

SENIOR THESIS MANUAL

Departmental Honors Programs

Liberal Arts Honors Programs
College of Liberal Arts
The University of Texas at Austin



Suggested Thesis Deadlines

FOR A TWO-SEMESTER THESIS:

NOTE: Work out a calendar based on this one, with careful reference to the important deadlines on the fourth class day, mid-semester, and last class day.

Fourth class day: Submit to your departmental honors adviser a thesis proposal with the names and signatures of your first and second readers.

Twelfth class day: Submit to your first reader a research prospectus and draft bibliography.

Mid-semester deadline: Complete the initial research and reading phase. Discuss findings with your supervisor.

Last class day: Submit a detailed outline and draft of introduction.

Second semester twelfth class day: Complete first draft of first section or chapter.

Early February - Spring Break: For a 60-page thesis, aim to produce 8-10 pages a week. Leave time to incorporate changes suggested by your readers.

Mid-semester deadline: Submit a COMPLETED FIRST DRAFT by this date, the end of the ninth week of the second semester. This will leave three weeks for comments and revisions before submitting a revised draft.

Twelfth week of class: Submit a final draft to both readers. This will leave two weeks for final corrections, revisions, binding, and collecting signatures.

Last class day: Submit bound, signed copies of your thesis in regulation format as required by your department.

FOR A ONE SEMESTER THESIS: FALL or SPRING

Fourth class day: Submit to your departmental honors adviser a thesis proposal with the name and signature of your thesis supervisor.

Twelfth class day: Submit to your thesis supervisor a research prospectus and draft bibliography.

Fourth week of class: Completion of the bulk of initial research and reading phase. Discuss findings with your supervisor.

Sixth week of class: Submit a detailed outline and draft of introduction.

Eighth week of class: COMPLETE FIRST DRAFT. This will leave three weeks for preparing a revised draft.

Twelfth week of class: Submit a revised draft to your thesis supervisor. This will leave two weeks for final corrections, revisions, binding, and collecting signatures.

Last class day: Submit bound, signed copies of your thesis in regulation format as required by your department.

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Acknowledgments

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What is a Senior Thesis?

A senior thesis is a sustained examination of a central idea or question, developed in a professional and mature manner under the guidance of a faculty supervisor and a second reader. A senior thesis is also a potential source of great satisfaction, tempered by periods of frustration, revelation, and discovery. No two theses are alike. Each is an individual reflection of an emerging scholar, researcher, critic, artist, or thinker. A thesis should provide a culminating experience for your work in one or more disciplines at the University. The thesis is not the place to explore a discipline for the first time. You and your advisers may develop methods of inquiry that bridge disciplines you have already studied.

Should I write a Senior Thesis?

The main prerequisite for a thesis is that you want to write one. A thesis can provide a rigorous focus for your intellectual curiosity and academic acumen. You should certainly take into account your own record of achievement and your personal history with research and writing. The thesis is typically part of the requirements for departmental honors, and so presupposes that you have done excellent work in at least one academic department. If you are unsure, talk with the honors adviser in your major department.

Payoff: What benefit is there in writing an honors thesis?

Successful completion of a senior thesis is not only a satisfaction in itself. It may be a part of the requirements for departmental honors. More importantly, completion of a thesis is a valuable credential for graduate school and employment. Admissions boards, employers, and colleagues regard a thesis with respect due to the motivation and discipline required.

Originality: What if I don't have an original idea?

The question of originality plagues scholars of all levels. Anyone in the world of academics would be disingenuous to say that an academic work is ever entirely original. We all build upon libraries of information and resources that have come before us. An important part of academic work is acknowledging our debt to other scholars fully and clearly. Rather than asking if a thesis is completely original, ask if you can deal with a subject in such a way as to add to the conversation already begun on this topic. You will draw upon the research and ideas of many other scholars, creators, and thinkers, citing their work as you go. Your contribution may come out as a re-evaluation of the material, or as fresh perspective. You may not have that insight as you begin the project, but as a critical and creative student, you can find that element during your research. Remember, no two theses are alike, even if they deal with the same information and topic.

The faculty supervisors: How do I choose them and what are their roles?

In general it is best to work with a professor who is familiar with your work and ability, but successful theses have also been written under the direction of a supervisor who has never taught the student. You will meet regularly with the supervisor, producing drafts and revisions under her or his guidance. In addition to the primary supervisor (who must be a member of the UT faculty), you will need to secure a second reader. You can read more on how to find a supervisor and what is expected from each of you in the third section of this manual.

Length: How long should a thesis be?

Each discipline will make different guidelines for the length of its honors theses. One-semester theses are often thirty to fifty pages in length, and two-semester theses are usually fifty to eighty.

Can my research include human subjects or interviews?

Any student using research with human subjects must receive the approval of the Office of Research Support and Compliance. See <http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humanresearch/undergraduate.php> for more information.

Funding: Can I get funding for thesis research?

There are various research fellowships and scholarships to help with undergraduate theses. The Liberal Arts Honors Programs sponsor the Rapoport-King scholarship which awards both the student and supervising professor. The Vice President for Research sponsors Undergraduate Research Fellowships, or URFs, which award only the student. In addition, other entities such as the University Co-op have various scholarship opportunities. You may need to do some footwork to find out more. Begin by contacting Liberal Arts Honors and your department, as they may have additional research funding available. Usually, a proposal and letter of recommendation from your supervisor are required.

Completion: What happens when I finish my thesis?

You will file an official copy of your thesis, signed by your faculty readers, with the sponsoring department. Your department may require that you defend your thesis orally to qualify for departmental honors. The title of your thesis will appear on your curriculum vitae, perhaps as the first of a growing list of your scholarly writings.

A Suggested Three-Year Timeline for a Liberal Arts Thesis

Sophomore Year

- Begin to collect ideas, books, and faculty advice on topics that interest you.
- Consider your work in each course as a possible field of inquiry for a thesis.
- Apply to your department's honors program and become familiar with its requirements for special honors, including the honors thesis.

Junior Year

- Intensify the search for courses, faculty mentors, and topics of special interest.
- Take your department's course in research methods, or LAH 112H, The Nature of Inquiry (offered only in the spring semester).
- Discuss your developing research ideas with professors who can advise you.
- Select a topic and write a proposal (see page 6).
- Discuss your proposal with professors, one of whom who may become your thesis supervisor (see page 7).
- Enter into a firm agreement with a thesis supervisor, and discuss plans for summer research.
- NB: If you study abroad during your spring semester, try to make thesis arrangements with faculty advisers before you go abroad. Exchange e-mails or messages with your adviser while you are away.

Senior Year

- Make an appointment with your supervisor/first reader in the first week of schedule as described below in the section called "The Research and Writing Process: A Checklist."
- Check with your department's honors adviser, and follow their directions closely.
- Follow your checklist closely, leaving ample time to finish without last-minute agonies.

Step One: Reflection

A senior thesis should be based on something that has interested you during your pursuit of an undergraduate degree. Often, a thesis topic grows from a persistent question you have studied or even written about in a course you valued. How does this question connect with other things that interest you? Often it is best to talk with a friend, professor, or adviser in your department. You must get used to talking about your ideas as soon as possible.

Step Two: Focus

After you have traced several branches of your main idea, choose one of these and pare away all excess material. This aspect may be your thesis topic. The best test to see if this idea can be made into a thesis is to prepare an abstract.

Step Three: Writing a Proposal

A proposal is a refined synopsis of your proposed thesis topic. A well-composed proposal guides your research and writing. It also helps you engage a faculty supervisor, and it is required for research funding. The proposal is broken down into the following questions/topics.

Thesis statement – This is one sentence, 25 words or less, that makes the main idea of your argument clear to any intelligent reader.

Method – Is there a theoretical model you will follow? What is your evidence? Are you doing field research?

Goals – What do you hope to accomplish by writing this? Are you hoping to fill a particular gap in the research of this topic, or to bring a special perspective?

Audience – In general, the audience for a research thesis will be professionals in your discipline.

Implications – So what? What do you hope to show that is different from what has been said before in the conversation on your topic? How do you see your project fitting into the big picture of studies in your chosen discipline? If you are writing a creative thesis, what is creative about it?

A good proposal usually goes through several drafts, and it will continue to change even as you write the thesis itself. It is essential that you get feedback from readers you respect at every stage of proposal development.

Faculty Thesis Supervisors: Your First and Second Readers

Who can supervise a thesis? The student is responsible for securing two readers. Your thesis supervisor (first reader) must be a member of the UT Austin faculty. Usually, your supervisor should be a professor with whom you have previously worked. The second reader is usually a faculty member, but may in some cases be an expert in your field outside of the University. Approval for non-faculty readers should always be obtained from your specific department before making any firm commitments. A successful student-supervisor match is one of the most important elements for a successful thesis.

How does a student get a thesis supervisor? You should approach prospective supervising professors in the spring of your junior year. Provide an abstract of your project and make a point of meeting in person, as this will greatly increase your chances of getting a positive answer from the professor in question. Check with your department's honors adviser about deadlines for designating your thesis supervisor. If you need help finding faculty with similar research underway, consider utilizing the resources available to undergraduates at EUREKA:
<http://www.utexas.edu/research/eureka/>

What are the first steps to take with a thesis supervisor? Come to a clear, explicit agreement about the following things:

- the topic and the limits of your research, as worked out in your abstract
- a schedule for regular meetings or communications with your supervisor
- a timeline for completing outlines, bibliographies, drafts, and revisions

You should raise these points in your first meeting and confirm them in writing or email. Get momentum going quickly on the project, for two reasons: to develop the thesis project itself, and to develop the working relationship with your supervisor.

What about the second reader? During the fall semester, consult with your first reader about possible second readers, and then work out a feedback schedule with the second reader. Although you may only meet a couple of times with your second reader, it is nonetheless important that you arrive at an explicit agreement of mutual expectations. Leave plenty of time to follow your second reader's suggestions on your final draft. The second reader is not obligated to approve your thesis just because your first reader has approved it.

How often should I meet with my supervisors? Some supervisors will want to have weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly conferences. It is to your benefit to start with a regular schedule of appointments, and to keep them.

What if problems develop between student and supervisor? If you suspect you may be mismatched with your supervisor, act sooner rather than later. Go to the honors adviser in your department for guidance on how to proceed.

For the Thesis Supervisor (First Reader)

The thesis supervisor (first reader) is the student's primary source of feedback for the honors thesis project. The most common complaint from thesis students is that they don't get enough feedback and are not sure where they stand in the project. The Liberal Arts Honors office has recommended that the thesis student enter into an explicit agreement with you on the following points:

- the topic and the limits of the research, as worked out in an abstract
- the times for regular meetings or communications
- a timeline for completing outlines, bibliographies, drafts, revisions
- advice on choosing a second reader for the thesis

Beyond these guidelines, your thesis student should obtain and follow any guidelines published by your departmental honors program. See facing page for an example of expectations.

For the Second Reader

Second readers often offer general advice on content rather than detailed editorial comments on style. Consequently, you may want to see an early draft rather than waiting to judge the final draft. The second reader should not feel obligated to approve a thesis that clearly seems inadequate, even in the eleventh hour. Last minute dilemmas can be avoided only by early intervention.

You may want to meet with the student and thesis supervisor to discuss your role as soon as you agree to be the second reader. Students are encouraged to meet regularly with their primary adviser, but at less frequent intervals with their second readers. Make a schedule with the student to help facilitate the feedback process. If you have any questions, you should contact the department for which the student is writing the senior thesis.

Note: Once the thesis is completed, the student should provide a copy to each reader.

What does it mean to give a passing grade to an Honors thesis?

1. The student met with me regularly-as agreed between the student and me- to discuss research and drafts.
2. I received a full draft of the thesis in early April (early November for fall theses).
3. The student made a reasonable attempt to revise as I suggested.
4. In the process the student faced, identified, and surmounted a problem in research or creative process.
5. The thesis is worth a passing grade (D or better), agreed upon by supervisor and second reader. Only those that meet the highest standards for honors work should receive an A.

If a thesis does not meet all five requirements, you may assign it an incomplete and allow the student to finish by a date convenient to you and the second reader. You should also feel free to assign a grade of F; we will back you up on this. Students are entitled to an opportunity to fail.

If you find the thesis especially distinguished, please tell us at: (lahonors@uts.cc.utexas.edu). We may include it on the Liberal Arts Honors and Humanities Web site as a model thesis.

Final Grade: All students are required to present their research at the thesis conference (usually around Honors Day in the spring, fall thesis date is flexible and determined by the director and the few students completing a thesis). The final grade for each thesis will therefore be composed as follows: 85% thesis grade agreed upon by first and second reader; 15% symposium grade. The program director reserves the right to alter a thesis grade on the basis of the student's performance at the thesis symposium.

FINAL DATE FOR SUBMISSION: Each student should submit a final bound copy of the thesis on or before the last class day of the semester. A student who submits the final bound copy after the last class day assumes the risk that the grade may not be posted in time for final grades or graduation.

If you have questions, please contact Liberal Arts Honors at 471-3458 or samorous@mail.utexas.edu. A pdf version of the Senior Thesis Manual can be found at: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/progs/humanities/resources/>

The Research and Writing Process: A Checklist

_____ Discuss your proposal with the faculty member who will be your supervisor / first reader. Make necessary revisions to the scope and focus.

_____ Work out a written schedule with your supervisor for each of the following checkpoints. **For each step you should determine two dates: a date by which you will turn in your work, and a date by which your supervisor will return your work with feedback.**

- submission of revised proposal to your departmental honors adviser
(Suggested deadline: first week of class. You must consult your departmental honors adviser for department deadlines.)
- date for submission of research prospectus and bibliography
(Suggested deadline: twelfth class day.)
- date for completion of the bulk of the research and reading phase
(Suggested deadline: for a two-semester thesis, midpoint of first semester: you will of course revisit research after this date.)
- date for submission of detailed outline and draft of introduction
(Suggested deadline: for a two-semester thesis, last class day of first semester, to allow feedback and revision by end of semester.)
- dates for submission of each chapter or section draft
(Suggested deadline: first draft of first section (8-10 pages) by second week of second semester. For a 60-page thesis, aim to produce 8-10 pages a week.)
- date for submission of first completed draft
(Suggested deadline: mid-point of second semester.)
- date for submission of final draft for last reading and faculty signatures
(Suggested deadline: twelfth week of the second semester. You must consult with your department's honors adviser for department deadlines.)

_____ Follow the schedule as closely as possible, and make explicit, mutually agreeable revisions to deadlines only as needed. Avoid drift.

_____ Submit final, signed copies of your thesis in regulation format as required by your department. See Appendices for LAH Council formats.

Form a small group with other thesis writers

Writing for other student readers can help keep your style clean and fresh, and they can help you spot problems before you submit drafts to your supervisor.

Join seminars and workshops on thesis writing

LAH 112H, *The Nature of Inquiry*, is a spring course designed for second-semester juniors as a preparation for the thesis, and students report that it has been very valuable in working on focus, scope, bibliography, research, and planning. Your own department may offer a similar course or workshop.

Read successful theses kept by your department

Your department's honors office should have a collection of recent theses. As of 2007, undergraduate Honors Theses will also be shelved in the PCL. These can offer models, inspiration, and reassurance.

Don't let stress build up

A thesis is a high-stress endeavor. Don't become a victim of it. If you need to talk with someone, make an appointment with an adviser, or if necessary, visit the Health Center for help. Your physical and mental health come first.

Exercise, eat right, and rest

Sounds simple enough, but it is very common for students to forget to do these things while in the throes of a thesis. Plan to include some sort of physical activity in your day. Many of the greatest thinkers were also avid walkers. A walk is sometime the best way to break writer's block or to stave off a bout of anxiety.

Share your work

Scholarship is meant for publication. Make multiple copies for friends and family. Attend a thesis symposium if your department offers one. Or, look for campus-wide symposia. Better yet, submit a proposal for a conference. You can't get accepted if you don't apply.

Utilize the resources on campus

On a campus of this magnitude, resources abound in all departments. Faculty are always willing to help, and facilities exist for your use. Don't forget about the Ransom Humanities Research Center, the LBJ Library, the Blanton Museum, the Texas History Center, and the Benson Latin American Collection.

General Resources

Barzun, Jacques – The Modern Researcher
Booth, Wayne – The Craft of Research
MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers
The Essentials of MLA Style (amended format)
Turabian, Kate – A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations
Zerubavel, Eviator – The Clockwork Muse

Style Guidelines from Your Department and the College of Liberal Arts

Consult your department for their specific style requirements, including specifications for fonts, formatting, pagination, and binding. Some departments may not have special requirements, but you should always check first.

Upon completion, submit a copy of your thesis with the original signature page to your major department. You may want to supply a copy to the library for archival purposes. It is also a customary courtesy to provide a bound copy to your first reader.

The Liberal Arts Council has set the following guidelines for theses that are to be shelved in the library:

1. The copy must be bound in a simple tape flat binding (no spiral bound). A Velo vinyl report cover is preferred. You can get your thesis bound at any printing or copy and binding store. It is recommended you provide them your thesis in hard copy or on a disk in pdf format, so changes to your text or formatting are not inadvertently made.
2. The copy needs to be on 100% cotton, acid-free paper.
3. Margins need to be at least 1.25", especially on the left.
4. The departmental honors program often requires a bound, signed original. Check with your honors adviser. The student may submit a copy to be placed in the main library. It is a courtesy to present a copy to each reader.
5. The Title Page should be based on the template for the masters thesis or dissertation, with title, author, "special honors in [department name]," and month and year of degree.

The online catalog entry for the thesis will be the full name of the student, the degree, the date, and the department.

Appendix Two: Sample Pages

Sample Title Page

Sample Proposal Page (optional)

Sample Table of Contents

Sample First Page of Text

[sample title page]

Women of Empire: Gender and Politics in Colonial Brazil

Mary Margaret Portman

HIS 679HB
Special Honors in the Department of History
The University of Texas at Austin

May 2006

_____[first reader's signature]_____

Peter St.Giles Frothingale
Department of History
Supervising Professor

_____[second reader's signature]_____

Elisabet Kubitszek
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
Second Reader

[sample abstract]

**Title of Thesis: double-spaced
and centered**

Student's Name(as registered with the University), degree sought (abbreviated)
The University of Texas at Austin, (year)

Supervisor: (Professor's name without titles or degrees)

Your Proposal goes here. It should not exceed two pages and should address the questions that are discussed in Part Two of this manual. A proposal can give “teasers” about your big findings, but keep your best work for the introduction and body of the text.

[sample table of contents]

Table of Contents.....	#
List of Tables [if any].....	#
List of Figures [if any].....	#
Chapter 1: Title of Chapter.....	#
Chapter 2: Title of Chapter.....	#
Appendix A: Name of Appendix [if any].....	#
Glossary [if any].....	#
Bibliography.....	#
Vita [optional, required by some departments].....	#

[sample first page]

CHAPTER ONE

Title of Chapter (optional)

Sometimes people will put a quotation here to begin a chapter. This is optional, but can often set the tone for your chapter.

Author's name, Source

Sectional Heading (optional)

You should indent the first line of your paragraphs one-half inch. Then, the paragraph should be double-spaced and justified on both sides. If you have quotes that run longer than three lines, then you would do a block quote format which looks something like this:

Here is your block quote. You will use this format for longer quotes. If you don't use a block quote format, then your reader may not realize that it is not you writing. This can take away from the power of the quote, or just be misleading for your audience.

Here you return to your normal format. Don't get fancy when you don't need to.

Style should only enhance your thesis, not mask any lack of content or distract. Let your words do the magic, not your word processor.

Author's Name, *Source* (Publisher's location: Publisher, Date), p. xxx. Footnotes are also where you can insert your own thoughts. If you have something to say that may not work in the main body of the text, but you feel that it is important, try a footnote. Work out in advance with your supervisor if you are going to use footnotes or endnotes. The only true advice about footnote and endnote formatting is simply to be consistent. Once you decide on a format, stay with it.



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