

University Honors College

THESIS MENTOR GUIDELINES

Thank you very much for your interest in serving as a mentor to a University Honors College student's senior thesis! The thesis mentor is a central figure in the thesis process, and the student-mentor relationship has a significant impact on students' undergraduate experiences and long-term plans. Faculty who have taken on this invaluable role in the past have appreciated the opportunity to work closely with an enthusiastic, dedicated, and talented student, and it is important to us that this be a positive experience for you, as well as for the student. The thesis is one of the main components of the Honors curriculum, and for many students, it is also one of the most rewarding and influential experiences of their undergraduate careers. The mentor-student relationship is one of the most important factors in the success of this process.

The information in this packet is intended to let you know more about the mentor's responsibilities and the thesis process. If you have any additional questions, please let us know.

MENTOR QUALIFICATIONS AND RECOGNITION

All tenure-track faculty (assistant professors, associate professors, and professors) and senior instructors at OSU are eligible to serve as a faculty mentor. Faculty who teach in or mentor for the UHC are listed as *University Honors College Faculty* in the OSU General Catalog. This is a way of informing the campus and our students of your service and experience in the UHC. The Office of Academic Affairs recognizes that listing as indicative of instructional excellence.

BACKGROUND

Like virtually every degree-granting honors program in the country, Oregon State's University Honors College requires all students to complete and defend a senior thesis in order to receive the Honors Baccalaureate degree. The goal of the thesis is to engage Honors students in a hands-on, participatory learning experience that allows them to see a scholarly project from inception through defense and presentation. The Honors thesis project is much more than an extended term paper: think of it as similar in scope and expectations to a Master's project but scaled to a level appropriate to undergraduates' experience, time, and abilities. The thesis can be a traditional research project, a creative work, or a service-oriented exercise with a clear scholarly component. The projects may be within any discipline or interdisciplinary and do not need to be in or connected to the student's major field of study. Combining the UHC thesis with another senior project requirement is allowed. Team projects are acceptable, but individual theses are required.

Bound copies of all Honors theses are housed in the UHC main offices in Strand 229, and all theses since 2007 (and some from earlier) are also available electronically through the Valley Library Scholars Archive. Students are required to provide a digital copy and a signed release form for fair access upon submission of their bound, final thesis.

Senior projects can inspire considerable anxiety and trepidation in students, but upon completion, many see their projects as high points of their undergraduate experience. Because senior projects are not widely required on this campus (UHC, International Degree, Bio-Resource Research, Physics, and some Engineering disciplines are exceptions), students may express concern and uncertainty at the outset about the project and their ability to complete it; a major part of the

mentor role is helping students realize their own capabilities and learn to manage their concerns in a healthy, productive way.

THE THESIS PROCESS – THESIS

The UHC has a multi-step thesis process called “TheSIS – Thesis Success in Stages,” designed to keep students on track and translate the thesis into a series of manageable steps. There are four stages in TheSIS roughly corresponding to a four-year college plan.

- **Stage 1 – START:** In their first years^{*}, students are asked to complete two tasks introducing them to the thesis requirement.
- **Stage 2 – LEARN:** The key component of this stage is the class HC 408: TheSIS LEARN. In this course, students are asked to look more carefully at completed theses, interview a UHC alumnus or current student working on a thesis, and interview a mentor-eligible OSU faculty member.
- **Stage 3 – UNDERTAKE:** Students who are ready to write their thesis proposal are encouraged to take HC 408: TheSIS UNDERTAKE. This one credit seminar workshop assists students in focusing their thesis and completing a proposal
- **Stage 4 – GRADUATE:** The final stage involves completing thesis research, preparing thesis drafts, the defense, the Thesis Poster Fair, and the submission of a bound final copy.

These stages are managed via a Blackboard page; all work is submitted on Blackboard, and UHC staff use the page to monitor student progress.

The UHC thesis webpages (<http://honors.oregonstate.edu/current/thesis>) are also a useful resource for students and their mentors. These pages provide an overview of the thesis process, links to resources, and a number of important documents, including the thesis formal guidelines and the proposal template.

THESIS PROPOSAL

The mentor’s first official role involves approving a student’s official thesis proposal. All students are required to submit a thesis proposal, signed by their mentor, to the UHC main office.

A signed (mentor signature only) thesis proposal is required by the UHC and becomes part of the student’s file. Their specificity should be appropriate for an undergraduate honors thesis project but is not fixed in stone; subsequent changes only require a new signed proposal. Students may not be familiar with the norms of “thesis statements” so your direction and mentoring will be greatly appreciated. These proposals should be no longer than two pages, carry your signature and be linked with a work plan to ensure that no unexpected delays derail the process.

THESIS COMMITTEE

A three-person committee is required (larger committees are optional); it consists of a mentor (major professor) and two others. The UHC has what we refer to as the “2/3s rule”. The mentor and one other committee member must be tenure-track faculty (senior instructor or one of the professorial lines that earn tenure); the third member may be anyone the mentor considers an

^{*} Students who transfer into the UHC, either from OSU or another institution, are still required to complete the START tasks.

expert (e.g. post doc; research associate, community based experts such as a physician or practitioner of a profession). The mentor has approval responsibility. The UHC will not be involved in deciding whether the third committee member meets any set of criteria.

Should the third person be a faculty member at another institution or otherwise be located away from campus, they must still participate in the thesis defense in person or *via* video/telephone conference connections--whatever mechanism works and does not impose undue expense on the student. The UHC has no funds to help facilitate full committee participation.

THESIS DEFENSE AND THESIS FAIR

The thesis defense is comparable in form and process to a Master's student defense but the substance is clearly at an undergraduate level. The presentation portion is open to any interested parties although the examination portion should be in "executive session", the student is excused during committee deliberations. We advise the students that the presentation and examination should take approximately one hour.

The thesis defense should be scheduled so as to permit time to make corrections, process the final document, have it bound, and delivered to the UHC office by **Friday of dead week** of the term they expect to graduate or complete their OSU requirements. Because of interlocking schedules with the Graduation Audits clerk in the Registrar's office this **deadline cannot flex** but should be considered **firm and hard**. Students are apprised of that fact repeatedly and in writing. Earlier submissions are acceptable, of course.

The UHC Thesis Fair is held in late May each year and is open to the public. All students completing their thesis are expected to participate and present their work in the form of a poster presentation. Often the mentor or the committee is present to provide moral support and on occasion the defense is held on the same day though the delivery deadline is no more than two weeks away.

THESIS SUBMISSION

Once corrections mandated by the defense are made, the students print the document on the paper stipulated in the UHC Thesis Guidelines, have it tape bound, and deliver it to the UHC office by the deadline (*see below for important note on timelines*). There is a signature page included where, by original signatures, members of the committee note their acceptance of the student's work. The nature of the project, standard style guidelines of the discipline, and principles of consistency determine length and format. More particulars are laid out in the UHC Thesis Guidelines.

TIMELINES, DEADLINES, AND THE MENTOR'S ROLE

All UHC students are required to take HC 408 TheSIS LEARN by the end of their second year. After completing the course, students are expected to identify a mentor and begin defining their thesis scope with their mentor. A thesis proposal outlining the thesis and signed by the mentor and the student, should be turned into the UHC office by the end of student's third year. Students who would like assistance in completing the proposal are strongly encouraged to enroll in HC 408 TheSIS UNDERTAKE. Maintaining timely progress is crucial in the terms following the class. Progress reports will help keep the student on schedule.

The research phase may extend over several terms may be awarded credit under a departmental designator (UHC option available as a default). Prior to graduation audits, mentors should provide an e-mail or written indication that the research credits taken under the departmental designator were indeed part of the student's thesis research and the UHC will count them toward the student's UHC requirements. Students may count up to six credits for this purpose. The workload should reflect that prospect. Additional credits acceptable to the academic department may be negotiated.

It is helpful to the student if you, as mentor, **establish your expectations** for regular meetings, progress reports, delivery dates and writing schedules. It is a "local option" whether the other two committee members are involved at this stage. As you might expect, keeping a long-term time frame in mind is a new experience for many students, any assistance you can provide in terms of keeping them on pace will be helpful. Although it is rare, occasionally students put the work off until too late, only to discover their calculations on timing/ are seriously in error. Obviously this creates stress. UHC students have a long "focal length" though one likely inexperienced with producing a scholarly product that requires a sustained effort.

TIPS AND RESOURCES

Please help your student realize that the delivery deadline of not later than Friday of dead week has no flexibility.

IRB requirements are changing rapidly and all Honors research must comply with IRB mandates. The Research Office will provide particulars (contact irb@orst.edu) and web-based courses are available in several areas. *The OSU policy is that student research falls under the same guidelines as the rest of the university.*

Regular thesis meetings and progress schedules are recommended.