

X. GUIDELINES FOR THE HONORS PROGRAM AND HONORS THESIS

Academic
Policy
Committee
Dec. 1974
Revised:
Apr. 1977
Dec. 1977
Aug. 1996

Students embarking on an honors project frequently have questions about the quantity and quality of work expected. As the project nears culmination in a thesis, the questions become more specifically about the form of the thesis. There will, of course, be variations from discipline to discipline, but what follows are general guidelines intended to be helpful to both students and directors alike.

Eligibility

Fac. Min.
Mar. 1986
Dec. 2012

A senior who has maintained a cumulative average of 3.00 in her college work or a 3.00 average in her major field may undertake an honors program with the approval of the department or major committee concerned. Honors ordinarily are pursued in the major field, but may be undertaken in another field if the student has sufficient background in that field and has the approval of both the department or major committee concerned and the Dean of the College. Sufficient background usually entails the student's already having taken course work at the 300-level, and being familiar with the methodology of the discipline to such a degree that she can reasonably be expected to work independently.

Credit

The honors program consists of a minimum of 8 credits (usually recorded as 395 on the transcript) distributed between at least two semesters. These are usually the two semesters of senior year, although some students begin in the second semester of junior year. A student may include an approved 2–4 credit capstone or equivalent (300-level) course, with the remaining credits being independent study, recorded on the transcript as 395. Any department that wishes to add such a capstone course as part of their honors program should submit a proposal explaining the rationale to the Academic Administrative Board. One-semester honors projects are not permitted, because one semester does not allow sufficient time for the research, assimilation of material, writing, and polishing required. The project may be extended through more than two semesters provided that such a concentration on one topic seems wise in the student's total educational program. A maximum of 16 credits of honors and independent work together may count in the minimum 128 credits presented for the A.B. degree. If the honors project does not culminate in a recommendation for a degree with honor, it is recorded as independent work. Both honors and independent work are recorded on the transcript as 395.

Grade

In a two-semester honors or independent project, no grade should be submitted at the end of the first semester; the instructor need only indicate on the grade sheet that it is a continuing project. The grade submitted upon completion of the project will be recorded for both semesters.

Scope of Project

Research for the honors program should be designed so that it may be completed in the approximately nine months that are available and with materials that are accessible. In practice this may mean beginning with broad background research or reading, then narrowing the project down to a topic that is feasible within the time allotted and with the materials at hand. Unlike a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, it is not expected that the research be exhaustive and completion delayed until all materials have been consulted. A well-chosen topic will be complete in itself, with no important avenues of exploration being left untouched. Defining the topic is one of the most important steps of the project.

Work Schedule

The early months of the first semester obviously will be devoted to the most basic research: bibliography, reading, designing the experiment, collecting data, etc. The professional members of the library staff are available for reference and welcome the opportunity to assist students who are doing independent and honors work. By the end of the first semester the thesis should be beginning to take shape in the form of a tentative outline. It is best to aim at beginning to write early in the second semester, so as to have time to write, rewrite, polish, and type in final form. The thesis must be submitted in final form to the department or major committee by the deadline *they* have set. This deadline is set early enough so that the grade on the thesis and on the Honors examination reaches the Registrar no later than eleven calendar days before Commencement. The polished honors thesis takes more time to write than a series of papers for a course, and it is not uncommon for individual chapters or the entire thesis to require rewriting. The kind of schedule given above may not apply in all cases, e.g., in the sciences, the experimentation and data collecting may go on longer and the thesis itself may be shorter, but whatever work schedule is set up should allow ample time for writing.

Thesis Length

Most honors work undertaken at Mount Holyoke culminates in a thesis, a copy of which is placed on file in the library; some departments also keep copies of all theses. The average honors thesis is 75-100 pages long, although some may be 25-30 pages and others may run over 100 pages. About 125 pages should be viewed as a maximum. The important things in an honors program are the quality of the research, the originality of the thinking, and the quality of the writing. Quality will be more evident in a thesis that is well organized and succinctly and clearly stated than in one which relies on the volume of evidence to make its point. The ability to think through a point selecting what is most important and to present a well-thought-out argument in a concise style is precisely what distinguishes work of honors quality. It is easier to quote other sources extensively and to present an abundance of data, but this will only overwhelm the reader and leave her/him with the task of doing the sorting out that should reveal the student's ability to cope with the material and to think analytically.

Academic
Priorities
Committee
Apr. 2005

Studio Arts and the Performing Arts

Projects in Art or in the Performing Arts such as music, dance, and in the theatre, do not lend themselves to the usual thesis. Normally the evidence of independent work that is presented is the work itself, together with a technical explanation of the process used or a philosophical discussion of the aesthetic process. Sometimes prints or other products are donated to the art collection. Similarly, in dance, what is presented are photographs, slides, or a video tape of the performance and a written technical or philosophic discussion; in music, the written portion may be accompanied by an audio recording. In theatre, if the project has been direction of a major production, the student would submit the prompt book with blocking and other details of the production, character analyses, her analysis of the play from the director's viewpoint, her concept of the production and probably a self-critique.

Fac. Min.
May 2004
Nov. 2006
Apr. 2013

The Form of the Honors Thesis Manuscript

Consult with your advisor or department on whether they require a paper copy of the honors thesis and on any specific requirements within your particular discipline. In general, the following guidelines may be helpful when preparing your thesis:

Font. It is recommended that you use a font such as Times Roman, Palatino, or Courier in 12 point.

Spacing and pagination. Five spaces indentation is recommended for paragraphs in the double-spaced matter in the text and appendices; for footnotes and bibliography, three spaces indentation is suggested.

Page numbers and Arabic figures should appear in the upper right hand corner of the page in line with the text margin. Pages should normally be numbered sequentially.

Pages with charts, diagrams, illustrations, or photographs may be assigned lower-case letters after the number of the page they follow, e.g., 14a, but the thesis should be internally consistent in its treatment of such pages.

Each chapter or division should begin on a new page, the heading and title dropped about two inches from the top of the page, centered and written in full capitals.

Number of Copies. A student should submit three copies of her thesis to her major department/examining committee, who will, in recommendations for *summa cum laude*, submit one copy to the Academic Administrative Board for review. This copy will later be returned to the department. In addition, the honors thesis and any accompanying materials, e.g.: digital video, images, and audio, should be submitted to the Library, Information and Technology Services (LITS) See https://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/find/theses_research_papers for complete instructions on format specifications and assistance.

Parts of the Thesis. The honors thesis should include a short abstract of the work, in English, preceding the title page. Parts of the thesis should be arranged in the following order: abstract; title page; acknowledgment; table of contents or outline; table of charts, figures, or diagrams, if any; preface and/or introduction; main text by chapters or parts; summary or conclusion; appendices, if any; bibliography or literature cited. Historically, print theses included a permissions sheet bound into the volume. The LITS e-thesis management system allows you to set access permissions to your work during the submission process. For information see: https://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/find/theses_research_papers

Footnotes. Footnotes may be placed at the bottom of the page below a line drawn completely across under the text, at the end of the chapter, or following the summary or conclusion. Acknowledgment of sources should follow the accepted practice in the discipline concerned. The thesis director can refer the student to a style manual that will set forth acceptable practices. Quotations of five or more lines should be single-spaced and indented five spaces from the left margin, without framing quotation marks. If a single paragraph or part of one is quoted consecutively, indent the first line of each three spaces. Verse quotations of a single line or part of a line should be run on, in quotation marks, in the text; longer verse quotations should be centered. For ellipsis within a sentence, use three . . . spaced periods, leaving a space before the first period.

Evaluation of Thesis or Project

The honors thesis or its equivalent is evaluated by an examining committee appointed by the department and composed of at least three members: two or more members of the department in which the work has been done, including the director of the project, and ordinarily, the Chair of the department, as well as a member of another department at MHC or an examiner from outside the college. In the case of an interdisciplinary or special major, the thesis or its equivalent is to be evaluated by an examining committee composed of at least three members drawn from at least two departments, including the director(s) of the honors project and the student's advisor or advising committee. The examining committee normally conducts the honors examination.

Honors Examination

No later than twelve days before Commencement, the student must take an honors examination, either oral or written, designed to test her command of the special subject of her honors work and her ability to see its significance as part of the field. If oral, the honors examination takes no more than one hour; if written or both oral and written, no more than two hours. In practice, most honors examinations are oral and are called a "defense" of the thesis or project. The word "defense" should not be taken literally. The examination is a discussion of the project between the student and her examining committee, in which members of the committee may ask for elaboration or clarification of specific points, or may ask the student to relate her work to other things in the field. The examining committee may suggest or ask that the student make corrections or rewrite certain portions of the thesis before turning it in to the Library.

Recommendation of the Examining Committee

Fac. Min
Mar. 1986

If the examining committee considers the thesis or project worthy of honors, it may recommend to the Academic Administrative Board that the student receive the A.B. degree either with honor, with high honor, or summa cum laude. Honor is recommended if two thirds of the examining committee and a majority of the department agree that the student has presented a satisfactory honors thesis or project. Evidence of outstanding work in the honors program may lead to a recommendation for High Honor.

For High Honor, the examining committee must agree unanimously and two-thirds of the department, major committee, or special honors committee must concur. *Summa cum laude* is the highest award, so the specifications are stricter, requiring an exceptional academic record at Mount Holyoke and exceptional work in the honors program. For a *summa* recommendation, the student must have a cumulative average of 3.75 in her college work, the unanimous agreement of her examining committee, and the concurrence of two-thirds of the department or major committee. (For special majors, members of the departments combined in the major usually act as "the department" in these recommendations).

The director of the project and/or the chair of the department is responsible for conveying the recommendation of the examining committee and the department to the Academic Administrative Board, via the Registrar, *in writing*, by the date announced each spring. At that time the student should be told only that she is being recommended for honors; the Registrar will notify her of the level of honors she will receive after the Board has taken official action on the recommendation. If the student does not meet all of the qualifications outlined in the preceding paragraph for the level of honors the examining committee and the department think she deserves, they may recommend that the AAB make an exception. Such a recommendation should be accompanied by a statement of full particulars

Fac. Min
Nov. 2006

All recommendations for the degree *summa cum laude* must be accompanied by a letter from the committee and/or department evaluating the student's project, thesis, and examination, elaborating on the reasons for making the recommendation. One copy of the thesis, bound in a black spring bound binder with a copy of the letter from the Committee bound inside, must be delivered to the Registrar's Office as soon as possible. (To insure availability, it is recommended that students order their binders from the College bookstore by mid-March. Binders are available in 1" or 1 1/2" and range in price from approximately \$15.00 to \$20.00 each. The 1" binder holds 100 sheets, and the 1 1/2" binder holds 150 sheets.) Each binder must have a label with the student's name, thesis title, and department on the outside of the front cover. All members of the Academic Administrative Board will read the thesis before acting upon the recommendation. The thesis is presented to the Board *only for summa* recommendations.

Fac. Min.
Nov. 2006
Apr. 2013

Sending the Thesis to the Library

Only accepted theses which have culminated in a degree with honors should be sent to the Library, Information, and Technology Services (LITS). By July 1, the corrected version of the honors thesis or other evidence (images, multimedia, etc.) is to be submitted to LITS for cataloging and preservation. The honors thesis should be submitted according to the procedures defined by LITS (https://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/find/theses_research_papers). Although the proprietary nature of many file formats makes it impossible to guarantee future access, LITS is committed to migrating file formats and preserving and providing access to theses over time. LITS procedures will also outline currently supported file formats at any given time.

Successful honors theses are discoverable in the Five College catalog, in the OCLC national database, and in other discovery venues. It is the policy of LITS to follow the permissions for redistribution as selected by the student when she submits her thesis.