The goal of the Biology Undergraduate Honors Thesis Program is to provide a rigorous research and scientific writing experience for outstanding undergraduates in the Department of Biology. Students perform research with a faculty member in Biology (or related) at Portland State University or other research institution, and present the research in the form of a written thesis that is evaluated by a three-person committee. This committee consists of the Research Advisor and two other faculty members with expertise relevant to the student's research goals.

Requirements:

Students should apply for participation in Biology Honors Thesis Program in the spring term of their junior (or next to last) year, or earlier. A minimum 3.25 Grade Point Average, overall as well as in science courses, is required.

To guarantee consideration, the applicant must identify a faculty member who is willing to serve as the principal Research Advisor (see below), as well as two other faculty members who will serve on the student’s Thesis Committee. At least one of these faculty members should be in the PSU Biology Dept.

How to apply *

Submit the following five items to the Biology Honors Thesis Director (Michael Bartlett, micb@pdx.edu), no later than the Spring Term preceding your senior year. ¶

1. A copy of your transcripts or your current DARS report.
2. A signed letter of support from the faculty member who will serve as your Research Advisor. You must identify a faculty member who you would like to work with, and who is willing to serve as your Research Advisor. Many honors thesis students identify faculty members from the PSU Biology Department, but some work with faculty members in other PSU departments or at other research institutions, such as OHSU, who are doing biology-related work. It is very important to work in an area of biology that is exciting to you, and it also crucial to find a laboratory where you feel comfortable. Use careful planning and thought to make this decision. Note: an email from the Research Advisor to the Honors Thesis Director (micb@pdx.edu) is acceptable.
3. A brief written statement (300 words maximum) describing the research project you plan to complete, the nature of the guidance you expect to receive from your Research Advisor, and your expected timeline, including the term in which you expect to submit your thesis.
4. The names and contact information for two other faculty members in science departments who have agreed to serve as committee members for your thesis.
5. Your PSU ID number, and a mailing address, phone number, and email address where the Honors Thesis Director can reach you.

* Students in the Portland State University Honors College who wish to complete their thesis in Biology must submit the above materials in order to be registered as a Biology Honors Thesis student.

¶ The dates of application for and admission to the program are flexible, since student progress may vary from the from the “standard” 4 year degree program.

Supervision:

Most supervision will come directly from the Research Advisor. A three-person thesis committee (including the Research Advisor) will evaluate the progress of the student at the end of each quarter. Students not performing to adequate standards will be dropped from the program at the recommendation of this committee. Students may request a change of Research Advisor during the first term of participation in the
program. The Research Advisor does not necessarily have to be in the Biology Department, but must be approved by the Biology Honors Thesis Director.

Requirements for completion of the program:

I. A three quarter sequence of Biology 401 (8 credits) is required, and should be entitled Honors Reading (2 credits) for the first term, Honors Research (3 credits) for the second term, and Honors Thesis (3 credits) for the third term. Student enrollment in Biology 401 requires submission of a “By Arrangement Request” form signed by the Research Advisor, or the Honors Thesis Director (for students with non-PSU Research Advisors). The signee is the instructor of record, and will enter the grade at the end of that term. “By Arrangement Request” forms are available from the Registration Office in Neuburger Hall and online. Grading must be P/NP, NOT letter. To earn a grade of “P”, the student must give a brief summary of work done during the term, with an approximation of the time committed during the term. This summary must be approved by the Research Advisor, and then forwarded to the Honors Thesis Director if necessary. A useful rule of thumb: each credit represents a minimum of 40 hours of work towards the thesis. This represents a substantial commitment of time (two or three credits = 8 or 12 hours per week in a 10 week term), and the Research Advisor is responsible for making sure this requirement is met.

Note 1: for Bi 401 credits, normally a maximum of 6 credits can be counted towards a biology degree as upper division electives, but if a student is pursuing an honors biology degree a maximum of 8 credits are allowed.

Note 2: the requirement for 8 credits of Bi 401 may be partly or completely waived if the student is completing equivalent, supervised thesis-related research and writing in the course of satisfying Capstone or PSU Honors College requirements, or through another channel, e.g. summer internship or research fellowship. The student’s advisor must confirm: i) that the student has completed, or is in the process of completing independent research under the advisor’s supervision, ii) the approximate number of hours the student is devoting to the research and writing, and iii) that the advisor is committed to assisting the student in completing the written thesis. Waiver of the credits requirement will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Note 3: For University Honors students who are Biology majors, the course registration sequence of Hon 407 (2 credits) and Hon 403 (6 credits) will satisfy the 8 credit requirement for Biology Honors.

II. A written thesis is required, and will be completed during the third term of work. For examples of a successful thesis (with acceptable formatting), contact the Biology Honors Thesis Director.

For a student to earn Biology Honors, and to have “Honors Thesis in Biology” added to her/his diploma, the completed thesis must be approved by the Thesis Advisor and Committee, the Honors Thesis Director, as well as by the Chair of the Biology Department. The Director will send notice of approval to the Degree Requirements and Certification Office, 104A Neuberger Hall (Victoria Chau).

The completed thesis must be approved and signed by the student’s thesis committee by the last day of classes of the term in which the student will graduate. To ensure that this deadline is met, students must allow sufficient time for Committee reading, student corrections, and final approval of the corrected thesis.

Suggested time-line:

a) No later than the end of week 8 of “Honors Thesis” term: student gives committee members final draft of thesis.

b) No later than the end of week 9: student receives comments from committee with necessary corrections.

c) No later than week 10: student makes required corrections, and presents corrected final draft to committee for signatures. Student gives signed final draft of thesis to the Honors Thesis Director by Friday of week 10.

d) Finals Week. Honors Thesis Director and Biology Department Chair both approve and sign thesis. Degree Requirements and Certification Office is notified.

(Last update: April 2013)