

## William Paterson University Honors College

### Overview of the Honors Thesis

*This is an overview of the Honors thesis and its requirements. Additional information including other requirements and specific evaluation procedures are available from your Honors Track Director.*

#### **Benefits of the Thesis Process**

Deciding to undertake the thesis process is a commitment to a significant amount of work, but there are important benefits to consider:

- Being one of a select group of students graduating from William Paterson University. Only around 7% of graduating seniors each year complete the Honors College, receiving the Honors College designation on their diploma and transcript.
- An opportunity to explore, research, and create something that particularly interests you.
- Gaining/honing a particular knowledge and/or skill set.
- Confidence in your public presentation and speaking abilities.
- The chance to reflect on and synthesize four years of intellectual and personal growth.
- Developing professional relationships with advisors and mentors.
- Demonstrating academic motivation and intellectual specialization through a well-written document to highlight to graduate programs or employers.
- Developing a keen sense of accomplishment on having completed a major, independent research, or creative project.
- The thesis topic is a vehicle for self-expression that may be the basis for an offer of admission to a graduate program or for a career opportunity.

#### **Sources for this handbook**

The writing of an Honors thesis is something that few undergraduates do, but there are national standards regarding expectations. This overview is inspired by *The Honors Thesis: a Handbook for Directors, Deans, and Faculty Advisors*, Mark Anderson, Karen Lyons and Norman Weiner (Lincoln, Nebraska: National Collegiate Honors College, 2014). Parts of this overview are borrowed in whole from the Honors Thesis Handbooks from the University of Maine and the University of Texas at San Antonio thesis handbooks found here:

the University of Maine Honors Thesis Handbook <https://honors.umaine.edu/current-students/academics/thesis/thesis-handbook/>

the University of Texas at San Antonio  
<https://honors.utsa.edu/resources/pdf/honors-thesis-handbook.pdf>

#### **What is an Honors Thesis Project?**

Broadly, the Honors thesis is an independent undertaking involving research or creative work that represents the culmination of your academic and personal endeavors as an undergraduate.

This project includes four key components:

- 1) the completion of a series of courses in an Honors Track

- 2) timely submission of all required pre-presentation materials to Honors including: A completed and signed application to present, a three page project description, a photo to be used in the program, and an abstract.
- 3) a university-wide presentation of your thesis work during Honors Research Week
- 4) a written Honors thesis--a body of work which demonstrates a deep understanding of a research or creative topic

Completion of Track Courses: You will apply to and be accepted into an Honors Track before the start of your junior year. The Honors Tracks are outlined on the Honors website and in the Honors College Student Handbook. Please refer to them for specific information about the tracks and the track courses.

Thesis Presentation: You will give a 10-12 minute presentation of your findings with additional time allotted for a question-and-answer period, at a university-wide event during Honors Research Week held in November or April. Your presentation must occur during your last thesis course, and must take place prior to graduation. The presentation time will be arranged by the Honors College.

Written Thesis: Your thesis is a written document where the thesis question is discussed based on your research and analysis. If you write a creative thesis project, it should include information on the creative process. In both types of theses, the student is expected to include a thesis question, relevant literature, methodology, and analysis.

### **Who Writes an Honors Thesis?**

All students enrolled in the University Honors College author an Honors thesis.

**Thesis Archives:** One way to find out what projects have been done in your discipline is to look at the Honors College thesis archive. We have hard copies of theses from the last 20 years in the Honors College office. Stop by to take a look!

**Thesis length:** You will notice that theses range in length, and there is no definitive answer to “how long does a thesis have to be?” The best way to find what would be appropriate in your field is to find examples of previous theses or to ask your Honors Track Director.

### **The Timeline for an Honors Thesis**

Sophomores: Apply and be accepted into an Honors Track. Tracks have a certain capacity and can fill.

Juniors: Complete all track courses except for thesis courses.

Seniors: Complete thesis courses.

Transfer students: Students who transfer to WP as juniors will apply to their Honors Track in their second semester but should begin taking track courses in their first semester. Students who transfer as freshmen or sophomores should follow the schedule above.

Above all, YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TIMELY AND SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF YOUR THESIS. It is this independence and commitment that separates Honors thesis work from normal coursework. At the same time, your track director and the Honors staff know that this is your first time doing a thesis and will provide you with appropriate guidance and mentorship throughout the process.

### **Thesis Presentation**

You will give a 10-12 minute thesis presentation during Honors Research Week. You may be required to record your presentation prior to its premiere. If you are required or allowed to record your presentation, your recording will be premiered to a university-wide audience at which you will be present to field live questions. Your Honors track director may require that you prepare PowerPoint slides to accompany your presentation. Creative thesis projects may require filming a performance. The exact requirements will be determined by the Honors College staff and your track director.

### **Thesis Forms**

Thesis forms provide deadlines to keep you on track and allows us to measure the progress of thesis students. Thesis forms can be found on the Honors College website. It is YOUR responsibility to make sure these forms are submitted by the Honors College deadlines. Please make sure to read ALL directions closely on each form before they are submitted.

### **Research (and Projects) Involving Human Subjects**

If you plan to conduct research involving human participants, you have an additional step to take in completing your thesis: You MUST obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for any research involving human participants. You may NOT involve human subjects in any research activity until you have obtained IRB approval!

If you plan to film or photograph human subjects, you typically only need to obtain a video release from the individuals whose images will be captured in your thesis work.

### **Thesis Content Expectations**

Determining a Thesis Topic: Before the start of your junior year, you will apply to join a research or creative performance Honors track. You will determine your thesis topic in consultation with your track director. Track courses inform the kinds of topics you will choose.

Below are the standard requirements. **Your Honors College track director and/or thesis advisor may have specific requirements that differ from the following**, including the number of chapters, chapter content and organization, etc. Below are the general expectations. Refer to instructions from your track director for additional requirements and expectations.

### **Text of a Research-Based Thesis in the Sciences, Social Sciences and Business**

Typically, the body of a standard, research-based thesis will include the following sections:

Chapter 1: Introduction/Background: The Introduction/Background should include a clear statement of the subject under investigation, the questions the thesis will attempt to answer, definitions of important terms, and a rationale for the study and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Materials and Methods: This should include a detailed description of the materials and methods – the theoretical approach, instruments used, data collection and analysis, performance principles, etc. This section often has subsections with sub-headers. For example, the Methods section may have subsections, such as Participants, Procedures, Materials, Equipment, etc. You and your thesis advisor should determine what the appropriate sub-sections are.

Chapter 3: Presentation of Findings or Results: This section of the thesis must provide a careful analysis of results with convincing evidence to support the main thesis presented in the introduction, along with an analysis of the results of testing the hypotheses presented in the introduction.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusions: This section will summarize the results and significance of your research, attempt to explain any unexpected findings, discuss the limitations of the project, and address directions that future work in the area should take.

***Biology*** theses have specific requirements. Refer to the section of the Honors College Student Handbook that refers to the Biology Track.

***Nursing*** theses require five chapters with slightly different titles and expectations.

***Social Science*** theses: Depending on the topic, theses in the social sciences track might be: 1) empirical research reports, 2) comprehensive reviews of the scientific literature, 3) legal analyses, 4) policy papers, or 5) historical essays. Some of these options are social science as described above and some are more like humanities described below.

### **Text of a Thesis in the Humanities and Related Disciplines**

Scholars from the humanities and related disciplines write a thesis that builds an argument. That argument or thesis statement should be a unique take on work in the field. Research into what others have said and done is the essential first step, but your thesis should go beyond prior work to include your own insights and critical thinking.

Chapter 1: Introduction/Background/Literature Review. The Introduction will have the thesis statement – that is, what you intend to argue in the thesis – as its centerpiece. A thesis statement is a short statement that summarizes the main point or claim of an essay, research paper, etc., and is developed, supported, and explained in the text by means of examples and evidence.

Middle Chapters Build the Argument. The middle chapters in this type of thesis address various aspects of the topic necessary to build the overall argument. There must be at least one chapter in between the Introduction and Discussion and most Honors theses will have at least two chapters in between the Introduction and Discussion, but you and your track director are responsible for deciding how many chapters are necessary.

Conclusion. In this final chapter of the Honors thesis, you sum everything up. Just as your introduction acts as a bridge that transports your readers into the “place” of your analysis, your conclusion should help them see why all your analysis and information should matter to them

after they put the paper down. In your conclusion you will consider broader issues, make new connections, and elaborate on the significance of your findings.

### **Text of a Creative Thesis**

A creative thesis should never consist of just the creative work itself. In addition to whatever creative product a student decides to prepare, the creative thesis needs at a minimum two additional written sections – a proposal piece that explains the goals of the project and an evaluative piece that assesses whether and to what extent the student reached his or her goals. Thus, an Honors thesis that involves a creative presentation or a problem-solving project should contain the following sections:

Chapter 1: Introduction/Background/Plan. This Introduction will describe what you were attempting to accomplish in preparing the creative work, what goals you set for yourself, and why you set those goals. It should also typically contain a discussion of the historical and cultural context of the work and should explain how your work is influenced by the work of other artists, writers, musicians, etc., in your field.

Chapter 2: The Creative Product. This section will contain the actual creative work that you produced. If the product involved creative writing, then the text should appear here. If the product was a website, you should include pdfs of the website and links to the various pages of the website. If the product is not written, you should refer the reader to the creative piece that is attached to the text – e.g., a CD, DVD, photographs, etc. If the product is a performance, the student should aim to video record the performance, although audio recording is acceptable. If the product is a visual one – e.g., sculptures or paintings – slides or photos of the work should be included in this section.

Chapter 3: Evaluation. This section should address a variety of issues, including whether or not you accomplished what you set out to accomplish, what problems you encountered that led you to modify the product, etc. You may also wish to describe the creative process you went through as you worked on the product – e.g., what changed for you, what did you learn as you worked?

### **Group Business Projects**

***Group projects are allowed only in the Honors Business Track for students who participate in a group project as part of Practicum (ACCT/ECON/FIN/MGT/MKT 4850) and Case Writing (ACCT/ECON/FIN/MGT/MKT 4860)***

Here are the guidelines for acceptance of a group thesis project:

1. There is a strong rationale for the thesis to be a group project.
2. The student, the track director, the project advisor (if different from the track director), and the Dean of the Honors College meet prior to the start of the thesis work to discuss the structure of the project.
3. It must be clear, in writing and from the outset, what part of the work is the responsibility of each student and what is the group's responsibility.

4. Each student produces a thesis in which there may be some shared text/material, but which also includes the student's individual contributions to the project. Work done by the group must be appropriately cited.
5. Each student, after the completion of the project, produces a written reflection on the nature of the endeavor with the group: how it worked and what was valuable. This reflection should be included as the last appendix to the student's thesis.

The Dean of the Honors College, in consultation with the track director(s) will make the final determination as to the acceptability of the group project thesis proposal.

***Collaborative Thesis Projects (must be approved by September 30 if presenting/completing in May; must be approved by May 30 if presenting/completing in December)***

The Honors thesis project is an individual project. In rare cases, the Honors College is open to exploring options for joint thesis work by pairs of honors students. The Honors College will accept proposals for collaborative theses under the following policies:

1. There is a strong rationale for the thesis to be collaborative.
2. There are two collaborators; both are Honors students.
3. The two students have the same thesis advisor.
4. The students, the thesis advisor, and the honors track director (if different from the thesis advisor), and the Dean of the Honors College meet prior to the start of the thesis work to discuss the structure of the project.
5. It must be clear, in writing and from the outset, who is responsible for what part(s) of the work.
6. Each student, after the completion of the project produces a written reflection on the nature of the collaboration: how it worked and what was valuable. This reflection should be included as the last appendix to the thesis.
7. The students produce two theses in which there may be some shared text/material, but which also includes their individual contributions to the project. Work done by the collaborating student must be appropriately cited.
8. The students, with consultation and approval by the Honors Track Director and the Honors Dean, can opt for either a joint presentation or two individual presentations.

### **Evaluation of your thesis presentation and your thesis**

Your Honors Track Director will evaluate your thesis presentation and your thesis. Others, including other track directors and other Honors students, may be given evaluation rubrics for assessment purposes that will not factor into your grade for your thesis courses.

**Graduating with Honors:** All thesis forms and the digital thesis (properly formatted) must be submitted by May 1st for May grads, by August 1st for August grads, and by December 1st for January/December grads. These documents are required before the Honors College will certify you as an Honors College graduate. It is your responsibility to be sure all of the documents are submitted by the deadline.