

GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HONORS THESES

The Honors Program provides students with special opportunities for intellectual excellence in and out of the classroom. The curriculum begins with broader liberal arts courses in many disciplines, and it concludes with the Honors Thesis. The thesis usually (not always) forms a part of the student's major field of study. In addition, the Honors Program hopes that this senior project incorporates the skills and habits of thought learned throughout the student's liberal arts education and helps the student synthesize knowledge gained throughout his or her collegiate experience.

The thesis must be a work of scholarship. It may be any type of scholarship in any discipline.

Timeline

Freshmen and sophomore years: The student should focus on completing the Core Seminars in philosophy, English, literature, and theology and other core requirements, and also on beginning a major course of study. Along the way, the student should identify professors from whom he or she would like to learn more. One benefit of attending a liberal arts college like Assumption is the opportunity for sustained out-of-the-classroom discussions between students and professors. Through such discussions, a student will more easily identify a mentor and develop a topic for his or her thesis.

HON300 Junior Honors Seminar: This is a workshop in which the student develops a thesis proposal. At the conclusion of HON300, the student shall orally present the proposal to a committee (and may choose to use visual aids, or not).

HON444 Honors Thesis: This is an independent study in which the student takes primary initiative. The mentor guides the student and provides feedback. The student meets weekly with his or her mentor.

The student must successfully defend his or her thesis to a faculty committee before the end of his or her senior year. The approved thesis must be submitted in quadruplicate to the Program prior to the end of exams before graduation.

Goal of the Thesis

All academic assignments have the goal of helping students learn. Thus, most of all, the student should aim in the thesis to **achieve and demonstrate** (1) **excellence of understanding**. The student should also achieve and demonstrate (2) proficiency with background knowledge (the most important achievements, findings, or writings by others relevant to the project); and (3) facility with the way practitioners in that field produce, explain, and display their works.

Disciplinary Variety

The thesis may be any type of scholarship in any discipline. Some are research or experimental projects designed to discover new knowledge. Some are creative projects (producing, e.g., a computer program, a business plan, an artistic, musical, or literary work). Others are reflective essays interpreting a text or phenomenon.

In all cases, the thesis must include a substantial written component demonstrating excellence of understanding. When the thesis is a creative project, the thesis must include a written portion explaining or reflecting upon the creative achievement.

Guidelines for Honors Thesis Proposals

Typical proposals will be 10-15 pages in length and will include the following:

- a. An introduction identifying the question, theme, or the goal of the project
- b. A review of the most relevant textual sources (secondary or primary) or a review of the key background knowledge of the phenomenon to be studied
- c. An explanation of the significance of the proposed project
- d. A statement of the plan for developing the project (or a statement of methodology)
- e. A reasonable timeline for completing the project in phases
- f. An annotated bibliography of key sources read so far. An additional bibliography of works one expects to be helpful in one's further scholarship.

The content and style of these components will vary. The proposal need not follow this outline, but should contain something like each of these parts, however ordered or synthesized. Because of disciplinary differences and expertise, deference should be given to the mentor's opinion about the content and style of the proposal.

Guidelines for Honors Theses

Length will vary, but the typical thesis will be 30-40 pages. The thesis should:

- (a) Present the work accomplished, what has been learned, and how we should understand it.
- (b) Discuss the most relevant textual sources (secondary or primary) or review the most relevant background knowledge of the phenomenon studied
- (c) Make clear the significance of the project (for example, reflect on or explicate the creative work; or report on one's findings relative to others' findings or to one's hypotheses or prior expectations; or situate one's conclusions in the context of human life and other thinkers' conclusions).
- (d) A bibliography.

Given the variety of types of scholarly project, these aspects of the thesis will vary in prominence, style, and order.