Definition of the Honors Thesis

The honors thesis is the Honors Program's capstone experience. It allows students to explore academic areas of their most passionate interests, engage in the process of discovery, and contribute in their areas of interest and expertise.

An honors thesis involves substantially more work that than a term paper. It will probably be the largest single project you will undertake as an undergraduate. The completion of such a project--the research, experimentation, or design of a product--can focus your interests, provide perspective in a chosen major, develop basic scholarly skills, foster creativity and independent effort, and bring the educational experiences together in a way that other academic projects do not. In addition to independent work, the project also involves close associations between the student and the faculty members, particularly with the professor supervising the research work. Such sustained interaction contributes greatly to the quality of the experience.

The Honors Program also encourages student writers and artists to develop honors thesis projects. Proposals for creative arts and performance projects will naturally be somewhat different from proposals in scholarly and scientific fields.

Format for Honors Theses by Discipline or Area:

Honors theses come in a variety of formats but all include a formal written component and formal oral presentation.

• Research paper- This paper uses reliable methods to analyze first-hand data from experiments and surveys. It may include laboratory or field-work and/or research including human subjects (with the guidance of an adviser trained in human subjects research and formal approval of the research project). (roughly 15-25 pages)

• Scholarly paper- A paper that uses original and secondary published sources to formulate a thesis question and make a creative and sound contribution to the literature. The paper may be a review and synthesis of the literature or an original paper. (roughly 25-35 pages)

• Business Plan- The student conceptualizes a business, including a plan for marketing, finance, and implementation. Students interested in entrepreneurship often choose this format. (roughly 20 pages)

• Pedagogy- Students create educational "units" which include lesson plans, pedagogical instructions, and a formal reflection paper. (roughly 20 pages)

• Performance (primarily for Theater and Music majors)- presentation or display of a student's creative artistry (e.g., dance, music, and vocal recitals; art, film, theatrical performance). This option will include an additional formal reflection paper (roughly 12-15 pages)

• Portfolio (primarily for Fine Arts majors)- A visual compilation or display of a student's artistry. This option will include an additional formal reflection paper. (roughly 12-15 pages)

ORAL COMPONENT: The presentation is approximately fifteen to twenty minutes in duration and followed by a question and answer session with the committee and or audience. The formal oral presentation should draw upon the informative and persuasive speaking skills you have developed in the Honors seminars. You will need to pay particular attention to:

- writing, reviewing, and revising a complete sentence outline of your presentation;
- developing a much shorter “bare bones” outline for the actual extemporaneous presentation;
- introducing the presentation in a way that captures audience attention and interest, and previews the main points;
- developing a main body that presents key points (ideas) and perspectives, analysis, arguments, and results;
- focusing on a delivery that is well-organized and clearly presented; • ending with a summary and conclusion; and
- using PowerPoint is acceptable so long as the presentation is formal, extemporaneous, and follows the presentation guidelines.