

UMASS DARTMOUTH HONORS PROGRAM  
Guidelines for the Commonwealth Scholar Thesis or Project  
2008-2009 Academic Year

**Introduction**

Every student in the Honors Program must complete a senior honors thesis or project in order to graduate as a Commonwealth Scholar. By undertaking and completing an honors thesis or project, you will demonstrate your ability to make a significant, original contribution to your chosen field of study—precisely the quality sought by most employers and all graduate school admissions committees. Your senior project may take the form of an original research project, a critical or philosophical analysis, a computer program, a performance, an art exhibit, a public service project, or any other original work that makes a significant contribution to your field of study.

Work on the thesis or project traditionally takes place over two consecutive semesters, beginning in either the second semester of the junior year or the first semester of the senior year, but single-semester projects are also common. The project may simultaneously fulfill a college or departmental thesis or project requirement. This work typically earns the student six academic credits toward graduation, but the number of credits may be higher or lower if your college or department has different requirements. Regardless of the total number of credits you earn for this work, no more than three may be counted toward the Commonwealth Scholar graduation requirement of 18 Honors credits with a grade of B or better.

If the project is a traditional thesis, its scope and length should reflect the norm for undergraduate theses in your major field. It should be written or otherwise presented in a professional or academic style characteristic of the subject matter or discipline of the thesis, and it should contain documentation that is appropriate to the field. If the project is a performance, presentation, exhibit, or public service project, it should be of sufficient scope and quality to demonstrate competence in the field. Your thesis advisor will help you to determine what is appropriate for your field.

Some theses will be entirely written, while others (such as those in the visual or performing arts) will consist of both written and non-written components. However, all theses and projects should have a written component, which includes the following elements:

- 1) the purpose of your project, such as the question addressed or artistic goal;
- 2) a review of what has been done before, such as the prior literature on a research topic, or an analysis of previous artistic works and traditions that set the stage for your current project;
- 3) a written description of your individual work, which may include visual illustrations;
- 4) an explanation and discussion of your own individual contribution to the field in which you have chosen to work, including (if applicable) policy recommendations and/or suggestions for future research.

Finally, all theses or projects must be presented in an appropriate public venue. This can take the form of a traditional thesis defense before the student's committee, a public performance or display, and/or presentation at a regional or national conference. All students are encouraged to present their theses or projects at the annual Commonwealth Undergraduate Research Conference in May.

## The Process

- 1) You should begin by discussing topics or projects with possible faculty supervisors. Your supervisor or advisor (the terms are used interchangeably) must be a member of the UMass Dartmouth faculty, and most often will be a member of your major department. At this stage of the process, you will also begin reading and conducting preliminary research as you refine ideas for the thesis or project. This phase should ideally begin in the junior year, but no later than September of the senior year.
- 2) When you enroll for the first semester for which you plan to earn credit, register for honors thesis credits or 400-level independent research or independent study credits. The norm is three credits per semester for two consecutive semesters, but individual cases vary. There are two methods for earning thesis/project credits:
  - a) Many departments have 400-level course numbers set aside for theses, projects, and/or independent study. Credits earned in this way may also count toward your department's graduate requirements. The thesis supervisor serves as the course instructor and assigns a grade at the end of each semester.
  - b) Students undertaking interdisciplinary projects, or those whose major departments do not have a thesis option or appropriate 400-level independent study option, may register for Honors 490 (first semester) and 491 (second semester). In this case, the Director or Associate Director of the Honors Program serves as the formal instructor of record, but the grade will be determined in consultation with the thesis or project supervisor.
- 3) Note: The grade for the first semester of a two-semester project is most commonly "in progress" or "IP." The "IP" is later replaced by the grade assigned at the end of the second semester, when the thesis is complete. For example, if you earn a grade of "A" at the end of your second semester, then the "IP" entered for the first semester turns into an "A" as well.
- 4) By the appropriate deadline (see timetable below), submit a brief description of your proposed project to the Honors Program. The proposal must be approved by your supervisor. (Form attached.)
- 5) In consultation with your supervisor, select two additional members for your thesis/project committee. All three members will serve as resources for your research and evaluate the final submission. One committee member may be someone from outside the university; the supervisor and one other member must be UMD faculty members. An interdisciplinary project should have a committee representing at least two academic disciplines.
- 6) By the appropriate deadline (see the timetable below), compose and submit a much more detailed description of your proposed project. This is known as the "prospectus." The prospectus must be approved by all three members of your committee, your department chair, and the Director or Associate Director of the Honors Program. (Form attached.)
- 7) By the appropriate deadline (see timetable below), submit a progress report to the Honors Program, signed by your supervisor. (Form attached.)
- 8) As you near completion of the work, you must schedule a defense or other public presentation of your work, to take place no later than the end of the semester. The Director and/or Associate Director of the Honors Program should be invited to attend the defense or presentation.

- 9) Unlike most papers or projects that you will have undertaken in your courses, the “final draft” that you submit to your committee in advance of your defense is unlikely to be the final version. Instead, committee members commonly request that revisions be undertaken before approving the final version of the thesis or project. It is therefore **VERY IMPORTANT** that you submit your thesis or project to your supervisor, committee members, and the Honors Program well before the end of the semester in which you plan to finish it. You and your committee should establish a precise deadline for the submission of early drafts or sections of your work.
- 10) Finally, once your thesis/project has been evaluated and approved by your committee, you must file a copy of your thesis or report of project with the Honors Program, together with the original copy of the signed approval sheet. (Form attached.) This copy of the thesis or project report remains the property of the UMass Dartmouth Honors Program. Publication rights are reserved to the author unless research contracts, patent rights, or other agreements made with other departments of the university prohibit such publications.

### **Timetable and Reports**

The table below presents the timetable for the submission of reports about your work, including the final work itself, to the Honors Director.

	<b>Semesters When Credit is Earned for Thesis/Project Work</b>		
	<b>Fall 2008 and Spring 2009</b>	<b>Spring 2009 only</b>	<b>Spring 2009 and Fall 2010</b>
Submit Proposal to the Honors Director	No later than October 1, 2008	No later than February 1, 2009	No later than February 26, 2009
Submit Prospectus to the Honors Director	No later than November 3, 2008	No later than March 2, 2009	No later than April 3, 2009
Submit Progress Report to the Honors Director	No later than February 16, 2009	No later than April 3, 2009	No later than September 28, 2010
Submit final draft for evaluation by supervisor and committee	According to the timetable established by the supervisor, but no later than the last week of classes	According to the timetable established by the supervisor, but no later than the last week of classes	According to the timetable established by the supervisor, but no later than the last week of classes
Submit final text and signed thesis/project approval form to the Honors Director	No later than May 20, 2009	No later than May 20, 2009	No later than the last day of the Fall 2010 final examination period



University of  
Massachusetts  
Dartmouth

**Honors Program**  
Robert Darst, Director

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FAX: 508 999-6451  
rdarst@umassd.edu

## Step 1: Commonwealth Honors Thesis/Project Proposal

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Graduation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Local Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Working Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Registrations (fall and spring): \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach a brief description of proposed thesis or project, not to exceed two double-spaced typed pages.

Signatures (Type each name and get signature next to it):

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Honors Director: \_\_\_\_\_



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## Step 2: Commonwealth Honors Thesis/Project Prospectus

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Graduation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Local Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Registrations (fall and spring): \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach a detailed explanation of your proposed thesis or project and your schedule for completion. Your prospectus should not exceed ten double-spaced typed pages and should include the following components:

*Project Description.* Describe the scope, theme, and nature of your topic or project. Explain your purpose in undertaking this project. Explain what form your project will take and how you will present your results.

*Modes of Inquiry.* List the methods, primary and supplementary, that you will use to obtain information about your topic (e.g., library research, surveys, interviews, experimentation, observation, etc.).

*Anticipated Problems.* List any problems that you foresee and possible solutions to them.

*Timetable.* Describe the work that you have accomplished thus far and your planned timetable for all remaining work, including the final date of completion.

Signatures (Type each name and get signature next to it):

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Department Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Honors Director: \_\_\_\_\_



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### Step 3: Commonwealth Honors Thesis/Project Progress Report

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe your progress since the submission of your prospectus, including any changes to your topic, the planned final product, and/or the timetable for completion. Attach additional pages as needed.

#### Signatures

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_



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## Commonwealth Honors Thesis/Project Approval Form

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Project/Thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

This Commonwealth Honors thesis/project has been submitted, defended, and approved in accordance with the policies of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth University Honors Program.

Approved:

Chair, Thesis Committee \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type Name) Date

Thesis Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type Name) Date

Thesis Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type Name) Date

Chair, Major Department \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type Name) Date

Honors Director \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor Robert Darst Date