HOWARD UNIVERSITY

College of Arts and Sciences · Honors Program

Senior Thesis Guidelines

Requirements, Timelines & Submission Standards

LaTanya Brown-Robertson, PhD | Director
J. Elijah Bratton, PhD | Assistant Director of Academic & Student Affairs
Locke Hall, Room 124 | coashonors.howard.edu

About this Document

The contents of this document consist of original material written by the College of Arts and Sciences Honors Program staff and material excerpted from other online sources consulted by the staff. This document is intended to guide all COAS Honors Program students through the senior thesis process from inception through final submission.

Table of Contents

What is an Honors Senior Thesis?
Purpose of Senior Thesis
How the Thesis Satisfies Career Readiness Competencies
Getting Started
- Departmental Directed Readings Courses
- Honors Program Directed Readings Courses / Senior Thesis Requirements
- Finding a Thesis Advisor
- Choosing a Research Topic
- Thesis Evaluation Checklist

Submission Format
Presentation Formats
Submission Requirements and Instructions
Thesis Checklist / Timeline by Classification
Written Research Resources & Document Sources

What is an Honors Senior Thesis?

Each COAS Honors Program student is required to complete an Honors Senior Thesis in the discipline of their major. A Senior Thesis is broadly defined as a substantial work of independent scholarship that culminates in a written product, presentation, or performance. The fundamental goal of a Senior Thesis is to develop students' intellectual self-determination and self-efficacy.

A thesis must be student-driven, meaning that the student is responsible for developing the research question (or appropriate equivalent), determining the plan of action, and carrying out the required work. The student's faculty advisor serves as a subject matter expert who supports and encourages the student — and is responsible for evaluating (grading) the final product.

> **All honors theses share two essential characteristics:** (1) they are based on the student's original research, and (2) they take the form of a written manuscript presenting the findings of that research.

Purpose of Senior Thesis

1. Satisfy your intellectual curiosity
2. Develop transferable skills applicable to any career
3. Work closely with faculty members in your discipline
4. Open windows into future research opportunities and professions
5. Create a lasting contribution to the university's scholarly record
6. Strengthen graduate school applications — many programs seek out undergraduates who have produced high-level thesis work

How the Thesis Satisfies Career Readiness Competencies

Develop transferable skills: Most jobs require problem-solving and oral and written communication skills. Writing an honors thesis equips you to:

- Ask smart questions and acquire investigative instincts to find answers
- Navigate libraries, laboratories, archives, and databases
- Develop flexibility to redirect research when initial plans require adjustment
- Master time management across a long-term, self-directed project
- Hone argumentation skills and organize a substantial piece of scholarly writing
- Polish oral communication skills by presenting and defending your project to faculty and peers

Getting Started

Departmental Directed Readings Courses

Directed reading courses exist in nearly all departments of the College of Arts and Sciences for sophomores (one credit hour), juniors (one credit hour), and seniors (three credit hours). Biology majors begin a one credit hour course during freshman year. Directed readings is an independent-study course in which a student, under the supervision of a faculty mentor, explores the literature of a well-defined area of scholarship — preferably one in which the faculty member has done, or is doing, research.

Sophomore and junior directed reading courses are typically independent study courses for a department's top majors, taught by senior or junior faculty actively engaged in research. These enrichment courses are designed to introduce energetic and talented students to unexplored dimensions in their chosen disciplines through current journals, books, lab work, or field trips.

The directed reading instructor typically meets with students individually or in small groups to develop a definite syllabus that meets both students' and professor's needs. Senior directed reading courses (three credit hours) are more intensive, with a clear deliverable: the senior thesis.

Honors Program Directed Readings Courses / Honors Program Senior Thesis Requirements

All graduating Honors Program seniors are required to submit a senior thesis in the Spring semester of their senior year. Students are strongly encouraged to begin intentionally working towards their thesis topic during sophomore year — choosing a thesis advisor, taking advantage of research-related opportunities (Study Abroad, conferences, internships, etc.) and making use of Honors Program research workshops and resources.

Beginning in the Fall semester, the Honors Program began providing a one credit hour course focusing on the research process and program orientation for incoming freshmen and sophomores. This course supplements directed readings by providing in-depth research process content in a learning community format that includes guest lectures, data analytics applications, workshops, medical pipeline, ePortfolio development, and peer review.

In addition to the Honors Thesis, the ePortfolio is a required end product for all graduating Honors Program students. ePortfolio development begins during freshman year and continues throughout the student's academic career; it is also the online submission location for the Senior Thesis.

Finding a Thesis Advisor

Choosing the right thesis advisor is one of the most consequential decisions you will make in the thesis process, so it is worth starting early. Begin by identifying faculty members in your department whose research interests, methodological expertise, or coursework align with the topic you are considering. Sophomore and junior year directed readings courses, departmental colloquia, and conversations with your academic advisor are all good starting points for this search. Once you have a shortlist, set up a meeting to discuss your interests and gauge fit — a good advisor relationship depends as much on communication style and availability as it does on subject-matter expertise. Your department's

undergraduate coordinator or the COAS Honors Program office can also help connect you with faculty who have a history of mentoring successful thesis projects.

Your thesis advisor is expected to serve as a subject-matter expert who guides — rather than directs — your research. This means meeting with you regularly throughout the process to discuss your research question, methodology, and progress; providing timely, substantive feedback on drafts; helping you navigate discipline-specific expectations for sources, citation style, and analysis; and ultimately evaluating (grading) your completed thesis. Because the thesis is meant to be student-driven, your advisor's role is to support your intellectual development and hold you accountable to a rigorous standard, not to determine your research question or complete the work on your behalf. Establishing clear expectations early — meeting frequency, response times for drafts, and key milestones — will help the relationship run smoothly for both of you.

> **External advisors are permitted with departmental approval.** If you choose an external advisor (i.e., a mentor who is not a Howard University faculty member), you must also secure a Howard University faculty member in your department to serve as a co-mentor of record; this faculty mentor's signature is required on the Certification Page alongside your external advisor's, and your department must sign off on the arrangement before it is finalized. Students considering an external advisor should raise the possibility with their department as early as possible — ideally by the end of junior year — so an appropriate departmental faculty mentor can be identified and the approval process completed well ahead of the thesis submission deadline.

Choosing a Research Topic

Ideally, begin thinking about topics during your sophomore year so you can plan experiences that feed your topic idea and direct exploratory research intentionally. Narrow your focus as you move into junior year, solidifying your topic before entering senior year.

How to choose a topic:

- Read widely in fields that interest you. Browse professional journals to survey active research areas and familiarize yourself with your field's stylistic conventions.
- Set up appointments with faculty in your field. Your thesis advisor can help you narrow your topic.
- Review past honors senior theses. The COAS Honors Program office houses past theses in Locke Hall 124; recent theses will also be available on the program website (coming soon).

What makes a good topic:

- Choose something genuinely interesting to you — your motivation to complete and share it matters.
- Ensure the topic is researchable and narrow enough. You should have access to the materials you need, and the scope should be achievable within your timeline.
- Develop a guiding research question. A question focuses your research far more effectively than a topic alone.

Thesis Evaluation Checklist

The following checklist outlines the minimum criteria the Honors Program will use to evaluate undergraduate theses. It is designed to ensure a baseline level of quality and rigor across all disciplines and is subject to adjustment based on the student's thesis advisor in consultation with the Honors Program Director.

☐ Abstract

- ☐ The Abstract and Introduction sections are clear and well-organized.

☐ Introduction

- ☐ The research question or thesis statement is clear, specific, and relevant to the field of study.

☐ Literature Review

- ☐ Includes at least ten relevant, scholarly peer-reviewed sources.
- ☐ All literature reviewed is clearly connected to the paper topic; where connections are indirect, the student must explicitly articulate them.

☐ Methodology

- ☐ Research methods are explained clearly and understandably.

☐ Data Analysis and/or Content

- ☐ The quality of data or content analysis is appropriate to the discipline.

☐ Optional — Graphs and Charts

- ☐ Where included, graphs and charts are clear, relevant, and properly labeled.

☐ Discussion and Interpretation

- ☐ Findings connect directly to the research question.
- ☐ Findings are original and insightful.

☐ Writing and Organization

- ☐ The thesis is clearly written and well-organized.
- ☐ The thesis adheres to style guidelines appropriate to the discipline.
- ☐ References and sources are consistent with disciplinary style guidelines.

Submission Format

Length: Natural sciences theses are typically 20 pages or more; all other divisions are 40 pages or more. Your thesis advisor makes the final determination of acceptable length.

Language: The manuscript must be typewritten in correct, formal English and follow the documentation format recommended by the student's major department.

> **Recommended style references include:** A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Turabian); MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (Gibaldi); The Chicago Manual of Style Online; Modern Language Association's Style Manual; The Craft of Research, 4th Edition (Booth et al.); Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, 4th Edition (Creswell); Publication Manual of the APA, 6th Edition; How to Write a Lot (Silvia). Consult your departmental advisor regarding the appropriate manual for your field.

Formatting Requirements

Title Page. Must follow the provided sample form. The title must be identical to that submitted when the topic was formally accepted. The approving advisor must generally be the same individual who originally approved the topic.

Margins. Double-spaced on 20-pound bond paper, 8½ × 11 inches. Margins: 1½ inches top, bottom, and left; 1¼ inches on the right.

Spacing. Double-spacing throughout, except where conventional usage calls for single spacing (footnotes, indented quotations, tables).

Page Numbers. Assign a number to every page except the blank sheet preceding the title page. Preliminary pages use Roman numerals (Title page = I; Certification page = II; Acknowledgment page (optional) = III; Table of Contents = IV). All remaining pages use Arabic numerals in the upper right-hand corner.

Certification Page. Roman numeral II. Must be signed by your Thesis Mentor. If the Mentor is not a Howard University faculty member, also secure the signature of a faculty mentor in your department.

Plates, Figures, Illustrations, and Tables. Use original or clear reproductions; scanned images must be at least 300 ppi. Inclusion of illustrations in a thesis falls under fair use. Caption every component with identifying text or source attribution.

Final submission check: Before submitting, review for Cleanliness · Neatness · Margins · Uniform Type Style · Spelling · Grammar · Paper of uniform size, weight, and kind.

Presentation Formats

All Honors Program graduates are required to present their thesis research. Presentations may take the form of research posters, PowerPoint slides, or oral presentations.

Recommended resource for poster design: PosterPresentations.com — provides free and premium templates for academic research posters.

Submission Requirements and Instructions

Honors Program

Dates of Filing. The unbound original certified by the senior thesis advisor must be submitted to the Honors Program Office, Locke Hall, Room 124. An electronic copy must also be submitted to the COAS Honors Program Assignments link on Canvas (same deadlines apply).

FALL GRADUATES	SPRING GRADUATES
November 15	**March 15**

The office will retain your original submission. Students are encouraged to keep a copy of their signed thesis for personal reference, for their department's archives, and possibly to share with a mentor.

HU Research Month

COAS Honors Program graduating seniors are required to present their thesis at the Annual Research Symposium held each April as part of Howard University's Research Month, sponsored by the Office of Research. Participation fulfills a Senior Honors Thesis requirement.

Abstracts must meet the guidelines posted on the Symposium website. Presenters must follow all symposium presentation guidelines. This participation is a formal academic exercise, not a thesis defense — students should be prepared to answer substantive questions on both the content and quality of the presentation.

SYMPOSIUM ABSTRACT DEADLINE	FINAL THESIS SUBMISSION
January 15 · 11:59 PM	**March 15**

Thesis Checklist / Timeline by Classification

Freshmen

- Stay open-minded. Take courses to explore new things.
- Attend Honors Program workshops, talks, and opportunities.
- Attend Research Month events — visit your Honors colleagues' presentations.
- Volunteer — reach out to CASHA's Community Service Liaison for opportunities.
- Develop your Four-Year Plan (see program website for the link).
- Complete CITI Certification in preparation for possible IRB approval.
- Decide where and how you will Study Abroad; have a plan ready by the following summer.
- Create your Honors ePortfolio and begin adding artifacts.

Sophomores

- Take additional courses in areas of interest (ensure alignment with graduation requirements).
- Sign up for your honors course and follow your Four-Year Plan.
- Research faculty members at HU whose work aligns with your interests; set up meetings.
- Consider a methods, statistics, or data science course to support your research.
- Begin early exploratory research and topic brainstorming.
- Identify a faculty member who may serve as your thesis advisor.
- Complete CITI Certification in preparation for possible IRB approval.
- Schedule an appointment with the COAS Writing Center. Make use of HU Library Research Support.
- Attend COAS Honors Program events.
- Continue building your Honors ePortfolio (add artifacts regularly).

Juniors

- Begin focusing on a specific research topic.
- Start working with your Thesis Advisor — schedule regular meetings and request suggested readings.
- If necessary, begin the IRB process (see program website for more information).
- Work on literature review and methodology sections. Discuss source requirements with your advisor. Document progress in your ePortfolio.
- Review past theses in the COAS Honors Program Suite, Locke Hall 124, and online (coming soon).
- Schedule appointments with the COAS Writing Center and make use of HU Library Research Support.
- Attend Honors Program research events.
- Continue building your Honors ePortfolio.

Seniors — Summer Before Senior Year

- Conduct preparatory or fieldwork/archival research that is more difficult once the semester begins.
- Tell professors and graduate students about your thesis — ask for suggested readings.
- Write a research proposal to focus your plan and prepare for potential grant applications.
- Draft pages on your background readings, outlining main arguments.
- Work toward finalizing your thesis statement.

Seniors — Fall Semester

- Confirm an established agreement with your advisor and a clear research topic.
- Meet with your thesis advisor early to set deadlines, expectations, and a consultation schedule.
- Register for Honors Program Research Courses and Workshops.
- Consider setting up regular meetings with the HU Writing Center.
- Schedule dedicated writing and research time — protect it on your calendar.
- Compile a bibliography to survey what is available and what research you need to do.
- Draft an appropriate number of pages; plan to finish a draft early enough to incorporate reader feedback. Submit progress in your ePortfolio.
- Check abstract and draft submission deadlines for HU-related requirements and external conferences or journals.
- Consider registering for the National Regional Honors Council (NRHC) or National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) conference in October.
- Revisit your timeline: Are you on track? What needs updating before year-end and Winter break?
- If completing your thesis in the Fall Semester, use both the Fall and Spring checklists. Fall graduates: Honors Program thesis submission deadline is November 15.

Seniors — Spring Semester

- Your research should be concluded; you are now writing and refining your thesis.
- Establish calendar dates for: completion of chapters, and scheduled chapter review meetings with your advisor.
- Check abstract and draft submission deadlines for HU requirements and external venues.
- Finish a complete draft by the end of February to allow time for editing and reviewer feedback.
- Review your thesis thoroughly for any final revisions.
- Add your completed thesis to your ePortfolio.
- Submit abstract to HU's Research Month Symposium — due 11:59 PM on January 15.
- Submit all final documents to your thesis advisor and to the COAS Honors Program. Honors Program thesis submission deadline is March 15 for Spring graduates.

Written Research Resources & Document Sources

Research Resources

- UNC Thesis and Dissertation Submission Guidelines
- Excelsior Owl Thesis Checklist
- Choosing a Topic and Thesis Advisor
- Video: The Structure of a Literature Review | Thesis Writing Guide
- Howard University Library — Research Support resources available via the HU Library portal

Document Sources

UNC Writing Center Link · honors.ls.wisc.edu/timeline-for-senior-thesis · honors.fsu.edu · University of Houston · Howard University website

LaTanya Brown-Robertson, PhD
Director, Honors Program
l.brown-robertson@howard.edu

J. Elijah Bratton, PhD
Assistant Director of Academic & Student Affairs
Joseph.Bratton@howard.edu