Honors Thesis or Project: Guidance Committee

A number of faculty and staff members help guide every Commonwealth Honors College student's Honors Thesis or Project experience. Their specific roles are defined below.

Honors Thesis or Project Committee
Honors Thesis or Project Committee Chair
Honors Thesis or Project Committee Member(s)
Honors Program Director
Commonwealth Honors College Advisors

The Honors Thesis or Project Committee: In most cases, the committee will consist of two people, a chair and a member (both roles are described in detail below). Before you begin your research, you should meet with both of them to discuss their expectations of you. Faculty members have different ideas about what Honors Thesis/Project research should accomplish. It is best to make their expectations clear by recording a detailed agreement in writing as part of your formal proposal. Your committee will help you develop a proposal, provide feedback during research and writing, and conduct the oral defense. It is up to you and your committee to decide the level of involvement of the faculty members, and it is best to record all decisions in writing as part of the proposal and proposal revisions. While you should have a basic idea of your Honors Thesis or Project topic, it is not necessary to write a definitive proposal before meeting with your committee. In fact, developing the proposal with your committee clarifies everybody’s interests and expectations before the research begins. This process is beneficial because it further safeguards against later misunderstandings.

If you are not sure who to ask to be on your committee, speak with the Honors Program Director and/or the chief undergraduate advisor of your department and ask which faculty members have chaired committees in the past, who has interests similar to yours, and so on. Once you have a chair, he or she can suggest colleagues who might be willing to serve as the other committee member. Honors Program Directors from other departments may also be able to provide suggestions for potential members from their departments.

Guidelines for Committee Constituents

- Commonwealth Honors College with Departmental Honors:
Chair: Departmental Faculty  
Member(s): Faculty member(s) [determined by department]

- Commonwealth Honors College with Interdisciplinary Honors:  
  Chair: Faculty in 1st Expertise Area  
  Member: Faculty in 2nd Expertise Area

The Honors Thesis or Project Committee Chair: This is the faculty member with whom a Commonwealth Honors College student undertaking an Honors Thesis or Project works most closely. Once you have selected a chair, it is a good idea to set up regular meetings to keep him or her informed of your progress and discuss any existing or potential problems. Ordinarily, chairs of departmental honors committees should be from the department in which the research track is based. Interdisciplinary honors research may be chaired by a faculty member from a related department at any of the five colleges. The chair you choose should be an expert in the area of your research and someone with whom you have had previous experience, perhaps through a class or an honors independent study. In consultation with the committee, the chair determines the appropriate grade for the completed research at the oral defense. The chair has, however, a slightly more weighted vote on the research committee and submits the grade through the proper departmental and honors channels. Some students have co-chairs who share guidance responsibility equally. In this case, the faculty member who signs on the chair line of the registration forms will be considered the primary chair for the purposes of grading and the routing of forms and information. Committees with co-chairs should negotiate responsibilities and roles within the committee.

Honors Thesis or Project Committee Member(s): In addition to the committee chair, there is at least one other committee member. Committee members are usually faculty from the student’s major department or one of the five colleges. While some departments put additional restrictions on who may serve as committee members, with approval from the chair and Commonwealth Honors College, committee members may be from universities outside the Five College system or may be professionals in related fields. For the Departmental Honors track, the Honors Program Director must also approve your choice. In general, only one committee member in addition to the chair is required, but some departments may require a three-person committee. The committee member is responsible for assisting the student with research and being present for the oral defense. He or she might play significant roles at particular points in the research process (e.g., assistance with statistics or reference resources).

Many students select a committee from professors they have had in a class, independent study course, or practicum. Because you will probably speak to several faculty members before making a decision, it is also not unusual to work with a faculty member that you may not know well at the outset, but whose expertise is in the field you wish to study. It is important to either choose someone who shares a passion for your topic or someone with whom you work well and would like to apprentice.

Honors Program Director: The member of a department who oversees the student’s Departmental Honors (HN-CCDEPT) track progress. The Honors Program Director must admit students to the Departmental Honors track (with a Change of Major form) and approve all departmental honors research, proposals, and courses. Regular meetings with this individual ensure that Departmental Honors students remain on track to graduate with Departmental Honors credentials.
Commonwealth Honors College Advisors: Commonwealth Honors College advisors assist students pursuing research in interdisciplinary honors and departmental honors tracks. Honors College advisors review and approve interdisciplinary honors proposals with the input of departmental faculty advisors. All students pursuing research should consult Honors College advisors regularly to ensure that graduation and research requirements are being met. Honors College advisors assist with the process of rather than the content of the research (e.g., they may suggest outside committee members, help a student strategize, explain necessary forms, procedures, and deadlines, and so on).

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