

Pittsburg State University
Honors College
Senior Honors Project Handbook

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What is the Senior Honors Project?

The Senior Honors Project is your opportunity to contribute to and advance knowledge in your discipline in a meaningful way. It is an opportunity to engage with professors, nationally recognized in their fields and specifically interested and committed to working with honors students as Senior Honors Project faculty mentors. Completing a Senior Honors Project can be the most rewarding experience of an undergraduate career. The project provides opportunity for you to explore areas of academic interest with greater intensity than is possible in a single course. You will earn six credit hours for directed research, performance or artistic production of original work conceived in conjunction with your faculty mentor.

Students who work closely with faculty mentors through the Senior Honors Project process have unique advantages in demonstrating their scholarly commitment. Graduate schools frequently require writing or research samples as part of the application process and this criterion is often weighed heavily in evaluating your skills and preparation for succeeding in their programs. The Senior Honors Project can also be beneficial to those entering the job market. This work can provide tangible evidence to prospective employers of your research, writing and creative skills. Senior Honors Projects demonstrate experience with design, execution, analysis, and presentation in your field of study.

The Senior Honors Project should be on a topic about which you are passionate. Each department may set its own standards for methodology (i.e., empirical, comparative, or descriptive), thesis/creative project length, etc.

You and your faculty mentor will create the goals and parameters for your specific topic. Some general guidelines include:

- The Senior Honors Project is an endeavor that will span over two semesters.
- You will receive six upper division honors credits for your project that will apply to your Departmental Academic Honors requirements.

The Senior Honors Project is an original piece of work developed by you and your faculty mentor.

The Faculty Mentor

Once you have narrowed your ideas to several topics, you can begin to identify the specific faculty member who does research in the field in which you are interested and might serve as your faculty mentor. Be certain to review each faculty member's scholarly body of work to determine if your interests align with his or her area of expertise. The choice of a faculty mentor is extremely important as he or she will be responsible for providing guidance throughout the entire project process.

Finding a Faculty Mentor

- Contact the Chair in the discipline related to your topic to discuss faculty who might share your interests in a topic. Think of professors with whom you have developed a working relationship by taking their classes.

Meeting with potential Mentors

After you have made a list of faculty you want to approach, schedule a meeting with each of them.

- Come prepared to discuss your ideas and hear theirs. Be prepared to discuss how your ideas are related to the faculty member's research interests.
- Make sure you discuss the professor's availability, communication style, and any other points that are important to you and your project.
- If a professor with whom you have met is not a match, ask him or her for recommendations of other professors who may be a good fit for working with you on your project.

Selecting Your Topic

Because the Senior Honors Project is the culmination of your undergraduate studies, begin thinking about a topic as early as your second or sophomore year. The experiences you have in your classes, internships, research opportunities, study abroad, and conversations with faculty will help define your interests and develop ideas for your topic. You should choose a topic that genuinely interests you. Conversations with professors will help you determine viable topics in your areas of interest.

You will probably base your project on an aspect of your coursework, internship or research that piqued your interest. A topic often emerges from a solid background in a specific subject, such as one from your academic major. Every academic experience has the potential to introduce you to ideas that could grow into your project. You should be alert to the possibilities. If something in a class excites your interest, take the time to discuss with the professor how this topic might lend itself to a project. If you are proposing a project that involves statistical analysis, it will be beneficial to take a statistics course prior to beginning your project. One key to your success is to be in conversation with faculty as your ideas emerge. The project is a joint effort between you and your faculty mentor.

Once you have identified a few ideas for your project, you need to narrow your topic. This should be done under the guidance of a faculty mentor. You should develop a topic that is broad enough to be researchable but specific enough in scope that you can thoroughly dissect and discuss it. The following is a list of tips and resources available to you as you begin the process of selecting a topic:

- Reflect on past experience to determine what interests you. Consider academic papers, courses, internships, creative projects, research, professors and personal experiences that you found meaningful.
- Talk to faculty about topics interesting to you and relevant to your coursework, major or career interests. Topics of interest may also stem from ongoing faculty research.
- Read widely in the field that interests you by making a habit of browsing professional journals to familiarize yourself with current research and creative work in the field.

Enrollment and Grading

All students must enroll in (Department Code) 603 and 604. Students are responsible for enrolling in these courses during normal registration periods. (Biology and English have numbers 601 and 604). For the purpose of ease, the (Department Code) will hereafter be referred to as Honor.

Grading the Senior Honors Project Course

In Honor 603: Senior Honors Project 1, students will receive a grade of A, B, IP (in progress) or NC (no credit) for their enrollment. A grade of NC voids the process and the student must then complete Departmental Academic Honors requirements in the traditional way.

In Honor 604: Senior Honors Project 2, students must earn a grade of A or B to receive credit for this course. Failure to complete the course with a grade of A or B will void this option and students will have to satisfy their Departmental Academic Honors requirement in the traditional way. There will be no IP or INC grades for this course. Projects must be done by the end of the spring term to count towards Departmental Academic Honors requirements.

Prospectus

Every Senior Honors Project is officially launched with a prospectus, which indicates that you are formalizing the beginning of your project. The prospectus form includes your name, current working title, the name of your faculty mentor and signatures from the faculty mentor, the Chair of the Department, and the Director of the Honors College (see Appendix A).

The completed prospectus is submitted to the Director of the Honors College the semester before you enroll in Honor 603 to start your project.

The prospectus also includes a 2-3 page summary of your work that serves as an action plan for the Senior Honors Project and provides a definitive list of goals and procedures, developed with your faculty mentor. Include expectations for the project and overall timeline of progress and internal deadlines for your work. The summary should be professional, clear, and grammatically correct. The prospectus will be kept on file in the Honors College Office to serve as confirmation of your Senior Honors Project.

Use the following questions as an outline when writing your summary.

a. From what field of study is your topic derived? What is the compelling question or idea?

- What interests you about this topic?
- What are the main goals/aims of your Senior Honors Project?

b. How will you conduct your research and prepare for your Senior Honors Project?

- What are your resources?
- How many sources do you expect to analyze and cite?

c. What are the expectations of meeting frequency with your faculty mentor?

- When, where, and how many times each semester will you meet?
- What are your goals for the meetings? What should each of you prepare in advance?

d. Describe your *two semester timeline* with Senior Honors Project goals and due dates.

- What will you do on a regular basis for your Senior Honors Project during Honor 603?
- What will you do on a regular basis for your Senior Honors Project during Honor 604?
- When will you begin drafts of your final project?

Public Presentation Requirements

The result of the Senior Honors Project *must* be presented in a public forum as appropriate. Options include the Undergraduate Research Colloquium, Departmental forums, or the Honors College Senior Honors Project Display. Presentations at state, regional, or national conferences are highly encouraged. Submissions are in poster or digital media format and members of the entire PSU community are welcome at these presentations.

Choosing a topic

- Describe and define your area of interest
- Develop a list of keywords associated with your area of interest-do internet search
- Meet with library staff to explore specific databases for your topic area
- Define the purpose of your project
- Define your organizational strategy for the project
- Meet with your faculty mentor to finalize the topic of your project

Format Options

You have two options: a formal paper or a creative or applied project.

The **formal paper** should be substantial in length and should reflect independent research conducted under the supervision of a faculty mentor. It should make some contribution to your field of study. The nature of this contribution will, of course, vary greatly depending upon your area of interest. You might, for example, provide a novel interpretation of a literary text, investigate an event or idea that has received little attention, or design and execute an experiment. Generally, formal papers written in the humanities are argumentative. They present the reader with a disputable thesis and supply arguments in support of this thesis.

The **creative or applied project** should be the result of independent critical inquiry in the arts, the applied arts, the applied sciences, business, or teacher education. The project should reflect independent or creative work conducted under a faculty mentor who will help you determine the scope, length, and style of the work. Undertaking an extensive independent project allows you to apply what you've learned and to create a product/project that reflects your very best work. It can help you to learn what kind of creative work you enjoy as well as help you develop your artistic and organizational abilities.

How long does the project have to be?

Everyone asks this and there is no categorical answer. The answer depends on the expectations of your major field, on the particular topic that you address, and on the way in which you present your completed project. In the humanities and social sciences, projects will range between 40 and 80 pages (think of this as two or three chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion). Applied projects written by business majors may be this length or they may be shorter, particularly if much of the data is presented in tabular form. In the sciences and mathematics, projects are typically shorter, perhaps 25-40 pages, but also denser. Students who do a creative project will need to include a short explanatory paper (perhaps 10-15 pages) in addition to the creative exercise itself. You may also include a CD or DVD as part of your project. Another way of thinking about a project and its length is to keep in mind that you are getting five or six units of credit for it over two semesters. You enroll in Honors 603 and 604 for three credit hours each. Your work should reflect that.

Checklist

- Thoroughly review the *Senior Honors Project Handbook* and reference it throughout your project. Be aware of the deadlines and expectations of the project.
- Brainstorm ideas for your topic. Think of subjects that you have a passion for and that may assist you with future academic and career goals.
- Create a list of questions and topic ideas to discuss with a potential faculty mentor.
- Schedule a meeting with a potential faculty mentor.
- Once you have a confirmed faculty mentor, register for Honor 603: Senior Honors Project 1.
- Write your prospectus, have it reviewed and signed by the required signatures.
- Submit your prospectus to the Honors College Office.

- Confirm that your faculty mentor submits a grade for the completed Senior Honors Project courses.

Writing Tips

Organize your approach

1. Keep a binder with separate tabs for each part of the Senior Honors Project.
2. Keep a check list in the front of the binder to make sure you have completed all steps and to give you a sense of your progress.
3. Organize your computer files rationally and consistently in an area dedicated only to the project.
4. Keep each section as a separate file and label consistently. Date each of the revisions. For example: Intro 1 Sept 25, Intro 2 Oct 10, etc.

Work a little at a time

1. Do not attempt to complete all of your writing at once, since this method invites disaster and writer's block. One hour twice a week is far better than twelve hours once a month.
2. Divide the project into manageable sections and complete each section individually.
3. Submit each individual section to your faculty mentor before going on to the next section
4. Keep all the sections filed in their dedicated place in your binder.
5. Complete the "simpler" tasks during times when you come to a standstill in your work.

Dedicate adequate time

1. Consider how much work you regularly put into two challenging courses and assume that you will need to spend adequate time on the Senior Honors Project that receives just as much credit.
2. Pace yourself. Courses pace you automatically with their due dates, exams and papers. Independent study work requires maturity and an ability to think and work for yourself.

Use writer's block wisely

1. Writer's block means that you have an as yet unrecognized or unresolved problem which may include actually starting the project.
2. This can be a profitable time if you remember that it is an essential part of writing and often leads to better writing.
3. Use the time to work on something that does not require a high level of conceptual skill, such as writing your acknowledgments, working on your bibliography, completing graphs, illustrations.
4. Begin somewhere in the middle, rather than at the beginning. You will go back and revise later, but this is a good method for circumventing writer's block.

Advice from Students

- Choose a topic that you can discuss in graduate school or job interviews.
- Do research, a little at a time, throughout the semester. Don't put it off until the end.
- Meet with your faculty mentor often.
- Plan ahead and develop a timeline of deadlines.
- Expect your faculty mentor to request many revisions.
- Backup your files often.

Other important notes:

Faculty have full control as to whether or not they want to serve as a faculty mentor. Please respect their decision if they decline.

You cannot “double dip” projects. If there is already some sort of capstone project required in your degree, you cannot use that project to satisfy this requirement.

The student will be responsible for any and all expenses associated with the project.

Students are encouraged to enroll in the UGS 241 Methods of Research Class before starting this process.

There will be periodic Cohort Meetings each term where we will bring together all students working on a Senior Honors Project to discuss progress and challenges. Any student working on a project will be expected to attend these meetings.

Appendix A: THE SENIOR HONORS PROJECT PROSPECTUS

Please type the information requested on this form and attach it to your
2-3pp. prospectus

Student's Name: _____ ID: _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone#: _____

Title of Thesis: _____

Semester in which work is to be started: _____

Semester in which work is to be completed: _____

When do you plan to graduate? _____

Faculty Mentor Name: _____

Department: _____ Phone: _____

E-Mail: _____

_____/_____
Student Signature/Date

Prospectus approved by: _____/_____
Faculty Mentor/ Date

_____/_____
Chair of the Department/Date

_____/_____
Director of Honors College/Date

Date Prospectus submitted: _____

Appendix B: General Timeline

Spring junior year:

Define your topic, find your thesis advisor.

Submit your Senior Honors Project Prospectus with all signatures to the Honors College.

Enroll in Honor 603 during enrollment period.

Before you leave for the summer, know what you need to do to begin your research. Set yourself goals and deadlines, and keep them.

Fall senior year:

Meet with your thesis advisor during the first week of classes, if possible.

Set up a specific timeline for submissions to occur.

Keep those dates.

Meet regularly with your thesis advisor.

Enroll in Honor 604 during enrollment period.

The timeline should enable you to have a draft or outline of your completed project by the end of the semester.

Spring senior year:

Meet with your thesis advisor regularly.

Revisions to your draft.

Be sure to know your college deadlines and follow them carefully if they apply.

Submit your completed thesis by the date specified.

NOTE: For those students who will student teach or be off-campus during the second semester of their senior year, this timeline would be moved back one term to allow for a two semester window to complete the requirements.

Appendix C: Examples of Senior Honors Projects from other Institutions

Ball State University

<http://cms.bsu.edu/Academics/CollegesandDepartments/HonorsCollege/AcademicsandAdmissions/SeniorThesisProjectGuidelines/PastSeniorProjects.aspx>

Black Hills State University

<http://www.bhsu.edu/Academics/HonorsProgram/CurrentStudents/HonorsProjects/tabid/5713/Default.aspx>

Kenyon College

<http://www.kenyon.edu/x690.xml>

Appendix D: Senior Honors Project Checklist

- _____ Work to establish general ideas for Project Topic
- _____ Find your Faculty Mentor
- _____ Develop and submit your Prospectus
- _____ Enroll in Honor 603
- _____ Work on project during fall term
- _____ Work on project during spring term
- _____ Submit your project according to the timeline
- _____ Prepare for the public presentation of your project