

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.

People holding other types of positions may also petition to serve as a mentor. Anyone interested in initiating a petition should send a recent CV and their supervisor's contact information to the UHC associate dean. The petition process involves a rigorous review of the petitioner's experience and qualifications by Honors faculty in related disciplines as well as confirmation from the petitioner's supervisor that this responsibility would be an appropriate addition to their workload.

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 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 more ambitious in scope and expectations while still appropriate to an undergraduate's 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 offices, and all theses since 2007 (and some from earlier) are also available electronically through the Valley Library Scholars Archive (<http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/handle/1957/8>). Students upload a digital copy and complete a release form for open access upon submission of their bound, final thesis.

Capstone projects can inspire considerable anxiety and trepidation in students, but upon completion, many see their projects as high points of their undergraduate experience. Because the undergraduate thesis is not widely required on this campus (UHC, International Degree, BioResource Research, Physics, and some Liberal Arts 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 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 become familiar with the thesis requirement and chart a tentative plan for completion.
- **Stage 2 – LEARN:** In this stage, students are asked to look more carefully at what research looks like in various disciplines, explore what research is happening across campus and interview a mentor-eligible OSU faculty member.
- **Stage 3 – UNDERTAKE:** This stage requires the student to select a mentor and write a thesis proposal outlining the thesis project.
- **Stage 4 – GRADUATE:** The final stage involves completing thesis research, preparing thesis drafts, the defense, the poster, and the submission of an electronic and bound final copy.

The UHC thesis webpage (<http://honors.oregonstate.edu/current/thesis>) is a useful resource such as links to resources, and other important documents, including the thesis formal guidelines and the proposal template.

THESIS PROPOSAL

The thesis mentor's first official role involves shaping and approving a student's thesis proposal. All students are required to submit a UHC Thesis Proposal, Agreement, & Timeline to the UHC.

Students are provided with the UHC Thesis Proposal, Agreement & Timeline Template to assist with this process. Students upload this document once it is signed and approved by the mentor.

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. Although UHC students have a long “focal length” they are also likely inexperienced with producing a scholarly product that requires a sustained effort. Regular thesis meetings and progress schedules are recommended.

This approved thesis proposal becomes part of the student’s file. The specificity should be appropriate for an undergraduate honors thesis project but is not fixed in stone; Deviation from the proposal is allowed; however, keep the following in mind:

- Minor changes should be approved by the mentor and do not require revision of the documentation on file with the UHC.
- Major changes, such as choosing a different topic or mentor, require the student to submit a new Thesis Proposal, Agreement & Timeline to the UHC.

Students may not be familiar with the norms of “thesis statements” so your direction and mentoring will be greatly appreciated. The proposal should be no longer than two pages, and be accompanied by an expectation agreement and timeline to ensure that no unexpected delays derail the process.

THESIS COMMITTEE

A three-person committee is required (larger committees are optional); it consists of the thesis mentor and two others. The UHC has what we refer to as the “*2/3 rule*”. The thesis 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 thesis mentor considers an expert (e.g. post doc; research associate, community based experts such as a physician or practitioner of a profession). **The thesis 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 POSTER

The thesis defense is comparable in form and process to a Masters 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 week 10** 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 in various communications during the final stage of their thesis. Earlier submissions are acceptable, of course.

The UHC Thesis Poster 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 attends to provide moral support.

THESIS SUBMISSION

Once corrections mandated by the defense are made, the student prints the document on the paper stipulated in the UHC Thesis Guidelines, has it tape bound, and delivers it to the UHC office by the deadline. There is a signature page included where, by original signature, 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. However, there are specific requirements for formatting the pre-text pages, including the flyleaves, abstract, copyright page, title page and signed approval page.

TIPS AND RESOURCES

Please help your student realize that the delivery deadline of no later than Friday of week 10 has no flexibility.

Research compliance requirements are changing rapidly and all Honors research must comply with 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.*

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