

Honors College Senior Research Project

In order to graduate with honors from West Liberty University, a student must complete an Honors College Senior Research Project. The project consists of original, independent research undertaken with a faculty advisor. This work is designed to be a defining accomplishment of an honors undergraduate education, serving as an example of one's finest academic work. It provides a showcase for one's past endeavors, while in many cases also serving as a transition to post-graduate education or other career goals.

Thesis vs. Project

All senior honors work requires research in a subject area pertaining to the student's coursework and the use of scholarly sources. It can involve significant primary research or can produce an applied product or creative work. Accordingly, one may opt to complete senior honors work in the form of a thesis or a project. The product of the Honors Thesis is a substantial paper, written in the model of a professional paper in that field. A thesis is often around 12-15 pages, but varying by project and discipline. The Honors Project culminates in an applied endeavor. However, it also includes a written component that documents 1) the context and impact of the work, 2) the procedures used by the student, and 3) scholarly sources that informed the project. Some examples of suitable projects include:

- a mathematical proof
- a public performance
- a work of art
- a computer program
- a marketing campaign
- an instructional / pedagogical design

For examples of previous Honors Research Projects, refer to the Honors College website.

Project Guidelines

The Senior Research Project is designed with great flexibility. The student will decide what to investigate and how to best present it. Whatever form the research project takes, it must meet certain criteria. The research need not be in the student's major field of study, but it must be related to the student's academic coursework. It must be original research, although it can build off of work done for a class or capstone project. A student cannot receive both honors credit and other course/project credit (e.g. a capstone) for the same work. An honors project that overlaps with capstone work must clearly delineate the components done solely for honors credit.

While some honors project work may be completed prior to one's senior year, the student must register for HON 498 during one semester of senior year.

Planning the Senior Honors Project

Students are responsible for finding and developing a topic for the project. The senior work should build upon questions and areas of interest that have been identified during undergraduate study. Consider keeping a journal of interests and questions throughout major and minor coursework. Despite the name, the project is not limited to senior year, and many students begin research prior to their senior year. Keep in mind that projects are time consuming and often have unanticipated delays and complications. Planning ahead is essential to a successful, fulfilling project.

Be advised that research involving human subjects must receive approval from the Human Subjects Committee. Information about the committee and its submission protocol can be found here: <http://westliberty.edu/college-of-sciences/human-subjects-committee/>

Senior Honors Research Project Timeline

Once an honors research project topic has been identified, students will take the following steps to carry out the research:

Step 1 – Determine the best time to carry out the work. Honors College students must enroll in HON 498 in either fall or spring of their senior year. Although work can be done outside this semester, the course will represent the primary time of work on the research project. HON 498 is a workshop that guides the completion of the project, and it may be taken for 1–3 honors credit hours. The course is offered by arrangement and by permission of the Honors College. Students must contact the Honors College Research Coordinator in order to be enrolled in the course.

Step 2 – Find a faculty advisor. Once a topic area is identified, find a faculty member in that field of study to discuss the idea with. This contact should take place no later than the semester prior to primary research semester. The Honors College Research Coordinator is also available for discussion and consultation. The Coordinator can provide feedback and assistance in finding a faculty advisor who is knowledgeable in the subject area.

Step 3 – Write a research project proposal. The deadline for the research proposal will occur, at the latest, in the beginning of the HON 498 semester. The proposal will be a 1-2 page single-spaced document that provides the following types of information:

- a) The aims of the project and the thesis/hypothesis to be investigated
- b) The nature of the existing research on this topic, or a preliminary bibliography
- c) The proposed means for carrying out the research, including materials and research methods
- d) Whether it will take the form of a thesis or a project
- e) A timeline for the completion of the work
- f) A working title for the project

Step 4 – The proposal must be approved by both the faculty advisor and the Honors College Research Coordinator. The faculty advisor will provide feedback and approval prior

to assessment and approval by the Honors College. Upon approval, an *Honors Research Project Agreement* will be signed by the student, faculty advisor, and Coordinator.

Step 5 – During the course of completing the project, the student should have occasional meetings with the faculty advisor to review drafts and discuss the status of the project. Keep in mind that projects often encounter unforeseen delays, and regular meetings help to keep the project on track. In HON 498, additional deadlines and meetings will be set to encourage timely completion of the project.

Step 6 – Research projects must be deemed satisfactory to meet the research project requirements by both the faculty advisor and Honors College Research Coordinator. Approval will be documented on the *Honors Research Project Agreement* form. Make sure to leave enough time at the end of the semester for the project to be approved and proper signatures gathered.

Step 7 – After receiving approval in Step 6, research projects must be officially submitted to the Honors College by email. Submission must occur prior to the end of finals week in the semester of graduation.

Research Project Presentation and Awards

In addition to submission of the research project, students are expected to present their work in a format to be designated by the Honors College. Typically this will include an Honors College Research Project presentation event, scheduled near the end of the academic year, and it will include poster or brief oral presentations. Select research projects may also be asked to present their work at a meeting of the Honors College.

The Honors College will present a Senior Research Project award to recognize outstanding work on the research project. The recipient of the award(s) will be decided by the Honors Council. To be eligible for the award, research projects must be submitted for award consideration by April 1 of the student's final year. The winner of the award may be asked to provide an additional presentation of the research project at a forum to be determined by the Dean of the Honors College.

Students are allowed (and encouraged!) to submit work from the Senior Research Projects to other organizations, such as academic conferences, Alpha Chi, or graduate school applications.