

## **An Overview of the Honors Senior Research Project**

The *Undergraduate Catalog* contains this brief description of the Honors Senior Research Project:

Students who aspire to graduate magna cum laude or summa cum laude must undertake a senior research project in his or her major subject or teaching field. The project is carried out under the direction of a faculty member conversant with the topic under investigation. When completed, the research project will be submitted to a committee composed of the members of the University Honors Committee and the supervising faculty member. In addition, the student will present the paper orally to the same committee and other faculty wishing to attend. The student will receive three credit hours in his or her major subject or teaching field for the research project, if he or she enrolls in an Independent Study course or a Research course.

The Honors Committee encourages students to accept the challenge of this project. It is a meaningful experience and possibly one of the best educational instruments available for an honors student. Such projects are rarely "easy," but they are worthwhile and enjoyable. The Senior Research Project, obviously, will differ according to the student's discipline and interests. A project in Chemistry won't look much like one in Business or one in History or English. However, all the projects will share similar goals and attributes, some of which are included below.

### **Expectations for the Senior Research Project**

1. The project should represent some of your best work as an undergraduate, even theoretically moving toward entry level graduate work. We hope that the project will be something that you are proud to show a graduate program or future employer as an example of your abilities. As such, the research should be sound and should be presented effectively. Your efforts should meet the burden of proof recognized by experts in your discipline. Arguments should be reasonable and logical. They should be supported with evidence and reasoning. They should use claims, data, and warrants in appropriate ways. They should use levels of development and provide adequate generalizations and details to create unity and coherence. At the same time, effective projects are well-written, clear, and cogent. They use appropriate style and form for both academic discourse in general and the major discipline in particular.
2. Papers produced during the Honors Senior Research Project should be more than a review of literature or a summary of current opinions on a subject. The goal is not to merely report the findings of others. This project invites students to engage in some original research and in some original thinking. Certainly the project should be informed by the work of experts in the discipline and should draw from the expertise of others. Knowledge does not exist in a vacuum, and you must establish appropriate contexts for your work. Still, the project must be driven by a clear sense of purpose

that is the student's, not someone else's. Establish that purpose by clearly defining the project in the prospectus. In the prospectus identify both the scope and focus of the project and indicate specific aims and goals of your project. Obviously the prospectus will be tentative and is subject to revision as the project proceeds, but a good prospectus prepares the way for success on large projects.

3. Documentation and mechanical aspects of the paper in the research project should conform to the appropriate style sheet (MLA, APA, Chicago, or whatever) that governs the major field or discipline. Use the same style sheet consistently and correctly throughout the project. (The final arbiter on choice of style sheets is the supervising faculty mentor of the project.)
4. Papers should be relatively free of mechanical and grammatical errors. Students should avoid anything that detracts from the clarity of the paper and, consequently, from the impact of the content in the paper. Supervising faculty should require revision as needed.
5. Because papers must fit within a context of the discipline, students will use sources (written and otherwise). All borrowings of words, phrases, and ideas in quotation, paraphrase, and summary will be correctly cited and documented. Attribution of sources and materials is an essential component of learning to engage in academic discussions and students are expected to handle attribution correctly. Students should be familiar with the concept of plagiarism and should be careful in their handling of source materials to avoid plagiarizing.
6. The Director of Honors will appoint a preliminary outside reader to represent the Honors Committee for every Senior Research Project. Throughout the project, the Honors Committee representative will assist the supervising faculty member and the student in meeting the expectations for the project. The representative will serve as a liaison to the committee from the beginning of the project until the official presentation of the project. The representative should be included as early as possible to provide support and guidance during the project. The representative may act (in consultation with the committee and the Director of Honors) on behalf of the Honors Committee, including the authority to require necessary revisions in the paper before the official presentation is permitted.

### **Definition of Participants and Expected Roles in the Process**

If an **Honors Student** wishes to participate in the Senior Research Project, he or she should have completed all other requirements for the Honors Program, including the junior-level Honors Seminars (HNRS 3110 and 3120) and the three designated honors courses in his or her major subject. The student should first create a preliminary proposal for the project and negotiate the topic with a supervising faculty member from the major field of study. The student should then complete and submit the form declaring the intent to do the research project and any necessary forms for registering in appropriate courses for credit. Having received approval to work on the project, the student will conduct the

research and complete the project, then present the project through a paper and an oral presentation to the Honors Committee. Successful completion of the project, paper, and presentation merits a designation of magna cum laude or summa cum laude at graduation.

**Supervising Faculty Members** should be familiar with and have some expertise in the particular topic so that they may provide good support and guidance to the student. The supervising faculty member should encourage the student both to be ambitious and to establish reasonable goals for the project. The Honors Committee asks supervising faculty to recognize the limits of an undergraduate research project, but also to motivate students to work up to their potential in original research and thinking. The supervising faculty member is the student's advocate, but also acts in the interest of the University and encourages the student to meet the expectations of academic community. The supervising faculty member is free to communicate with the Honors Committee representative of the Director of Honors and to ask for interpretations or suggestions at any point during the project.

The Director of the Honors Program will appoint an **Honors Committee Representative** to serve as a liaison between the student and the Honors Committee. This representative is familiar with the process and with expectations of the Honors Committee for the research project and can help answer questions and provide guidance to the student and supervising faculty member. In addition, this representative serves as an initial outside reader and will provide feedback and suggestions for revision. The representative is generally willing to be as involved in the process as the student and supervising faculty member would like. At the very least, the representative should be provided a timetable for the project and should be copied on major drafts of the paper. The representative must authorize the final step of the project (scheduling the oral presentation to the complete Honors Committee).

**The Honors Committee** consists of faculty members from different disciplines who volunteer to serve on this body. All of them have at one time or another participated in the Honors seminars or have taught Honors courses in the upper- and lower-level Honors Program. After they have received the final draft of the research project, Committee members will assemble for the student's oral presentation and will discuss the project with the student. Based on the paper, the presentation, and discussion, members will determine the appropriate level of honor to confer at graduation.

**The Director of Honors** oversees the process from start to finish, provides the forms and maintains the records for the program, and coordinates the interactions of the student and the Honors community. Students will submit an initial application announcing their intention to participate in a Senior Research Project. If the Director approves the project, the Director will then assign an appropriate representative of the Honors Committee to work with the student and supervising faculty member. The Director will receive the final paper (which has first been approved by the Honors Committee Representative), distribute it to the Committee, and schedule the time for the oral presentation. The Director will then communicate the appropriate level of honor to the Registrar.