

HONORS THESIS PROJECTS: AN OVERVIEW

Most of the upper-division Honors Program curriculum is devoted to the development of a thesis project under the direction of a faculty mentor. Through independent study and research, conducted over several semesters, students begin to apply the methods of their chosen discipline(s) to the investigation of a specific topic of interest.

The extent and content of Honors thesis projects vary considerably across different fields of study. They may include significant components of textual criticism (in the humanities); laboratory research (in physical sciences); data collection and analysis (in social sciences); or creative expression (in art, creative writing, or dramatic or musical performance). In any case, the thesis project introduces Honors students to the techniques of research, writing, and performance that they will encounter at the graduate level, and helps to cultivate the intellectual skills that are essential to critical inquiry and advanced scholarship.

STAGE ONE: HONORS 3100, 3101 (“Advanced Readings & Research”) Junior-Year Readings & Research: Foundations

The thesis project usually begins in the junior year with a sequence of two Advanced Readings & Research courses (HON 3100 and 3101: two credit-hours total). These courses are most often taken individually in sequential semesters (see “Suggested Sequencing” below). The readings (or a combination of readings and, for example, laboratory procedures) are arranged in consultation between the student and a professor who agrees to supervise the work, and they are designed to provide a solid foundation in a specific research field and to familiarize Honors students with current methodologies, debates, and problems in the discipline.

During HON 3100, students participate in a series of weekly seminars. These are designed to assist the student in formulating a research topic, identify and connect with the faculty mentor for the project, highlight the requirements and expectations of an Honors thesis, and begin creating a list of readings and research that will form the foundation of the thesis project. At the conclusion of HON 3101, students complete and submit a proposal which outlines a research agenda or performance design and identifies the primary sources and tentative methods for the thesis project. (Especially in the humanities, many faculty mentors will also expect substantial work toward a first chapter by the end of the junior year.) In the spring semester, students in HON 3100 and HON 3101 are expected to attend senior thesis presentations during Honors Week in April. A letter grade will be assigned for both Advanced Reading hours.

STAGE TWO: HONORS 4V87 (“Honors Thesis”)

Senior-Year Thesis Courses: Development, Structure, & Defense

Development of the thesis continues into the senior year in a sequence of courses totaling four credit-hours of HON 4V87. Students are encouraged to take HON 4V87 for two credit hours during their penultimate semester and then for another two credit hours in their final semester as a Baylor undergraduate.

Students are expected to draft substantial sections of the thesis (viz., approximately 25%) for each hour of credit. The first section or chapter of the project is quite often a review of the relevant literature, explored in the Readings courses, that places the thesis in the Honors Program context of current scholarship. Subsequent sections then proceed to analyze primary sources, data, or laboratory results. At the conclusion of the project, the completed Honors thesis is presented by the student and evaluated by a committee of at least three professors in a one-hour oral defense. The thesis is graded “credit” or “no credit” at the end of each semester.

The thesis mentor is responsible for entering a grade (credit or no credit) at the end of each semester, similar to the procedure for most other classes. This means that there will be little, if any, need for students to have a grade of “Incomplete” during the thesis writing process.

Please note that the Honors Program provides a set of [specific guidelines and recommended procedures](#) for every phase of the thesis project, but each thesis director may opt to modify the requirements of any thesis course at her or his discretion and evaluate the student’s progress accordingly.

STAGE THREE: HONORS 4088 (“Honors Exit Review”)

Preparation for Honors Graduation

All Honors Program students must receive a grade of “credit” for HON 4088 prior to Honors Program graduation. Credit is granted only to those students who have successfully completed all Honors Program requirements including, but not necessarily limited to, required Honors classes/credits, the Honors thesis with required formatting, and achievement of the minimum acceptable GPA (cumulative 3.2). Other factors may preclude a grade of credit for HON 4088, such as academic dishonesty and failure to meet final deadlines for graduation. The completion of a thesis project to the satisfaction of a thesis mentor does not guarantee that a student will graduate from the Honors Program. All Honors Program requirements must be satisfied.

SUGGESTED SEQUENCING OF THESIS-RELATED CREDITS

Alterations to these timelines may occasionally be required by specific circumstances in a student's academic plans. Compressing this timeline is almost never recommended; rather, some students may choose to move all or certain portions to earlier semesters. Any changes should be made in consultation with the Honors Program advisor and thesis mentor.

Traditional Thesis Plan (most non-science students):

Junior Year:

Fall: HON 3100

Spring: HON 3101

Senior Year:

Fall: HON 4V87, two credit hours

Spring: HON 4V87, two credit hours
HON 4088

Science Thesis (Particularly lab-based research):

Sophomore Year:

Spring: HON 3100

Junior Year:

Fall: HON 3101

Spring: HON 4V87, two credit hours

Senior Year:

Fall: HON 4V87, two credit hours

Spring: HON 4088