

Frequently Asked Questions about Graduating with Honors at the University of Colorado Boulder

If you are pursuing Departmental Honors, we recommend that you contact your Honors Council Representative first; they will know the specifics of what your department requires. The most current list of Honors Council Representatives is available on the Honors Program website (colorado.edu/honors/graduation).

For General Honors questions, such as finding out what General Honors requirement a specific course fulfills, stop by the Honors Program Office or email us at honors@colorado.edu.

Who is qualified to do an Honors thesis? The Honors Program requires that a student wishing to graduate with Honors have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.3 for Departmental Honors and a 3.5 for General Honors. There is some variation among departments but no department has a requirement below 3.3. Some departments also have specific course requirements. If you are uncertain about your department's requirements, including GPA, check with your department's Honors Council Representative. Students who have already earned a bachelor's degree from CU or any other institution are not eligible. This includes students who have graduated in one major and are finishing a second major.

Is it really worth it to do a thesis? Will the graduate schools I apply to care? When the Honors Program did its self-study, we learned that the process of graduating with Honors at CU-Boulder is among the most intensive in the nation among peer institutes. The thesis is modeled directly after a Master's thesis, as is the defense. However, the schools you apply to may not be aware of the rigor of CU-Boulder's thesis experience, so we recommend that you have your thesis advisor write a letter of recommendation for you that describes the process.

If I do a thesis, am I guaranteed to graduate with Honors? Although this rarely happens, there are the occasional candidates who write their thesis, defend it and still do not graduate with Honors. These candidates usually fall into one of two categories: students whose GPAs were really too low for them to earn Honors anyway, but were encouraged to write a thesis purely for the learning experience; and students who had the GPA requirement but did poorly in their defense/thesis. The decision to do a thesis is a serious one, and the thesis must be of very high quality to warrant Honors.

Can I graduate with Honors without doing a thesis? No. However, you may be able to graduate with Distinction, which is based on GPA. Check with the College of Arts and Sciences for more details.

What are the GPA requirements for graduating *cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, and *summa cum laude*? Students should understand that grades do not singularly determine the levels of Honors you are awarded. However, there are guidelines.

- Students with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.3 are qualified to be considered for Honors, *cum laude*
- Students with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.5 are qualified to be considered for Honors, *magna cum laude*
- Students with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.8 are qualified to be considered for Honors, *summa cum laude*

While the above guidelines qualify you for consideration for a given level of Honors, the level you earn is based on the quality of your thesis and thesis defense. Grades do not solely determine your level of Honors. If warranted by the quality of the theses and thesis defense, a committee may recommend you for an Honors designation one level higher than the guidelines suggest.

How long are Honors theses? Anywhere between 10 and 150 pages long – it really varies that much. What is important is the content, not the length.

May I write a thesis in a minor? To pursue Honors in a minor, you must have written approval by both your major and minor departments.

I am a distributed studies student. Can I write an Honors thesis? Students graduating with a distributed studies degree may pursue General Honors or they may select an appropriate topic in one of their participating departments (contingent on departmental approval). The Honors designation would be attached to the distributed studies degree.

I am a double major. Can I submit the same thesis for both degrees? No. That said, something you should consider is that students pursuing double majors or double degrees must complete the Honors process and defend their thesis at the time their first major and first degree is awarded.

What are the advantages to doing a General Honors thesis over a Departmental Honors thesis and vice versa?

There is an important difference between General Honors and Departmental Honors theses. The Departmental Honors thesis is designed to demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct original creative research within the boundaries of the candidate's discipline. General Honors research is designed to demonstrate the candidate's ability to either conduct research of a broad interdisciplinary nature or to allow the candidate to conduct cross-disciplinary research beyond the bounds of the major. Which one you decide to do is entirely up to you. Some people value the experience of making connections across disciplines, and some people prefer to demonstrate their command of a particular subject area. Which type of thesis will look better on a graduate school application is debatable. You can also elect to do both a General Honors thesis and a Departmental thesis, which would demonstrate your abilities in both areas.

What are the requirements to pursue General Honors?

Most importantly:

- Students in the College of Arts and Sciences *must* meet with the Honors Program Director for thesis approval.
- Students outside of the College of Arts and Sciences must have their proposal for General Honors research reviewed and approved by a General Honors faculty member of the Honors Council.

Additional requirements:

- Candidates for General Honors must have at least a 3.5 cumulative GPA at the time they apply to graduate with Honors.
- Candidates must complete at least 12 hours of General Honors courses with a grade of A or B. This coursework must include one course from each area of the General Honors core: Humanities, Social Science, Natural Science, and a Senior Seminar course. The Honors Program determines which Honors courses fulfill these areas; visit the office for assistance.
- Students may receive course credit for their General Honors thesis work by taking HONR 4959. See the Honors Program Office for details.

I took Honors courses at another school – can I use them to fulfill General Honors core requirements? You cannot use Honors courses taken at another school to fulfill General Honors core requirements. Since you only have to take four different General Honors courses to fulfill the requirements, the burden shouldn't be too great. Your major department may allow you to use transfer credits to fulfill some of their requirements. Check with your department's Honors Council Representative to find out.

When should I start working on my Honors thesis? Typically the thesis involves concentrated work over a five or six-month period and reports original research or creative work. Seniors intending to graduate in the spring should start making plans and discussing those plans with their primary advisor by the beginning of the fall term prior to graduation. Likewise, fall graduates should begin their work in the spring prior to the semester they graduate.

Can I graduate with Honors in the summer? Yes, you can, but you must finish your thesis and defense according to the Spring deadlines. The Honors Council does not meet in the summer; if you do not defend by the Spring deadlines, they will not be able to vote on your level of Honors until the following December. If you do meet the Spring deadlines but decide to graduate in the summer, let the Honors Program Office know so we can make sure that your Honors designation is properly noted on the summer graduation program.

My research requires funding. How can I apply for assistance? Honors candidates are urged to look into the possibilities for participation in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP). Under this program a student and a faculty member may submit a proposal for partial funding of a research project. The UROP office is located in Norlin Room S430, phone 303-492-2596.

The Registration to Graduate with Honors form calls for a prospectus, bibliography and timeline. How complete do these have to be? These are required so we can see that you've given your topic some thought. We recommend that the summary be as detailed as possible while maintaining brevity. We recommend that your timeline include when you intend to complete primary research, dates that drafts will be completed and times that you can discuss these drafts with your advisor. We hope that this process will help you develop realistic deadlines for yourself and time the workload more efficiently. The bibliography doesn't need to be complete; what we require are at least a few initial sources for your research.

Is it possible for me to look at past theses in my field to see what sorts of things previous Honors graduates did? Yes. The Honors Program Office keeps theses on file. Visit the office to fill out a request form; it usually takes 1-2 days to fulfill requests, and you will be notified via email when your request is ready to view. Theses are viewable in the Honors Program Office only. If you are looking for a specific thesis, we need to know their name and when they graduated. With specific requests, we may be able to find the thesis but be prepared for the possibility that we can't.

When should I set up my committee? The best option is to set up your committee as soon as you start working on your thesis so that you can get ongoing input from your committee members as well as your advisor. Your committee members should be faculty members with an interest in or knowledge of your topic. They may not be able to put in as much time as your main advisor, but may also be able to give you some guidance. Failing that, your defense committee should be set up at least three weeks before you are set to defend. You need to have time to set up and confirm with each member a specific time and date for your defense and you need to find out how much time they will require to review your thesis before the defense. Some committee members require a copy of the thesis as much as two weeks before the defense date. Don't expect them to read your thesis the night before or the morning of your defense.

How should I go about choosing people to be on my defense committee? The best way to start is to contact any professors you have had that have an interest in your thesis subject area. You should also talk to your thesis advisor to see if they have anyone that they can recommend.

How do I schedule my defense? Departmental Honors candidates should contact the staff in their department to determine if the department has a room that you can use. General Honors candidates can schedule their defense with the Honors Program Office. If no other room can be arranged, Norlin Library has study rooms that can be reserved. Check their website or contact Circulation (303-492-7477). The UMC (303-492-8833) may also have space available.

Who needs to be on my defense committee? You must have at least three faculty members on your committee. One of these people must be on the Honors Council, and one of them must be from outside your department. After you meet these requirements, you can have any additional members you want. If you are writing a General Honors thesis, you must have at least one member of the General Honors faculty on your committee. If you do not have a specific person in mind, the Honors Program Director will assign someone to you. This person will also function as a co-advisor, whose main job will be to make sure you are doing a clearly interdisciplinary thesis.

What do committees look for in the oral defense? While each committee is different, things that are often commented upon are your ability to make connections between your thesis and situations posed by committee members and the thoroughness of your grasp of your topic. Your committee will want to see you demonstrate the sort of comfort level with your topic that comes from truly understanding the concepts you set forth in your thesis. Show them that you take your subject seriously, and that you learned something.

If I turned in the Registration to Graduate with Honors form in the spring (fall) and find out that I am not graduating until the fall (spring), should I let the Honors Program Office know? Yes. Otherwise, your materials will be placed in the Abandoned Theses file with all of the other people who just never come back.

What role should my advisor play in my thesis project? Your advisor should help you find focus for your thesis. Use them to make sure that you are staying focused on your topic, to strengthen weak areas of your thesis, and for general advice. They should be able to help you define your goals in writing an Honors thesis and help you to achieve that goal. Are you writing this paper to publish your research, refine your skills, demonstrate your knowledge of a particular subject, or to more deeply study a topic or concept? Your advisor should help you determine how to achieve that goal.

What is the required format for the Honors thesis? Because the College of Arts and Sciences covers many departments the Honors Program does not set many requirements for the thesis format. Students pursuing Departmental Honors should check with their department's Honors Council Representative for departmental format requirements.

That said, the Honors Program has the following requirements for the thesis format:

- The archival (final) copy of your thesis must be Velobound. ***Spiral-bound theses will not be accepted.*** Velobinding is a service offered by the UMC Copy Center (the Ink Spot). Please be aware that off-campus copy centers often do not offer Velobinding.
- A title page and one-page abstract:
 - The title page must include: the title of your thesis, your name, the date, and the names and departments of your thesis advisor and committee members. The title on the archival copy of your thesis is the title which will be used on the Honors Convocation program and in the University of Colorado archives, so make sure you're happy with it. Note that the title must conform to MLA rules for capitalization. For information about MLA rules, go to the Writing Center or visit Purdue's MLA Formatting and Style Guide: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>
 - The abstract should be 100-250 words and should address the following: Why did you undertake this study or project? What did you do and how? What did you find? What do your findings mean?

How are designations decided? There are several different steps to deciding the level of Honors (if any) a candidate will receive. The first step, of course, is maintaining a GPA of generally 3.3 or better. The second step is writing a quality Honors thesis and successfully defending your thesis before your committee. While you may turn in an archival (final) copy of your thesis, with corrections, to the Honors Program Office after you defend, the copy of the thesis that the committee sees on your defense day – the defense copy – is the copy on which they will base their recommendation. After you have completed your oral defense, your committee makes its recommendation to the Honors Council. The Honors Council then considers each candidate individually. The Honors Council is made up of representatives from each department that participates in the Honors Program (in other words, all departments in the College of Arts and Sciences, plus the School of Engineering and the School of Business). Honors designations (*cum laude*, *magna cum laude* and *summa cum laude*) are recognized by a certificate, an Honors medal, are noted in the graduation program, and are indicated as Honors on the diploma.

What if I have more questions? Check with your thesis advisor or Honors Council Representative first. If they can't answer your questions, please feel free to stop by the Honors Program Office anytime.