GEOG 799
Honors Thesis

Purpose

The honors thesis is intended to provide undergraduates the opportunity to complete a substantial research project under the direction of a faculty member culminating in a written thesis. It is required of all honors students. Only honors students are eligible to enroll in the course.

Preparation

Students planning to do a thesis must first identify a faculty member with whom they wish to work and obtain written approval that he or she is willing to act as sponsor. This should be done well in advance of the semester in which the student plans to enroll in the course.

Once a faculty sponsor has been secured, the student should work with the advisor to choose a topic. Normally, the student will propose a topic. Students should begin thinking about possible topics at least one year before enrolling in GEOG 799. The topic should be in a subject area about which the faculty sponsor has sufficient knowledge to satisfactorily advise the student. The sponsor will provide the student comments about possible topics and suggestions for revising potential topics.

The process of deciding on a topic that is agreeable to both student and faculty sponsor takes time. Students may want to consider enrolling in GEOG 795, Special Project, in the semester before they enroll in GEOG 799 in order to explore possible topics, consider research methodologies, and begin their research. Many students may find a single semester is too little time to produce a quality thesis.

Once the student and their faculty sponsor have agreed on a thesis topic, the student must complete an honors thesis student/sponsor agreement, available from the university Honors Program. The agreement must be signed by the sponsor, student, and Department of Geography honors liaison. The original form should be filed with the Honors Program and a copy should be provided to the Department of Geography. Only then will the student be permitted to register for GEOG 799.

In the semester before enrolling in GEOG 799, the student should also prepare a brief project proposal in which they explain their topic in greater depth, justify why it is worth doing, identify themes they plan to explore, and describe the kinds of research methods and source materials they intend to use. They should meet with their faculty sponsor to discuss the proposal and revise the proposal based on that discussion.

Funding for thesis research is available on a competitive basis from UNH’s Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program and International Research Opportunities Program. Information on those programs is available from the Hamel
Center for Undergraduate Research. The Hamel Center also offers grants of up to $150 to support honors thesis research.

Students may wish to consult past theses as they consider topics and pursue their research. Theses completed as part of the Honors Program are available in Milne Special Collections & Archives, Dimond Library.

All research proposing to involve human subjects must be reviewed and receive approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board before commencing. For more information, see http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html

Research and writing

The honors thesis is an independent project and most of the work required will be carried out by the student on their own. A thesis is a major undertaking and a student must show strong initiative and responsibility in order to successfully complete such a project. The faculty sponsor is not expected to badger the student to complete necessary tasks in a timely manner.

The student should meet regularly with their faculty sponsor throughout the semester to discuss their progress and seek input. Early in the semester in which the student is enrolled in GEOG 799, if not sooner, the student and faculty sponsor should establish a timetable by which individual stages in the project will be completed. A sample timetable is provided below. The specific plan will depend on the nature of the topic and the research proposed. At each stage in the process, the student should provide copies of their work to the faculty sponsor for comment and suggestions.

The student is expected to submit a draft of their thesis to the faculty sponsor several weeks before the end of the semester so that the sponsor can read the draft and provide comments. The student is expected to revise the draft based on the sponsor’s comments and submit a revised draft to the sponsor no later than the last day of classes. If the sponsor judges the revised draft unsatisfactory, the student will be required to make additional revisions before the thesis will be accepted.

Finished product

The thesis should be a substantial work of scholarship based on original research. The length of the thesis will depend on the nature of the topic and the research required. Past theses completed in the Department of Geography have ranged from 40 to 75 pages, excluding citations and other supplementary materials. The student and faculty sponsor should agree on an expected length early in the research process.

The final thesis should be prepared in a professional manner. It should include a separate title page that identifies the student, faculty sponsor, and the date the thesis is submitted. It should include a table of contents and separate lists of
figures and tables. The main body of the manuscript should be double spaced and all pages should be numbered. Illustrations should be high in quality and inserted where most appropriate in the manuscript. Sources should be cited using a widely accepted citation method agreed upon by the student and faculty sponsor.

Copies of the approved thesis must be provided to the Honors Program and the Department of Geography.

Presentation of work

Prior to graduation, the student must make a public presentation of their thesis, either at the annual Undergraduate Research Conference at UNH, a professional meeting, or another event approved by the faculty sponsor.

Grading

The course can only be taken for a letter grade, which will be assigned by the faculty sponsor. The grade will be based entirely on the sponsor’s evaluation of the final thesis.

Sample schedule

Pre-registration: Secure faculty sponsor, obtain approval from sponsor for thesis topic, and prepare written project proposal.

Week 1: Establish timetable for completing project in consultation with faculty sponsor.

Week 3: Submit preliminary bibliography to faculty sponsor.

Week 4: Submit proposed research plan to sponsor.

Week 5: Submit literature review to sponsor.

Week 8: Submit proposed outline for thesis to sponsor.

Week 11: Submit draft of thesis to sponsor.

Week 14: Submit revised thesis to sponsor.