

Thesis Guide for the Smeal College of Business

The Schreyer Honors College has a description of the honors thesis and offers advice about how to choose a topic, find an advisor, and budget one's time (located at <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/>).

ADVISORS: A useful resource may be *Advising the Senior Thesis*, by Ken Kirpatrick, Sheila Reindl, Christine Cozzens; for a synopsis see Linda Simon's adaptation at: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/sr.html>.

The Thesis

The Honors College describes the thesis as ***“a scholarly piece of writing in which the writer is expected to show a command of the relevant scholarship in his (or her) field and contribute to the scholarship. It should confront a question that is unresolved and push towards a resolution.”***

The thesis is likely to be one of the most challenging and rewarding assignments of a student's undergraduate career. In the process of pursuing a topic, conducting independent research, formulating, articulating and crafting a sustained argument, students will build on what they have learned in coursework, gain insights into scholarship and methodology pertaining to their major, and develop their talents as writers and thinkers. Once the thesis is completed students will have the satisfaction of knowing they have produced a work of scholarship that will be permanently archived in the Penn State Library system.

The Smeal College expects honors theses to be based on thorough research and to offer an original interpretation. The nature and extent of the primary research may vary according to the question pursued and the field of study. Students are also expected to situate their research and analysis within the scholarship of the field and to clearly articulate and support the significance of their project and its contribution. Students whose work involves extensive primary research should be careful not simply to present a narrative or an inventory of their sources, but to center the thesis on the analysis and interpretation of their research in such a way that their thesis makes an argument. Advisors should help determine the appropriate balance between primary and secondary research and between presentation of the evidence and interpretation.

Length

A typical Smeal thesis length is **40-100 pages of text** (300 words/page), plus the bibliography and notes. The text must be double-spaced.

References and Bibliography

You must identify the source of every quotation and every idea, conclusion, or inference you have drawn from the work of another author or source. You are free to choose the form of the footnotes or endnotes, but you must be consistent. Consult a guide such as the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations; The Chicago Manual of Style; Kate Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations.

The thesis must include a complete bibliography citing all the materials used for the thesis. See the above source for format.

Style and Usage

The thesis is a formal piece of scholarly writing. Do not use colloquial expressions or contractions. Remember that the thesis is important- it is a source of pride and will be archived. Go over the final draft and correct awkward phrasing; be sure to eliminate all errors in typing, spelling, and grammar.

Schedule of Key Dates for the Smeal Honors Thesis

Three Semesters before Graduation (SPRING SEMESTER OF STUDENT'S JUNIOR YEAR)

A Thesis Proposal Report is due to the Schreyer Honors College in the spring semester of the Junior year --- typically April 15th for those planning to graduate in the spring of their senior year (so, then if the student is planning to graduate in Spring 2020, the proposal is filed in Spring 2019). The Thesis Proposal Report outlines the scope of the proposed research and any special needs the student might have to pursue this topic, such as the need to travel to archival collections, order microfilm, and so on.

This proposal will be approved by (1) the thesis supervisor (that is—the Department faculty member who will be your primary advisor on the thesis), (2) the honors advisor (who can also serve as the thesis supervisor, but then an

additional reader will need to approve the thesis), and (3) the Schreyer Honors College. This means the student must have a fairly well defined topic and thesis supervisor one full year before the thesis is due. BA 412H is an elective honors course offered by the Smeal College that is partially designed to help students meet this objective.

It is incumbent upon the student—in the months preceding the time of submission of Thesis Proposal Report—to identify and approach a faculty member of their department as a potential thesis supervisor, someone whose field is relevant. Ideally, this is someone whom the student already knows. The student should explain their research interests and ask the faculty member to serve as thesis supervisor.

Narrowing down your list of potential thesis supervisors should really be done, at the latest, during the second semester of your junior year (to give you plenty of time to have investigatory conversations).

As required, all theses should be read and reviewed by the thesis supervisor, your department's honors advisor, and perhaps, a secondary reader. Again, a secondary reader is required if your thesis supervisor is also your department's honors advisor.

There are many opportunities to apply for scholarships to study abroad and to conduct thesis research in the summer of the junior year. All Schreyer's Honors College students are strongly encouraged to apply for such funding in order to pursue thesis research full-time over the summer of their junior year.

One Year before Graduation

The student will be enrolled in the equivalent of two semesters of study in the final year of enrollment. The student registers for XXX 494H twice (first (usually fall) semester of thesis research/writing and second (usually spring) semester of thesis research/writing). You should arrange regular meetings with your thesis supervisor advisor in order to meet the requirements for 494H. ***By registering for the 494H sequence, students will earn 6 honors credits total (which will count toward the required 14 for the junior/senior block) for writing their thesis.***

General Advice: The more time the readers have to read the student's work the better they can comment, and the more the student can benefit from their expertise. Expect the need for significant revisions. Be considerate of your supervisor's busy schedule and recognize the constraints of your own schedule. Try to complete sections of the thesis ahead of the suggested schedule—the

sooner you have a complete draft, the better.

The following schedule offers a guide for the spring semester of senior year: the first third of the thesis should be finished one to two (1-2) weeks into the semester; the second third should be finished three to five (3-5) weeks into the semester; the final third should be finished six to seven (6-7) weeks into the semester, which is to say, before spring break; thus reserving weeks seven to ten (7-10) of the semester to revise the introduction and conclusion and to make revisions to the chapters read and commented on by the thesis supervisor (and second reader).

REGARDING THE SECOND READER: A **second reader** is another Penn State Faculty member, who has specialized knowledge in the thesis topic, and agrees—by the request of the student and/or the thesis supervisor / honors advisor—to read the thesis draft and offers constructive guidance and advice. The second reader provides a helpful supplementary role, and the Smeal College encourages thesis writers to seek out, and garner the advice of, an appropriate second reader.

Unless the thesis supervisor and departmental honors advisor are the same person, a second reader is not required for thesis approval, but, again, such input is greatly encouraged. It is recommended that the student contact the intended second reader no later than the second month of the final semester.

The student will receive a grade from the thesis supervisor (then passed along and recorded by the honors advisor) for **494H** based on the quality of the student's thesis as well as the student's participation in meetings.

Submitting the Thesis

A complete draft of the Honors Thesis must be filed with the Schreyer Honors College in early March as part of a format review. Around this time students must also submit their first draft for review to their thesis supervisor, the honors advisor (and second reader) for critical feedback. More specifically, this first draft is to be submitted to all these parties no later than the first Monday before Spring break.

Students should also electronically submit a copy of their complete first draft, firstly, to the thesis supervisor and also the honors advisor. The thesis must meet the approval of the thesis supervisor, the honors advisor, (and second reader, if relevant) before final submission to Schreyer Honors College.

The Smeal College upholds rigorous standards for the Honors Thesis and a thesis may not be approved if it is not deemed up to those standards.

Only those students whose thesis is successfully reviewed in March will be allowed to file a thesis. If the student's thesis is deemed insufficiently developed, the student may be asked to defer graduation or to forego graduating with honors.

In early April, the final version of the thesis must be filed with the Schreyer Honors College. The next day a signatory page with the signatures of the thesis supervisor and the honors advisor (and the second reader, if relevant) must be filed with the Schreyer Honors College.

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