

## HONORS 4V87: HONORS THESIS GUIDELINES FOR THE ORAL DEFENSE & SUBMISSION OF THE HONORS THESIS

### *A: Concluding Procedures*

1) Per the **deadline on the [Honors Thesis syllabus](#)**, the faculty mentor should thoroughly review the completed thesis and decide if it is suitable for presentation to the examining committee. If the document is satisfactory, the mentor and student should select the members of the examining committee (if this has not already been done), and set a time and place for the **one-hour oral defense**. Students are responsible for submitting the [Thesis Defense Scheduling Form](#) to the Honors Program office by the deadline found in the syllabus. It is recommended that students and mentors begin discussing the composition of the committee early, usually before the thesis itself is fully complete.

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2) As noted in the syllabus, the Honors Program office shall receive from the student the [Thesis Defense Scheduling Form](#). This form will establish the composition of the defense committee as well as the time and place of the thesis defense.

The **examining committee** must include at least: (1) the first reader—the supervising Baylor professor; (2) a second reader—a full-time Baylor professor from within the first reader’s academic discipline (i.e., usually the same academic department); and (3) an “outside reader”—usually a Baylor faculty member from another department, but occasionally an Honors Program representative or an expert in the field from outside the university. Honors Program faculty/staff will not usually be present at each student’s thesis defense. Additional committee members may be appointed at the discretion of the thesis mentor.

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3) The **completed draft of the Honors thesis** is to be submitted to the student’s faculty mentor, other members of the examining committee, and the Honors Program office on or before the deadline noted in the syllabus unless other arrangements have been made with the mentor and approved by the Honors Program office. Students should plan on finishing the project sooner than this, however.

This draft should be a finished product—revised in consultation with the faculty mentor, free of grammatical and spelling errors, logical in its reasoning and presentation of evidence and conclusions, and appropriate (according to disciplinary conventions) in its citation of source materials. Formatting should be according to the Thesis Formatting Guidelines established by the Honors Program. **Do not assume that there will be time for substantial revisions after the oral defense.**

For instructions on **formatting the thesis document** (e.g., on preliminary pages, chapter and section divisions, page numeration, fonts, footnotes and/or endnotes), please see the comprehensive guidelines for formatting an Honors thesis, updated once per year and available online: <https://program.honors.baylor.edu/current-students/thesis/thesis-format>.

Copies of the completed, revised thesis are to be given to all members of the examining committee **at least one week** prior to the oral defense. Note: (1) The current syllabus directs each Honors student to do this, with his or her mentor’s consent. This is not the responsibility of the faculty mentor. (2) Failure to provide at least one week for committee review may, at the faculty mentor’s discretion, lead to an unsatisfactory grade assignment and a failure of the entire thesis project.

**Prospective Honors graduates must provide a copy of [this document \(i.e., oral defense guidelines\)](#) and a blank [evaluation page](#) to their faculty mentor** at the time they submit their complete and polished final draft. These documents are also available to the thesis mentor via the Faculty Resources section of the Honors Program website, but **it is the student's responsibility to ensure that this information is provided to the mentor**. The evaluation page will be signed by the committee at the conclusion of the defense and returned in person to Ms. Moore in Morrison 203.4 or emailed to [thesis@baylor.edu](mailto:thesis@baylor.edu). If a student fails to complete the thesis project or postpones it, the mentor should notify the Honors Program office and destroy the unsigned evaluation page.

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4) The deadline for **final submission** of the Honors thesis is firm, but final drafts may be turned in sooner. The final version of the thesis essay must include the frontal material (see the online "Guidelines for Formatting an Honors Thesis"), must be properly formatted (see the checklist within the formatting guidelines), and must incorporate all the minor revisions suggested by the examining committee. Preparing the thesis for proper formatting can be a time-consuming task, so you are encouraged to begin the formatting as soon as possible.

The *signature page* (different from the evaluation page signed by the entire committee at the defense) is generated by the Honors student and should be signed by the mentor and included in the final document after the final revisions have been approved. (An example of the signature page is found in the Thesis Guidelines.)

For final submission, students must submit an Archival PDF of their thesis to BEARdocs. **N.B.: A thesis submitted after the firm, final deadline will not be accepted under any circumstance.**

Note that all other Honors Program requirements must be satisfied in order to graduate from the Honors Program, including GPA and course requirements.

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### ***B: Suggestions for Conducting the Oral Thesis Defense***

The one-hour oral defense of the Honors thesis may be conducted in several different ways. The session needn't be as rigorous as a doctoral examination or a graduate-school thesis or dissertation defense, but we do think that students should be asked to do more than engage in friendly conversation about their project.

The thesis director is expected to moderate the session. Usually, the defense is conducted in a classroom or conference room affiliated with the director's home department. Many defenses begin with a brief opening statement (or sometimes a more formal presentation) by the student, but others proceed directly to a question-and-response format. Often the thesis director will pose the first question or series of questions. During some defenses each committee member is given one opportunity to ask several questions; in others the faculty ask questions in a rotating sequence or intervene to address specific issues as they arise.

**The most important consideration is to give the students adequate opportunities to respond to questions and thereby to demonstrate the knowledge and skills that they have acquired and refined during the thesis project.**

Students may be asked to address the following topics, among others:

- origin and development of the thesis idea or proposal;
- secondary literature (current scholarly opinion/debates in the research field);
- research methods, analytical procedures, and alternative approaches;

- explanation of primary sources or experimental data;
- interpretations of or responses to specific sources cited in the thesis;
- uses of evidence, formulation of conclusions, and other possible perspectives; or
- directions for further research.

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### ***C: Evaluation of the Project and the Oral Defense***

At the conclusion of the oral examination, the committee should dismiss the student temporarily in order to discuss the quality of the Honors thesis project in its entirety, from project design to development and refinement to performance or reflection in the defense session itself. The committee's holistic evaluation should especially account, then, for (1) the *written thesis* that has been submitted, from its big-picture argument or purpose to its precision at the level of particulars; (2) the quality and quantity of *research* (including laboratory or field work where applicable) conducted as part of the thesis project, as well as the project's use of sources; (3) the student's formal *presentation* of the thesis in the oral defense; and (4) the student's learning throughout the *thesis-writing process* as a whole (e.g., showing responsibility and initiative, responding to constructive criticism, employing critical thinking and problem solving).

The evaluation form asks the committee to agree unanimously on a designation of "Outstanding", "Very Good", "Good", "Satisfactory", or "Unsatisfactory."

- **"Outstanding"** should be reserved for those few thesis projects that are excellent in every respect—comparable in all respects to master's-level work. We anticipate that **no more than 5% of all theses** produced each year will be of this caliber.
- **"Very Good"** represents exceptional research and writing of the thesis, e.g., top-25% work.
- **"Good"** represents solid, commendable work at the undergraduate level.
- **"Satisfactory"** is for a thesis that meets the minimal standards of research and writing.
- **"Unsatisfactory"** should be given to those theses that do not meet the minimal standards of research and writing.

This designation is the official assessment of the quality of the thesis, recording its success more specifically than the "Credit" or "No Credit" the student will earn on their transcript for the Honors Thesis courses. Only a thesis that is aborted or that earns an "Unsatisfactory" designation will result in "No Credit" marks on the student's transcript and will keep him or her from graduating with the Honors Program designation.

We hope these comments will be helpful especially to new thesis directors and committee members; they are not intended to be prescriptive, and we would welcome any comments or suggestions that involved faculty may have regarding this essential component of the Honors thesis project.

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### ***D: Submission of Final Copies of the Approved Project***

Each Honors student must submit a digital copy (Archival PDF) of the final thesis to BEARdocs. Instructions for submission to BEARdocs are available online at <https://program.honors.baylor.edu/current-students/thesis/beardocs-submission>. The student and his or her faculty mentor must sign the Honors College agreement/authorization form (copyright agreement form) and then scan the signed form for uploading to

BEARdocs. Failure to submit a signed release form will preclude BEARdocs submission and, in consequence, Honors Program graduation. We recommend that a copy of this form be brought with the student to the oral defense.

Students may order extra bound copies at their own expense. Fees include printing, binding, and shipping to a single address. Students are encouraged to provide one printed copy to the thesis mentor as a courtesy. The Honors Program will print copies to be bound from the Archival PDF submitted to BEARdocs, and any errors remaining in that copy are the student's responsibility. See "Final Copies" in the Formatting Guide available at <https://program.honors.baylor.edu/current-students/thesis/thesis-format>.