

# University Honors College

## THESIS MENTOR GUIDELINES

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This information is for faculty who have agreed to serve as mentors to University Honors College students for their senior thesis. Thank you very much for your willingness to help and for sharing your time and energy. Faculty who have taken on this important role value the opportunities to work with students who are enthusiastic, even avid in their pursuit of new knowledge. There are no spectators when it comes to inquiry-based learning but without faculty such as you, Honors students would not have access to what may be the most enticing aspect of their undergraduate education.

This message is intended to answer questions you might have as you work with UHC students.

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### THE THESIS EXPERIENCE AND FACULTY RECOGNITION

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Your mentoring is invaluable to the UHC and to Honors students. All faculty who teach in or mentor for the UHC are listed as *University Honors College Faculty* in the OSU General Catalog. It is a way to signal the campus and our students that you have provided an important and compelling learning opportunity. The Office of Academic Affairs recognizes that listing as indicative of instructional excellence.

If you have questions, please call. If your student is having difficulty, we are ready to work with you to aid the student. If the student seems insecure, why should they be any different than the rest of us who embark on a journey into uncharted territory?

### BACKGROUND

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Like virtually every honors program in the country, OSU's University Honors College requires all students to complete and defend a senior thesis in order to receive the Honors Baccalaureate degree. The goal is to engage Honors students in a direct, hands-on, participatory learning experience. The honors thesis/project is a baccalaureate-level thesis, not merely an extended term paper. Think of it as similar in process to a Master's project but at a level appropriate to undergraduates. The projects may be traditional research projects, creative effort, or a service-oriented exercise that is conceptually grounded in key concepts of a body of knowledge. The projects may be within a discipline or interdisciplinary. Team projects are acceptable though individual theses are required.

All Honors theses are housed in the UHC and are also available electronically through the Valley Library. Students are required to provide a digital copy and signed release form for fair access.

Despite the fact that senior projects prompt considerable trepidation in the beginning, by the end the students report they are among the high points of their undergraduate experience. Because senior projects are not widely required on this campus (UHC, ID, BRR, Physics, and some Engineering disciplines), students may express concern and uncertainty; anything you can do to reassure them will be greatly appreciated. Once finished, the completed projects are bound, catalogued in the Valley Library, available in the UHC and available for review by others.

## THESIS GUIDELINES

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Upon taking the HC 403 *“Introduction to Thesis”* class, students receive a set of Thesis Guidelines (often called the long-guidelines). This 25-page document sets forth many details of their final product. They also receive *“Getting Started on Your Thesis”* document, a short “helpful hints” listing of basics, and other handout materials. If you have questions you might ask to see the student’s copy, request a copy from our offices, or visit our Web page where all these materials can be accessed.

UHC Thesis Guidelines have been matched with those of ID and BRR and Physics. Should your student be earning a degree in one of those programs or any other unit where a senior project may be part of their experience, assure the student that a common document is possible. Our goal is to work with the students’ academic departments to enhance their experience and not to put more hurdles in their way.

## THESIS PROPOSAL

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A signed (mentor signature only) thesis proposal is required in HC 403 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. The broad parameters are covered in the “Introduction to Thesis” class but inevitably there are additional questions. 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.

In the event that the student has not yet decided on a project, we advise them that a “generic” proposal, signed by the mentor to indicate that the student understands the expectations of research in their discipline, is acceptable for completion of the thesis class. A “generic” proposal should be replaced, however, as soon as the student and mentor decide on a project. The same option is possible if a project changes and new directions emerge (study abroad opportunities that provide a comparative perspective are a common example of something that prompts a redirection or an area where students may not know the details until they arrive on site). Students may work on a mentor’s project, or their own project, Honors does not stipulate anything in that regard.

## UHC THESIS COMMITTEE

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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 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 EXAMINATION AND ORAL DEFENSE

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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.

## END PRODUCT

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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, CREDIT AND OTHER PACING ISSUES

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All UHC students are required to take the "Introduction to Thesis" class, normally not later than their junior year. To receive a passing grade a succinct thesis proposal, signed by a mentor, must be turned in to the UHC office. Normally the students should transition into a continuing "research" phase immediately after completion of the "Introduction to Thesis" class. 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.

## DEFENSE AND UHC THESIS FAIR

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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.

## LAST WORD

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**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.** New policies were implemented in April 2002 and compliance training and documentation are required. The Research Office will provide particulars (contact [irb@orst.edu](mailto: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.

Listing of Thesis Documents Provided to Students (*please request copies if interested*):

Thesis materials are available on the web at: <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/honors/students/thesis/>

- 1) *The Honors Thesis: An Overview (single page introductory glimpse)*
- 2) *Getting Started on your Thesis (five page synopsis)*
- 3) *UHC Thesis Guidelines (25 page enumeration of specifics for producing the thesis)*
- 4) *Proposal Guidelines for UHC Thesis (Proposal of 1-2 pages)*