

Guidelines and Procedures for the Commonwealth Scholar Honors Thesis

Students in the Commonwealth Scholars Program are required to complete five Honors courses, each with a grade of B or better, and an Honors thesis in order to graduate as Commonwealth Scholars. Work on this thesis generally takes place during the second semester of the junior year or the first semester of the senior year and usually earns the student three academic credits in HON 490. You should begin planning your thesis well in advance of the semester in which you plan to do the bulk of the work. We do not recommend waiting until your final semester before graduation to attempt the thesis: it is not unusual for even a well-conceived project to take longer than anticipated, and an incomplete thesis may well hold up your graduation in such cases. The number of thesis credits may be higher if the project warrants a full year of work, or if the student's major department has a more extensive honors thesis requirement, but additional thesis credits will not reduce the requirement of five other Honors courses. This capstone requirement of the Honors Program may be undertaken in the student's major discipline or in another academic area. The thesis will always include a substantial written component and will always involve academic research. It may also include original creative work, video or web components, a performance or exhibit, a public service project, or any other academic exercise approved by the thesis director and the Director of the Honors Program. Students are required to present the results of their work in some public forum, at the minimum through a formal thesis defense before the student's thesis committee.

If the project is a traditional thesis, its scope and length should reflect the norm for undergraduate theses in the student's major field, and be presented in a professional or academic style suitable to the subject matter or discipline of the thesis, with documentation appropriate to the field (your thesis advisor can help you determine what is appropriate for your field). If the thesis includes a performance, presentation, exhibit, or public service project, it should be of sufficient scope and quality to demonstrate competence in the field. All theses and projects must have an extensive written component, which normally includes the following elements: 1) a literature review (what has been written previously about the topic?), 2) a research report (what has the student contributed to our understanding of the subject?), and 3) a discussion of results or conclusions. The Honors thesis may also fulfill a departmental capstone or honors requirement, and some majors (HST, PSY) prefer that students register for their departmental honors thesis course in lieu of HON 490. The Honors Director and your thesis director can help you decide what course to register for.

Steps in Developing an Honors Thesis

- 1) Select a member of the UMD faculty that you would like to work with as your thesis director. We do not normally approve non-UMD faculty or visiting lecturers as thesis directors. At this stage of the process you should already have been reading and conducting

preliminary research in an attempt to refine ideas for the thesis or project. Meet with your proposed director to develop a thesis topic.

- 2) As soon as you, your thesis director, and the Honors Director have agreed upon a topic, choose the rest of your committee. Normally a thesis will have three readers, one of whom may be the Honors Director (who will always read every thesis whether serving as a member of the committee or not). All three members will serve as resources for your research and will evaluate the final submission. No more than one committee member may be from outside the university; the thesis director and one other member must be UMD faculty.
- 3) Submit a formal thesis proposal to the Honors program. All students who plan to graduate with the designation "Commonwealth Scholar" must file this proposal (the form is available on the Honors website) with the Director of the University Honors Program no later than the second week of the semester in which the thesis will be undertaken. The proposal explains the nature of the project or research, offers a tentative timetable for stages in which the work will be accomplished, and specifies the form of the final submission. It also identifies the thesis director and the other two members of the thesis committee. The proposal must be signed by the student, the committee members, and the Honors Director.
- 3) Register for HON 490, or, if your major has an honors thesis option, for the appropriate departmental equivalent. The thesis director, who is also the chair of the thesis committee, serves as the course instructor and determines the course grade at the end of the semester. If you devote two semesters to your thesis, you should register for HON 491 or its departmental equivalent in the second semester. If you make satisfactory progress during the first semester, you will receive a grade of "in progress" (IP). At the end of the second semester, the "IP" for the first semester will be replaced by the letter grade earned in the second semester.
- 4) Submit a progress report to the Honors Director by the mid-term date set for the current UMD academic calendar. This report discusses the status of the project with reference to the tentative timetable from the proposal and matches actual progress against anticipated progress. It should identify difficulties encountered and plans for dealing with them, and note any changes in the project's subject, scope, projected outcomes, or method of reporting suggested by the research in progress. It should be signed by the student and the thesis director.
- 5) As you near completion of the work, schedule a defense or other public presentation of your work with your committee, to take place no later than the period of final examinations. It is not possible to guarantee the availability of faculty members for defenses scheduled after finals end. Whether a member of the committee or not, the Honors Director should be invited to the defense or presentation.
- 6) Submit one copy of the final thesis, with a signed thesis approval sheet (available on the Honors website) to the Honors Director.



**University
Honors Program**
Dr William Nelles, Director

285 Old Westport Road
Dartmouth, MA
02747-2300

TEL: 508 999-9189
FAX: 508 999-6451
honors@umassd.edu

Honors Thesis Proposal

Name: _____

ID Number: _____ Major: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Project Title: _____

Course Registration for thesis credits: _____

Please attach separate pages in which you briefly map out these four areas:

- **Topic Proposal:** Describe the scope, theme, and nature of your topic, and explain your purpose in undertaking this project.
- **Modes of Inquiry:** List the methods that you will use to obtain information on your topic (e.g., library research, surveys, interviews, experimentation, observation, etc.).
- **Timetable:** List the meetings planned to discuss your work in progress and the tentative calendar of work, including the due date for completion of the parts and of the whole.
- **Final Product:** Explain what form your project will take and how you will present your results. Signatures (Type each name on or below the signature line):

Student: _____

Thesis Director: _____

Committee Members: _____

Honors Director: _____



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Honors Thesis Progress Report

Name: _____

Project Title: _____

Status of Project:

Signatures

Student: _____

Thesis Director: _____



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Honors Thesis Approval Form

Title of Project/Thesis: _____

Author: _____

This senior 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)

Thesis Committee Member _____
(Type Name)

Thesis Committee Member _____
(Type Name)

Honors Director _____