



University of Massachusetts Lowell
Honors Program

“A proud member of the Commonwealth Honors Program”

Honors Project Handbook

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Honors Project Guidebook

Introduction

Every honors student is required to complete an honors thesis or project worth at least 3 credits. The nature of your project will depend on your major and interests. For example, a chemistry major might perform a series of lab experiments in order to understand the nature of some reaction, while an art major might produce a portfolio of original works of art. The purpose of this handbook is to outline the Honors Program project requirements and to offer some tips on getting started and carrying out the project.

Your honors project has the potential to be the most exciting and rewarding academic activity you undertake as a college student. It offers you the chance to create something for yourself instead of simply responding to the work of others. Working closely with a faculty member can itself be a rich learning experience. A good honors project can also be a stepping stone to the next stage of your career, perhaps by catching the attention of a potential employer or of a graduate school admissions officer. You will acquire valuable skills by planning and carrying out a project of this nature.

Requirements

- At least 3 of your honors course credits must consist of an honors thesis or project.
- You must have a faculty advisor plus 1-2 other committee members for your project.
- You must file a project proposal and Project Proposal Form with the Honors Program Office (Southwick 320) as early as possible, but no later than the end of the second week of the semester in which you start your project. Proposal guidelines and a Project Proposal Form are included in this handbook. Additional copies of the Project Proposal Form are available at <http://www.uml.edu/honors>.
- You must turn in a copy of your final product (usually a thesis) and file an abstract and Project Completion Form when you have completed your project. A Project Completion Form is included in this handbook; additional copies are available at the Honors Program Office.
- **You must give a public presentation of your project.** You can do this by giving a presentation at the UML Student Research Symposium and/or at the Massachusetts Undergraduate Research Conference, or you and your advisor can arrange a presentation in your department.

Getting Started

Finding a topic The most important criterion for choosing a project is that it should greatly interest you. If you have taken a course you really liked or if you have read or heard about a subject you would like to pursue further, consider doing a project in that area. If you are having difficulty choosing a topic, talk to your academic advisor.

It is very important to get an early start on choosing your topic and your faculty advisor. A hastily arranged project will probably not work out the way you would like. If you plan to do your project in your senior year, you should start thinking about it in your junior year. By the end of the second semester of your junior year you should have chosen a topic and found an advisor, and if possible you should have written your proposal. It is difficult to finish a project in just one semester. Therefore, if you intend to do a 3-credit project in your senior year rather than a 6-credit project, you should plan to do it in the fall semester to avoid problems with graduation in the event of a delay in the completion of your project.

Putting together a committee Your honors project/thesis committee will consist of one advisor and 1-2 other faculty members. Your committee should be knowledgeable about your topic and a group with whom you have a comfortable working relationship. You probably already know several faculty members in your department. One of them may be willing to serve as your advisor or to suggest someone who would be willing to serve. If you are having difficulty finding an advisor, talk to your academic advisor or the Honors Director.

In addition to your advisor, need to have one or two other faculty members on your project committee to provide additional guidance and information.

The Project Proposal

Your project proposal serves several purposes. Writing the proposal will help you organize your thoughts and decide exactly what you would like to accomplish. While you are working on your project, your proposal will serve as a “road map” that will help keep you focused on your goals. Your proposal also serves as a kind of contract between you and your committee and between you and the Honors Program. Having all parties agree in advance on the nature of your project will minimize the chance of misunderstandings later.

You may find as you work on your project that you will not be able to do exactly what you said you would do in your proposal. This is a common occurrence and should not worry you. If major discrepancies arise between your proposal and your actual project, however, you should submit an amended proposal to the Honors Program Office. Your advisor and the Honors Program Office can help you determine whether this is necessary. **Consult the Project Proposal Guidelines on p. 6-8.**

Thesis Style Requirements

The final product for most honors projects is a thesis. In order to ensure some degree of uniformity among the honors theses, please follow the guidelines below when writing your thesis. These guidelines were adapted from the dissertation requirements of the Graduate School.

Technical specifications

Your thesis should be done on 8 1/2 x 11 inch white paper. It should be typed or printed on a letter-quality printer on only one side of the paper. The text should be double-spaced. The left margin should be 1.5 inches, and the other margins should be 1 inch.

Format Your thesis should consist of the following components in the order shown:

- Title Page (including the thesis title, your name and signature, and your committee members' names and signatures). Sample on following page
- Abstract
- Acknowledgments
- Table of Contents, with page references
- List of Tables, if any, with titles and page references
- List of Illustrations, if any, with titles and page references
- Text
- Literature Cited
- Appendices, if any

Components of the Thesis

The **abstract** should give a succinct account of your thesis work, briefly summarizing your conclusions. It should not exceed 150 words. The **table of contents** should contain the list of tables (if any), the list of illustrations (if any), the major divisions (e.g. chapters) and first level of subdivisions, the literature citation page, and the appendices (if any). A page number for each item in the table of contents should be shown in a column at the right margin. The **list of tables** should be a complete list of all tables and the pages on which they appear. The **list of illustrations** should be a complete list of all illustrations (including photographs, maps, and charts) and the pages on which they appear.

Title Page Format

The Use of Onomatopoeia in Melville's Moby Dick

by

John Q. Doe

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Honors Program
University of Massachusetts Lowell
(Year)

Faculty Advisor: Professor Jane J. Smith, Department of English

Author's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Advisor's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signatures of other Committee Members (at least one):

_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

Words of Wisdom

Your honors project can be one of your most exciting and rewarding college experiences. To help ensure that this is the case, please keep the following suggestions in mind.

- Decide at the start of your project how many hours per week you will work on the project, and *stick to that commitment*. Working at a steady pace will produce much better results than trying to do the whole project in two weeks.
- Schedule frequent (preferably weekly) meetings with your advisor to discuss your progress. Remember that your advisor has the primary responsibility for approving your project. S/he may decide not to approve your project if you have not had regular contact.
- When you are setting up the timetable for your project, remember that it always takes longer than you expect to complete a task. A good rule of thumb is to estimate the maximum amount of time required to complete a task in the worst possible case, and then double your estimate.
- Reread your proposal from time to time to keep your focus.
- The reference librarians at O'Leary and Lydon libraries can be very helpful.
- **Remember to have fun!**

Guidelines for Honors Project Proposal

Your proposal for the Honors Office should be brief. Your advisor might suggest a more detailed proposal in line with the conventions of your discipline, but the proposal for the Honors Office should be approximately two typed pages with an additional one page timeline appended. It must include the following components:

1. Introduction

A brief paragraph should introduce your project and place it in context. Say why it is important, what it adds to the existing body of literature or art in your area. Although this is not a formal review of the literature, this paragraph should offer an idea about why it makes sense in your discipline to undertake this particular project. Using the hourglass analogy for expository writing, think broad. Begin with the general background and proceed over the remainder of your proposal to get more specific. A *hypothetical* example follows:

- Most people are familiar with the story of Pygmalion, a young street woman of London whose transformation to the aristocracy was prompted by Henry Higgins's expectation that in fact she could be so transformed. Psychologists who have studied such "Pygmalion effects," or "self-fulfilling prophecies," have affirmed that what one expects of people can influence their behavior across a variety of social settings including classrooms and the workplace (Brown, 2000; Jones, 2001). However, such expectancy effects actually account for very little variance in behavior outcomes, about 14% on average. Surprisingly, there have been few studies that have offered a direct comparison of expectation with other strategies such as verbal instruction as I propose to do in my honors project.

2. Basic project description: research question, hypothesis, central focus

Now that you have introduced your topic, get more specific. Again this is just a few sentences at most, but it should give the reader a very clear idea of what you are trying to accomplish. You might follow up our hypothetical example above with something like:

- My project is designed to examine the extent to which direct instruction offers an advantage beyond expectation alone.

3. Materials and methods

Now you get very specific: what and how. Explain how you plan to carry out your project. If you plan to conduct experiments, explain what those experiments will entail; if you plan to do a critical study of a work of literature, explain what your approach will be; if you plan a creative product, explain how you will go about

designing and executing the production. Also indicate the methods of analysis you will be using to obtain your results and form conclusions—to the extent possible, indicate which statistical tests will be conducted on which variables.

Your reader should have a clear idea of the types of assessments or analyses or creative productions you will be working with. A key concept here is the *operational definition*, or what operations are entailed in a specific construct.

If, for example, you were interested in investigating the roles of women in 20th century American literature, this would be the section where you would specify exactly what literature and how you will conceptualize these roles. Perhaps you want to focus on pre- and post-WWII novels by male authors, or on pre and post-19th Amendment literature, or on literature during the post-Viet Nam period, or in spy novels compared to historical novels. Perhaps you would analyze how often women occupied powerful or submissive roles, or how many lines of dialogue were provided women compared with men, or whether male vs. female authors differed in the level of physical description they provided for male or female lead characters. Each of these different indicators reflects something different about the roles of women in 20th century American literature.

Note that you must obtain ethical review from the University of Massachusetts Lowell Institutional Review Board (IRB) *prior* to conducting any research involving the use of human or animal participants or certain types of sensitive documents. Because the honors project requires a public presentation, such research is not exempted under the types of considerations given exercises that are designed for classroom use only. Please see the IRB website (<http://irb.uml.edu>) for more information and to download forms.

So, how might this section look? To continue with our hypothetical example:

- After obtaining approval from the University IRB, I will recruit college students to learn a set of hypothetical constructs. I will imply to half that the task is within their grasp, and to the other half that it is probably too hard for them. I will then also instruct half of the participants from each group (high/low expectations) in strategies for learning the material so that their performance can be examined for its relation to both expectation and teaching. Learning material will be taken from the Johnson (2000) Tasks for Rapid Assimilation that have been standardized on college students. Performance data obtained in this 2x2 design (high/low expectancy and with/without instruction) will be analyzed using a 2x2 ANOVA testing for both main effects and interaction.

The more specific you are at this point, the closer you are to beginning the real work of your project and the more focused you are on an attainable goal. Obviously, the details of this section will vary from discipline to discipline, and your advisor will help you to find the appropriate types of information for your discipline and level of specificity for your project.

Most projects will require the use of reference material, and so you should include a preliminary bibliography (this may be on an additional sheet). Be sure to use the citation style of choice for your discipline (e.g., APA, MLA).

If your project requires any special materials (e.g., laboratory equipment, historical documents, psychological tests, animal lines), explain what materials you will need and how you will procure them.

Be sure that everything you write has a rationale. If it is not clear why a particular item in your materials list is necessary, say why it is. If some procedure that you intend to use is not clear or some sampling strategy seems arbitrary, make the rationale explicit.

4. Product & Presentation

What will the final product of your project be? In most cases it will be a thesis, but depending on your major it might be a collection of original poetry, a prototype of some machine, or some type a computer program.

Your project must be presented to an audience larger than yourself, your advisor, and the Honors Director. The Annual UML Student Research Symposium, which is held in the spring, provides a forum for students to present the projects that are research based. *Research here is research as defined by the discipline*, and need not involve empirical data or laboratory work. See <http://www.uml.edu/centers/ctrls/fscr/> for more information about poster sessions or the humanities panels.

5. Timeline

You should include a tentative schedule for completing each part of your project, including the final product. This may include obtaining approval from the UML Institutional Review Board if your research involves human or animal participants, reviewing the literature, obtaining materials, recruiting participants, refining data, analyzing data and reporting results. You should also indicate how frequently you would meet your advisor to discuss your progress.

You may not be able to follow this tentative schedule exactly, but it will provide some benchmarks by which you can gauge your progress.

Remember: Good writing does not require a lot of words; it requires well-chosen ones. Be brief but be clear. You will have more room to explain details and review literature and procedure in your final thesis or product—or in a separate proposal as your advisor may see fit.

The first draft of your proposal should go to your advisor and you should probably plan on a revision or two before you have a proposal that adequately describes your plans and permits accountability to send to the Honors Office.



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Honors Project Proposal Form

This form and your proposal must be turned in to the Honors Office **before the end of the drop-add period** for the semester in which you start your project.

Name _____

SID Number _____

Expected semester & year of graduation _____

Local address _____

Phone number _____ Email address _____

Major(s) _____

Name of project advisor _____

Name(s) of additional committee members (at least one) _____

Duration of project (1 or 2 semesters) _____

Course name(s) and number(s) _____

**PLEASE ATTACH PROPOSAL AS APPROVED BY YOUR SUPERVISOR.
Proposal should be approx. 2 pages with 1 page timeline. See guidelines.**

Student's signature _____ Date _____

By signing below, I endorse my approval for the attached proposal and I agree to my role as advisor or committee member for this student's honors project.

Advisor _____ Date _____

Committee Member(s) _____ Date _____

Honors Director _____ Date _____



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Honors Project Completion Form

Student's Name _____

SID Number _____

Faculty advisor _____

Project/Thesis Title _____

Course name(s) and number(s) _____

Grade _____

Date of Public Presentation of Project _____

Student's signature _____ Date _____

I certify that this student has satisfactorily completed his/her honors project and has given a public presentation on the date listed above.

Advisor's signature _____ Date _____

Committee Member(s) signature(s) _____ Date _____

_____ Date _____

Please complete and return this form, along with a copy of your thesis, to the Honors Program Office (Southwick 320) **by the end of the final exam period**. Students whose final product is not a thesis should submit a description of their project with this form.