The Honors Thesis

To graduate from the Honors College, you are required to complete an Honors Senior Thesis. The senior thesis is a research-based written work that aims to answer a specific research question proposed by you, the researcher. You might think of your project as a written argument that takes the form of a conversation with significant scholars in your discipline. As the authors of *The Craft of Research* put it, “you make a *claim*, back it with reasons, support them with *evidence*, *acknowledge* and *respond* to other views, and [sic] explain your principles of *reasoning*” (Booth, Colomb, and Williams, 108). That being said, the honors thesis is distinct from previous undergraduate work you have done in terms of your greater development of an argument and greater scope of research. You can think of it as a two-term in-depth research paper in which you form a developed argument on a question germane to your discipline (your major) and demonstrate knowledge of the related scholarship.

You will begin the process by taking the thesis prospectus seminar. Working closely with a faculty advisor from your major and with Honors College faculty, you will articulate your research question. Your written thesis will be designed to answer your research question utilizing the evidence you assemble by doing the actual research. Keep in mind that the process of writing an extended research paper is iterative not linear. As you formulate your research question, you will already be dipping into potential sources; as you develop your literature review, you may go back and revise your research question. Your progress assumes the form of spiral, hearkening back to its starting points even as you march forward with your research and writing.

So what are the expectations for an honors thesis? Here is a list of keys:

1. **It must articulate a research question in the discipline of your major.**

2. **It must put forth a strong argument of your views on the question.** More must be said here, for the success of your thesis depends on this. Some research projects never go beyond summarizing the material in a discipline related to the research question. This is not enough. The challenge for the writer is to marshal the evidence she gains through research in support of her argument. In this sense, you will have to make your research material your own. You will have to subordinate the scholarship of professionals to the necessity of your argument.

3. **It must utilize a research methodology practiced in the discipline of your major.**

4. **It must demonstrate knowledge of the scholarly literature germane to your research question.**

5. **It must assemble evidence in support of your argument and clearly justify the evidence.**
6. It must include an abstract, typically no more than 250 words in length, which concisely captures the focus of your research, your findings, and your key evidence.

A qualifying word about expectations: it is important to distinguish an undergraduate honors thesis from a graduate school dissertation. While the graduate school dissertation aims to produce new knowledge in the given discipline, the undergraduate thesis is generally studying existing knowledge in your discipline. The undergraduate thesis is shorter than a graduate level dissertation, and you have limited resources (less time, no archives, etc.).

It is vital that you familiarize yourself with examples of successful honors theses written previously by PSU students. You can go to the link in PDX Scholar for the Honors College (http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honors/) to read through honors theses in your or related majors.

Keep in mind that you will not be on your own throughout this process. During the 4-credit thesis prospectus seminar—which you are required to take two terms in advance of your expected graduation—you will work closely each step of the way with Honors College faculty and with peers. You will find an advisor, formulate your research question, produce a partial annotated bibliography, write a working abstract, and complete a prospectus or plan for your research project.

In the subsequent two terms, you will enroll in 2-credit tutorials with Honors College faculty who will keep you meeting deadlines and provide supportive feedback and suggestions for revision. Finally, when you have completed your work, you will make a five-minute presentation on your work before a thesis committee at the Honors College.

If you plan to graduate in June 2015, the deadline for submitting your thesis is May 22, 2015. The date when all thesis presentations will take place is May 28, 2015.