

# Honors Program

## Newcomb Tulane College

### THE HONORS THESIS

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

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

Please note that students typically will not be allowed to register for the honors thesis in their third year of undergraduate study, regardless of whether or not they have sufficient credit hours to qualify for “senior standing.” Exceptions to this rule may be granted by way of a petition to the Director of the Honors Program in cases where students can demonstrate sufficient academic training, or some other compelling academic rationale, for undertaking the thesis project in the third year. Each petition must be accompanied by a letter of support from a faculty member who has agreed to direct the honors thesis.

For other requirements of the Honors Program, please see the Honors Program website, [honors.tulane.edu](http://honors.tulane.edu).

### EXPECTATIONS

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

have said about the subject. The Honors Thesis is the culminating experience for honors students, and as such we expect students to aim high in formulating thesis proposals.

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

## PROCEDURES

**Students may write honors theses only for departments in which they are majoring. The eligibility requirement for the honors thesis is an overall GPA of 3.4, and a GPA of 3.5 in the major for which the student is writing for honors.**

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

### *Readers*

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

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

A student who is writing a thesis for honors in two majors must have a first reader from one major and a second reader from the other. In this case, each reader is, in effect, "first reader" for the major he or she represents.

- **The Third Reader** serves as a representative of the Honors Program, and must be a full-time faculty member who is not a member of the department or departments for which the student is writing the thesis. It is not necessary that the third reader be able to make a substantial contribution to the thesis,

but only that she or he be able to report to the honors program about the process.

### *Registration*

Students register for the Honors Theses in their major department, using course number 4990 in the fall and 5000 in the spring. Students who are writing theses in two major departments register for 4990 in one department and 5000 in the other.

### *Schedule of Completion*

- **Monday, September 11, 2017.** Signed thesis Prospectus due in the Honors Program office.
- **Monday, November 13, 2017.** First chapter and progress report form due in the Honors Program office. (See instructions on first progress report form.) The writing completed by this deadline need not be Chapter One of the eventual thesis, but should be equivalent to a chapter of significant length (for example, in humanities theses, around 10-15 pages).
- **Monday, January 22, 2018.** Second progress report form due in the Honors Program office. (See instructions on second progress report form.) With this submission, it is expected that at least 1/3 of the thesis be complete in draft form.
- **March-April.** Students should schedule a date for submission of a complete preliminary version of the thesis to readers, and schedule a date for the oral exam. In general, students should allow at least two weeks and possibly as much as a month (depending on the readers' preferences) between the submission of the thesis and the oral exam.
- **Monday, April 16, 2018.** The final date for oral examinations. Signed exam forms should be submitted to the Honors Program office by 4:00 pm.
- **Friday, April 30, 2018.** Final date for the submission of the final copy of the thesis, along with an extra copy of the title page and abstract, to the Honors Program office. See the Honors Thesis Style Sheet for detailed information concerning the preparation and formatting of theses. It is strongly suggested that students check with the Honors Program office early about any questions or points of confusion regarding the format of the thesis.

Beyond this schedule, it is the responsibility of the student to keep in touch with readers and present them with work-in-progress in a timely fashion. Students are

strongly urged to arrange with their thesis advisor a regular schedule of meetings, submission of work-in-progress, and the expected date for the submission of the near final copy of the thesis. This helps ensure the continued progress of the research and prevents misunderstandings about the scope and direction of the study. It is recommended that students discuss with all readers the criteria that will be used to evaluate interim papers and the completed thesis.

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

### ***Assessment of the Honors Thesis and the Oral Defense***

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

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

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

The third reader will report to the Honors Program the results of the oral exam, and the nature of the revisions required (if any) before the thesis is to be considered

final.

### ***Variations on the Standard Honors Thesis Expectations***

- **Business Majors:** Students in the School of Business have the option of either writing a research-based thesis through the Honors Program, following the guidelines laid out in this document, or writing a business case study honors project directed by the School of Business. Students interested in the business case study option should consult with their advisors in the School of Business as to specific requirements and deadlines, in addition to the schedule of completion laid out above.
- **Biomedical Engineering and Architecture majors:** The honors theses in these two majors exceed the scholarly expectations of the thesis required normally by the majors. Students should consult their major advisors for more information about the expectations for Honors Theses. Students writing theses in BMEN and Architecture are required to submit prospectuses to the honors program by the prospectus deadline given above. In their prospectuses, students should explain how their theses exceed the usual expectations—in other words, what makes them Honors thesis projects as opposed to regular thesis projects. Students in both majors are required to submit completed theses, formatted according to the Honors Thesis Style Sheet, to the Honors Program by the deadline given above.

### ***Grading of the Honors Thesis***

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

### ***Honors Theses that Are Not Completed***

A student may decide to terminate a thesis before it is completed, or the thesis director may decide that the student cannot complete the thesis in a satisfactory manner by the stated deadline. If this occurs before a final copy is submitted and before the student stands for the oral examination, two options exist as to credit and grades:

- If, in the opinion of the thesis director, the student has done sufficient satisfactory work, the thesis director may give her or him credit for an Independent Study and assign a grade. Credit is awarded by the thesis director according to departmental rules.
- If, in the opinion of the thesis director, the student has not done sufficient satisfactory work, the student must undertake to drop the thesis course or courses. Students may obtain the drop form from their academic advisors. In this case, the thesis course will be expunged without record on the student's transcript.

### ***Honors Theses or Oral Examinations that receive "Fail"***

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

### ***Submitting the Thesis***

Each honors thesis must be prepared in conformity with the Tulane University Honors Thesis Style Sheet. Copies are available in the Honors Program office (105 Hebert Hall) and on the Honors Program website.

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