



*University Honors Program*  
PLN-120 (714) 278-7443

## SENIOR HONORS PROJECT GUIDELINES

### **What is a senior honors project?**

The best short description of an honors project is that it is: an opportunity to work closely with a member of the faculty on a research or creative enterprise that brings to a conclusion your undergraduate experience.

It is a requirement and it is an exciting opportunity. You have to complete an honors project to graduate with University Honors. But, the project is much more than just another requirement. Students at universities with long-established honors programs report that doing the research and writing for their senior honors projects is the most exciting, fulfilling, and rewarding experience of their undergraduate careers. Why is that? When you undertake an honors project, you are doing your own work, in close collaboration with a faculty mentor. You come up with the topic and have primary responsibility for designing the study. You are doing something that is important to you and you are doing it for your own reasons. Of course, it can also be a frustrating, scary, and daunting experience. But, you will have support.

### **Do I have to do a project in my major?**

No, but we encourage you to bring the study of your major field to bear on your project. A good strategy for some of you might be to connect the honors project with your major department's senior "capstone" seminar. Or you might think about designing an interdisciplinary project that would allow you to span your major and minor fields. The situation to avoid is trying to do a project that requires you to master an entirely new field of study.

### **What are my options?**

You have two main 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. The paper can be written in any field or area of specialization. It should make some contribution to that 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 (music, art, theatre, dance, film, creative writing), the applied arts (architecture, graphic design), the applied sciences (engineering, computer science), business (management, marketing, information systems, finance, ecommerce), 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 something 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 yet we can't give a 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. It will be placed in a sleeve in the final, bound copy 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 HONR 497 (Honors Project) your final two semesters, typically earning two units the first semester and three units the second semester. Your work should reflect that.

### **What deadlines do I have to keep in mind?**

#### **Junior year, second semester:**

- Enroll in HONR 300B
- Choose your topic
- Choose your mentor(s) and begin planning your project
- Prepare a proposal and get the project proposal signed by your primary mentor, by your secondary mentor (if you have one), and by the Honors Program director—Deadline is end of semester

#### **Senior year, first semester:**

- Enroll in HONR 497 (2-3 units)—or contract a course in your major; conduct research on your project topic, meeting regularly with your mentor(s)
- Enroll in HONR 400A
- Revise your proposal if necessary. Any changes in the proposal or in mentor(s) require signatures and submission of the revised proposal form

#### **Senior year, second semester:**

- Enroll in HONR 497 (3 units)—write your project—expect several drafts; submit to mentor(s) on a regular basis throughout writing time
- Enroll in HONR 400B
- Submit a one-paragraph biographical statement and a two or three-paragraph summary of your project to the Honors Center at least two weeks before your oral presentation (these will be used in preparing the program for presentations and will be bound with your project)

- Submit one copy of the approved final draft of project to Honors Center; including the standard title page signed by your mentor(s)
- Oral presentation during final two weeks of semester

**What is a “mentor,” when do I choose my primary mentor and, if appropriate, my secondary mentor, and what are their roles?**

“Mentor” is the term we’ve chosen to designate your project adviser, the person with whom you work most closely on your project. Your primary mentor must be a CSU Fullerton faculty member. Full-time faculty are preferred, but part-time faculty are eligible if there is a strong likelihood that they will be available throughout the time you will be working on your project. Usually, your mentor will be from your major department, but there is no requirement that this be so.

You select your mentor. You make this selection no later than the second semester of your junior year. It is your responsibility to seek out a mentor; the Honors Program will not do this for you. Talk to faculty in your major department. You are looking for someone who has expertise in the area of your research and who shows interest and support for your project. Sometimes students choose their mentor first and then select a topic that the mentor suggests or that conforms to the mentor’s own interests and expertise. More often, students have topics in mind and look for mentors who can work with them on those topics.

You may decide, in consultation with your primary mentor and the Honors Director, that you want two mentors. For example, you may want expertise and advice from two disciplinary perspectives or your project may divide into parts, each requiring a different expertise. One person will be the primary mentor and the other person will be the secondary mentor. You should decide who is the primary mentor and who is the secondary mentor, but you will want to discuss the issue with both people so that each is clear on his or her distinct role.

Your mentor(s) will assist you in designing your project—narrowing the topic, identifying relevant background reading, framing the questions you are asking, identifying research strategies, sources, and measurements. Your mentor(s) will read every draft of your proposal and your project and supply you with written and verbal commentary on those drafts. Ultimately, your mentor(s) will sign the final draft and attend your oral presentation. Your primary mentor will assign your grade for HONR 497. You should plan to meet with one or another of your mentors at least once every two weeks during your senior year.

As important as the mentors are, in the final analysis

**YOU are responsible for the timely and successful completion of your project. It is this independence and commitment that separates senior honors project work from normal coursework.**

**Is there a special format or style sheet for an honors project?**

No. The Honors Program leaves details about format and structure to the collaboration between you and your mentor(s). This is something you must discuss with your mentor(s) and about which you must reach explicit agreement. In particular, find out what style manual is standard in your primary mentor’s discipline and get yourself a copy. The style manual will specify, for

example, how you should cite sources. Be sure that you include a table of contents or other appropriate guide to the contents of your project and of any supplemental CDs or DVDs that you include. Think about the students and faculty who will read your project in the future. You want them to easily find their way.

The only Honors Program requirement is that you use a standard title page that includes the signature of your primary mentor, and, if you have one, your secondary mentor. Instructions for formatting of the standard title page are available in the Honors Center or at the Program's web site.

The Honors Program will duplicate your project on appropriate paper and will have copies bound. The Program retains one bound copy and you get bound copies for yourself and your mentor(s).

### **What is a proposal, how long is it, and when is it due?**

Your proposal summarizes your preliminary thinking about your project. It is **due at the end of your junior year**. It provides you, your mentor(s), and the Honors Program with a clear, written statement of your topic and your research plans. Think of the proposal as an action plan for your honors project research. It provides a definite list of goals and procedures with which you and your committee will work. Your proposal must be signed by your primary mentor, your secondary mentor if you have chosen one, and by the Honors Program director.

You may wonder whether you are required to follow through on your original proposal. It will feel like a contract, and there is certainly some commitment on your part. However, all faculty understand that ideas change, so modifications, even major modifications, are certainly possible. Discuss modifications with your mentor(s) or with the Honors Program director early in your reevaluation process. It may turn out that the junior year exercise was exploratory rather than definitive. That's OK. The point is to get started and to establish a working relationship with a faculty mentor.

If you do make changes in your plans or in your choice of mentor(s), you must inform the Honors Program director. There is a form to record such revisions.

If you do not feel that you are sufficiently advanced in your major to complete a detailed proposal during your junior year, you should talk to the Honors Program director. It may be appropriate for you to conduct faculty-directed preliminary research and to submit a report on that research rather than a project proposal. This is an option that science and business students, in particular, may want to consider. However, if you do choose this option, you will need to submit a formal project proposal no later than the end of the first semester of your senior year.

A proposal should include the information from the following list. This list is designed for formal papers. If you are planning to complete a creative or applied project, make appropriate modifications in the list, but your proposal should convey the same level of detail and address similar concerns. A proposal should be **approximately five pages, double-spaced, plus a preliminary bibliography**.

**The proposal should include:**

- a. What do you wish to study?
  - What is the broad topic, question, or issue you want to investigate?
  - What is the specific topic you wish to study?
  - Why is this topic personally important to you?
  - Why is this an important topic for people in your field or for the wider community?
- b. How will you conduct your research?
  - Where are your resources?
  - How many sources do your mentor(s) expect you to analyze?
  - What process of analysis will you use?
  - What access permissions are required?
  - Are there issues involving the use of human subjects that require approval by the university's Institutional Review Board?
- c. What are the expectations of meeting frequency with your mentor(s)?
  - How often will you meet?
  - During the meetings, what do your mentor(s) expect to happen? What do you expect to happen at each meeting?
- d. Preliminary bibliography and brief literature review on your topic. You must include a preliminary bibliography at the end of your proposal. The literature review may be incorporated into the body of the proposal or presented as annotations in the bibliography.

Although you will be conducting primary research, your project should be written in full knowledge of relevant work by others. You will need to identify, read, and reflect on this wider body of work. Your mentor(s) can be terrific resources for you in identifying the literature in your field. But you will also need to do your own library work to compile your bibliography. Your literature review should help you narrow your topic and refine the questions you will be asking. You should realize that "reviewing the literature" is an ongoing process. You will only be able to read a sample of relevant literature during the second semester of your junior year, when you are preparing your proposal. You will continue reading during the summer and your first semester of your senior year.

**What is the oral presentation of my project?**

After you have completed the writing of your project and obtained all necessary signatures, there is one final step: an oral presentation of your work. Oral presentations are public performances and anyone may be invited. At a minimum, your mentor(s) and your project cohort (fellow students in your area with whom you have worked in HONR 300B and HONR 400A and B) will be in your audience. In fact, giving and attending oral presentations is the primary assignment in HONR 400B and part of the requirements for HONR 300B.

You can expect to make a twenty minute presentation, explaining your project and its main findings or results. You may use PowerPoint or other audio-visual aids, but make sure you arrange for them ahead of time. After your presentation, your audience will want to ask you questions. That's it; scary but harmless, exciting, and rewarding, a fitting finale to your months of hard work.