
- 3) A third faculty member drawn from outside of the major department.

Only the Thesis Director is required to hold professorial rank, but committee members must be members of the faculty. Graduate students and staff members may not serve of thesis committees. Additional committee members are acceptable but should be kept to a minimum and appropriately contribute to the project. The names and departments of all of the Committee members should be submitted to the Upper Division Academic Adviser via an online submission form (see below) by the last day to drop classes of the final semester of thesis enrollment.

Thesis Defense

Students must defend their Honors Thesis Project before the Thesis Committee. The student should expect to make a presentation of the thesis research to the committee, followed by a series of questions and possible suggestions for revision. Please note the following:

- It is the student's responsibility to coordinate the date, time, and location of the defense (including notifying the Committee and the Honors College, as well as securing the facility)
- Each committee member should be provided with a final draft at least two weeks prior to the date of the defense
- The defense should occur no less than three weeks prior to the end of classes to allow sufficient time to incorporate any revisions
- Thesis Directors will receive the final '**Thesis Approval Form**' from the Upper Division Advisor in advance of the Defense. This form serves as the official verification of completion for the Honors Thesis. Directors must send this form back to the Upper Division Advisor by the last day of class.
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****Students should submit both their Thesis Committee members and their Defense details to the Honors College early in their defending semester (by the last day to drop classes) at the following link: [Thesis Defense and Committee Registration](#)****

The Document: Cover Sheet

All final thesis documents must use our Thesis Cover Sheet format, which the Upper Division advisor provides via email to the thesis writers. Once defended, edited, and finalized, the student then submits the approved thesis as a .pdf using our online submission form. Any student with issues in obtaining the cover sheet or in submitting the file should contact the Upper Division Advisor.

The Document: Citations

Honors Theses should follow standard practice rules for Master's Theses and Ph.D. Dissertations in their specific discipline. **The Thesis Director will be responsible for guiding the student to use citations appropriate for Master's Theses or scholarly journal submissions in the discipline.**

The Outstanding Thesis Award

Each Spring, The Ogden Honors College presents the Outstanding Thesis Award to students at the Honors Graduation Ceremony. Thesis Committees should nominate thesis projects that they deem exceptional for the field. In order to be eligible, students must have their thesis submitted, as well as the Thesis Approval Form (on which the nomination is made) by April 16.

Thesis Directors must supply a letter of support for the student's project to the Honors College by this date. After April 16, a faculty panel judges all nominated theses from that academic year.

IV. Submitting the Thesis

After the defense, students should make all necessary revisions to the thesis document. Once complete, the final steps to completing the Honors Thesis are two-fold:

- 1) The *Thesis Approval Form* (see: Thesis Defense) must be returned to the Upper Division Advisor.
- 2) The final version of the thesis document must be submitted via the online [Thesis Submission Form](#)

Students defending in the fall semester of 2017 must complete both steps by **Friday, Dec. 1**

Students defending in the spring semester of 2018 must complete both steps by **Monday, April 16**. *Theses not submitted by this date will not be eligible for the Outstanding Thesis Award.*

V. Resources for Undergraduates Pursuing Research

How to Get Started

A student can begin participating in research as early as the first year by utilizing student aid awards such as President's Student Aid (PSA) or President's Future Leaders in Research (PFLR). Students also might discover faculty mentors on their own and use Independent study courses to allow for guided research opportunities. Getting involved early is particularly valuable for laboratory-based research, given that in such environments it may take some time to develop the skills necessary to complete an independent research project.

The Honors Thesis demands self-reliance and is an independent accomplishment, but the student should also keep in mind that there are many opportunities to receive essential help along the way. The Upper Division Advisor, the entire staff of the Honors College, the Thesis Director and committee members, as well as many University and departmental resources, are ready to assist in ensuring student success. Students should not hesitate to reach out to advisors for assistance when needed.

The LSU Libraries are an invaluable resource for conducting thesis research. LSU librarians are experienced in particular subject areas and are proficient with a wide variety of subject-specific databases. Students can schedule consultations with librarians for assistance at any point in the research process, from sharpening topics to reviewing end-project bibliographies. For more information about the LSU Libraries, visit www.lib.lsu.edu.

Funding

There are several ways students can acquire funds to help them complete their thesis research. **All Honors students working on a thesis should apply for a TAF Thesis Research Scholarship, which may provide at least \$500 for the costs associated with research-related travel, materials, and other expenditures.** Students should also investigate scholarships sponsored by their respective colleges and grants related to their area of study. The TAF scholarship application can be found on the Honors website's Scholarships page.

VI. The Honors Thesis: Beyond the Honors College

The Honors Thesis is a valuable tool for conveying academic ability, commitment, and professionalism. By defending an Honors Thesis, Honors students achieve more than the standard college curriculum. They prove their ability to manage large projects, engage in current issues, and work with a mentor. As a result, Thesis students are competitive candidates for graduate and professional schools and earn the respect of potential employers.

A student should maximize the value of the thesis through practical measures. While impressive as a stand-alone achievement, students should highlight it on resumes or mention it in personal statements and interviews, and seek to connect the knowledge gained to real life experiences. Letters of recommendation from thesis directors or committee members can offer real insight and back up your skills and knowledge.

The thesis can be an impetus for contacting persons with expertise in the research area. Professionals and researchers will be interested in your inquiry and the outcomes of your project. Students should not hesitate to reach out or seek introduction to leading experts at research centers, archives, and laboratories. The thesis director may serve an important link to scholars in their discipline. Research scholarships can pay for travel to visit other institutions. These contacts can provide resources and insight into thesis projects but may also be of assistance in post-graduate career development.

Presenting Thesis Research

Students are encouraged to share their thesis research with other scholars. Students should consider submitting their work to national conferences and/or submitted to academic journals for publication. Additionally, Honors students may choose to display their thesis research at one of LSU's conferences or symposiums, such as LSU Discover Day. By participating in the larger discussion about one's discipline, Honors students gain valuable experience defining, explaining, and expanding their thesis.

VII. A Sample Timeline for Thesis Writers

The following timeline is meant to assist the thesis writer in the appropriate steps toward successful complete of the undergraduate honors thesis within a 4 year curriculum. It is geared toward the typical Honors student who defends the thesis in the senior year but builds toward that goal in previous years. Students defending early or extending their time should adjust the semester tasks as needed.

Freshman/Sophomore Years

Assist a Professor in Research
Learn the specific Upper Division Requirements for your Major
Declare Intent for Upper Division program by the end of the Sophomore year.

Junior Fall

Discuss research/thesis plans with Professors in your department
Use the Honors Option for appropriate Upper Division courses in your major

Junior Spring

Ask a Professor to serve as your Thesis Director
Go over this Thesis Guide with your Thesis Director
Enroll in your Thesis course the following Fall
Apply for the TAF Thesis Scholarship to Support your Project
Participate in a Poster Session for LSU Discover Day

Senior Fall

Discuss Fall semester expectations for the Thesis project
Conduct Thesis Research
Enroll for the 2 nd semester of Thesis work and submit Thesis Enrollment Form - Course registration begins October 22, 2017.
Complete a 'Senior Checkout' advising appointment with the Upper Division Advisor
Shoot for having a draft of the Thesis by the end of the semester

Senior Spring

Schedule your defense and submit those details, along with Committee member names, to the Honors College by January 19, 2018
Purchase the appropriate Honors Regalia from the Bookstore (this list is provide by the College to the Bookstore)
Defend your Thesis at least two weeks prior to April 16 (Any complications for completion by this date should be discussed with the Upper Division Advisor)
Submit the thesis online to the Honors College as a .pdf (student) by April 16, 2018
Submit the Thesis Approval Form to the Honors College by April 16 (Professor), 2018
Present at LSU Discover Day
Attend the Honors College Graduation May 10, 2018

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