Thank you for agreeing to work with one of our Honors students and for your commitment to undergraduate education and research. This document describes your role as the advisor of an Honors thesis. A complete thesis guide is available on the Honors College website. In addition to these formal guidelines, here’s some advice for you on making this a successful experience.

In order to graduate from the Honors College and receive the Honors Diploma, students are required to complete a Senior Honors Thesis/Creative Project. The project qualifies for three credits of HONR 499 and is graded by you. You should see HONR 499 among your list of courses for which grades are due at the end of the relevant semester. Remember to record a grade for this student! If the student doesn’t complete the project by the end of the semester, please award an “Incomplete” and then change it to a letter grade when completed. The Honors College can substitute a departmental capstone number for HONR 499, but this must be requested on the Project proposal (there are no automatic substitutions); alternatively, the department may wish to substitute HONR 499 for a departmental capstone requirement.

The student will already have all the procedural information below. The information below is intended as a reference for you.

The first step in undertaking an Honors project is to identify a topic and a BSU faculty member who will serve as the project advisor. At least one conference with the Honors College personnel is a required part of the project process. The official thesis appointment consists of the final, approved, signed, project proposal form. The proposal coversheet must be signed by you and the student before it is turned in to the Honors College. Honors College approval will not be given until both signatures are received, and the student cannot enroll in HONR 499 without this approval. If a departmental course is to be substituted for HONR 499, this must also be on the submitted proposal, so that we can make the necessary adjustments to DegreeWorks.

The following information must be included with the project proposal form (written by the student with your input):

1. What the student will do. The student should indicate the type of independent research or inquiry being proposed; a description of the project’s objective/purpose; the intended outcome of the project (e.g., a paper, finished piece of research, creative activity).

2. Why the student wants to complete this particular project.
3. For whom this project is being created. The students should indicate the target audience (real or imagined) and describe the value of the project to others.

The written proposal does not have to be lengthy; a couple of pages describing the project is usually adequate. (You may, of course, require a lengthier document.)

Completed and approved senior Honors theses are archived in Bracken Library and are available online from 1963 to the present: http://cardinalscholar.bsu.edu/handle/123456789/14. Theses for Departmental Honors or for the Miller Business Honors Program are not archived with Honors Theses unless the student is also member of the Honors College.

We rely on the faculty mentor to ensure that the student creates a final, submitted manuscript that is well-written, complete, and appropriate for a public archive. If you have concerns regarding the quality of the final document, please contact the Associate Dean of the Honors College (285-1024) for further discussion. The grade for the course is awarded by you; this grade enables the student to graduate from Ball State. Final approval for the Honors Diploma awaits review and – if needed – revisions that may be required by the Honors College. (This is stated several times in the Thesis Guide provided to the student.)

The senior Honors Thesis/Project should meet the University Core Curriculum goals for learning outcomes in Tier 3. These outcomes, as applied to the senior Honors thesis are (emphases added):

A Tier 3 course enables students to (a) use information from multiple sources to evaluate competing hypotheses, form judgments, and provide rationales; (b) critically analyze the strengths and weaknesses of various logical arguments and decision-making strategies; (c) demonstrate effective, refined writing and presentation skills as appropriate to the discipline.

Students should be able to
- articulate an effective plan of study and preparation appropriate to the proposed honors project
- appropriately synthesize information from multiple sources into an intellectual framework, as appropriate to the discipline
- critically analyze and reflect on their own personal development, as appropriate to the project
- convey their project outcomes through well-crafted discussions, writings, presentations, and/or activities, as appropriate to the project
- articulate their project outcomes in an effective, refined written document
- elucidate and nurture their own place within contemporary American society
In order to help both you and the student see that these goals are met, students must write a process analysis statement to accompany their thesis. Often, the product they produce (especially projects where the end product is a work or art, a performance, etc.) doesn’t allow us to understand the process that went into making it. Thus, we ask students to engage in some critical reflection on their process, some meta-thinking about learning. This applies to scientific or other highly technical theses wherein the language used may not be very accessible to readers outside the field, and thus some explanation of process in layperson’s terms is helpful. Every student, regardless of the nature of their project, must write a process analysis essay. There’s more on this in the Honors Thesis Handbook.

If engagement with human beings is involved in the thesis project (e.g., surveys, interviews, observation of any kind), the student should inquire about the need for review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for possible clearance on human subjects research before the project begins. This is a matter of federal law. Please do not assume that this is unnecessary; in extreme cases, the student (and you) could be liable for a financial penalty. In any case, the work could be invalidated and interfere with the student’s graduation. See the following for more details: http://cms.bsu.edu/About/AdministrativeOffices/ResearchIntegrity/HumanSubjects.aspx.

IRB rules are complicated. Be safe and check with them to be sure you and your advisee are in compliance.

When the project is completed and submitted to the Honors College, you will be asked to complete a short assessment of the student’s success in meeting the Tier 3 learning outcomes as described above. You’ll receive an email with a link to that assessment.

Some Helpful Hints for Ensuring Success in Advising an Honors Thesis

Some faculty members are very experienced in guiding thesis projects; others are new to the process. Either way, you may find the following advice helpful:

Before completion:

- Have a conversation about what a successful piece of research or creative project looks like in your field and what it will/should look like in this particular student’s case.
- Set up a schedule of meetings between you and the student and hold him/her to it. Every other week is a good standard, but whatever you both find helpful will work. Once a month may be too infrequent, as it may not allow you catch problems in time to correct them. It’s easy to forget about advisees (and for them to forget about you) if this is not done, as everyone is busy with their regular classes. Students regularly have an issue with time management of the thesis because we aren’t in their face several times a week in regularly-scheduled class meetings.
• If IRB approval is needed, make sure that’s been given and documented (have the approval from IRB in writing as you’ll need to include it in the thesis) before you get started.
• Using the thesis proposal as a guide, you may choose to set up a contract in writing for what the student will do and when in order to be successful in their project. Work out a timetable with the student for when significant parts of the thesis will be turned in to you and when the completed draft and final copy are due. The student should make the completed draft and final copy due dates early enough before the end of the semester so you have time to read and respond to it and so the student has time to make any corrections or changes.

When the thesis is completed and ready to turn in:

• Does the project match the project approved by the Honors College and documented in the project proposal form?
• Has the project achieved a level of quality consistent with standards in your field? Are you happy with it?
• If the project feels slight, lacking in intellectual heft, or otherwise insufficient, discuss what the student can do to improve it. The thesis should feel like a substantial piece of work, a capstone project, not simply a paper one might do in a regular class. In cases like this, you are welcome to discuss any concerns with the Associate Dean (285-1024).
• Has the student completed the process analysis essay discussing the thinking behind and process of completing the project?
• Are the references in a format consistent with a style in your discipline? Is it grammatically correct? Are there spelling errors?
• When the student has met the formatting instructions and requirements outlined in the Honors Thesis Guide and is ready for you to sign the Final Checklist, sit down with the student and go over the formatting checklist to be sure all items have been met. We no longer require that you sign the title page of the thesis itself.
• Award a letter grade for the thesis and research process.

Questions? Contact the Associate Dean at 285-1024.

Again, thank you for your mentorship of this student and support of the Honors College.