

## Guidelines/Handbook for Undergraduate Thesis FAQ for Undergraduate Honors Theses

### When should I get started?

- Brainstorm early! It's a good idea to have a general subject in mind and a list of potential faculty mentors by the **fall of your junior year**.
- In middle of **junior year**, you should meet with a potential faculty mentor to discuss a topic for your thesis.
- By the **beginning of your senior year**, you should formally request a member of the faculty to serve as your Undergraduate Honors Thesis Director and begin to outline your project.
- Submit the Honors Thesis Form to SHC by **the end of the semester BEFORE you plan to defend**: [https://www.honors.msstate.edu/sites/www.honors.msstate.edu/files/HONORS%20THESIS%20FORM\\_1.pdf](https://www.honors.msstate.edu/sites/www.honors.msstate.edu/files/HONORS%20THESIS%20FORM_1.pdf)
- See below for details and suggested deadlines for the semester of your Thesis defense.

### How do I decide on a topic?

Inspiration can come from multiple areas:

- Existing research you are engaged in;
- Elaborating on a topic from a class;
- Extending a capstone project;
- Consultation with faculty mentors.

### What constitutes an Undergraduate Honors Thesis?

- An Undergraduate Honors Thesis is a significant research project, and often serves as the culmination of months or even years of sustained investigation into an area of a your academic interest.
- Theses must be individual (not group) work, and must be original: the writing and analysis may build upon the research you do for a class or with a faculty advisor (e.g., in a laboratory setting), but it must extend that work into something that is both new and unique to you.
- Undergraduate Honors Theses should both explain the significance of the research for a non-expert audience and discuss the implications of the research for the student's intellectual field (e.g., answer the question: "so what?"). Often the former is accomplished through a clear and accessible introduction, and the latter is accomplished through a specific conclusion. More guidance is available here: <https://www.honors.msstate.edu/node/746/>
- The length of theses will vary from discipline to discipline, but a good rule of thumb is that an Undergraduate Honors Thesis should be about the length of a substantial published article in the student's discipline.
  - Theses should approximate the length, scope, and formatting of an article from your discipline. (Your faculty advisor will know this information best.)

- Theses should go through **at least** one round of feedback with your faculty advisor before you share the complete draft with the rest of the faculty committee. The committee may ask for further revisions after the defense.
- For some, an Undergraduate Honors Thesis may even serve as the basis for a future publication.
- Undergraduate Honors Theses, may be creative, but creative theses require a critical apparatus explaining the significance of the artistic endeavor.
- There is a repository of successful Undergraduate Honors Theses on the SHC website. We suggest you look at a few of them to have multiple models.  
<https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/honorstheses/>

### Who should be on my Committee?

Your committee will be made up of 3 people who will read and evaluate your paper and ask you questions during your defense.

1. Thesis Director (this is the faculty member who is an expert in the field of your thesis project, listed on your initial form, and with whom you will work most closely). A faculty member from MSU that has knowledge of topic and can supervise the project. S/he approves topic, supervises work, provides at least one round of substantial feedback, approves the final draft, and oversees any necessary revisions after the defense.
2. Faculty Member with expertise in a field related to the thesis topic; often your advisor can recommend someone. Consider someone who can offer you additional insights and has knowledge in the field of your project.
3. Member of Honors College Faculty who ensures your theses follows SHC guidelines (see above) and can help with the logistics of the defense meeting. You may choose someone you have had as an instructor of a HON class or know well, or you may ask for a recommendation of an Honors Faculty Member. You can find a list of Honors Faculty here:  
<https://www.honors.msstate.edu/about/faculty-staff/>

### Should I enroll in a class for this?

- We encourage you to enroll in Honors Thesis hours (HON 4093), particularly during the semester you plan to defend your thesis. By enrolling in course credit, you have time to devote to researching and writing your thesis. You will also receive a grade (S/U) for your efforts, which will require you to meet regularly with your advisor (instructor of record for the class).
- Some students may already have DIS hours or EXL hours for their research. These are an adequate substitution.

### What are the important Deadlines and Due Dates?

- Submit the Honors Thesis Form to SHC by the end of the semester before you plan to defend.
- Submit the names of all faculty members on your committee to SHC in the first month of the semester you plan to defend your thesis. Typically done with signing up for a defense time.

- Please note: You MUST have permission from all members of your committee to submit their names to SHC. It's a good idea to ask faculty members—including Honors faculty—if they will serve on your committee well in advance.
- Schedule defense during thesis week, typically November or April. This is done in conjunction with the Undergraduate Research Office—look for announcements and be sure to communicate with your committee to schedule a date and time.
- Work closely with your Thesis Director and make changes to drafts based on their feedback.
- Give final thesis to your committee members 1-2 weeks prior to defense (plan for this!). Your Thesis Director must approve your draft before you send it out to other committee members.
- Example deadlines for a spring defense can look like this:
  - Feb 1: identify committee members and look for sign up dates and times
  - March 1: draft of thesis shared with Thesis Director
  - March 10: Director returns draft with advice for edits
  - March 21: revised thesis shared with the full committee; student prepares presentation
  - April 1: thesis week begins; remind committee of date, time, and place

### What is a thesis defense?

- This is a meeting of the student and their committee and any guests during which the student presents their thesis and answers questions about their work.
- SHC hosts Thesis Defense Weeks every fall and spring (typically November or April), so plan to schedule one during your senior year.

### How do I prepare for the Thesis Defense?

- Undergraduate Honors Thesis defenses are typically scheduled for 90 min timeslots but usually take about 60-75 minutes. They are open to the public, so you may invite family and friends to come.
- Undergraduate Honors Thesis defenses are run like Master's Thesis Defenses, and follow this general format:
  - Introductions
  - Student Presentation
  - Public Q&A
  - Committee Q&A
  - Committee Deliberation
  - Announcement of Result
- Your presentation should last about 20-30 minutes. You should introduce your project to the general public, provide an overview of your research methods, highlight your important arguments and findings, and explain the implications of your research for your academic and intellectual field.
  - Your presentation should have a visual component (e.g., PowerPoint) with clear and informative slides.
  - Practice your presentation before your defense!

- Expect to answer questions from each committee member about your methods, your findings, and your conclusions. Try to anticipate what these questions might be and think about what your answers will be.
- Possible Results:
  - Pass with No Revisions
  - Pass with Minor Revisions – Committee signs off on Thesis; Director ensures that revisions are made
  - Pass with Major Revisions – All committee members must approve revisions before signing off on Thesis
  - Fail – Committee determines that the Thesis does not meet the requirements or expectations of an Undergraduate Honors Thesis

#### My advisor has questions about their role, what do I tell them?

- Direct them to the SHC website (<https://www.honors.msstate.edu/curriculum/honors-thesis/>).
- Show them this FAQ page.
- Aim to meet with them at least monthly and develop plan of progress for your completion.
- Further questions can be directed to Dr. A. Elder, Associate Dean for Shackouls Honors College

#### What does a thesis look like and how do I format it?

- Aim for conventions of your field and your advisor's directions for the format of the thesis.
- There is a repository on the honor's website to look at past examples. We suggest you look at a few of them in your field to have multiple models.  
<https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/honorsthesis/>
- You may format your thesis according to this guide:  
[https://ir.library.msstate.edu/bitstream/handle/11668/14613/ETD\\_Standards\\_8th\\_Edition.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y](https://ir.library.msstate.edu/bitstream/handle/11668/14613/ETD_Standards_8th_Edition.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y)

#### What Do I Do After My Defense?

- You likely have revisions; complete these and make sure you have them reviewed by your advisor.
- Have prepared signature and title page signed by committee members (initiate this with your advisor). ALL Theses MUST include the signature page and an abstract. See website.
- Email pdf of complete thesis (including signed signature page) to [mainoffice@honors.msstate.edu](mailto:mainoffice@honors.msstate.edu)

#### I have read through this but I still have questions. Who should I talk to?

You may contact Dr. Elder at [aelder@honors.msstate.edu](mailto:aelder@honors.msstate.edu) or 325-2522.

Be sure to be in regular communication with your faculty mentor about your project and progress.