

Senior Honors Thesis Guidelines

Before Senior Year – Recommended Preparation

During the spring semester of junior year, students are encouraged to discuss the possibility of completing a senior thesis and potential thesis projects with a faculty mentor who has expertise in their area of interest. At the end of the spring semester of their junior year or during the summer before their senior year, thesis students with the guidance of their research mentor should develop a broad research plan.

Candidates for honors must have by graduation a cumulative GPA of 3.00 and a GPA of 3.20 within their honors department.

Fall Semester of Senior Year

The student should enroll in Thesis (ENVS 495 or EVST 495). At the start of the semester, the student and research mentor will develop a thesis syllabus that contains a statement of objectives as well as a general thesis timeline and a list of major tasks for completing the necessary elements of a senior thesis. Early in the fall semester, the student in consultation with their research mentor should form a thesis committee. The committee should consist of the student's research mentor and two other faculty. All three committee members cannot be from the same academic department. At least one committee member must be on the environmental advisory committee. One of the committee members can be someone external to the College who possesses relevant expertise. Students should expect to meet regularly (~ weekly) with their research advisor. They should also periodically check in with the other members of their thesis committee about their progress.

Thesis activities should proceed in general accordance with the thesis timeline agreed upon during the first few weeks of the semester. Generally, early in the fall semester students will work on collecting data as well as a review of relevant scholarly literature. By the end of fall semester, students pursuing thesis in environmental science should produce for evaluation by their research committee a draft of their introduction, methods, and preliminary results sections, including relevant figures and references (~10-15 pages including figures and references). For environmental studies thesis projects, a detailed outline and minimum of 20-30 pages are normally expected. At the end of fall semester, all students pursuing theses in environmental science or studies will be required to give an overview presentation of their thesis to the thesis committee, and interested faculty and students. The presentation will entail an explanation of the motivation for their study citing relevant scholarly literature, a description of the methods they have employed and/or intend to employ, and any initial results they have obtained. Presentations should be ~10-15 minutes in duration and will be followed by a question and answer period. The thesis advisor in consultation with the thesis committee will evaluate the student's progress and make a recommendation about whether or not the student should continue the thesis during spring semester.

If data collection during the fall semester was delayed or proceeded more slowly than initially anticipated, students should be prepared to return to campus during interim session to make additional progress on their projects. Similarly, for thesis projects oriented towards humanities and/or the social sciences, research and writing during interim may be required.

Spring Semester

If the thesis committee makes a positive recommendation at the end of fall semester, at the start of spring semester the thesis student should enroll in Thesis (ENVS 496 or EVST 496). The thesis student and research mentor must complete and submit a Notice of Graduation with Departmental Honors form to the Academic Progress Committee by the end of the second week of classes spring semester.

During the early part of spring semester, environmental science students should anticipate completing the data collection phase of their thesis and devoting significant time to data analysis and interpretation. Thesis projects in environmental studies will move from research to writing at this time. Thesis students must submit a final thesis draft to their thesis committee no later than one week before their final thesis presentation. Typically, the student will have submitted and received comments from their thesis advisor on each section of the thesis draft multiple times before the submission of this final draft to their committee.

No later than the middle of finals week in the spring semester, thesis students will give a final thesis presentation sharing the results of their work with their committee, interested faculty and students, and any other guests who wish to attend. Students should prepare a ~30 minute presentation suitable for a general audience. The presentation will be followed by a questions and answer period open to all attendees, which is then followed by a closed-door question and answer session with thesis committee members. After this session, the honors thesis committee will judge the quality of the thesis determining whether or not honors will be awarded and then inform the student of their determination. At this time, committee members will make any recommendations for revisions to the text of the thesis. The research mentor will submit a completed "approval of thesis" form to the Academic Progress Committee after the senior thesis presentation. Before the end of finals week, a final revised copy of the thesis with signatures of the thesis committee members should be submitted to the research mentor and to the program chair.