

# Political Science Program Undergraduate Honours Thesis Handbook

University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT)

Faculty of Social Science and Humanities

55 Bond Street East

Oshawa, Ont. L1G 0A5

Canada

T: 905.721.3234

F: 905.721.3372

E: [sshadvising@uoit.ca](mailto:sshadvising@uoit.ca)

[www.socialscienceandhumanities.uoit.ca](http://www.socialscienceandhumanities.uoit.ca)

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## ACADEMIC ADVISING

The academic advising office provides an important point of contact for students and faculty regarding timelines, required forms, and other administrative details

### Contact

Bordessa Hall, Room 403  
905.721.8668 ext. 3838  
[sshadvising@uoit.ca](mailto:sshadvising@uoit.ca)

<http://www.uoit.ca/main/current-students/academics/academic-advising/index.php>

<http://socialscienceandhumanities.uoit.ca/people/academic-advisors.php>

<http://socialscienceandhumanities.uoit.ca/undergraduate/programs/community-development-policy-studies/index.php>

## UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS THESIS OVERVIEW

### What is an Honours Thesis?

An Honours Thesis is an undergraduate student's first significant piece of independent scholarly research. The student is responsible for seeing this entire research process through from start to finish with guidance from the Thesis Supervisor (hereafter, "TS"). The Honours Thesis articulates a research question and/or a hypothesis and describes why it is important to answer the question or test the hypothesis. It outlines the methods to be used to measure concepts and how the data will be collected to answer the research question posed. The thesis may involve collection of original data, reanalysis of secondary data, or library research to provide new insights about a problem.

Both empirical and conceptual/theoretical projects require extended research designed to satisfy students' intellectual curiosity, develop their research, argumentation, and writing skills, and advance knowledge in a specific academic area of study. Although length varies, an undergraduate Honours Thesis in the Political Science Program shall meet the following in order to fulfill the requirements: *"A manuscript that is thoroughly researched, well written, consistently and carefully formatted, which shows sufficient evidence of synthesis, integration, and originality in the analysis. The thesis should also point to future research and, possibly, lay out a research agenda that the student may wish to pursue further in graduate school."* In addition, students are required to present their completed project as a poster in the Honours Thesis showcase.

### Honours Thesis Topic

During the third year of study, undergraduate students considering undertaking an honours thesis should begin thinking about potential topics. By the end of the third year, students can apply for the honours thesis. You will need a focused research topic or question or testable research hypothesis.

Although some level of "original research" involving data collection and analysis or a critical review of the literature about a problem which advances the literature on a selected topic is

expected, *realistic expectations* should be maintained—knowledge accumulates incrementally with only occasional leaps, and the thesis should offer an incremental contribution to the topic and the literature the student has selected.

Before undertaking an Honours Thesis, a student should consider:

- **General Interests:** What are you most interested in?
- **Research Interests:** Consider your general interests in the context of your coursework and your general interests. How might your discipline guide you towards a particular area of research?
- **Goals:** What do you hope to get out of your undergraduate research experience? If your primary goal is to publish a journal article, present at a professional conference, or prepare for graduate school, make your goal clearly known to a potential supervisor.
- **Weaknesses:** What are your weaknesses as a student? Is the nature of your weakness academic or general discipline? Consider what you need most out of a mentor and consider how you might rank the various criteria listed in the section below. Be aware that conducting research and writing an extended paper requires self-discipline and strong organizational skills. If you do not enjoy conducting research and writing essays, an honours thesis may not be right for you.

### Research Ethics Approval

All research involving human or animal subjects must receive Research Ethics Board (REB) approval before proceeding. Approval requires completion and submission of the REB Application for Ethical Review. The review process can take several weeks so it is important to plan accordingly. For information about research ethics and the approval process see: <http://research.uoit.ca/faculty/ethics-safety-research-conduct/research-involving-human-participants/index.php>.

### UOIT Academic Integrity Policy and Turnitin

Academic Integrity is treated very seriously at UOIT. It is *your responsibility* to understand what this means and to be diligent in ensuring your writing is properly paraphrased, quoted, cited and referenced. Further information about Academic Integrity and Turnitin can be found on the Academic Integrity link on the UOIT website: <http://academicintegrity.uoit.ca>

### Components of the Thesis

Roughly speaking, the thesis will include similar components to a standard research article. Depending on the type of research being done, the body of the thesis may include the following sections:

- (1) **Introduction:** This section will include a brief statement of the problem and its significance. Students must clearly define a research question, an argument, or a hypothesis to be tested. This is where you will tell the reader why your topic, research and argument matters and who should care about. In other words, answer the questions: So what? and Who cares?
- (2) **Review of the Literature/Theoretical Framework:** This section summarizes the existing body of knowledge on a given topic, and provides a critique of the literature in its broader scholarly context so that the student's current work is logically justified.

- (3) **Methodology:** This section articulates in detail the methods used to collect data, such as: the sample, the measures, the data collection technique, the theoretical foundations or framework, and so on.
- (4) **Results:** This section includes a report of the findings of the data collection process, relevant tables and figures. This section may not be necessary if your research uses primarily secondary sources. Sometimes, the findings and discussion are intertwined to create a coherent and logical narrative that supports your argument and answers your research question(s).
- (5) **Discussion:** Your discussion provides a narrative of what your results mean and what implications come out of your findings.
- (6) **Conclusions:** This section provides an overview of your results and what they mean, the limitations of the results, what your conclusion is, and possible avenues for future research.
- (7) **Front matter** (e.g., Title page, Abstract, Table of Contents) and **back matter** (e.g., references, tables, appendices, glossary).

## UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS THESIS ADMISSION

In order to be considered for Honours Thesis I, students must have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.7 and must apply during their sixth semester (i.e., the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> year) to begin their Honours Thesis I in semester seven (the start of 4<sup>th</sup> year). The application must include a detailed statement of intent outlining the topic and research question, methodology, theoretical significance and the projected timelines for completion of the project. To proceed to Honours Thesis II, a student must have successfully completed Honours Thesis I with a minimum grade of A- and have prepared a written statement outlining the projected timelines for completion of the project.

**Please note:** only a limited number of applicants will be admitted to the Honours Thesis. Students must meet the minimum GPA requirement of 3.7, as stipulated in the UOIT Undergraduate Academic Calendar and Course Catalogue (see <http://www.uoit.ca/main/current-students/academics/academic-calendars/index.php>). Consent is required from the instructor who will act as Thesis Supervisor and the Dean or Dean's representative.

### Project Proposal (to be submitted along with Honours Thesis Application)

Students who meet the admission requirements must submit a short project proposal to a potential thesis supervisor at the end of the third year. The project proposal, which is about 1 to 2 pages long, should accomplish the following:

- (1) identify the topic of study and a tentative research question/thesis;
- (2) provide 2 or 3 key sources to start the research; and,
- (3) identify the research method to be used (e.g., quantitative or qualitative or mixed methods).

## Honours Thesis I

During the fall semester of a student's fourth year in the program, the student will complete the work required to proceed to the data collection stage. At the first meeting with the thesis supervisor, a schedule of meetings and progress reports will be agreed upon. The main goal of the work for this term is to conduct a review of the literature and to prepare for data collection (if applicable) and analysis of the data and literature. Depending on the nature of the proposed topic and methodology, the literature review will be approximately 10-15 pages, excluding references, and should contain the following:

- 1) a review of the literature related to topic;
- 2) a critique of the literature (e.g., conceptual, methodological);
- 3) a clear set of objectives and/or rationale for proposed study; and,
- 4) a detailed explanation of the methodology.

## Honours Thesis II

In the Winter semester of 4<sup>th</sup> year, after successfully completing Honours Thesis I with a grade of A-, the student will undertake Honours Thesis II. By the end of the Winter term, the student will have completed the research and writing of the honours thesis.

## Tips on Thesis Quality and Thesis Completion

The Honours Thesis showcases students' intellectual development and must involve a substantial amount of research and writing. **The completed thesis must be submitted at least three weeks before the end of the winter term.**

1. Decide on a topic and stick to it. The student must have at least a tentative idea of what it is that s/he wants to write about.
2. Find a thesis supervisor who is interested in the same area of research as the student, and whose personality and working style parallels your own.
3. Meet regularly with your thesis supervisor. To ensure timely completion of all stages of the honours thesis, regular meetings and careful time management are necessary.
4. Submit drafts of the thesis to the TS, who shall return the student's draft with comments and feedback. Allow 2-4 weeks for comments to be returned to you.
5. Expect to complete 3-5 drafts of the thesis. Students are "finished" with their honours thesis only when the final document meets the scholarly requirements of an honours thesis.

NOTE: Students should not submit a first draft of a thesis paper in late March or early April and expect to graduate in June. If a student expects to graduate in June, then the final version of the thesis ought to be in final form before or near the graduation filing deadline specified by the Academic Calendar.

## HONOURS THESIS PROGRESSION TIMELINE

<b>Fall/Winter (3<sup>rd</sup> year)</b>	
<p><b>Semester #6:</b> Submit application to Academic Advising no later than 30 June (end of 3<sup>rd</sup> year) The application requires you to have a thesis supervisor who has agreed to supervise your thesis. Do this by 30 May.</p> <p><b>Before</b> the Fall (semester #7) begins, student should do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with thesis supervisor (TS);</li> <li>• Narrow down a potential topic;</li> <li>• Develop a reading list;</li> <li>• Begin background reading on topic; and,</li> <li>• Formulate a tentative research question</li> </ul>	
<b>Fall (4<sup>th</sup> year)</b>	<b>Winter (4<sup>th</sup> year)</b>
<p><b>Semester #7:</b> Honours Thesis I (beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> year)</p> <p><b>Benchmarks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• September: Must meet with TS to discuss research project, expectations, and decide on a regular meeting schedule;</li> <li>• Initiate research program (e.g., collect, read, and complete relevant literature and review; define research question, etc.);</li> <li>• Develop, refine, complete, and defend research proposal; TS approves student's research proposal and documents approval on progress report;</li> <li>• Submit REB application and obtain approval (if necessary);</li> <li>• Begin data collection;</li> <li>• Provide TS with (at least) monthly updates/progress reports;</li> <li>• Complete and submit a literature review and/or annotated bibliography and/or outline of thesis.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Semester # 8:</b> Honours Thesis II (end of 4<sup>th</sup> year)</p> <p><b>Benchmarks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete data collection/analysis;</li> <li>• Begin writing;</li> <li>• Submit numerous drafts to TS;</li> <li>• Student finalizes thesis (by mid-March);</li> <li>• Submit final draft to TS;</li> <li>• Submit final PDF copy to advising office;</li> <li>• Present work in Honours Thesis showcase.</li> </ul>

## STUDENT SUPERVISION

Each undergraduate honours thesis student has a Thesis Supervisor (TS) who provides guidance throughout the duration of the honours thesis process. The job of the TS is to advise the student on research-related matters.

### Thesis Supervisor (“TS”) selection process

The TS must be a full-time faculty member (and not a part-time, sessional instructor). After identifying a potential TS whose area of research and topic is consistent with the student's own interests, the student should contact the instructor and determine if s/he is willing to supervise a

student. Students should keep in mind that a potential TS should be selected carefully since it is difficult to change a supervisor once a student begins his/her thesis project.

- Do you get along with the faculty member? Do you share similar philosophical approaches to research and understanding of your topic?
- Ask other students about their experiences with different faculty members.
- Remember that faculty members are not obligated to say “yes” to your request.

### Shared Supervisor-Student Responsibilities

- a) Work together to plan a suitable, timely and manageable research topic;
- b) Cooperate with each other to have regular meetings, at least once a week or once a month, to evaluate progress;
- c) Foster a research environment that is safe, healthy, tolerant and free from harassment, discrimination and conflict for all involved;
- d) Endeavour to achieve consensus and resolve differences in the best interests of all involved;
- e) Be reasonably available for meetings to discuss the program of study, as well as any academic concerns.

### Thesis Supervisor responsibilities

The TS is normally a member of the student’s home program. The main responsibilities of the TS include the following:

- a) Being sufficiently familiar with the field of research to provide guidance to a student;
- b) Being accessible to the student for consultation and discussion of progress and research;
- c) Responding in a timely, consistent and thorough manner to written work submitted by the student, with constructive and well-informed suggestions for improvement and continuation;
- d) Acknowledging the contributions of the student in presentations and published material (in many cases, via joint authorship);
- e) Being sensitive to cultural factors which may influence the individual student’s learning and research behaviour and experience;
- f) Making arrangements for continuity of the student’s supervision before beginning an extended leave of absence;
- g) Monitoring the student’s academic progress;

### Student responsibilities

Student responsibilities include the following:

- a) Making a commitment to completing the thesis and showing substantial effort, initiative and dedication to gain the background knowledge and skills needed to pursue the research project successfully;
- b) Commit to meeting deadlines;
- c) Meeting regularly with the thesis supervisor and reporting on progress and results;
- d) Adhering to the standards of research ethics, health and safety, and respecting the requirements of academic integrity, honesty and professionalism. (This includes, but is not limited to, acknowledging and crediting any source of ideas, assistance, materials and/or data provided by others.);

- e) Responding in a timely and thorough manner to feedback provided by the thesis supervisor;
- f) Responding in a timely manner to communication requests via e-mail, phone, or in-person. In other words, check your email and respond to messages.

### Student-Thesis Supervisor Conflicts

The first step must be to attempt to resolve the conflict informally between the student and thesis supervisor. If the matter can't be resolved, the undergraduate program director will act as a mediator if and when needed. A student who believes the conflict has not been resolved should contact the office of the Dean of the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities.

### Regular meetings

Students and the TS are expected to meet regularly. At a minimum, the TS and student should meet at least once a month; however, frequent regular (weekly or bi-weekly) meetings are encouraged. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss the student's problems and progress in the thesis, to help resolve difficulties, and to determine next steps in the research process. Regular meetings help to keep the student on schedule in completing the research and writing.

### End-of-term Progress Report

At the end of every term, the TS shall fill out a Student Progress Report. The completed forms should be sent to Academic Advising for recordkeeping purposes.