



UNC
COLLEGE OF
ARTS & SCIENCES

THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

HONORS CAROLINA

JAMES M. JOHNSTON CENTER
FOR UNDERGRADUATE EXCELLENCE
225 GRAHAM MEMORIAL

CAMPUS BOX 3510
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27599-3510
www.honorscarolina.unc.edu

T 919.966.5110

F 919.962.1548

honorscarolina@unc.edu

Senior Honors Thesis Guidelines for Academic Units, Faculty Advisors, and Students

General Guidelines

Students who wish to graduate from Carolina with honors or highest honors must complete a senior honors thesis project in their major field(s) of study. Such students need not have been members of Honors Carolina. They must, however, meet academic eligibility standards set by Honors Carolina and the individual departments, curricula, and professional schools (hereinafter referred to as academic units) that sponsor senior honors thesis programs.

Students with double majors may graduate with honors or highest honors in both fields of study. To do so, they must complete a distinct project in each field. Students may not undertake a senior honors thesis project in a minor field (Creative Writing is the sole exception) or in a field outside of their declared major(s).

Graduating with honors or highest honors is separate from graduating with distinction or highest distinction. The latter designations are awarded by the University solely on the basis of cumulative GPA. Students graduate with distinction or highest distinction if they have completed at least 45 academic hours at UNC-CH and have obtained an overall GPA of at least 3.500 (distinction) or 3.800 (highest distinction).

Students who successfully complete a senior honors thesis project will have the designation 'Honors' or 'Highest Honors' printed beside their names in the Commencement bulletins and recorded on their diplomas and transcripts. Creative Writing minors earning honors or highest honors will be recognized in the Commencement bulletins and will receive a special remark on their transcripts, but no designation will appear on their diplomas.

Eligibility

Students who wish to undertake a senior honors thesis project must have a cumulative GPA of 3.300 or higher. This revised standard (up from 3.2) is effective with students admitted to honors candidacy in January 2014 for graduation beginning in December 2014.

Students whose GPA is close to the eligibility standard and who have a reasonable chance of meeting the requirement within a semester of additional coursework may begin a senior honors thesis project on a probationary basis. Such exceptions must be approved in advance by students' major academic units and either the Associate or the Assistant Dean for Honors. Students who fail to raise their GPAs to meet the standard at the end of the probationary semester may not continue as candidates for graduation with honors or highest honors. They should receive graded course credit for the work completed and may, at the discretion of their major academic units, continue their projects by way of independent study. Students who continue on that basis are not eligible to graduate with honors or highest honors.

Academic units that wish to impose a higher GPA eligibility standard may do so by requiring that students meet both the cumulative 3.3 GPA standard set by the Honors Carolina office and a higher GPA standard for coursework within the major field of study. Academic units that have required a cumulative GPA higher than the standard set by Honors Carolina should no longer do so, beginning with students who are admitted to honors candidacy in January 2014.

Standardization of Senior Honors Thesis Coursework

Senior honors thesis students must complete an original and substantial research, performance, or creative project under direct supervision by a faculty advisor.

Students beginning the senior honors thesis sequence may be in the second semester of their junior year or the first semester of their senior year.

Based on recent recommendations of the [Independent Study Task Force](#) and an Honors Carolina review of current practices, the format of senior honors thesis coursework must conform to one of the options below, beginning in January 2014. Regardless of the scheduling format used, senior honors thesis courses may be scheduled only during fall or spring semesters, not during summer sessions. Registration of senior honors thesis students is handled within each academic unit.

Format 1:

Two-semester (or optional three-semester) sequence of regularly-scheduled courses taught by unit-designated faculty. Course numbers 691H through 694H should be used for this purpose.

- Instructor of record = unit-designated course instructor
 - Meeting pattern = standard class meeting period
 - Credit hours = 3.0
 - Enrollment typically between 10 and 20 students
 - Syllabus distributed on first day of class
 - Students enrolled also work under the supervision of an individual faculty thesis advisor.
- Faculty thesis advisors may supervise no more than two students per semester.**

Format 2:

Two-semester sequence of independent research taught by faculty thesis advisors. Course numbers 691H through 694H should be used for this purpose. Section numbers based on thesis advisor.

- Instructor of record = faculty thesis advisor
- Credit hours = 3.0
- Enrollment maximum of two students per faculty thesis advisor
- Independent study learning contract required for each student, approved and kept on file for four years by academic units

Format 3:

A combination of regularly-scheduled coursework and independent study compliant with the guidelines above and approved by the Associate Dean for Honors.

Credit and Grading

At the end of the first semester of senior honors thesis work (whether in a regularly-scheduled course or independent study), academic units should evaluate students' progress and determine whether they will continue their projects. Students making satisfactory progress should be awarded the temporary grade SP for the semester, and be enrolled by their academic units in the second semester of senior honors thesis work. Students whose work is deemed insufficient are to receive a permanent grade for the work completed and may, at the discretion of their major academic units, continue their projects by way of non-honors study. Students who continue on that basis are not eligible to graduate with honors or highest honors.

A temporary grade of IN should not be used for the first semester of senior honors thesis work, unless a student fails to meet course requirements. A grade of IN is calculated as an F and lowers a student's cumulative GPA until changed to a permanent letter grade. That is a concern for students applying for post-graduate study as they complete their honors coursework.

At the end of the second semester of senior honors thesis work, academic units should assign students a permanent letter grade for the semester. Academic units should also change students' first semester grades from SP to permanent letter grades.

Only instructors of record are allowed to submit grades and grade changes. Submissions should be made in compliance with deadlines established each semester by the Office of the University Registrar.

Supervision

Tenured and tenure-track faculty, retired faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and fixed-term faculty (who have been employed by an academic unit for at least one year) may serve as senior honors thesis advisors. Advisors must have a permanent or adjunct appointment in the unit in which their advisees' honors coursework is scheduled.

Graduate students may not serve as thesis advisors or as instructors for senior honors thesis courses.

Evaluation for Honors or Highest Honors

Upon the completion of their projects, senior honors thesis students must pass an oral examination or other appropriate form of evaluation. Faculty in each academic unit should define an evaluation process that reflects their discipline's scholarly norms and customary practices. In most instances, evaluations are made by a committee of two or more faculty, one of whom is the candidate's project advisor. Other committee members may be drawn from any academic unit or from another college or university, as deemed appropriate and approved by the project advisor. Academic units may also require the approval of their honors director and/or director of undergraduate studies.

Evaluators have three options: 1) they may award only course credit for a student's thesis work; 2) they may designate that the student graduate with honors; or 3) they may stipulate that the student graduate with highest honors. As a matter of best practice, a number of academic units require that examining committees refer all candidates for highest honors to a unit-level committee that evaluates nominated projects and makes the final decision on awarding highest honors. Highest honors should be awarded only to students who have met the most rigorous standards of scholarly excellence.

Academic units should not include cumulative GPA as a factor in awarding honors or highest honors. The University recognizes students' overall academic achievement by graduating them with distinction or highest distinction. Honors and highest honors are awarded more specifically for outstanding scholarly achievement within a specific field of study. In light of that fact, academic units may, if they wish, consider students' GPAs within their major(s) as a factor in awarding honors or highest honors.

Research Funding

Honors Carolina (<http://honorscarolina.unc.edu/current-students/honors-thesis-and-undergraduate-research/honors-thesis-research-grants/>) offers financial awards to support senior honors thesis projects. There are two funding cycles per year, with deadlines announced by the Honors Carolina office. Students must apply through their major academic unit's honors director, or in units without honors directors, their project advisors. Funding is also available through the Office for Undergraduate Research (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/our>) and from funds administered by individual academic units.

Reporting Requirements and Deadlines

Academic units must report their honors and highest honors candidates to Honors Carolina by the deadlines listed on the Honors Carolina web site (<http://honorscarolina.unc.edu/current-students/faculty-staff/honors-thesis/>).

Candidates should be reported during the semester they complete their senior thesis coursework, which may or may not be the semester in which they intend to graduate.

The Honors Carolina office will send academic units reporting forms prior to each deadline. Academic units will be asked to provide their candidates' names and PIDs, to specify the courses in which students were enrolled for honors thesis work, and to indicate whether individual students earned honors or highest honors.

Academic units should also confirm that their candidates have the minimum 3.300 cumulative GPA required by the Honors Carolina office and that the students meet any other standards set within their major field(s) of study.

Students whose names are reported to the Honors Carolina office after the deadlines will not receive recognition in the Commencement program.

Electronic Submission of Senior Honors Theses

Beginning in Fall 2013, students will no longer submit paper copies of their senior honors theses for archiving. Instead, they will submit electronic copies to the Carolina Digital Repository. Honors Carolina will provide detailed instructions in advance of submission deadlines. The University Library will catalog electronic theses and make them available to the public.

Research Recognition

The Honors Carolina office provides cords for students graduating with honors or highest honors to wear with their commencement gowns. Academic units should retrieve the honors cords from the Honors Carolina office and distribute them to their honors graduates. An email notice will be sent to each academic unit's honors director or director of undergraduate studies when the honors cords are available for distribution. Honors cords will only be issued to academic units for students whose names have been officially reported to Honors Carolina as having been confirmed for graduation with honors or highest honors.

Many academic units sponsor end-of-the-year events to celebrate their senior honors thesis students' work. Those events range from luncheons and receptions to day-long symposia at which students present their work to the academic community. Senior honors thesis students may also apply to participate in the annual Celebration of Undergraduate Research sponsored by the Office for Undergraduate Research.

October 22, 2013

Additional Justification for Raising the Minimum GPA Required for Eligibility to Graduate with Honors or Highest Honors

The overall GPA required for eligibility to graduate with honors or highest honors was raised from 3.0 to 3.2 in academic year 1983-84.¹ In most departments, Juniors applied in Spring 1984 for admission to senior thesis programs during the following year. The average GPA for Juniors in Spring 1984 was 2.717, a figure well below the eligibility threshold.² That threshold has remained unchanged for 30 years, despite the fact that the average GPA for Juniors has risen to 3.170. The averages for Juniors sorted by division and school are as follows:³

Fine Arts 3.192
Humanities 3.067
Natural Sciences 3.104
Social Sciences 3.135
Business 3.536
Education 3.281
Journalism 3.306
Library Science 3.322
Nursing 3.373
Pharmacy 3.593
Public Health 3.507

It is hard to read those numbers as anything other than evidence of a relaxation of rigor. Honors and highest honors are the most prestigious accolades the University bestows upon its graduates. It stands to reason that recipients of those accolades should meet at least an “average” standard of academic performance, as evidenced by their GPAs. Faculty in many units agree. Units listed below⁴ have imposed overall GPA requirements above the current 3.2 minimum set by Honors Carolina – and, for that matter, above the proposed new standard of 3.3:

Business 3.5
Chemistry 3.4
Economics 3.5
Education 3.4
English 3.6
Journalism 3.5

It is worth noting that the proposed 3.3 minimum is also well below the thresholds for Dean’s List in the College of Arts and Sciences and for graduation with Distinction, both of which are set at 3.5.⁵

As explained in the original proposal, Honors Carolina requests approval to standardize practices throughout the College of Arts and Sciences by requiring that all academic units adopt an overall GPA standard of 3.3 for eligibility to undertake a senior thesis project. Units would then have the option to impose additional filtering by setting their own higher standards for course work within students’ major fields of study.

October 23, 2013

¹ *Undergraduate Bulletin, 1982-83*, p. 70, and *Undergraduate Bulletin, 1983-84*, p. 69

² See attached table, provided by Bobbi Owen, Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education.

³ Data pulled from the UNC Reporting Warehouse, October 22, 2013.

⁴ *Undergraduate Bulletin, 2013-14*, pp. 365, 124, 161, 351, 168, and 341.

⁵ *Undergraduate Bulletin, 2013-14*, pp. 49-50.