GUIDELINES FOR DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

Overview:

The Departmental Honors Program allows qualified undergraduates the opportunity to distinguish themselves in psychology by participating in all phases of research. Although many students participate as research assistants by running experiments or entering data, few gain experience in research design, data analysis, and presentation of the results. Students participating in departmental honors will gain such experience and, in addition, will have the satisfaction of completing their own research projects independently. Students planning to pursue higher degrees (e.g., M.A.s and Ph.D.s) will find this experience invaluable. Finally, the Department hopes that students will submit reports of projects for presentation at scientific meetings or for publication in scientific journals. (Note that Departmental Honors are different from, but potentially consistent with, University Honors [see the Undergraduate Studies catalog].)

Eligibility:

Candidates for Departmental honors must:

1. Be psychology majors (i.e., enrolled in either the B.A. or B.S. degree plan)
2. Have a grade point average of 3.00 overall and in psychology
3. Maintain a 3.00 average until graduation
4. Complete at least three hours of Psychology 4352 – Independent Research
5. Enroll in Psychology 4353 – Honors Research – at least once and during the semester the student intends to finish the Honors thesis.

In many cases, honors theses may require more than two semesters to complete. Thus, students should be prepared to enroll in additional hours of PSYC 4352 or PSYC 4353 if necessary to complete thesis work. This decision should be made in consultation with the faculty supervisor of the honors project.

Procedure:

1. Identify a faculty supervisor and general research/thesis topic.

   In the semester before beginning honors work (usually the junior year), potential candidates should identify a suitable faculty member and determine the faculty member’s willingness to supervise an honors project. If the faculty member agrees, the candidate should notify the Honors Coordinator (Dr. Francis) of his or her intention to complete departmental honors. If the candidate has not completed six hours of 4352, he or she should enroll in this course under the faculty supervisor’s name. Honors candidates are encouraged to begin work on their honors projects as early as possible. While such projects can be completed over a two-semester period (i.e., the senior year), we recommend beginning honors activities as early as the second semester of the junior year.

2. Develop a research plan.

   Shortly after identifying a faculty supervisor, the candidate and supervisor should meet to decide the nature of the research project. Though desirable, it is not necessary that the honors candidate develop his or her own research ideas and experimental design independent of the
faculty supervisor. Instead, supervisor and candidate should mutually agree upon the project. Projects should be empirical (i.e., involve data collection and analysis), though the Honors Coordinator may grant exceptions. Once he or she has developed a project idea, the candidate should submit a short one-paragraph summary of the project to the Honors Coordinator and obtain Internal Review Board approval (if necessary).

3. **Collect data, extend literature review, and begin writing the thesis.**

After IRB approval, the candidate should begin collecting the data required to complete the project as soon as possible. It is a good idea for all candidates to finish data collection by the end of the first long (i.e., fall or spring) semester as an honors candidate. It is also a good idea for candidates to begin doing the background research (e.g., literature searches, background reading) required for successful completion of the project during this time. The candidate should also begin drafting the introduction and method sections of the honors thesis.

4. **Analyze the data; complete the thesis**

At the start of the candidate’s second and final long semester, he or she should begin organizing the data (e.g., complete any scoring and computer data entry) and begin conducting statistical analyses. These activities should be done under the careful supervision of the faculty advisor. Once the candidate analyzes the data, he or she should write the results and discussion sections and thus complete the honors thesis. In any given semester, the thesis is due one week before the first day of final exams.

5. **Presentation of the results**

Near the very end of the second long semester, the honors candidate will present the results of the research in a public forum to the entire Psychology Department. The form of this presentation may vary from year to year, but might include a departmental poster session, or a short oral presentation made as part of a Departmental Colloquium or Brown Bag.

**Evaluation:**

The written thesis will be the primary basis for evaluating the honors project. Candidates should write the thesis as a journal submission and in accord with APA guidelines. Each thesis should have four major sections (i.e., introduction, methods, results, and discussion), a short abstract (120 words), and a complete reference list. The main body of the thesis should contain approximately 15-25 pages of double-spaced text (excluding title page, abstract, references, notes, tables, and figures), though there is no minimum or maximum number of pages. Both the faculty supervisor and a separate reader will evaluate the final thesis. Usually, the reader will be another faculty member. If changes to the thesis are recommended during the evaluation process, the changes should be made within two weeks after the student receives feedback. Two bound copies of the final draft should then be deposited with the Honors Coordinator.

For more information, contact:
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