

2009-2010

**The Honors Program in Psychology and Education  
and in Neuroscience and Behavior When the Student is  
Sponsored by a Member of This Department**

A. Eligibility for Honors: College Requirements

1. A cumulative average of 3.00 in the major field
2. Approval of the Department or Program (finding someone to supervise the project)
3. Enrollment in Psychology or Neuroscience and Behavior 395

College guidelines for the honors program and honors thesis are available from the Office of the Dean of the College. These guidelines are sent to students enrolled in 395 Independent Study during the fall of senior year. We strongly recommend that students who are contemplating honors obtain the guidelines during their junior year.

B. The Honors Program in Psychology and Education

See the attached timetable of dates for various stages of the Honors Program. This program applies to majors in Psychology, Psychology and Education, and to those Neuroscience and Behavior majors whose honors research is supervised by a member of the Department of Psychology and Education.

1. Entering the Honors Program

In this department, entrance into the Honors program is initiated by the student. Eligible students who are interested in conducting research for an Honors degree should explore the possibility with potential faculty sponsors; and, whenever possible, they should do so during the junior year.<sup>1</sup>

Students who plan to conduct research that may lead to an Honors degree should enroll in Psychology 395 or Neuroscience and Behavior 395. The department also offers Psychology 411-412, which is a 1-credit, 2-semester course for graduate students and potential honors students. Anyone contemplating Honors is strongly advised to enroll in this course.

By the third week of the first semester of 395, the student should have discussed possible projects with potential sponsors and found someone who agrees to direct her project. Usually, such agreement is obtained prior to the start of the first semester. If the student and sponsor agree that the project may develop into an honors thesis, the student should prepare a thesis proposal, or prospectus, that will be reviewed by the departmental Thesis Committee (see below)

---

<sup>1</sup>Independent work (395) leading to honors is usually conducted during the fall and spring semesters of the senior year; but it is sometimes possible to start during the spring semester of the junior year and continue the project through the fall of senior year. If this arrangement suits your program, see your advisor and potential sponsors as early as possible in the fall of junior year.

## 2. The Thesis Committee

The Thesis Committee will consist of the sponsor, who directs the project, and two other members of the department/program, to be selected by the student after consultation with her sponsor. The Thesis Committee for Neuroscience and Behavior majors may also include a member of the Department of Biological Sciences. A student also has the option of adding a fourth member from another institution if that person has particular expertise related to the student's project. This addition would be subject to approval by the student's advisor, all members of the Thesis Committee and the department/program chair. This fourth person would not qualify as the outside member required for the Honors Committee (see below). The primary functions of the thesis committee are to monitor the student's progress and to contribute advice, suggestions, and moral support. They will also review the thesis proposal (see #4.), the draft of the subsequent thesis if the proposal has been accepted and the student is a candidate for honors (see #7.), and they will be voting members of the Honors Committee (see #3.). Students are encouraged to consult with the members of their Thesis Committee throughout the course of the project.

## 3. The Honors Committee

The Honors Committee comprises the Thesis Committee, the department/program chair, and someone outside the department. The college requires that an honors thesis be evaluated by a faculty member from another department or another college in order to insure that a given department is neither too strict nor too lenient in its requirements for the degree with Honors. In the case of Neuroscience and Behavior majors whose work is sponsored by a member of the Psychology Department, the honors and thesis committees consist of at least three members, two of whom are members of the Program Committee for Neuroscience and Behavior. In addition, at least one member must be from a department other than psychology.

The members of the Honors Committee read the completed thesis, attend the student's oral presentation of her work, and make a recommendation to the department concerning the honors degree. The college sets the criteria for Honors and for the different degrees of Honors. The B.A. degree with honors signifies a major achievement on the part of a student. The degrees with high honor and summa cum laude are occasionally granted for projects of exceptional merit.

## 4. The Thesis Proposal

The thesis proposal should describe the purpose or rationale for the project and include a reasonably detailed description of the methods to employ. Technical terms should be defined and the procedures clearly described. In some cases, pilot studies may be necessary to determine certain details of the procedure. If so, the student should describe the pilot studies and state how they will contribute to the final methodology.

Proposals will differ somewhat according to the nature of the project, but the following

guidelines may be helpful in preparing the 10-12 page (double spaced) proposal. (References are not included in the 10-12 page limit, and additional tables or graphs may be appended.) The format of the proposal should follow the *APA Publication Manual (5th Ed.)* except that the student will use the future (rather than past) tense when describing her plans.

Title (tentative): Summarizes the question being asked; the emphasis or special features of the study (e.g., the variables that are being examined; the experience, behavior, population, or setting being studied; or the theory being tested). The title states what distinguishes the student's project from similar reports in the literature.

Abstract: 100-150 words

Introduction (3-6 pages): Describes the nature of the question and its significance. Briefly summarizes and analyzes the *relevant* literature. If testing a particular theory or model, analyzes basic assumptions and predictions with respect to the results the student might obtain. (In some cases it may make more sense for the student to describe possible results and their implications after she has described the procedure.) Closes by describing the purpose, the need for the research, variables (if applicable), and methodology.

Method (3-8 pages): Describes the method in enough detail so the reader can decide whether or not it is appropriate to answer the question(s) the student has posed.

Participants: Includes information about probable number, age, and other characteristics (including species, if appropriate). States clearly why these participants are appropriate to the study.

Procedure: Discusses ways the student will attempt to answer the questions she has posed in her introduction: the design of the research and how it will be conducted. Demonstrates that the student knows how to ask and answer a research question.

Apparatus and Stimulus Materials (if applicable): Describes as appropriate with diagrams included in the appendix. Discusses relevant ethical issues, research settings, definitions of behavior, recording procedures, interobserver agreement, etc. Describes rating scales, questionnaires, or interviews; appends examples or complete measures.

Analysis of Results: Describes analyses that will be employed (qualitative, quantitative, statistical, interpretive, etc.) and how they are appropriate to assess the questions being asked.

References (not included in 10-12 page limit)

Three copies of the student's proposal should be submitted to the chair of the Honors Committee who will forward them to other members of the Thesis Committee. (See Timetable for deadline.)

The proposal will be read by the members of the Thesis Committee. They will:

- a. Contribute questions, comments, and suggestions that might advance the project;
- b. Assess the likelihood that the project will lead to a degree with honors or whether it might better be conducted as an independent project that would not require a thesis.

The decision to admit a student as a candidate for Honors rests with these members of the Thesis Committee. The committee members have the following three options:

- a. the proposal is accepted, and the student is a candidate for Honors;
- b. the proposal is not accepted in its present form, but the student is invited to rewrite and resubmit the proposal, responding to the questions, comments, and suggestions raised by the committee;
- c. the proposal is not accepted as an honors project, but the student is encouraged to continue her work as an independent project.

Approximately two weeks after receiving the proposal, the student's sponsor will inform her of the decision and will discuss the specific reasons for the decision and any recommendations for a revised proposal or for the final thesis. In cases where members of the committee cannot reach agreement, the sponsor may request that the proposal be read by at least two other members of the department before the student is informed of the decision. One of these readers will be either the department chair or the coordinator of the honors program. The decision of this expanded committee will be final.

In all cases, the student is invited to meet with individual members of the Thesis Committee to discuss any questions or recommendations that have been made.

## 5. Ethics Proposals

- a. Human Subjects Students who will be working with human subjects must complete the College Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethics proposal forms and submit them to the IRB. The forms are available on the Dean of Faculty website: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/osr/irb/Application.shtml> or <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/osr/irb/IRBreviewform2.pdf>

No student may begin collecting data until the ethics proposal has been approved by the IRB. Whenever possible, a copy of the ethics proposal should also be included with the thesis proposal.

#### b. Animals

Students who will be working with animals should read the guidelines of the American Psychological Association, *Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Animals*, copies of which are available in the department office. Before designing a project, they should also obtain from the department administrative assistant a copy of the department's *Mount Holyoke College Animal Use Proposal* (<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/committees/iacuc/proposal.html>). This proposal form is designed to educate students about animal welfare as well as to insure the humane treatment of animals at Mount Holyoke. The student should read the proposal form *before* designing her project, and submit the completed form with the thesis proposal. If a student wishes to start working with animals before her thesis proposal is reviewed (i.e., in October or early November), she must obtain approval from the institutional animal care and use committee; that is, she must submit the animal proposal form at least one week (and, preferably, two weeks) before she plans to start work with the animals and await the decision of that committee. As in the case with human subjects, a student may not collect data or institute deprivation procedures -- indeed, in some cases a student may not even obtain the animals she needs -- until her IACUC proposal has been approved. Each student researcher should talk to her research advisor about these important restrictions.

#### 6. Conducting the Project

The major responsibility for honors research lies with the student and the faculty member who is directing the project. Together, they should discuss times and schedules for reviewing the literature, constructing or assembling apparatus or stimulus materials, locating subjects, collecting and analyzing data, and writing the various sections of the thesis. These deadlines will vary, depending on the nature of the project.

To avoid a last-minute rush and to deal with potential problems before they become insurmountable, we suggest frequent and regular discussions between student and sponsor. Most students have weekly meetings with their sponsor; others submit written progress reports at regular intervals.

#### 7. The Thesis

Guidelines for the preparation and format of the thesis are described on the Psychology and Education web site:

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/psychology/honors.html>

The student and her Thesis Committee will work out a timetable that specifies when one or more drafts of each section of the thesis will be due. However, each student will submit a complete draft -- including the Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, and

References sections – to all members of her Honors Committee by the specified date in April (see Timetable). This draft should include not only all analyses described in the proposal, as well as associated figures and tables, but also a full discussion of these results. [Formatting note: All formatting except the 2” left margin should be complete for the April draft.] Committee members will make comments and suggestions within one week. They will return their comments to the advisor, who will inform the student of the Committee’s decision as to whether or not to submit the thesis for Honors.

Please note that it is to the student's advantage to submit her complete draft at an earlier date to allow the student time to incorporate the suggestions of her committee members and to polish her writing.

The **final draft** that incorporates all of the comments and suggestions of the committee members of the thesis **must be submitted at least five (5) days before the oral presentation**. The final draft must have all formatting complete including the 2” margin. Copies of the final draft are submitted to the following:

- All members of the thesis committee
- The outside member of the honors committee
- The department office

## 8. Extensions

In unusual circumstances a student may petition for an extension of the deadline for the proposal, the complete draft of the thesis, or the final draft of the thesis. This request should first be discussed with and approved by the advisor, who in turn will consult other members of either the Thesis Committee or Honors Committee, as appropriate. If a majority of the committee agrees, the student and sponsor will then petition the Chair of the Department. Members of the Department will be advised that a petition has been received and of the circumstances and whether or not it has been approved. If the student wishes, she may first consult with the Chair. In the event the extension is not approved, the student will be encouraged to complete her work as an independent project.

## Timetable for Projects Leading to an Honors Thesis, 2009-2010

*Note: these are final deadlines for phases of an honors project.  
Due to the nature of the project, advisors may set earlier deadlines.*

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>
Spring - Sept. 2009	Explore the possibility of honors research with potential faculty sponsors. Enroll in Psychology (or Neuroscience and Behavior) 395.  You are also strongly encouraged to enroll in Psychology 411-412, a course designed for Honors and Graduate students (1 cr/sem).
October 9	Names of student, sponsor, and other members of Thesis Committee (see 2.) submitted to Sr. Administrative Assistant and Honors Advisor.
November 2	<u>Thesis Proposal</u> , to each thesis committee member.  If a student will collect pilot data before completing her proposal, the ethics proposal must be submitted to the college's IRB (after approval from advisor) at least two weeks before the student makes contact with her subjects. The sponsor will then organize a meeting of the thesis committee to discuss the proposal.
November 13	The student will be notified of the committee's decision by the faculty sponsor.
December 4	(Resubmit revised proposal.)
February, March	The sponsor may request <u>progress reports</u> and/or drafts of sections of the thesis.
March 22	Name of "outside" member of honors committee to Administrative Assistant and Honors Advisor.
Week of April 5th	Sign up for date of <u>oral presentation</u> . (First, check possible dates and times with all members of your Honors committee.)
April 12	<u>Complete draft of thesis</u> submitted to each member of the Thesis Committee. Members submit comments and suggestions to faculty sponsor by April 19. The student will then be advised by sponsor whether or not to submit the thesis for Honors. Students proceeding for honors should meet with each committee member to discuss comments unless advised it is unnecessary.
May 5 - May 8	Copies of <u>completed thesis</u> submitted to each member of the Honors committee (including outside member) and to the Department Office <u>at least 5 days before oral presentation</u> .
May 10 - May 13	<u>Oral Presentation</u> of thesis