

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Honors College

# Senior Honors Thesis Handbook

## Honors 689

(6H credits over two semesters; **Not open to students with credit in Honors 687**)

**PLEASE NOTE:** Students considering the senior thesis option should consult with the Honors thesis liaison **during their junior year** to discuss requirements and procedures. Before you register for a senior Honors thesis, you must have an approved proposal. **All proposals must be formally submitted to the Honors College by May 15 for fall semester or December 15 for spring semester.** To find out who the Honors thesis liaison is, call the Honors College office at 414-229-4658 or stop by the main office, Honors House 154.

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## **WHAT IS THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS?**

The senior Honors thesis (Honors 689) is a substantial formal paper reflecting independent research conducted under the supervision of a faculty thesis advisor. Written over the period of two semesters (3H credits each semester), the senior thesis can be written in any field or area of specialization including the humanities, social sciences, and biological and physical sciences. The thesis should make some contribution to your field of study, though the contribution will, of course, vary greatly depending upon your area of specialization. You might, for example, provide a novel interpretation of a literary text, investigate an event or idea that has received little attention, or design and execute an experiment. Generally, senior theses written in the humanities are argumentative. They present the reader with a disputable thesis and supply arguments in support of this thesis.

Senior Honors theses are usually written within your major field. Theses written in the humanities and social sciences are typically 50 to 75 pages long; in the natural sciences (and other subjects requiring field research or experimentation) they are somewhat shorter, 30 to 45 pages. You do not have to complete a senior thesis to graduate with an Honors degree, but students who complete the thesis option will be awarded the "Honors with Thesis" degree designation.

## **WHY DO SENIOR HONORS THESIS?**

Doing an extensive senior research paper can be challenging and rewarding. It will allow you to investigate a topic of particular interest in greater detail than is possible in normal semester classes, provide a forum for independent study if you thrive in such situations, and allow you to work closely with a faculty member whom you admire and find intellectually stimulating.

Completing a senior thesis is also valuable for students considering graduate or law school. A successfully completed senior thesis is often persuasive evidence to admissions and fellowship committees of your potential for outstanding performance in graduate or professional school. Writing a senior thesis can also help you develop the kind of background necessary for success in graduate school. You can develop research skills, writing ability, and self-discipline, learn to pace yourself through a long research project, and learn how to work with faculty members on a sustained research project. It can also provide you with an area of expertise and specialization on which to build in graduate school and perhaps even serve as the springboard for your master's thesis.

Finally, whether you are considering graduate school or not, a senior thesis provides a capstone to your undergraduate education. A senior thesis, in other words, may serve as a means of pulling together many of the interests you have developed during your years at UWM.

## **SELECTING AND LIMITING YOUR TOPIC**

One of the most difficult problems facing the student interested in doing a senior thesis is selecting a thesis topic. Normally, the topic is related to your major field. Often, it emerges either from a class of particular interest or from an independent research project. Students who want to do a senior thesis but who do not have a concrete topic in mind are encouraged either to act as a research assistant for faculty affiliated with the Honors College or do an independent study under faculty supervision. This will strengthen your research skills, allow you to see how scholars choose, define, and limit topics, and expose you to ideas for a topic. You may want to consult several faculty members in your department for help in identifying and refining your topic.

Beyond this, remember that your topic must be focused, flexible, and capable of sustaining your interest. Do not be too ambitious. A sign of maturity in scholarship is the ability to address broad issues through the medium of specific questions. Remember also that your topic is likely to undergo substantial revision from its initial formulation. So pick a topic that can be narrowed. Finally, realize that at some point in this project you will probably become tired and discouraged. This difficult period may be even worse if you are not interested and concerned with the subject of your project.

Here are some examples of theses written by UWM Honors graduates in recent years:

“West Allis, Wisconsin: A Case Study of an Industrial Suburb”

“The Effects of Social Organization on the Genetic Composition of Primate Populations: the Vervet Monkey (*Cercopithecus aethiops*)”

“Seed Bank Study of Ephemeral Wetland Ponds”

“REP-PCR: Validation of Reaction Specificity and Development of a Phylogenetic Tool for Whole Genome Comparisons”

“~~Boy, Girl~~, Boy: The Ideologies That Drive Sex Reassignment Surgery”

“Virginia Woolf and the World of Action”

“The Rational Voter: In Defense of Economic Theory”

“Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, and Sandra Cisneros: Three Approaches to Chicana Feminism”

“Childhood Sexual Abuse as a Model for Conditioning Learned Helplessness”

(Senior theses are available for perusal either in the UWM Library or in Honors House 155.)

### **FINDING A THESIS ADVISOR**

The student is responsible for finding a professor who will act as his or her thesis advisor. You might want to choose a former instructor whom you admire and feel comfortable with. Faculty members supervise senior theses on a voluntary basis, but many will be pleased to assist serious students with a thesis topic pertaining to their field of study or interest.

The thesis advisor is essential. The advisor offers the student informed, constructive criticism at all stages from the formulation of a feasible topic to the completion of the actual paper. He or she provides advice and, if necessary, training in the necessary research skills. The thesis advisor will also read and evaluate the finished thesis, but will not do any of the actual research, writing, or revising.

It is important to establish a good working relationship with your thesis advisor at the outset, one in which you both understand the mutual responsibilities. You both must agree on the scope, length, and format of the thesis, the frequency of advising sessions, and a timetable for completion.

## **THE HONORS COLLEGE THESIS LIAISON**

The Honors College thesis liaison is also available to help you in your research and writing. The Honors College liaison is not meant to serve as a substitute for the thesis advisor, but instead to provide additional support. Specifically, the Honors College thesis liaison will read and make suggestions on the proposal, meet with you and your advisor about the thesis, read and evaluate the thesis after a semester of work, and read and evaluate the final draft of the senior thesis. The Honors College liaison must approve the senior thesis before the designation “Honors with Thesis” is placed on your diploma. To find out who the Honors thesis liaison is, call the Honors College office at 414-229-4658 or stop by the main office, Honors House 154.

## **CREDITS**

The 6 credits for Honors 689 count toward the total of 21 Honors credits required for graduation with Honors. Departments are usually willing, if requested, to count senior thesis credits toward major requirements. **If you want these credits to count toward your major, you should obtain departmental approval in advance.**

## **WRITING A PROPOSAL**

The proposal is intended to serve as a guide and framework to which you can continually return as you focus and refine your research paper. The proposal will also help your thesis advisor understand the nature of your paper and thus provide solid advice. Do not treat this stage lightly. The ultimate quality of your research paper will depend upon whether or not you have written a cogent and substantive proposal.

Every proposal will be different. Nevertheless, as a general rule, the proposal should be four to five pages long and contain the following kinds of information: a description of the paper, an outline and organization of the thesis, a tentative plan of research, and an **annotated** bibliography.

### **a. Description of the Paper**

The proposal should include a clear statement of the purpose of your paper. Ask yourself the following questions and provide clear and direct answers to them. What am I investigating or testing? Why do I find this question significant and interesting? How does exploring this question make a contribution to my field of study? Is the topic sufficiently narrow that it can be completed in the time proposed?

### **b. Outline and Organization of the Project**

In your proposal, you should provide a tentative outline of your project. Ask yourself questions such as:

- How many chapters will my thesis contain?
- What will be the focus of each chapter?
- What is the most logical order for these chapters?

This outline may, of course, be changed during the course of your research and writing. The purpose in drawing it up, however, is to encourage you to think through the overall structure of your thesis and the relationship of its parts.

### **c. Plan of Research**

Your proposal should contain a paragraph or two about how you plan to proceed in your research, explaining what you will accomplish in each semester. What works will you research first? Why are you beginning here? Is there an underlying logic guiding your plan of research? Does your senior thesis build on previous research that you have done? If so, describe this research and its relationship to your proposed project.

### **d. Annotated Bibliography**

Your proposal should also include an annotated bibliography of primary and secondary source material on your topic, derived from intensive independent research and from consultation with your thesis advisor. The purpose of this section is to help you discover what materials are relevant to your project and whether these materials are available in UWM's library. Start by identifying 10-12 books, articles, and primary documents that you will be using during your research and browse through them. List them with full bibliographical data and provide a sentence or two after each work describing what the work contains and how you believe it will be important in your research. This bibliography is provisional and will no doubt expand as your thesis develops.

### **WEIL SENIOR HONORS THESIS AWARD**

Partial funding for research and related expenses is available through the Herman and Bertha Weil Senior Thesis Award. Successful applicants may be reimbursed for photocopying, use of equipment, travel to a resource library or site, attendance at a professional conference, or other valid expenses. Applications can be submitted at any point after the thesis proposal is approved and should include: an itemized list of expenses; a letter explaining why these expenses are essential to completion of the thesis; and receipts for any items or services purchased. Awards are based on merit and are not guaranteed for all applicants. For further information contact the Honors College thesis liaison.

### **LIBRARY PRIVILEGES**

Writing a senior thesis entitles you to graduate student borrowing privileges at the Golda Meir Library. You may take out a maximum of 50 books and keep them for a whole semester. (To avoid overdue notices, be sure to inform the circulation assistant that you have these privileges.)

### **AUDIENCE**

Strive to make your senior thesis understandable to a general intellectual audience, not simply to a reader within your discipline. This can be achieved in part by avoiding the unnecessary or undue use of disciplinary jargon or (when specialized language is appropriate) by providing your reader with a definition of the terms that you are using. In other words, when you use specialized language, carefully guide your reader through your analysis and argument. In general, ask yourself the question: Is my analysis understandable to someone who does not already know what I mean? This requirement is not intended to dilute the substance of your paper. It is instead premised on the belief that the qualities of good writing cross the boundaries of disciplines.

## **DOCUMENTATION**

The style of documentation will vary depending upon your discipline and should be worked out between you and your thesis advisor. Normally, the standards provided in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or *The Chicago Manual of Style* should be used for theses in the humanities.

Students must document all material that is drawn from outside sources. Facts, quotations, paraphrases of scholars' views, and background historical information all must be properly documented. There are no exceptions to this rule!

## **PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is presenting the work of someone else as your own. This ranges from flagrant forms such as simply copying the work of someone else and calling it your own, to more subtle forms such as borrowing selected phrases and ideas and weaving them within a text, or paraphrasing the author without citing his or her name. If you use the ideas or language of someone else, you must quote this person and document the source. If you have any questions, consult the Honors College liaison or your thesis advisor. Remember, as a general rule, it is always better to err on the side of caution and provide citations rather than risk plagiarism.

## **THESIS FORMAT AND PREPARATION**

The standards of your major field will determine the length and format of the thesis. In preparing the final version, however, please follow the guidelines below.

Here are the most important points:

1. Produce the thesis in 12 point font using a laser printer to ensure clear photocopies and microfilms.
2. Allow a one and one-half inch left margin. The other margins should be one inch.
3. Follow the title page format shown on the final page of this document.
4. Follow the title page with a 250-word thesis abstract, headed simply "Abstract." An abstract is a concise summary of the purposes, organization, methodology, and conclusions of your thesis. It is meant to tell your readers at a glance what your thesis is about so that they can determine whether or not it is relevant to their research and reading interests. Normally, an abstract states the purpose and scope of the thesis, outlines its organization, describes the research methods used, and states its conclusions.
5. Submit two unbound, signed copies of the thesis to the Honors College office. These may both be photocopies if they are clear copies. (You must pay for the binding of any additional copies you want.)
6. All senior theses should contain the following components in the following order: title page, abstract, table of contents, body of the work, endnotes (if endnotes are used instead of footnotes), and bibliography.

## **PROCEDURE AND TIMETABLE**

### **Getting started**

If you are interested in doing a senior thesis, you should consult the Honors College thesis liaison during **your junior year** (56-87 credits) to discuss requirements and procedures. At this time you should also meet with appropriate department faculty, develop a thesis topic, select a thesis advisor, and if desired, get departmental approval for counting the project toward your major requirements.

### **Getting the proposal approved**

**No later than the end of your junior year**, you must draft a proposal based on the guidelines provided above and show it to the Honors thesis liaison. (Since the proposal may go through several revisions, it is important to leave ample time for the writing process.) Once the thesis liaison has approved the proposal for submission, you will receive a signature form to fill out and attach to your proposal. The signature form must be signed by your faculty thesis advisor before the final proposal is formally submitted to the Honors College.

➔ **All proposals must be formally submitted to the Honors College by May 15 for fall semester or December 15 for spring semester.**

The final proposal must be formally approved by the thesis liaison and the director of the Honors College before you can register for the course.

After the final proposal is approved, the Honors College will register you in Honors 689. The Honors thesis liaison will arrange a meeting to discuss the thesis with you and your thesis advisor, making sure that all parties involved know how to proceed.

### **The First Semester**

After one semester you should turn in a draft of work completed (about twenty to thirty pages). This draft will be evaluated by both your thesis advisor and the Honors College liaison. This requirement will insure that you have made substantial progress and provide guidance on how best to finish your senior research. Once this draft is submitted, you may request to be registered for the second semester by the Honors College.

### **Completing the Thesis**

Your completed thesis must be turned in to the Honors College for final **approval no later than one week before the end of second-semester classes**. Submit two unbound copies to the Honors College Office. The title page of each must be signed by your faculty advisor, who will assign the final grade. Only when the Honors thesis liaison has approved and signed the completed thesis will it have earned the "Honors with Thesis" degree designation.

One copy of the approved thesis will be kept permanently in the Honors College Office. The Honors College submits the second copy to the UWM Golda Meir Library for binding, microfilming, cataloguing, and shelving. (These may both be photocopies if they are clear dark copies.) You must pay for the binding of any additional copies you want.

