

UNIVERSITY OF
DETROIT MERCY



UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

THESIS HANDBOOK

UPDATED AUGUST 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	The Thesis Experience	2
2.	Getting Started	3
	When to Begin	3
	Choosing a Topic	3
	Finding a Faculty Thesis Advisor	3
3.	Enrolling in the Honors Thesis sections	3
4.	HON 4997: Honors Thesis Proposal	3
5.	HON 4998: Honors Thesis Approval	4
	Forming the Honors Thesis Committee	4
6.	HON 4999: Honors Thesis Defense	5
	The Honors Thesis Defense	5
	Completing and Submitting the Thesis	6
	Thesis Reflection	6
	Formatting the Thesis	6
7.	The Role of the Faculty Thesis Advisor	7

1. THE THESIS EXPERIENCE

A University Honors Program (UHP) Thesis is a substantial, independent, intellectual, and creative endeavor initiated by the student. In undertaking an Honors thesis, the student will spend over a year researching literature, working on an experiment, or designing and producing creative work. An Honors Thesis should be undertaken as a major commitment and an exciting opportunity. **Though there is no official length requirement, the typical Honors Thesis is between 25 and 40 pages, including a bibliography and notes.**

As the capstone for the University Honors academic experience, the thesis represents the culmination of UHP students' undergraduate work at the University of Detroit Mercy. The thesis provides students a unique opportunity to apply the knowledge, skills, and talents they have cultivated at the university to create an original scholarly or creative work grounded in academic research.

The primary work of the thesis is completed over the course of three one-credit Honors Thesis sections: HON 4997: Thesis Proposal, HON 4998: Thesis Approval, and HON 4999: Thesis Defense. It is recommended that students devote a single semester to each section. Typically, students take HON 4997 in the Winter of their junior year, HON 4998 in the Fall of their senior year, and HON 4999 in the Winter of their senior year.

Students who are unable to take these three sections one at a time may take HON 4997 and HON 4998 in a single semester. It is highly discouraged that students take all three sections in a single semester. Students taking more than one section in a single semester are strongly encouraged to begin work on the thesis, including collaborating with their Faculty Thesis Advisor, before registering for HON 4997.

2. GETTING STARTED

When to Begin

In order to accommodate the various curricular demands of the many majors the UHP serves, a great deal of flexibility is allowed as to when students may begin work on their thesis. In general, students can start their thesis whenever they have chosen their topic and are ready to begin. Typically, a thesis is not started before a student's sophomore year, and no later than the second term of a student's junior year. As a general rule, an Honors Thesis takes at least a year to complete. The process of conceiving of the thesis and identifying a Faculty Thesis Advisor must begin at least one semester before you plan to register for the first thesis section, HON 4997: Honors Thesis Proposal.

Choosing a Topic

As you proceed through your university education, you should keep an eye out for topics you are passionate about and in which you would like to develop expertise. These topics may relate to your major, but they don't need to. Past Honors students have completed scholarly theses on a wide range of topics, including, for example, women's representation in the US judiciary (Political Science major), the interaction between *Veillonella parvula* and *Streptococcus* in biofilm formation (Biology major), the history of adoption literature (English major), the universal oxidation method for 2' and 5' positions of uridine (Biochemistry major), and the future of sustainability in Jesuit education (Business Administration major). Others have completed creative projects such as documentaries, plays, collections of poetry, and short story sequences. Truly, the possibilities are endless.

Finding a Faculty Thesis Advisor

When you have identified at least a preliminary topic of interest, reach out to a professor you have worked with to inquire whether they would be willing to serve as your Faculty Thesis Advisor. The Faculty Thesis Advisor should be someone you know from a previous class or project and must have expertise in your area of interest so that they are able to guide the development of the thesis. Students should begin seeking out a Faculty Thesis Advisor as soon as possible, ideally early in the semester before they register for HON 4997: Thesis Proposal.

3. ENROLLING IN THE HONORS THESIS SECTIONS

Once you have identified a thesis topic and a Faculty Thesis Advisor, you are ready to register for the first of three one-credit Honors Thesis sections. These sections are individually created for each student, with the Faculty Thesis Advisor as the instructor of record for each section. *Note for Faculty Thesis Advisors: your college may grant you one chit for each Honors Thesis section (HON 4997, HON 4998, and HON 4999) for which you are the instructor of record. Check with your Dean's office to see if this policy applies. Collecting a certain number of chits may grant you a future course release.*

To request to register for HON 4997, HON 4998, and/or HON 4999, fill out the [University Honors Program Thesis Sections Form](#) [links to external site].

4. HON 4997: HONORS THESIS PROPOSAL

Over the course of HON 4997, the student will be expected to produce a proposal for their Honors Thesis. The proposal should reflect a carefully thought-out approach to the subject with sufficient elaboration to enable any intelligent layperson to understand the student's aims and their plans for executing the work. In general, the proposal is between 300 and 1,000 words in length, depending on the discipline.

Faculty Thesis Advisors have discretion in how they would like to manage HON 4997. The Faculty Thesis Advisor and the student may hold required meetings no more than once per week and as little as once per month, as long as the advisor is confident that the student is making good progress.

Below is a sample schedule of meetings and assignments for HON 4997:

Week 1: Preliminary meeting with the Faculty Thesis Advisor (FTA) to set goals and expectations

Week 3: Rough draft of proposal due to Faculty Thesis Advisor

Week 4: Meeting with FTA to discuss the proposal draft, with recommendations for further research

Week 6: Second draft of proposal due to Faculty Thesis Advisor

Week 7: Meeting with FTA to discuss the proposal draft, with recommendations for further research

Week 9: Final draft of proposal due to Faculty Thesis Advisor

Week 10: Meeting with FTA to discuss the proposal and next steps

Week 12: First draft of HON 4998 preparatory document due (see below) to Faculty Thesis Advisor

Week 14: Meeting with FTA to discuss the preparatory document and plans for next semester

The thesis proposal must be completed and approved by the Faculty Thesis Advisor before the student can register for HON 4998: Honors Thesis Approval (see below).

**Required minimum grade for HON 4997: B*

5. HON 4998: HONORS THESIS APPROVAL

Over the course of HON 4998, the student should transition from the proposal stage to the drafting stage, so that by the end of HON 4998, the student should at least have begun to draft the Honors Thesis.

Before drafting the thesis, the student must complete a preparatory document that will aid in the student's planning and execution of the thesis. Examples of such documents include but are not limited to:

Prospectus: a longer, more developed proposal of at least 500 words, with a bibliography

Annotated bibliography: a list of sources the student has referenced and/or will reference in completing the thesis, along with brief descriptions of how each source will contribute to the thesis

Outline: a thorough, well-organized roadmap of what the thesis will cover

Whatever form this preparatory document takes is the decision of the Faculty Thesis Advisor, in collaboration with the student. As with HON 4997, the nature and frequency of meetings between the student and the Faculty Thesis Advisor is at the discretion of the advisor. The sample schedule for HON 4997 above may be used as a model for planning HON 4998.

The preparatory document—whether it be a prospectus, annotated bibliography, outline, or some alternative—must be completed and approved by the Faculty Thesis Advisor before the student can register for HON 4999: Honors Thesis Defense (see below).

Forming the Honors Thesis Committee

Additionally, before a student registers for HON 4999, they must identify at least one other faculty member to serve on their Honors Thesis Committee. The committee may consist of between two and four faculty. While the Faculty Thesis Advisor should have expertise in the thesis topic, the additional committee members may just have some degree of familiarity with the topic. The additional committee members are expected to take part in the Honors Thesis Defense, but they are not required (though they are certainly welcome) to provide feedback on the thesis ahead of the defense.

**Required minimum grade for HON 4998: B*

6. HON 4999: HONORS THESIS DEFENSE

By the end of HON 4999, the student must have completed, defended, and submitted the Honors Thesis. Below is a recommended schedule, with requirements noted:

Week 1: Preliminary meeting with the Faculty Thesis Advisor to set goals and expectations

Week 3: Set thesis defense date with Thesis Committee and Honors Director(s) **(required)**

Week 3: Submit draft of thesis to Faculty Thesis Advisor

Week 4: Meeting with Faculty Thesis Advisor to discuss thesis draft

Week 6: Submit revision of thesis to Faculty Thesis Advisor

Week 7: Meeting with Faculty Thesis Advisor to discuss thesis revision

Weeks 8–12: Honors Thesis Defense in Gardella Honors House **(required: no later than week 12)**

Week 14: Complete final revisions, if any are requested by the committee, and submit the final thesis manuscript to Thesis Committee and the Honors Director(s) **(required: no later than week 14)**

The Honors Thesis Defense

The final draft of the thesis must be submitted to the Thesis Committee **at least two weeks before** the defense date. Committee members may request final submission as much as one month in advance of the defense. The student should make every effort to accommodate such requests.

The defense is an oral presentation held in the Gardella Honors House. Visual components, such as PowerPoint slides, may also be part of the presentation. Students have the option of making the defense private (for their committee only) or public (for the Honors community, or for the wider university community). Students may also choose to invite friends and family. During the defense, the Honors student delivers a presentation of their thesis project.

Students should consult with their Faculty Thesis Advisor on the format and structure of the defense. Below is a suggested format:

Total time: One hour

Minutes 0-20: The student delivers an oral presentation that reflects on the process of selecting the thesis topic and composing the thesis, while also covering the main points of the project, such as its central argument or findings and its supporting evidence. For creative theses, the student may offer a reading of the work completed along with commentary and reflections on the work.

Minutes 20–55: The committee asks questions of the student. These questions may ask for clarification on any aspect of the thesis or the oral presentation. The student should address each

question and may offer further reflections on the thesis to aid in the committee's understanding of the project.

Minutes 55-60: The committee deliberates and determines if the student has passed the defense. The student is notified by the end of the defense whether they have passed.

Following the defense, the Faculty Thesis Advisor should notify the Honors Director(s) whether the student has passed the defense. The committee may request revisions to the thesis before final submission. The student is expected to complete these revisions in a timely manner so that they can turn in the final thesis to the Faculty Thesis Advisor and the Honors Director(s) no later than the end of the last week of classes.

Completing and Submitting the Thesis

By no later than three weeks after the defense or by the last day of classes (whichever comes first), the student must submit a completed Honors Thesis to the Faculty Thesis Advisor, the additional Honors Committee members, and the Honors Director(s). The completed thesis must address all the committee's requests for revisions following the defense. The thesis must be carefully and thoroughly proofread and correctly formatted.

Thesis Reflection

The final section of the thesis, marked with the section heading "**Reflection**" (before the Works Cited pages), must include a minimum of 250 words on how the thesis has contributed to at least one of the Honors Program's core values: Curiosity, Community, Critical Thinking, Reflection, Diversity, and Service. For more information on these core values, see the Honors Program Student Handbook.

Formatting the Thesis

Margins: 1 inch all around

Title and approval pages: The thesis must contain a title page and an approval page. The approval page must be signed by the Faculty Thesis Advisor before the thesis will be accepted by the Honors Program. The title and approval pages can be downloaded from the Honors Program's Blackboard site.

Pagination: All pages must be in the following order:

1. Title page (sample available to download from the Honors Program's Blackboard)
2. Blank page
3. Approval page (available to download from the Honors Program's Blackboard)
4. Blank page
5. Table of Contents
6. List of Figures (if any)
7. List of Illustrations (if any)
8. List of Tables (if any)
9. Preface, including acknowledgements
10. Main body text

Page numbers should begin with the first page of the thesis rather than the prefatory material (i.e., the title page, approval page, table of contents, lists, and preface).

Style Guide: The entire manuscript, including page numbers, should be composed in Times New Roman 12 pt. Please use the style guide (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) appropriate for your discipline. Defer to the Faculty Thesis Advisor on which style is appropriate for your thesis.

Figures: Illustrations, tables, charts, photographs, maps, etc. should be listed at the outset in a separate page (not paginated; see order of pages above). These figures should be referred to in the text before they appear and should be captioned.

7. THE ROLE OF THE FACULTY THESIS ADVISOR

The Honors Thesis is an independent, student-led project, in which the author transitions from being a student to becoming a scholar or artist, from being a consumer of knowledge to becoming a producer of knowledge. The Faculty Thesis Advisor's role is to guide and support that journey, making sure the student is adhering to the standards of the student's (and the faculty member's) academic discipline. The Faculty Thesis Advisor is tasked with reading, providing feedback, and meeting with the student in support of the satisfactory completion of the thesis. It is the Faculty Thesis Advisor's job to determine the nature and frequency of meetings with the student. The Faculty Thesis Advisor should not allow the student to defend the thesis unless they are confident the student is prepared, ensuring that the final draft of the thesis (prior to any post-defense revisions) is sufficient, and that the student has a firm grasp of their project. *Note for Faculty Thesis Advisors: your college may grant you one chit for each Honors Thesis section (HON 4997, HON 4998, and HON 4999) for which you are the instructor of record. Check with your Dean's office to see if this policy applies. Collecting a certain number of chits may grant you a future course release.*



udmercy.edu/honors