



UNC  
COLLEGE OF  
ARTS & SCIENCES

THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL

HONORS PROGRAM

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## Senior Honors Thesis Guidelines for Academic Units, Faculty Advisors, and Students

### General Guidelines

Students who wish to graduate from Carolina with honors or highest honors must complete a senior honors thesis project in their major(s). Such students need not have participated in the Honors Program prior to the senior year. They must, however, meet academic eligibility standards set by the Honors office and by the individual departments, curricula, and professional schools (hereinafter referred to as academic units) that sponsor senior honors thesis programs.

Students with double majors may graduate with honors or highest honors in both fields of study. To do so, they must complete a distinct project in each field. Students may not undertake a senior honors thesis project in a minor field (Creative Writing is the sole exception) or in a field outside of their declared major(s).

Graduating with honors or highest honors is separate from graduating with distinction or highest distinction. The latter designations are awarded by the University solely on the basis of cumulative GPA. Students graduate with distinction or highest distinction if they have completed at least 45 academic hours at UNC-CH and have obtained an overall GPA of at least 3.500 and 3.800, respectively.

Students who successfully complete a senior honors thesis project will have the designation 'honors' or 'highest honors' printed beside their names in the Commencement bulletins and recorded on their diplomas and transcripts.

### Eligibility

Students who wish to undertake a senior honors thesis project must have a cumulative GPA of 3.200 or higher.

Students whose GPA is close to the eligibility standard and who have a reasonable chance of meeting the requirement within a semester of additional course work may begin a senior honors thesis project on a probationary basis. Such exceptions must be approved by students' home academic units and either the Associate or the Assistant Dean for Honors. Students

who fail to raise their GPAs to meet the standard at the end of the probationary semester may not continue as candidates for graduation with honors or highest honors. They are to receive course credit for the work completed and may, at the discretion of their major academic units, continue their projects by way of independent study. Students who continue on that basis are not eligible to graduate with honors or highest honors.

Academic units that wish to impose a higher GPA eligibility standard may do so at their discretion. Many units have done this by requiring that students meet both the cumulative GPA standard set by the Honors office and a more demanding GPA standard for course work within the major field of study.

### **Credit and Supervision**

Senior honors thesis students must complete an original and substantial research, performance, or creative project under direct supervision by a faculty advisor. Under ordinary circumstances, this work is completed over the course of two semesters. Students may begin their projects in the second semester of their junior year or in the fall semester of their senior year. Scheduling is determined by individual academic units.

Most academic units require that senior honors thesis students participate in a two-course sequence (6 credit hours) designed to guide them through the process of research and project development. When such courses are offered, they must be taught by a member of the faculty. Academic units with few senior thesis candidates may organize their students' work through independent study. In either case, it is incumbent upon academic units to ensure that senior honors thesis students devote the equivalent of 6 credit hours to their projects.

At the end of the first semester of senior honors thesis work, academic units should evaluate students' progress and determine whether they will continue their projects. Students whose work is deemed insufficient are to receive course credit for the work completed and may, at the discretion of their major academic units, continue their projects by way of independent, non-honors study. Students who continue on that basis are not eligible to graduate with honors or highest honors.

Tenured and tenure-track faculty, retired faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and fixed-term faculty appointed for more than a single year may serve as thesis advisors.

Graduate students may not serve as thesis advisors or as instructors for senior honors thesis courses.

### **Evaluation for Honors or Highest Honors**

At the completion of their projects, senior honors thesis students must pass an oral examination or other appropriate form of evaluation. Faculty in each academic unit should define an evaluation process that reflects their discipline's scholarly norms and customary practices. In most instances, evaluations are made by a committee of two or more faculty, one of whom is the candidate's project advisor. Other committee members may be drawn from any academic unit, as deemed appropriate and approved by the project advisor. Academic units may also require the approval of their honors director and/or director of undergraduate studies.

Evaluators have three options: 1) They may award only course credit for a student's thesis work; 2) They may designate that the student graduate with honors; or 3) They may designate that the student graduate with highest honors. A number of academic units require that examining committees refer all candidates for highest honors to a unit-level committee that evaluates nominated projects and makes the final decision on awarding highest honors. Highest honors should be awarded only to students who have met the most rigorous standards of scholarly excellence.

Academic units are strongly urged not to include cumulative GPA as a factor in awarding honors or highest honors. The University recognizes students' overall academic achievement by graduating them with distinction or highest distinction. Honors and highest honors are awarded more specifically for outstanding scholarly achievement within a specific discipline or field of study. In light of that fact, academic units may, if they wish, consider students' GPAs within their majors as a factor in awarding honors or highest honors.

### **Research Funding**

The Honors office (<http://www.honors.unc.edu>) offers financial awards to support senior honors thesis research. There are two funding cycles per year, with deadlines announced by the Honors office. Students must apply through their academic unit's honors director, or in units without honors directors, their project advisors. Funding is also available through the Office of Undergraduate Research (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/our>) and from funds administered by individual academic units.

### **Reporting Requirements and Deadlines**

Academic units must report their degree with honors or highest honors candidates to the Honors office by the deadlines listed on our website ([www.honors.unc.edu](http://www.honors.unc.edu)). Candidates reported after the deadlines will not receive recognition in the Commencement program.

The Honors office will send academic units a reporting form prior to each deadline. Academic units will be asked to provide the name and PID of their candidates, the course numbers in which the student was enrolled for honors thesis work, and whether individual students have earned honors or highest honors.

Academic units should also confirm that their candidates have the minimum 3.200 cumulative GPA required by the Honors office and that the students meet any other standards set within their major field(s).

Reporting forms may be returned by fax (962-1548) or in person to the Honors office (225 Graham Memorial).

Students who cannot finish their projects prior to the reporting deadlines may still graduate with honors or highest honors. To do so, they must complete their work and their home academic unit's evaluation process no later than the last day of class in the semester in which they plan to graduate.

### **Archival Copies of Senior Honors Theses and On-Line Archive of Abstracts**

Students should register their senior honors theses by submitting an abstract of their work to the Honors Program's on-line database: [http://www.honors.unc.edu/thesis\\_registration.html](http://www.honors.unc.edu/thesis_registration.html). This is ordinarily done once thesis projects are completed.

Academic units should submit paper copies of their students' honors theses to the North Carolina Collection in Wilson Library. The Honors office does not need a copy of the theses. The theses are bound into volumes and housed in the North Carolina Collection permanently.

Copies must be reproduced on 100% cotton fiber paper. Submissions on paper of lesser quality will not be accepted. More extensive guidelines for the submission of a senior honors thesis are available at: <http://www.honors.unc.edu/docs/guidelines.pdf>.

The Honors office is investigating options for collecting and archiving digital copies of students' senior honors theses. More information will be available at a later date.

### **Research Recognition**

The Honors office provides cords for students graduating with honors or highest honors to wear with their commencement gowns. Academic units should retrieve the honors cords from the Honors office (225 Graham Memorial) and distribute them to their honors graduates. An email notice will be sent to each academic unit's honors director when the honors cords are available for distribution.

Many academic units sponsor end-of-the-year events to celebrate their senior honors thesis students' work. Those events range from luncheons and receptions to day-long symposia at which thesis students present their work to the academic community. Senior honors thesis students may also apply to participate in the annual Celebration of Undergraduate Research sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Research.