

UMASS DARTMOUTH HONORS PROGRAM
GUIDELINES FOR THE HONORS THESIS/PROJECT
2009-2010 Academic Year
Revised on September 7, 2009

I. Introduction

Every student in the University Honors Program must complete an Honors thesis or project in order to graduate as a Commonwealth Scholar. Your project may take the form of a 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. By undertaking and completing an Honors thesis or project, you will demonstrate your ability to work independently in your chosen field—precisely the quality sought by all employers and graduate school admissions committees.

Work on the thesis/project typically 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 possible. The thesis/project may simultaneously fulfill a college or departmental thesis or capstone project requirement. Typically, students earn three academic credits per semester for thesis/project work, but the number of credits may be higher or lower if your college or department has different requirements. You may take thesis/project credits in a major department or in the Honors Program, where HON 490 and 491 are set aside for this purpose. **Important note:** Credits earned for work on the thesis/project *cannot* be counted toward the minimum 15 credits of Honors coursework required for graduation as a Commonwealth Scholar.

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/project advisor will help you to determine what is appropriate for your field.

Some theses are entirely written, while others, such as those in the visual or performing arts, 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 policy recommendations and/or suggestions for future work.

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 conference presentation. All students are encouraged to present their theses or projects at the annual Commonwealth Undergraduate Research Conference at UMass Amherst in May.

II. The Process

A. The Faculty Supervisor

You should begin by identifying a faculty supervisor. 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 should also begin reading and conducting preliminary research as you refine your ideas for the thesis or project.

Please keep in mind that faculty members are not obligated to serve as thesis/project supervisors, and that they will usually do so only when they have some interest or expertise in the topic at hand. You should therefore be prepared to modify your topic in consultation with potential supervisors.

B. Thesis/project credits.

When you enroll for the first semester for which you plan to earn credit, you should register for Honors thesis/project credits 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:

- 1) 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.
- 2) If you are undertaking an interdisciplinary project, or if your major department does not have suitable thesis/project or independent study courses, you may register for Honors 490 (first semester) and 491 (second semester). You must request a permission number from the Honors Director in order to enroll. The Honors Director serves as the formal instructor of record, but the grade is determined by your thesis/project supervisor.

Please note:

- 1) Credits earned for work on the thesis/project *cannot* be counted toward the minimum 15 credits of Honors coursework required for graduation as a Commonwealth Scholar.
- 2) Departmental thesis/project and independent study courses are not normally listed in COIN until a student expresses the intention to take one of them and finds a faculty supervisor willing to serve as instructor. Once you have identified a faculty member willing to supervise the course, your supervisor or department chair will ask the registrar to create a section for the relevant semester and place you in that section. **This can be done AFTER the end of the normal add/drop period.**
- 3) 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 will turn into an "A" as well. This does not happen automatically—the instructor of record must request a grade change!

C. The Six Steps of the Process

- 1) **Thesis/Project Proposal.** By the appropriate deadline (see the timetable below), you must submit a brief description of your proposed project to the Honors Director. The proposal must be approved by your supervisor.
- 2) **Thesis/Project Prospectus.** This step requires a much more detailed description of your proposed project and a detailed timetable for its completion. This step also requires that you identify **two additional members for your thesis/project committee**. One committee member may be someone from outside the university; the supervisor and at least one other member must be UMD faculty members. They need not be from the same department. The prospectus form must be signed by all three committee members and your department chair prior to submission to the Honors Director.
- 3) **Progress Report.** By the appropriate deadline (see timetable below), submit a progress report to the Honors Director, signed by your supervisor.
- 4) **Completion of the project.** You and your supervisor should agree upon a detailed timetable for the completion of your project and for the submission of sections or drafts. 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 **VERY UNLIKELY** to be the final version. Instead, committee members typically demand further revisions before approving the final version of the thesis or project. It is therefore **VERY IMPORTANT** that you submit your thesis/project to your committee members well before the end of the semester!
- 5) **Public presentation of the project.** As you near completion of the work, you must schedule a public presentation or performance of your work, to take place no later than the last day of classes.
 - a) The single most common form of presentation is the "thesis defense": a meeting with the thesis/project committee, during which the committee members ask questions about the project and then decide what revisions, if any, are required before approval.
 - b) The Honors Program will accept another form of public presentation, such as a conference poster/panel presentation or performance, instead of a thesis defense.
 - c) Your committee may insist upon a defense even if you present your work in another venue. It is up to you to find out, and you should find out well in advance.
 - d) The timing and scheduling of the defense or presentation is your responsibility.
 - e) The Director and/or Associate Director of the Honors Program should be invited to attend your defense and/or presentation.
- 6) **Submission of the project to the Honors Director.** Finally, once your thesis/project has been evaluated and approved by your committee, you must file a copy of your thesis/project with the Honors Program, together with the original copy of the signed approval sheet. If your project is not primarily a written document, then check with the Honors Director to see what other materials (recordings, photographs, etc.) to include. These materials remain 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 FOR THE HONORS THESIS/PROJECT PROCESS
2009-2010 ACADEMIC YEAR**

	Semester(s) when credit will be earned for thesis/project work (choose the column that applies to you)			
	Fall 2009 only	Fall 2009 and Spring 2010	Spring 2010 only	Spring 2010 and Fall 2010
Step 1: Submit Proposal to the Honors Director	By Monday, September 14, 2009	By Monday, September 21, 2009	By Monday, February 8, 2010	By Monday, February 15, 2010
Step 2: Submit Prospectus to the Honors Director	By Monday, October 12, 2009	By Monday, November 2, 2009	By Monday, March 8, 2010	By Monday, March 29, 2010
Step 3: Submit Progress Report to the Honors Director	By Monday, November 9, 2009	By Monday, December 21, 2009	By Monday, April 5, 2010	By Monday, May 17, 2010
Step 4: Submit draft for evaluation by supervisor and committee	According to the timetable established by the supervisor	According to the timetable established by the supervisor	According to the timetable established by the supervisor	According to the timetable established by the supervisor
Step 5: Defense or other public presentation of thesis/project	By Tuesday, December 15, 2009	By Tuesday, May 11, 2010	By Tuesday, May 11, 2010	By the last day of classes, Fall 2010
Step 6: Submit final text and signed thesis/project approval form to the Honors Director	By Wednesday, December 23, 2009	By Wednesday, May 19, 2010	By Wednesday, May 19, 2010	By the last day of the Fall 2010 final examination period



**University
Honors Program**
Robert Darst, Director

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North Dartmouth, MA
Massachusetts 02747-2300

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rdarst@umassd.edu

Step 1: Commonwealth Honors Thesis/Project Proposal

Name: _____ Graduation Date: _____

Student ID: _____ Major: _____

Local Address: _____ Phone: _____

_____ E-mail: _____

Faculty Supervisor: _____

Working Title: _____

Semesters and course(s) in which you plan to take thesis/project credits:

First semester: _____

Second semester (if applicable): _____

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

Signatures:

Student: _____
Signature Date

Supervisor: _____
Signature Date

Honors Director: _____
Signature Date



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Step 2: Commonwealth Honors Thesis/Project Prospectus

Name: _____ Graduation Date: _____

Student ID: _____ Major: _____

Local Address: _____ Phone: _____

_____ E-mail: _____

Project Title: _____

Semesters and course(s) in which you plan to take thesis/project credits:

First semester: _____ Second semester (if applicable): _____

Please attach a detailed description of your proposed thesis/project. Your prospectus should not exceed ten double-spaced typed pages and should include the following components:

- 1) *Project Description*. Describe your project and your purpose in undertaking it. Explain what form your project will take and how you will present your results.
- 2) *Method of Inquiry*. Describe the methods that you will use to obtain information about your topic (e.g., library research, surveys, interviews, experimentation, observation, etc.).
- 3) *Anticipated Problems*. List any problems that you foresee and possible solutions to them.
- 4) *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 (please print names next to signatures):

Student: _____ Date

Supervisor: _____ Date

Committee Members: _____ Date

_____ Date

Department Chair: _____ Date

Honors Director: _____ Date



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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: _____ Date

Supervisor: _____ Date



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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 _____
Date

Thesis Committee Member _____
Date

Thesis Committee Member _____
Date

Chair, Major Department _____
Date

Honors Director _____
Date