Academics FAQs

Advising

What are the requirements for Commonwealth Honors College?
Must I take an honors course each semester?
How do I find an honors course?
How hard are honors courses?
Who is my advisor? Where is s/he?
Where do I start for Departmental Honors?

CHC PATHS

What is PATHS?
What happens once I click ‘Submit’?
How do I know the status of my contract?
How do I know when my contract has been approved?
What if I can't find my committee member in the list on CHC PATHS?
What happens when a faculty reviewer rejects the proposal or requests significant revisions before approving it?
What do I do if the faculty member has not reviewed or approved my contract in a timely manner?
What should I do if one of my committee members has lost or not received an email about approving a contract via PATHS?
What do I do if I need the thesis or independent study credit in order to reach 12 credits?
How do I change the number of credits?
What should I do if I get a ‘Form Available’ error message?

Departmental Honors

Where do I start for Departmental Honors?

Honors Thesis or Project

Can I choose anyone to serve on my Honors Thesis/Project guidance committee or must I have faculty from my major and the Commonwealth Honors College office?
Can my study abroad coursework count towards my Honors Thesis/Project?
Honors Thesis or Project: Getting Started

What's the difference between an Honors Thesis/Project Seminar and an individually-contracted Honors Thesis/Project?
How do I go about finding a topic for an individually-contracted Honors Thesis/Project?
How do I find faculty to serve on my individually-contracted Honors Thesis/Project committee?
Can I choose anyone to serve on my Honors Thesis/Project guidance committee or must I have faculty from my major and the Commonwealth Honors College office?
Can I do my Honors Thesis/Project during a summer or winter session, or all in one semester?
I'm going abroad in my senior year; what are my Honors Thesis or Project options?
If I'm already working in a lab, and wish to continue the research as an individually-contracted Honors Thesis or Project, what do I have to do?
Can I use my summer lab research for an individually-contracted Honors Thesis/Project if it was not conducted at UMass Amherst?
How will my Honors Thesis/Project be graded if it's a two-semester option?

Honors Thesis or Project: Formatting

Where do I start the page numbering?
How do I format charts/page numbers/citations/etc. in the main body of my manuscript?
How do I format the title page and abstract?

Honors Thesis or Project: Finishing Up

Am I supposed to have an oral defense?
My Honors Thesis/Project instructor, chairperson or committee member is unavailable to evaluate my work/sign my paperwork. What should I do?
I can't complete my Honors Thesis/Project coursework by the final grade deadline. What should I do?
Do I have to submit my Honors Thesis or Project materials in person? Can I have my instructor or friend deliver them? Or mail them?
I won't be able to submit my Honors Thesis/Project materials by the Honors College deadline. Can I turn them in late and still graduate with my class?
After I've submitted my Honors Thesis/Project materials what happens next?
Do I have to submit an Honors Thesis or Project manuscript to the Commonwealth Honors College office?
How long must my Honors Thesis or Project manuscript be?
My Honors Project was a film project. What do I submit for archiving in the W.E.B DuBois library?

Study Abroad

Can my study abroad courses count toward Honors College requirements?
Can my study abroad coursework count towards my Honors Thesis/Project?

Graduation
When I put on my graduation cap and gown, which side does my cap tassel go on?
I need to postpone my graduation to take care of outstanding problems (Inc grades, etc). How will you know to clear me for CHC graduation when my problems are all resolved?
How will I know if I'm all set for Commonwealth Honors College graduation clearance?
Can I graduate from the University if I haven't finished my Commonwealth Honors College requirements?

Advising

What are the requirements for Commonwealth Honors College?

Commonwealth Honors College (CHC) is a four-year academic program that enhances the undergraduate experience. The honors curriculum is designed in two parts. The first part, "Breadth of Study," anchors students' honors experience in their General Education coursework. In the second part, "Depth of Study," students concentrate their upper-level honors courses in their major through Departmental Honors, or outside their major through Multidisciplinary Honors and complete an honors thesis or project. There are minimum grade and GPA requirements for members based upon graduating class year. Full details can be found in the requirements section of our website.

Must I take an honors course each semester?

Not necessarily. You may adjust your schedule to accommodate other interests such as internships or extra-curricular activities. Just plan ahead to avoid a backlog of requirements in your final two semesters and stay in touch with your advisors.

How do I find an honors course?

Start with our online Honors Course Guide (HCG). This is a searchable database of courses offered as honors. Initially search for courses that you need to complete for your major or Gen Ed requirements. You may also register for honors courses for elective credit. Once you've found a course, proceed to the SPIRE database to register or follow alternate instructions listed in the HCG course description. (Note: Courses in the HCG may not appear on SPIRE if a department cancels a course and does not notify the Honors College.)

How hard are honors courses?

The challenge of an honors course will vary with its content and professor, but the focus of honors work is enrichment through engagement vs. difficulty. Honors courses may not be any more difficult than their non-honors counterparts but the benefits are usually greater.

Honors courses offer students the opportunity to engage in active learning in a class of 25 or fewer students. Oftentimes research opportunities and an increased level of faculty mentoring are provided beyond those in non-honors courses.
Who is my advisor? Where is s/he?

Each student has several advisors assigned to help with various categories of requirements:

- University requirements: see the Undergraduate Records Office in Whitmore Administration Bldg.
- College requirements: see the Academic Dean's advising office for the college of your major (e.g., College of Arts and Humanities for English, School of Management for Accounting, College of Natural Sciences for Psych, etc.)
- Major requirements: see the Chief Undergraduate Advisor in your major department (e.g., English, Accounting)
- Commonwealth Honors College requirements: see an honors advisor in 201 Commonwealth Honors College at the Bloom Honors Advising Center.

You may start at the Commonwealth Honors College office if you aren't sure where to begin!

Make sure to schedule visits with your Commonwealth Honors College and Major department advisors. October and March are great times for check-in appointments since demand for advisors' time is typically low.

Where do I start for Departmental Honors?

Consult the Departmental Honors section of our web site for information about DH tracks. You must have a declared major before you may declare a DH track.

CHC PATHS

What is PATHS?

CHC PATHS is a tool for the Commonwealth Honors College community. Honors students can use CHC PATHS to set up contracts for independent courses, such as an independent study honors (ISH) or an Honors Thesis/Project (499Y/T/P). Faculty members and honors thesis committee members use CHC PATHS to review and authorize these contracts.

What happens once I click ‘Submit’?

Once you hit submit, your proposal is final and cannot be edited. Automated emails will go out in sequence to the following people:

- Chair of committee/faculty overseeing your work
- Second committee member (if Honors Thesis or Project)
- Honors Program Director - in student’s major area
- Honors Program Director - in major area in which the course is being registered
- CHC Academic Standards Committee
- *If this review and approval process is completed BEFORE the add/drop*
**Deadline:** CHC will enroll you in the course via SPIRE

- **If this review and approval process is completed AFTER the add/drop deadline:** approval of your proposal will continue offline and then go to: (1) your academic dean for approval and (2) Registrar’s Office for enrollment

**How do I know the status of my contract?**

You can view the status of your contract(s) by logging into PATHS and looking under the status column. You will also receive automated emails providing you with information at every step of the process.

**How do I know when my contract has been approved?**

You will get an email from us!

**What if I can't find my committee member in the list on CHC PATHS?**

CHC PATHS uses a smart search feature to help students find their faculty member in the list. Trying searching by the faculty member's last name or first name or email address. All UMass Amherst and Five College faculty should be in the list already. If your committee member's name does not appear in the system, complete the rest of the contract and select 'SAVE' to save your work. Then contact Roland Packard (Course Registrar) at rpackard@honors.umass.edu or (413) 545-0136 to provide the committee member's name and email and to request that they are added to the list.

**What happens when a faculty reviewer rejects the proposal or requests significant revisions before approving it?**

To request that the student make revisions, the faculty reviewer enters comments and clicks ‘Return to Student.’ The student is then expected to make the requested changes in consultation with the chairperson. The student then resubmits the same contract (with revisions) and the approval process restarts.

**What do I do if the faculty member has not reviewed or approved my contract in a timely manner?**

Automated reminders are sent to the faculty member, but students are encouraged to respectfully remind committee members to read and approve contracts. As part of the contract, students should be in regular communication with the faculty member.

**What should I do if one of my committee members has lost or not received an email about approving a contract via PATHS?**

The faculty member can login to CHC PATHS at any time and review all contracts associated with their account. Remind the faculty member than an email prompt is not required to read and approve a contract.
What do I do if I need the thesis or independent study credit in order to reach 12 credits?

If, on the contract form, a student indicates that the course credits are needed to reach full-time status (12 credits), then the course will receive prioritized enrollment after it is approved. Students who have already submitted a contract but did not indicate that they need to reach 12 credits should login to CHC PATHS, click the ‘Contact Us’ link, and follow the directions to report the issue.

How do I change the number of credits?

Faculty members can login to CHC PATHS, click the 'Contact Us' link, and follow the directions to request that the CHC PATHS system administrator change the number of credits associated with a course contract.

What should I do if I get a ‘Form Available’ error message?

If you receive an error message login to CHC PATHS, click the 'Contact Us' link, and follow the directions to report the issue.

Departmental Honors

Where do I start for Departmental Honors?

Consult the Departmental Honors section of our web site for information about DH tracks. You must have a declared major before you may declare a DH track.

Honors Thesis or Project

Can I choose anyone to serve on my Honors Thesis/Project guidance committee or must I have faculty from my major and the Commonwealth Honors College office?

Please read the Honors Thesis/Project Guidance Committee section on our web site for details regarding committee member criteria.

Can my study abroad coursework count towards my Honors Thesis/Project?

Generally not, unless you specifically negotiate this arrangement in advance with your Independent Honors Thesis/Project guidance committee and the Honors College office.

Honors Thesis or Project: Getting Started

What's the difference between an Honors Thesis/Project Seminar and an individually-contracted Honors Thesis/Project?
The Seminar is faculty-initiated and is offered to a group of students in a traditional classroom setting, with a defined topic and syllabus. Research is conducted in the group environment based upon the instructor's guidance. An individually-contracted Honors Thesis or Project offers the flexibility of an independent study approach, with the student negotiating a topic with an Honors Thesis/Project guidance committee comprised of two faculty members. Individually-contracted Honors Theses/Projects are registered using the 499Y Honors Research (Part I) and 499T/P Honors Thesis/Project (Part II) contracts on our Forms web page.

Students in both options produce a final manuscript which details the goals, methodology and outcomes of their research. For more details, see the Honors Thesis/Project section of our web site.

**How do I go about finding a topic for an individually-contracted Honors Thesis/Project?**

Consider research topics which may improve your preparation for graduation study or particular career fields. Or consider a topic you are passionate or curious about. Another option is to assist a professor with his/her own professional research. We further encourage you to consider research which may benefit others as well as yourself, such as a community service research project.

**How do I find faculty to serve on my individually-contracted Honors Thesis/Project committee?**

A good place to start is to speak to professors you may have had for other coursework and who have an expertise or interest in your topic area. You could also consult various Honors Program Directors for assistance with identifying appropriate faculty.

**Can I choose anyone to serve on my Honors Thesis/Project guidance committee or must I have faculty from my major and the Commonwealth Honors College office?**

Please read the Honors Thesis/Project Guidance Committee section on our web site for details regarding committee member criteria.

**Can I do my Honors Thesis/Project during a summer or winter session, or all in one semester?**

Yes, if you are doing an individually-contracted Honors Thesis or Project and your guidance committee approves your timeframe. Be advised that Continuing Education registration fees will apply for summer and winter session enrollment. Note: Honors Thesis/Project Seminars are generally not available during summer/winter sessions.

**I'm going abroad in my senior year; what are my Honors Thesis or Project options?**
If you are studying abroad for a full year, plan to complete your Honors Thesis or Project in your Junior year. If you will be gone only one semester, you may complete your Honors Thesis or Project during your Junior year or negotiate a one-semester 6-credit Honors Thesis or Project in your Senior year for the semester you will be on the UMass campus.

**If I'm already working in a lab, and wish to continue the research as an individually-contracted Honors Thesis or Project, what do I have to do?**

You must complete an individually-contracted Honors Thesis/Project registration contract (499Y or 499T/P on our **Forms** web page) and attach a proposal for the six credits of additional research you intend to do. You must also establish a faculty guidance committee according to the guidelines in the Honors Thesis/Project section of our web site.

**Can I use my summer lab research for an individually-contracted Honors Thesis/Project if it was not conducted at UMass Amherst?**

If your research was not supervised and graded by a UMass Amherst faculty member, then the likelihood is no. But you should discuss your particular situation with a Commonwealth Honors College advisor.

**How will my Honors Thesis/Project be graded if it's a two-semester option?**

Please review our **CE Grading** web page for the grading options for individually-contracted Honors Theses or Projects as well as Honors Thesis or Project Seminars. (Note: the web page information is directed to faculty).

**Honors Thesis or Project: Formatting**

**Where do I start the page numbering?**

Do not number the title or abstract pages. Begin your numbering on the page following the abstract pages.

**How do I format charts/page numbers/citations/etc. in the main body of my manuscript?**

If your department has a preferred style (MLA, Chicago, Latex, etc.) you may use those guidelines. Alternately our web site describes general **formatting guidelines** which should be followed for the body of your manuscript. OIT's website has additional information and templates for Masters thesis manuscripts which may also be of help to you.

**How do I format the title page and abstract?**
The title and abstract pages must be formatted according to the Commonwealth Honors College formatting guidelines.

Honors Thesis or Project: Finishing Up

Am I supposed to have an oral defense?

If you are enrolled in a individually contracted honors thesis or project, we expect that your committee will require some kind of oral defense. Your committee members should discuss this with you; it may be formal or informal at their discretion. Students enrolled in honors thesis or project seminars (taught in a traditional classroom) will generally be expected to give a formal presentation to their classmates at the conclusion of their research.

My Honors Thesis/Project instructor, chairperson or committee member is unavailable to evaluate my work/sign my paperwork. What should I do?

You should have a discussion with your instructor, chairperson or committee member to negotiate an acceptable solution. In emergency situations, faculty who are not available to sign the title page upon completion of the evaluation and oral defense may email the Honors College office (signatures@honors.umass.edu) authorizing us to sign on their behalf.

I can't complete my Honors Thesis/Project coursework by the final grade deadline. What should I do?

Discuss your situation with your instructor or chairperson & committee member, and alert the Commonwealth Honors College office so we can note it in your file. In extenuating circumstances your professor may grant an INC. If so, we encourage you to provide the Honors College office with a signed "INC" contract which should include:

- Clear description of remaining requirements
- Timeline/deadline for completion of work
- Notation of current grade status prior to completion of work
- Signature of instructor or committee chair & member and student, with the date

See our Honors Thesis/Project Manuscript Submission web page for additional options and details.

Do I have to submit my Honors Thesis or Project materials in person? Can I have my instructor or friend deliver them? Or mail them?

We recommend that you deliver your materials in person since we can immediately review your materials and alert you to any problems that need your attention prior to
your leaving campus. We also recommend that you email yourself a copy of your manuscript prior to submitting your materials to our office. This will facilitate easy retrieval/revision/reprinting here in the office in the event we do discover problems. See our Honors Thesis/Project Manuscript Submission web page for additional options and details.

I won't be able to submit my Honors Thesis/Project materials by the Honors College deadline. Can I turn them in late and still graduate with my class?

Possibly, depending upon the date of submission. See our Honors Thesis/Project Manuscript Submission web page for details regarding late submissions and considerations.

After I've submitted my Honors Thesis/Project materials what happens next?

After final grades have been posted on SPIRE we review your file for honors clearance and notify you and the UG Records office of your honors clearance status. The UG Registrars office will then notify you of your UMass graduation status. Diplomas usually follow within 2 months. Make certain you have an accurate mailing address listed on SPIRE for our use! Please continue to read your @umass.edu email account for a period of about 4 months following graduation in the event any office at UMass is attempting to communicate with you.

Do I have to submit an Honors Thesis or Project manuscript to the Commonwealth Honors College office?

Only if you are seeking a credential of honors "with distinction" upon graduation. To earn one of three levels of distinction, you must also:

- Satisfactorily complete of all Commonwealth Honors College requirements
- Have a minimum 3.400 cumulative GPA
- Have a minimum B+ grade for each of your Honors Thesis/Project courses
- Have a minimum B+ grade for the final assignment for the Honors Thesis/Project Seminar option if you chose the Seminar option

If you receive less than a B+ for any of the grades, you are ineligible for honors "with distinction" and do NOT need to submit a manuscript to the Commonwealth Honors College office.

How long must my Honors Thesis or Project manuscript be?

Manuscripts will vary in length based upon the topic, content, and expectations of your guidance committee. For content guidelines please see our Honors Thesis/Project Manuscript and Formatting web page.

My Honors Project was a film project. What do I submit for archiving in the W.E.B DuBois library?
You are required to submit any "artifact" such as a video, CD, or screenplay along with your Honors Project manuscript if the artifact was the goal of your Honors Project.

Artifacts must be accompanied by a manuscript of at least 5-10 pages. Refer to our Honors Thesis/Project Manuscript and Formatting web page.

**Study Abroad**

Can my study abroad courses count toward Honors College requirements?

Yes, via submission of our "Petition for Exception" form.

Can my study abroad coursework count towards my Honors Thesis/Project?

Generally not, unless you specifically negotiate this arrangement in advance with your Independent Honors Thesis/Project guidance committee and the Honors College office.

**Graduation**

When I put on my graduation cap and gown, which side does my cap tassel go on?

The tassel is placed on your right hand side and is moved to the left after your degree is conferred at the UMass commencement ceremony.

I need to postpone my graduation to take care of outstanding problems (Inc grades, etc). How will you know to clear me for CHC graduation when my problems are all resolved?

We won't know unless you alert us! Please contact us (advisor@honors.umass.edu or 413.545.2483) after you see that SPIRE has recorded all the changes you were awaiting and you are ready for us to resume your honors clearance.

How will I know if I'm all set for Commonwealth Honors College graduation clearance?

You may either meet with an Honors College advisor to review your status or wait to receive our honors clearance status letter a month after your final semester grades are posted on SPIRE. Typical problems which hold up honors clearance include INC, NR or Y grades, GPA < 3.400, unfulfilled Honors College course requirements, or lack of submission of Honors Thesis/Project materials for graduation with honors distinction.

You can help by

- asking your professor(s) to submit missing grades to the Undergraduate
Can I graduate from the University if I haven't finished my Commonwealth Honors College requirements?

Yes, students may receive Latin honors (*cum laude, magna cum laude or summa cum laude*) based upon their final cumulative GPA and college/school class rank. Please see the [UG Registrar's site](https://www.honors.umass.edu/academics-faqs) for further details.