

English Honors Handbook

Department of English
University of South Florida

Issued November 2017

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Application and Admissions

Follow all instructions for completing the application. Pay particular attention to the Personal Statement, which should explain why you wish to be in Honors and what qualifies you to be in Honors. Write a statement that represents you as highly qualified, intelligent, and articulate. Be thoughtful and specific about why you want to be in English Honors, what you hope to gain from it, and how you would contribute to the program. If you are contemplating graduate school, consider this statement a dry run for graduate school applications. Do not be one of the legions writing “I have always loved to read” or “I have always loved to write” and giving examples from childhood; think about your intellectual growth thus far in college and how you want to further it.

You will need to supply a “Class History” report, which you can print from Degree Works. Be sure to write in the names of your instructors on this report.

Please be honest about your interests in taking seminars and thesis hours. These answers will not affect your chances of being accepted, and you will not be bound to them, but they help us predict departmental needs in the near future.

Submit a complete application packet on time.

Once decisions have been made, the Director of English Honors will notify all applicants of the outcome by email, so be certain to provide a correct USF email address.

Minimums for admission:

60 hours of coursework complete by time of admission

3.3 GPA in English major coursework

3.0 overall GPA

Getting Started in Honors

Your admissions email will outline the next steps you will need to take in order to get started with Honors coursework. It is YOUR responsibility to register for the right courses and to complete all 9 hours of the English Honors program; you should visit the English Department advisor, Mike Stowe, to help you with your schedule (use <http://usfweb3.usf.edu/appointments/StudentSignon.asp> to schedule an appointment). All students are required to complete an Honors seminar in the first semester after admissions. To enroll in a seminar, you will need a registration permit, which will be issued when you are accepted. If you have difficulty registering for this first seminar, please email Mike Stowe (mjstowe@usf.edu). You may also consider taking an Honors independent study, which requires advance permission from the professor with whom you wish to study: be sure the paperwork is filed no later than the drop/add deadline at 5 pm on Wednesday of the first week of classes to ensure you are able to register before the 5 pm deadline on the first Friday.

Although you may be tempted to attempt to complete the Honors program in a single semester, you are strongly advised not to try. At the very least, give yourself two semesters in which to complete the 9 hours of advanced work required.

If you have questions about the Honors program, contact the Director of English Honors, Dr. Nicole Guenther Discenza (ndiscenza@usf.edu). Keep Dr. Discenza informed about your progress through the program, and if you should choose to withdraw, let her know.

Program Requirements

The Honors program requires 9 hours of Honors-level work. All Honors students are required to complete at least one (three-hour) Honors seminar (ENG 4935 or ENG 4936). The first seminar must be taken in the first semester in English Honors.

Students should select two of the following options to fulfill the remaining six hours of credit in Honors:

- a second (three-hour) Honors English seminar (ENG 4935 or ENG 4936).
- a three-hour Honors English independent study (ENG 4906)
- a three-hour Honors English thesis
- a graduate course (in unusual cases; see below)

English Honors Seminar: One English Honors seminar is usually offered each fall and spring term. You must enroll in the English Honors seminar for your first term in English Honors, and so students in their first semester will have first priority to enroll in the seminar each semester; the remaining spaces will be filled by students who have already taken a seminar, so keep in mind the possibility that you may not be able to get into a second seminar and consider other ways of fulfilling your requirements.

Seminars are taught by various faculty members in their own areas of expertise; recent seminars have been offered by faculty from Literary Studies and Creative Writing and covered topics as diverse as Heroes and Heroines in Medieval Literature; Haunted Narratives: Ghosts in Poetry, Fiction, and Nonfiction; and Cross-Racial Relationalities.

Independent Study/Honors Connected Course: Honors independent studies are connected to an eligible upper-level course in the major being taught in that semester. A list of courses available for this option will be made available prior to registration each semester. Honors students will attend some or all of the scheduled course meetings and complete the bulk of reading, written, and other requirements for the course, but will be enrolled in an independent study with the instructor and have some requirements that vary from the non-honors course. The independent study will be considered a special “Honors section” of the course and will require additional work that may include extra reading, class presentations, and advanced research-based writing.

To complete an independent study, register for the ordinary class and meet with the faculty member **before** the first week of classes so that the instructor can determine an appropriate set of assignments for the Honors connected course. The instructor and student together should complete the Independent Study Contract **before** the Wednesday of the first week of classes and submit the completed contract to the Director of the English Honors program, Dr. Nicole Guenther Discenza (ndiscenza@usf.edu). The English Department will then create a section for the independent study and send registration information to the student; at that point, the student should add the new section using the permit provided, then drop the regular class, all **before** 5 pm on the Friday of the first week of classes. We strongly encourage Honors students to complete the process before the first

week of classes to avoid difficulties registering.

»**Form Alert: Independent Study Contract**« For a sample contract form, see the end of this handbook.

Honors Thesis: English Honors theses count for three credit hours and are supervised by a member of the English faculty. The Director of the English Honors Program will serve as instructor of record for the thesis hours, who encourages students to talk to her (Dr. Discenza, ndiscenza@usf.edu) **early in the semester *before* they plan to complete the thesis.** See below for further details on the English Honors Thesis.

Graduate Course: An English Honors student may in unusual cases enroll in a three-hour graduate-level course in English. In order to enroll in a graduate course, students must have completed at least one English Honors seminar with a final grade of A- or higher, and the student needs the written permission of (1) the Undergraduate Director, (2) the Graduate Director, and (3) the instructor of the course.

Dr. Discenza will determine which Honors courses may be used to satisfy requirements or electives towards the major (historical distribution requirements or electives).

Requirements for graduation with English Honors: to graduate with Departmental Honors, the student must satisfy the following requirements:

- Complete 9 hours of English Honors courses as described above with a 3.3 GPA in those courses;
- Complete all major requirements with a 3.3 GPA in the major and an overall GPA of 3.0. The credit hours completed within the program by the student who does not complete all Honors requirements will, of course, count toward the baccalaureate degree.

English Honors Thesis

I. Overview

A. Snapshot

English Honors students have the option to write a thesis for three credits. The English Honors thesis is an independent project that emphasizes writing skills, creativity, and the ability to join in the discourse of the field. Creative projects also focus on craft, genre, and form. Literary projects emphasize analytical and critical thinking abilities and competence in research. Projects in professional writing and rhetoric should include a combination of research and practice and include a substantial production component. A thesis should present an intelligent and significant creative work, argument, and/or application of theory to practice. It should be effectively structured and elegantly written, and literary theses should be thoroughly researched. All theses should follow the formatting and documentation style of the current edition of the MLA Style manual.

B. Length of the Honors Thesis

The required length of the thesis is at least 25 pages (not including the bibliography, which should be substantial for literary studies) but not generally more than 50 pages. The student and director should agree on an acceptable length. Creative writing projects can involve more variable formats and requirements, including length. Faculty should help the student determine a topic sufficiently focused and limited to ensure that (1) the thesis does not balloon into a lengthier product and (2) students can complete the thesis in a reasonable amount of time (one or two semesters) and graduate on schedule.

C. A Note on Students Enrolled in the Honors College

The Honors College gives 6 credit hours for theses (English awards only 3 credits). Students enrolled in both the Honors College and English Honors can satisfy the Research Track requirements for the Honors College by completing the English Honors thesis and the additional English Honors coursework. If a student elects to take this route, they should alert Mike Stowe (mjstowe@usf.edu) and their Honors College advisor of their intention to ensure accurate certification at graduation. Caveat: A student who exercises this option will not be able to meet the FKL Capstone and Writing Intensive Exit Requirements with the English Honors coursework and will need to address those requirements with other coursework.

D. ENG 4970: Thesis Hours

The Director of English Honors will serve as the instructor of record for thesis hours (ENG 4970). **Students may work on the thesis over two or more semesters but will enroll in thesis hours only once (for 3 credits).** If the student does not complete the thesis in the semester in which he/she enrolls in ENG 4970, a grade of Incomplete ("I") will be recorded. Once the student files the completed thesis, the "I" will be replaced by the final grade determined by the committee. In the rare case that the student fails to complete the project prior to graduating, the "I" will turn into an "F."

II. The Thesis Committee

The Honors thesis committee is made up of a faculty director and second reader; third readers are acceptable but not required. Students considering the thesis option should approach relevant faculty members to see if they would be willing to direct **early in the semester before they plan to complete the thesis**. In most cases, the student will select a director first; the director can then help the student identify a second reader with some knowledge of the proposed area of investigation. Students may consult the Director of English Honors, Dr. Discenza (ndiscenza@usf.edu), for help in selecting thesis directors.

Because service on an Honors Thesis goes beyond the normal teaching load, the director should usually be a permanent faculty member in English. The second reader may be from the department's permanent or visiting faculty. Non-English faculty may serve on a thesis committee, though students should seek permission of the Director of English Honors as well as their own director before approaching faculty from other departments.

The director will set deadlines, comment on drafts, and recommend revisions. The second reader usually reviews the thesis in its late stages. Director, readers, and students may negotiate other arrangements but should agree upon them early in the process and make sure that each member, including the student, knows how responsibilities have been divided.

III. Getting Started: Big Picture Planning

A. Plan a Sensible Schedule

The director and student should plan a prospectus and draft schedule according to the student's planned graduation date. If the student is graduating in the spring, it is a good idea to aim for a final draft of the thesis by mid-March so that the committee has 2-4 weeks to read the work and schedule a defense in early to mid-April; if in fall, a final draft should go to the committee by early November.

B. Maintain Contact

Students should understand that a thesis requires a great deal of work (and time); the director should impress upon the student the importance of getting an early start and the necessity of good work habits. Directors may want to email periodically to check in and monitor progress; students should keep in touch with directors about their work. Regular communication is especially important in the early stages, when many students have trouble getting a firm grip on a large project.

IV. Setting a Plan: The Prospectus

A. Ideal Schedule for Completing the Prospectus

Although the thesis is worth 3 credit hours, the student usually needs two semesters to complete it. The prospectus itself can take up to six weeks to draft, revise, and finalize with the committee. This preliminary planning is best done the semester before thesis hours are taken. English Honors recommends that students register for thesis hours only for the term they intend to complete the thesis. As failure to complete a thesis before graduation will

result in a grade of F on the transcript, it is generally advisable that students delay registration for thesis hours until they have an approved prospectus on file.

B. Content of the Prospectus

The prospectus should run 3-6 pages and include the following components:

- the names of the student, director, and second reader;
- the title of the thesis;
- a description of the work to be undertaken, including the questions to be explored and the issues to be researched or engaged in a creative work

For Literary Studies:

- a description of the preliminary research undertaken, with a sketch of the existing scholarship on the topic;
- a point-by-point outline of the thesis (its parts and subsections), with the argument of the thesis, along with its significance and rationale, clearly articulated;
- a working bibliography to be expanded once the student has completed more research.

For Creative Writing, the prospectus may:

- address creative models or influences
- discuss form, structure, or important craft elements;
- include a bibliography listing creative models or influences

»Form Alert: Prospectus«

Once the prospectus has been approved, the committee will need to complete the English Honors Prospectus Approval Form (included below and available as pdf) and submit it at the same time as the prospectus. Please submit the prospectus as a pdf and the form as a hard copy or pdf to Dr. Nicole Guenther Discenza (ndiscenza@usf.edu), English Honors Program Director. There is no hard deadline, but English Honors recommends that the prospectus be completed by the beginning of November for students planning to graduate in the spring and by the start of April for students planning to graduate in the fall.

V. Staying on Track: Drafting

English Honors recommends that the director establish two or three internal deadlines for submission of parts of the draft. Be sure to allow time both for reading by the director and revisions by the student. Most students undertaking the thesis have never written such a long work: they need guidance and milestones as opposed to one final submission date.

Directors: help students narrow the topic and research appropriately, advise them on how to conduct research or write a long creative project, and seek early and partial drafts, not a complete long work. Students: be honest with your director about where you need help.

VI. A Strong and Timely Finish

A. Scheduling the Defense

As the thesis project moves into its final stages, the director should set a firm final date for

submission to the committee. Mid-March is ideal for spring graduation and late October for fall. The student should submit an electronic draft of the thesis to the director, who will share it with the second reader. The committee should assess the work and may make further suggestions for final corrections or adjustments. The director and second reader should decide together whether the thesis is ready for defense. Generally, a thesis can go to defense so long as the remaining revisions are relatively minor and both members of the committee are satisfied that the work is nearly complete.

The defense should, ideally, be scheduled for mid-April or mid- to late November—before the end-of-semester rush to allow the student time for any final corrections between the defense and the last day of finals. Scheduling details (including location) are left to the student and committee: contact Jen Tavery (jtavery@usf.edu) to reserve classroom space.

B. The Importance of Completion

Students must observe deadlines and to give their committee sufficient time to read and comment on the final draft. Committee members are under no obligation to race through a final draft if the student has missed one or more deadlines, but keep in mind that a student who fails to complete the thesis before graduation will carry a grade of F on his/her transcript. This grade cannot be changed once the student graduates.

Only in extreme cases and with agreement from the full committee should a student extend the thesis into an additional (summer) term. If at all possible, the committee should try to ensure the student finishes within two semesters, even if it means accepting as final a draft that, while passable (B- or better), is not quite an “A” effort.

C. Defense Format

The defense usually runs 30 minutes and the full committee should be present, although Skype may be used for readers who cannot be present in person. In the first 5-10 minutes of the defense, the student should present an overview of the argument of the thesis, its rationale, and the findings or conclusions for a literary studies project; or of the genre, form, literary models, and accomplishments for a creative project. The remainder of the time is devoted to questions and answers about the student’s work, depth of understanding, and perhaps options for publication or further research in graduate school. Prior to the defense, the director should meet with the student to explain how to prepare. At the end of the defense, the student leaves the room and the committee determines the final grade. Both members of the committee must agree on a grade of B- or higher for the thesis to earn English Honors credit. The director then invites the student back in and announces the grade. Any final adjustments to the thesis required by the committee should also be clearly communicated at this time. Be sure that both members of the committee sign the English Honors Thesis Approval and Final Grade Form before leaving the defense. This defense is not a public meeting. The Director of the Undergraduate Program may attend, but ordinarily, only the student and the committee will be present.

C. Honors College Presentation Day

The Honors College usually has a research presentation day at the end of April; only a select number of students present, but if your student is invited to present, you will be

expected (as director) to attend the presentation and even contribute to the comments afterward. If your student is selected to make this presentation, you can forego the defense (but remember to submit the grade forms).

VIII. Wrapping it Up: Final Submission

A. Assigning a Grade to the Thesis

The director and reader must agree on a final grade for the thesis. Take into consideration the extensiveness and appropriateness of the research or creative project, the intellectual or artistic merits of the project, and the quality of the writing. +/- grades are acceptable. A student needs a grade of "B-" or better to pass the thesis: should the thesis receive a grade of "C+" or below, the student will not graduate with Honors in English. The English Honors Program Director will review and approve the thesis and the grade assigned by the thesis committee; the Director makes the thesis grade final and enters it into the system. In the rare case of significant disagreement between the Director and the thesis committee concerning the grade, the Director shall consult with the committee to reach a final determination of the grade.

B. Filing the Final (Approved) Draft

Students should submit the final draft electronically and Approval/Grade Form (electronically or in hard copy) **prior to the end of Final Exam Week.** Meeting this deadline will ensure that the final thesis grade will be properly reported to the Registrar. Failure to submit these documents on time (or at all) may result in the student not receiving credit for the thesis.

»Form Alert: Thesis Approval and Final Grade«

To bring the project to a finish, complete and sign the English Honors Thesis Approval and Final Grade Form (included below and available as pdf). Submit the completed form to Dr. Discenza, English Honors Program Director, who will ensure that the student's final thesis grade is submitted to the Registrar. Once the defense is over, the student will need to complete any final corrections or edits required by the committee. The student will then submit the final copy to Dr. Discenza as a pdf in an email attachment.

Appendix: Forms

English Honors Program Independent Study Contract

Student _____

Semester _____

U Number _____

Instructor _____

Affiliated Course _____

The Honors independent study (ENG 4906) should be connected to an eligible upper-level course within the major taught in the current semester. The independent study will be considered a special "Honors section" of the affiliated course and will require additional work that may include extra reading, class presentations, and advanced research-based writing. In addition to attending some (or all) of the regularly scheduled course meetings and completing most (if not all) of the reading and written requirements for the affiliated course, the student must undertake **additional** work for the independent study (this could include a formal presentation of research, an independent research project, a longer research paper, an annotated bibliography, a larger collection of creative work, etc.)

This contract for independent study must be signed by both the student and the instructor, approved by the Honors Committee, and filed with the Undergraduate Director prior to registration.

It is understood that the student undertaking this independent study will be responsible for the following work in order to fulfill the requirements for the course. (List all readings. Specify number and length of writing assignments and exams. Describe oral presentations and research projects. Attach a separate sheet if necessary.)

Signatures

Student _____

Date _____

Instructor _____

Date _____

Honors Director _____

Date _____

