

# COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATIONS

## SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE THESIS GUIDELINES (UPDATED SPRING 2017)

### **COLLEGE-WIDE GUIDELINES:**

In the College of Communications, the honors thesis may take the form of an original research project involving the scholarly examination of some aspect of the field of communications, or the thesis may involve the production of a professional project. In either case, the honors thesis consists of scholarship or professional work in which the student demonstrates a command of the relevant research in the field and makes an original contribution to that knowledge base.

An honors thesis is usually the student's most advanced research/creative project while at Penn State. Successful completion requires intellect, time management, dedication, determination and perseverance. It is important that you choose a topic that you are truly interested in, since you will need to spend a year or more working on the thesis. The Schreyer Honors College notes that your honors thesis is "your most ambitious undertaking as a scholar. If it doesn't seem like a daunting and perhaps even intimidating project, you're not being ambitious enough!" Your thesis is your opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to your field and to create a work that will be publically available and archived through the Penn State Library.

Whether undertaking a scholarly, research-based thesis or a professional project, the student must work closely with both the thesis supervisor and thesis honors advisor to ensure the project is within College of Communications norms about what constitutes thesis work. A typical thesis takes two or three semesters or more to complete. Students are strongly encouraged to be proactive in this process, to start early and arrange meetings with honors advisors and thesis supervisors, to stay in close contact with thesis supervisors as the thesis process unfolds, and to monitor and meet all Schreyer Honors College thesis related deadlines.

Setting goals, developing a realistic timeline, and staying on track are some of the keys to a positive thesis experience. Expect that the thesis work will go through several revisions before it is ready for approval. As you plan your thesis work, make sure to budget time for your thesis supervisor and thesis honors advisor to read each draft, make comments and for you to incorporate their suggestions into your revised work. A thesis that does not meet the standards set by the College of Communications will not be approved, which may lead to a delay in your graduation, or graduating without honors. The Schreyer Honors College has a wealth of advice and guidelines to help you develop your thesis and answer your thesis formatting questions at <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/>

Students earning honors in College must take at least one and up to six credits of COMM 496H for thesis work. These credits are most commonly distributed over two semesters. To apply for thesis credits, students must fill out the Comm 496H application (available in 204 Carnegie and online through the College of Communications website). Comm 496H credits are supervised and graded by the student's thesis supervisor. The application requires the signatures of the student's thesis supervisor, honors advisor, College of Communications

Honors Coordinator, and College of Communications Undergraduate Associate Dean. Questions about the form, or the application process should be directed to the College of Communications Honors Coordinator (Prof. Jo Dumas, jad21@psu.edu).

Specific guidelines and requirements for each of the College's five majors are below. As noted in the guidelines below, some of the Departments in the College may require non-majors to take a minimum number of credits in the Department as part of the work toward earning honors in that area. This requirement is to give you an understanding of the field and as noted in the Schreyer Honors College Thesis Project Guide, "the thesis project you propose represents adequate accomplishment in a given field, not just as an isolated piece of work."

### **ADVERTISING / PUBLIC RELATIONS:**

Thesis work in Advertising / Public Relations typically takes the form of a scholarly primary research project and uses survey, experiment, focus group, content analysis or case study methods as appropriate for the research questions being addressed. Theses in Advertising / Public Relations cover a wide range of topics and draw upon a number of different disciplines in business and the social sciences. Just a few examples include: the impacts of Advertising and Public Relations messages on audience beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, corporate social responsibility and ethics in Advertising and Public Relations, the use and impacts of social media in Advertising and Public Relations campaigns, analysis of creative approaches used in Advertising messages and Public Relations crisis communication strategies.

Scholars may also choose to do a professional project instead of a scholarly research-based thesis. This professional project, however, must be of greater scope or depth than the work required in the related professional skills classes in the major. The project must also include an academic component and serve as a demonstration of the student's understanding of professional practice in the area.

Whether doing a scholarly, research-based thesis or a professional project, students are expected to work closely with their Advertising / Public Relations honors advisor to develop appropriate thesis projects. This process should begin during the fourth semester prior to graduation. Then, with a topic in hand and in consultation with their honors advisor, scholars should plan to identify an appropriate thesis supervisor by the end of the third semester prior to graduation. Working with the thesis supervisor and thesis honors advisor, the student will next complete a Thesis Proposal. The Thesis Proposal must be submitted online to the SHC and approved by both the thesis supervisor and thesis honors advisor before the student can apply for any Comm 496H thesis credits.

Scholars who are not Advertising / Public Relations majors may do thesis work and earn honors in this Advertising / Public Relations. Non-majors, however, may be required to take courses in Advertising / Public Relations to ensure an adequate understanding of the field and provide a solid foundation for thesis work (these courses would be in addition to any credits earned in Comm 494, 495 or 496 or 496H). Specific courses required for non-majors will vary depending on the student's prior experience, coursework and interests, and will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the student's faculty honors advisor in Advertising / Public Relations.

## **FILM - VIDEO:**

Students earning honors in Film – Video typically create a short documentary film or write a feature length narrative film script as part of their thesis project. Guidelines and schedules for scholars wishing to earn honors in Film - Video include:

### SETTING UP THE ACADEMIC TEAM:

- The Student - designated as an entering freshman or “gateway” scholar who receives admission into Schreyer Honors College. Students who are not Film-Video majors may do thesis work and earn honors in Film-Video, but must consult with a faculty honors advisor in the Film-Video major early in the process to discuss this.
- The Honors Advisor – a Film - Video production faculty member who serves as the scholar’s honors advisor (or thesis honors advisor if the student is not a Film – Video major).
- The Thesis Supervisor – a faculty member, from Film – Video, or from the College of Communications, or from any other College who agrees to supervise the full year of thesis work.
- Where needed, a faculty member from any College who agrees to give feedback to thesis and serve as a thesis second reader.

### CREATING A SCHEDULE FOR THE JUNIOR AND SENIOR YEARS:

The suggested schedule below pertains to scholars earning honors in Film – Video and graduating at the end of the Spring semester. Students planning Summer or Fall graduation should meet with their honors advisor early in the process to develop an appropriate academic schedule.

#### JUNIOR YEAR ACADEMIC SCHEDULE:

Fall

- Gateway students get academic plan approved with their honors advisor by a mid-September deadline.
- The student initiates a meeting early in the semester with their Film-Video production faculty honors advisor (or thesis honors advisor if the student is not a Film – Video major) to brainstorm several ideas for the thesis, and then develops and focuses the thesis plan by December.

Spring

- The student recruits a thesis supervisor and building on the work done in the Fall, drafts a Thesis Proposal that includes a timeline and research plan for the thesis. The student then submits the Thesis Proposal online by the deadline to the SHC (see SHC Thesis Proposal deadlines, usually early April.)

#### SENIOR YEAR ACADEMIC SCHEDULE:

Fall

- The student begins the writing of scholarly work/creative work.
- The student may apply for COMM 496H credits.

## Spring

- The student gets copies of the rough draft of their thesis to their thesis supervisor, honors advisor or thesis honors advisor (and if needed, faculty second reader) for review.
- Upon review, the thesis is completed, printed and signed by the thesis supervisor, honors advisor or thesis honors advisor (and if needed, second reader) and turned into the Schreyer Honors College by the deadline (see the SHC website for deadlines).

## PLANNING FOR THE THESIS:

The thesis supervisor and the student together create a written plan for the completion of the honors thesis, which includes due dates for different portions of the project, as well as a description of the quality of work expected for the project. Creative production work made in a 400 level course may be part of the thesis, but a minimum 10 pages of written scholarly work forms the main body of the honors thesis.

If at any point during the thesis process, the student fails to meet the due dates, or submits work that in the thesis supervisor's estimation does not meet the standards of an honors thesis, the faculty member may choose to resign as the thesis supervisor. If the thesis supervisor resigns, it is up to the student to either a) find another thesis supervisor, or b) stop work on the thesis and withdraw from the Schreyer Honors College.

## **JOURNALISM:**

The Journalism major is designed to prepare students for work in a crucial and changing industry. As part of developing their understanding of the complexity of this field, scholars earning honors in Journalism may conduct scholarly original research in a wide variety of areas, such as First Amendment law, journalism history, news media ethics, sports journalism, and technology and information delivery. Thesis research methods and formats vary, reflecting the research questions asked and the norms of the area in which the student is working.

Students may also choose to do a professional project, rather than a traditional academic thesis, as part of their thesis work. This project should building on the student's specialization in broadcast, print or photo journalism and further the student's development as a writer, reporter editor or photographer. This project should build upon the skills developed in the Journalism Department courses in the College and should also include a scholarly or reflective component.

Whether choosing to do a scholarly research-based thesis, or a professional journalism project, scholars should plan to work with their honors advisors early in the process to develop their ideas, develop a project of manageable scope, and create a workable timeline for completion of the thesis work.

Non-majors should consult with an honors advisor in Journalism no later than three semesters prior to graduation about the viability of their thesis topics and to determine which (if any) courses in Journalism would be required as part of their honors work.

## **MEDIA STUDIES:**

Thesis work in Media Studies includes a wide range of scholarly topics and research approaches used to understand media, culture and society, such as legal-policy, social-behavioral, humanistic and aesthetic. Working with their thesis supervisor and thesis honors advisor, students are encouraged to develop their own media-related research questions and develop the research skills necessary to address these questions. These research questions build on the Media Studies coursework overall, and on the coursework scholars take in their Media Studies Option of Film and Television Studies, International Studies, Media Effects or Society and Culture. Scholars interested in conducting empirical research examining the psychological effects of media content, form and technology may be able to connect with ongoing research projects through the Media Effects Research Laboratory. Media Studies majors are encouraged to meet with their honors advisor early in the junior year to begin developing appropriate scholarly research topics.

Scholars who are not Media Studies majors may be allowed to earn honors in Media Studies, but must meet with a Media Studies honors advisor at least three semesters prior to graduation to discuss their ideas and to plan for any Media Studies or Communications coursework that would be required as part of the process.

## **TELECOMMUNICATIONS:**

An honors thesis is a work of scholarship in which the student demonstrates a command of the relevant research in the field and makes an original contribution to that knowledge base. A typical Telecommunications honors thesis entails (1) developing a research question or hypothesis related to telecommunications, (2) designing and conducting original research to answer that question, and (3) producing a scholarly piece of writing that details the research project and contributes to our understanding of the field.

Telecommunications is a very broad field that includes a wide range of research topics related to the information, communication, and entertainment industries. Radio, television, cable, music, movies, videogames, satellites, cell phones, electronic commerce, the Internet, and social networks are just some aspects of the broadband ecosystem that is reshaping communications and society in the 21st century. For students choosing to do a research-based scholarly thesis, research questions can focus on social, economic, political, ethical, legal, or technological issues related to any aspect of telecommunications. Students are encouraged to work with their honors advisor and other Telecommunications faculty in developing appropriate thesis projects.

As discussed in the Schreyer Honors College guidelines, "The thesis project can take many forms - from laboratory experiments all the way to artistic creations. The thesis document captures the relevant background, methods and techniques, as well as describing the details of the completion of the individual project." In addition to a traditional academic research paper, a Telecommunications honors thesis might also incorporate an audio, video, or multimedia project, or even a business proposal. Regardless of the type of project, the hallmark of a thesis is the inclusion of original research that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the relevant domain.

Any Schreyer scholar can complete an honors thesis in Telecommunications as long as he or she adheres to the following requirements:

1. The student's thesis supervisor and thesis honors advisor must both be full-time members of the Telecommunications faculty.
2. The student must complete a minimum of nine (9) credits of Telecommunications coursework, not including internships or independent studies.
3. The thesis supervisor is the primary faculty member responsible for approving the completed thesis. The student's thesis honors advisor must also approve the final thesis. If the student's honors advisor is also the thesis supervisor, then a second full-time faculty member from the College of Communications must also approve the thesis.