

## Completing the Honors Thesis

Students who have been admitted to the Department's Honors Program have already demonstrated outstanding academic achievement. They are bright, well motivated, and effective in getting work done. Many of them will go onto graduate or professional schools, and they will be admitted to some of the best programs in the country. Given their high potential, they may reasonably be expected to carry out professional level work for their honors projects. Professional expertise is what they lack, of course, and hence, the student must and should rely on a faculty advisor to provide professional expertise.

The first step for the student, therefore, is to find an expert with whom to work. Students should have found a faculty supervisor by the first month of their senior year. In order to find a supervisor, students should expect to shop around. Eligible supervisors include all regular faculty members (no graduate students), including people in other departments who have courtesy appointments in Psychology. The Director of the Psychology Honors Program has a file on current research interests of faculty, and is ready to consult with students about faculty to contact.

Once an expert supervisor has been found, what kinds of expertise are necessary? Here are some suggestions.

1. Identification and formulation of an appropriate research problem. **The research, if well executed and successful, should be publishable in a good journal.** Execution of the data collection, analysis, and write-up must be feasible, given the amount of time and other resources both student and advisor can devote to the project. Obviously, a project of mutual interest will be inspiring to both advisor and student. While occasional students will approach their senior honors work with a clear hypothesis or research question already formulated, many students will need some help from their research supervisor for the formulation of a research problem. Frequently, the basic idea for honors research comes from, or is closely related to, the ongoing research program of the faculty supervisor. However, the honors project should be an independent research project that stands on its own and, if successful, would be publishable by itself. This description is not meant to preclude the use of data collected by someone other than the honors student (e.g., survey data).

2. Selection and/or construction of appropriate methods, given the research problem. While some senior honors students will have had considerable relevant research experience, other will have had little or none. Faculty should apprise themselves of the likely amount of supervisory time for which they would assume responsibility in regard to any given student.

3. Data analysis. One or two courses in statistics and knowing how to use a computer statistical package do not necessarily equip a person to analyze data. Students should consult their advisors before starting data analyses. More troublesome are research problems that call for analyses that the advisor does not know how to do. While students on problems of data analysis, consultation with a third party can be a very painful and time consuming process for the student (and consultant) and should be avoided as much as possible.

4. The Thesis. There should be a clear understanding between student and advisor that the written research report (the Honors Thesis) is likely to require revisions before it meets professional standards. Indeed, nearly all past Honors students have been required to make revisions to the document even after the main advisor's approval (based on feedback provided by other faculty readers). The thesis must have a standard cover sheet (the Director will supply each senior with a model cover sheet during the spring semester) and must be in APA manuscript form except that tables and figures must be in the text rather than at the end of the paper. While the student may wish to refer to the APA Publication Manual, the easiest method is to ask one's supervisor for a copy of a manuscript already prepared in APA form. Although thesis work may be collaborative, the document itself must be written by the Honors student.

5. Deadline for Thesis Approval. Final approval of the Honors Thesis must be communicated to the College Office a few days before the end of the final examination period of each semester. Because faculty readers must be allowed a week to read a thesis, the deadline for turning in the completed thesis is normally Stop Day. By this day, the advisor should have approved the thesis (i.e., substantial revision should have already occurred).

The Honors Thesis must be read and approved by three departmental faculty members, including the research supervisor, the Director of the Honors Program, and a faculty member selected by the Director of the Honors Program in consultation with the research supervisor.

A final word of advice for students: make a careful estimate of how long each phase of your project will take--getting the project started, data collection, data analysis, write-up including the revision process--and then double the total estimated time in order to obtain a realistic estimate of what you are getting into.