Honors 499: The Honors Thesis

What is it and how do I complete it?

This guide will help you conceive, plan, carry out, and submit a successful Honors thesis, the final leg of your Honors College journey. This guide is divided into four parts:

1. How to plan and prepare your thesis topic and proposal.
2. How to carry out your thesis project once it is approved.
3. How to submit the thesis (formatting and other formal rules)
4. An appendix of required forms you will need

And along the way we’ll have some advice, helpful hints, and resources for you to make this a rewarding and successful experience. The key is to plan well and stay on top of things, which this guide will help you do. Read this very carefully!

Before we get started, though, what exactly is an Honors thesis?

The Honors thesis is your capstone Honors experience, an opportunity to craft a project that showcases the kinds of mature, educated, and developed critical thinking that is the hallmark of the Honors educational experience. It should reflect your best thinking and work after several years of university work. Some students produce traditional written research papers; others produce creative projects. The latter typically include projects in the fine arts (a series of paintings, a collection of short stories, a novel, a play, a choreographed dance, a musical composition or performance, etc.), but can also include creations that don’t lend themselves to a written research paper (a computer program, an app, a technological creation, an invention, etc.). In either case, what is presented as the thesis shows this advanced thinking, whether the end product is a written work or a creative project. Also, regardless of whether you do a traditional written thesis or a creative project, you will write an accompanying process analysis statement in which you reflect on your thesis process, any great obstacles or epiphanies you encountered, and your sense of the quality and meaning of your work. (More on that later.)

At its heart the thesis is an investigation into a question, theme, problem, or issue and the presentation of your answer(s) or response. The process and product of those investigations vary, as they should. For many students, what they pursue and how they pursue it is tied to their majors, though this doesn’t have to be the case. History majors often do historical research projects and write traditional research papers. Biology majors often carry out experiments in the lab or field. Theater majors often write plays or design sets. Art majors make art. You get the idea. In essence, for cases like these, you’re using the thinking skills you’ve developed in your Honors courses to further your work in your major. It can also be useful to think ahead to your post-BSU life. If you’re planning to do biological
research work in graduate school, it can make sense to do a really good scientific experiment to show future grad schools you know what you’re doing.

That said, it also perfectly fine if you just want to investigate something you’re into. Find an advisor, get the topic approved (more on those things later!) and go for it! Either way, you’ll be using those thinking skills to explore something you love. If you don’t love your topic, get a new one. Life’s too short to work on boring projects. Bring some passion to it and you’ll do your best work! You might even have some fun.

The Honors thesis is not a regular course with regular meeting times but it is a real course. It’s similar to an independent study with the course designation HONR 499, for which you earn three credit hours. You register for these credits during the appropriate semester for you (usually during your senior year). You should consider the workload equivalent to taking a regular 3-credit-hour course, with hours of work each week devoted to your thesis, just as if you were in a regular class that meets several times per week. It can be difficult to remember this (more on how to do so later!). You’ll meet with your advisor on a regular basis, and when the project is completed, your advisor will evaluate your work and submit a final letter grade for you, just as he or she would for a regular course.

Here are the basic steps in completing an Honors thesis:

1. Do some thinking and preliminary research into a possible topic or project.
2. Make an appointment with the Dean, the Associate Dean, the Honors Fellow, or their designated representative in order to discuss your project. Your proposal must be approved by one of these individuals. This can happen before or after step 3 below.
3. Find a project advisor. Complete a thesis proposal and the proposal coversheet.
4. After you receive approval you’ll be given permission to enroll in Honors 499 (or a department equivalent).
5. Complete the project, format it correctly, turn it in, and ring the bell of honor.