

IMJR Thesis Guide

The Thesis

Thesis projects usually take the form of a traditional research study, but other formats, such as a photo essay, film, website, or piece of creative writing are also possible. Thesis projects, whatever their form, should contribute to the development of knowledge or practice in new ways, involve significant background research, and require sustained attention in the implementation of the project. If the final product takes a less traditional form, it should include a piece of writing that describes the student's learning process.

An Honors Thesis in the IMJR program consists of a six-credit sequence, typically completed over the course of two to three semesters. A non-honors thesis may be either three or six credits.

Expectations and Learning Objectives

Faculty will differ in their expectations regarding methodology, theoretical approaches, and presentation of findings. Nonetheless, we have set out some general learning objectives for individualized major thesis writers.

Expectations

Your project should relate to your major and the process of completing it should help you to integrate the knowledge that you have gleaned from your coursework, internships, study abroad, research, and other experiences. The final product (essay, film, performance, etc.) should reflect a good understanding of the research methodologies in the discipline(s) included in the major and should make an original contribution to the field of study.

Learning Objectives

At the end of the thesis project, you should be able to:

- Define a research question and design a substantial research project.
- Identify relevant sources and collect reliable data that address your research question.
- Analyze the strengths and limitations of different approaches scholars have taken to the research question and recognize interpretative conflicts resulting from these different approaches.
- Develop an argument that is sustained by the available evidence and present the argument in a clear, well-organized manner consistent with disciplinary or interdisciplinary practices.

Planning a Thesis

A thesis is typically a year-long project completed during your senior year. But you will need to begin planning your thesis well in advance, no later than the second semester of your junior year. If you are planning a thesis in the sciences you may need to begin the planning process even earlier: in the second semester of your sophomore year and no later than the first semester of your junior year.

- Decide on a research topic and identify a faculty member who can serve as your thesis supervisor. Choose someone whose research interests match your own. Discuss your interests with the faculty member and begin to define the contours of your project.
- If you are an Honors student, you will also need to identify a second reader. The second reader should be a faculty member from a discipline relevant to your thesis. Consult with your thesis supervisor about when to bring the second reader on board.

Establishing Expectations with Your Thesis Supervisor

You and your thesis supervisor will need to establish a set of expectations (in terms of methodology, format, style, etc.) for your thesis. To do so, you might ask your thesis supervisor the following questions:

- *What are the expectations for a thesis in your department?* Each discipline typically has expectations for a thesis. Your thesis supervisor should be familiar with the thesis expectations in their department and these may be an appropriate starting point for a discussion of expectations.
- *Are these expectations also appropriate for a thesis in my individualized major?* Because your thesis will be interdisciplinary, the expectations may diverge from those of your thesis supervisor's department. It is important to establish early on how they might diverge, so that both you and your supervisor have a clear understanding of what is expected.
- *Considering my prior course work and my interests, what kind of preparatory work would be most appropriate for me?* You may be able to participate in a departmental methods course or thesis seminar during the fall semester of your senior year. Or, you may be admitted to a relevant graduate seminar.
- *How should I present my findings? What is the typical length of a thesis?* Disciplines have different conventions regarding the presentation of research findings. Most combine a review of relevant scholarly literature with a discussion of the findings. Some expect an explicit, detailed discussion of research methodologies. In other fields, research methods are implicit. In some fields, the written element of the thesis may be relatively short, while in others it may constitute the bulk of the work.
- *What arrangements for supervision should we make?* You may want to meet with your thesis supervisor on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. You may want to establish expectations regarding when and how you will report on the progress of your research and submit drafts of your writing.

We advise you to summarize the answers to these questions in the form of a learning agreement with your supervisor.

Submitting a Thesis Proposal

You should prepare a written proposal and submit it to the Individualized Major Program during the semester before you begin your project. Typically, this would be in the Spring semester of your junior year. The link to the online proposal form is available on the [forms page](#) of the Individualized Major Program website.

The proposal will help you to define the scope of your research, but it is not a definitive document. You will refine your topic as you do your research and discuss it with your thesis supervisor. The final result of the project may differ somewhat from your vision in the proposal.

Human Subjects Research

If your project involves human subjects research (for example, interviews or surveys), then your project will need to be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board before you begin. You should discuss this with your thesis supervisor and the Individualized Major Program office.

Research Funding

The earlier you begin to consider the sources you plan to use and the resources you will need for your thesis the better. You should consider whether your research will require support in the form of lab time, travel funds, or other such arrangements.

- The [Office of Undergraduate Research](#) awards grants for research projects conducted during the summer as well as the academic year.
- Your thesis supervisor may also have suggestions for how you can obtain the resources you need.

Registering for Thesis Coursework

Most theses will consist of a six-credit sequence completed over the course of two to three semesters. Students intending to complete Honors Scholar requirements in their individualized major *must* complete a six-credit thesis sequence.

Social Sciences and Humanities

In the social sciences and humanities, you will typically enroll in a research seminar, graduate course or independent study with your thesis supervisor during the Fall semester. This Fall semester course should provide you with an opportunity to explore the existing scholarship on your major theme and explore the specific topic of your thesis. During the spring semester, you will typically enroll in UNIV 4697W Senior Thesis, for which your thesis supervisor is the instructor. During this semester you will be engaged in a close investigation of your research question and write the thesis. You will meet regularly with your thesis supervisor who provides feedback on analysis and writing.

Natural Sciences

In the sciences, you may follow a somewhat different sequence with two or more semesters of data collection and laboratory work (during which you register for a research course or independent study in your thesis supervisor's department) followed by the writing stage, when you register for UNIV 4697W Senior Thesis.

Paperwork

To register for UNIV 4697W you must use the Student Enrollment Request Form available on the Registrar's website. Please carefully follow the directions on the [Capstone page](#) of the IISP website when you fill out this form.

Presenting Your Research

If you are an Honors student, you must make a public presentation of the thesis research in a format agreed on with the supervisor. It is for the supervisor to decide if the presentation forms part of the assessed work for the thesis course. Where possible, the audience should include your thesis supervisor and second reader. Ideally, an IISP staff member would also be part of the audience (not in an evaluative role).

We encourage you to make use of existing venues for your presentation. Frontiers in Undergraduate Research, put on semi-annually by the Office of Undergraduate Research, is an excellent choice. Some departments also organize exhibitions of student work and may be willing to include an individualized major. For students without another venue for presentation, the IISP will arrange opportunities for public presentations during the last two weeks of classes in consultation with faculty supervisors, second readers and Honors students.

Non-Honors students are also encouraged to make a public presentation.

Thesis writers also have the opportunity to submit their work for inclusion in UConn's Open Commons, an electronic repository for materials produced by UConn faculty and students. For further information see <http://opencommons.uconn.edu/>.