
BEGINNING THE HONORS THESIS

What is a Thesis?

An Honors thesis represents the culminating project of your experience with the BYU Honors Program. Many students report that writing their Honors thesis proved both the most rigorous and the most rewarding academic experience of their college years. As you prepare your thesis, you will learn to develop proficient research and rhetorical skills within your discipline while enhancing your academic or professional credentials and making an original contribution to your field. You will have help all along the way from your Honors coordinator, your faculty advisor, your reader, and the Honors Program.

Note that if you are already required to do a thesis or capstone experience in your major, you can almost always adapt that work to also satisfy the requirements of the Honors thesis. The final length of an Honors thesis often depends on the discipline in which it is completed. Keep in mind that each Honors thesis will need to have a written portion that can be bound and placed in the library upon completion, even if your capstone project is something such as software or a musical composition.

People to Know

The Honors Coordinator—Assigned by major

- *Your link to the Honors Program:* The Honors Coordinator is a faculty member from your major department or college who regularly works with the Honors Program and is qualified to advise students on the Honors thesis topics. The coordinator should know the faculty in your discipline as well as their general research interests and may be able to refer you to possible mentors. He or she is also familiar with what makes a good thesis in your field and can assist in identifying possible thesis topics. If your topic is interdisciplinary in nature, the Honors Coordinator in your major may also refer you to the coordinator of the other discipline relevant to your thesis. A current list of the coordinators for each major is available on the Honors website at <http://honors.byu.edu> under *Student Links* → *Honors Coordinators*.
- *Gives approval for thesis proposal:* The Honors Coordinator must read the thesis proposal and then sign the submission form for the proposal to be considered for approval. The Honors Coordinator helps the Honors Program determine if you have demonstrated a sufficient knowledge of your subject, if your focus and methods are appropriate, and whether you need IRB approval to continue your research.
- *Will serve as the third member of your thesis committee:* Unless your college appoints another faculty member, your Honors Coordinator will participate in your thesis defense.

The Faculty Advisor—Chosen by you

- *Supervises development of the thesis proposal:* The advisor will determine if the topic shows sufficient depth and promise for an Honors thesis (which requires more thought and discipline than a term paper but less rigor, skill, knowledge, and experience than a master's thesis). The topic must also be properly narrowed and focused so that you can complete the work in the time available. As you write the proposal, your advisor will offer comments and suggestions about what to say and how to say it. Your advisor's signature of approval is required for submission both of the thesis proposal and of the final version of the thesis.
- *Directs research and writing of the thesis:* It is critical that you have regular, scheduled meetings with your advisor throughout the life of your Honors thesis project.
- *Chairs the thesis defense:* When you are ready to submit and defend your thesis, your advisor will sign the Thesis Submission Form. He/she will chair your defense, and, in cooperation with other committee members, determine whether or not you will pass the defense.

The Faculty Reader—Chosen by you

- *Participates in the thesis defense:* With the help of your advisor, you are responsible to carefully select a faculty member to serve as another expert in your field of research to act as your reader. Often this person represents a second discipline in an interdisciplinary thesis or another faculty member from the same or a similar department as your advisor. A reader's role is much simpler than that of your advisor, i.e., he or she reads your thesis proposal and signs the submission form at the beginning of the process and then reads your finished thesis and participates on your thesis defense committee. You will want to choose someone who is supportive, but who will also be qualified enough to be objective in his/her analysis of your thesis.

How to Begin

- **Attend a thesis orientation meeting.** This is recommended at the end of your sophomore year or the beginning of your junior year. Times and dates are announced in the Honors Weekly Newsletter. You can then email the Honors Advisement Center at honors@byu.edu to sign up for a session. There is no limit to the number of people that can attend the orientations. The orientation meeting will help you learn about (1) the thesis requirement; (2) how to find a thesis topic; (3) how to choose a thesis advisor; (4) how to obtain funding, if you need it; and (5) who to work with to write and submit a thesis proposal.
- **Choose a thesis advisor and narrow your topic to a manageable scope.** It is best to start with a broad general interest within your major rather than a specific topic for your thesis. You may want to first meet with the Honors Coordinator for your discipline to consider possible topics and faculty advisors. Next, find out which faculty members have expertise in the area of your general interest. Let them help you focus on a specific topic that they are qualified to advise you about. You might also look at past theses from within your discipline by looking at the list on our website that is organized by college. Keep in mind that your topic should be something that you are sufficiently interested in to invest a lot of time towards, but also something that you have sufficient skills and background to do well.
- **Write a proposal for your thesis.** A thesis proposal is similar to a road-map. It designates where you are going and how you hope to get there. Visit the Honors Advisement Center to look at a sample thesis proposal from your discipline. Your proposal must be approved by your advisor, faculty reader, your Honors Coordinator, and the Honors Program Executive Committee. A proposal defines a contractual obligation between you and the primary audience, and it seeks to persuade readers that your idea ought to be accepted and that your investigative methodology will achieve the desired results. The purpose of a proposal is to persuade the faculty readers that your idea and methodology are legitimate and to convince readers that you have the skills necessary to do the work. **It is recommended that you submit your thesis proposal at least one year prior to your anticipated graduation date.**
- **Give yourself adequate time.** Your thesis orientation and thesis proposal should be completed at the beginning of your junior year, so you have **at least two full semesters** to work on your approved honor thesis. Your honors thesis is due in the semester you will graduate from the university.