UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT
Guidelines for Honors Thesis

Overview

The honors thesis is a substantial undergraduate research project completed under the supervision of a faculty mentor (FM). It may take different forms depending on the students' interests, career goals, and their faculty mentor's expertise. In economics theses are typically data-driven projects but can also take the form of substantive exploration of the literature, theory, or models. Writing a thesis is an opportunity for the student to strengthen analytical and writing skills while focusing on a topic that the student is passionate about. Regardless of the topic or methodology pursued, an Econ thesis demonstrates expertise in a field, command of relevant scholarship, and an effort to contribute to that scholarship.

The faculty mentor (FM) should have a Ph.D. in economics and be a tenure-line or career-line faculty member at the University of Utah. Exceptions may be granted at the discretion of the Honors Liaison for potential mentors who have appropriate alternative experience and training. Doctoral students may not serve as a faculty mentor but may help the honors student under the supervision of a faculty member. The Economics Department has no objection to an Economics honors student writing one honors thesis which is interdisciplinary and earns them honors degrees in more than one department, so long as the student has an Economics faculty mentor who meets the requirements listed above. In these cases, the other department may require the student to have a second faculty mentor who meets that department's faculty mentor requirements.

Typically, Econ students complete their thesis in their senior year by the time of their graduation, but to do so, the student has to identify a topic area in their junior year, take relevant upper-level courses both to gain foundational knowledge in the field and to connect with a potential faculty mentor who will supervise and guide their honors thesis project. Students meet with their honors faculty liaison (HFL) by the end of their junior year to discuss potential topics and faculty mentors for their thesis. By September of the senior year, students must receive approval for their honors project from an FM and the HFL, and submit their thesis proposal form to the Honors College. The student works with the FM on their thesis, enrolls in Econ 4999, typically in the second semester of senior year. The completed thesis is a well-written document that has undergone revisions in response to feedback from the FM and, at the end, from the HFL. The student submits the completed thesis to the Honors College upon approval by the FM, HFL, and the Econ Department chair.

Thesis Expectations

Although students will work with a faculty mentor (FM) to establish the expectations for the scope of the honors thesis research, Economics Department and Honors College have thesis content, writing quality, and formatting expectations. These include:

CONTENT EXPECTATIONS

1. The thesis must demonstrate research expertise in economics

2. The thesis must exhibit a command of relevant scholarship

3. The thesis must contribute to economics scholarship

A key prerequisite for meeting these expectations is that the student has foundational knowledge in the topic areas, which means that they have completed the relevant coursework.

The thesis topic is jointly determined with the FM and the student. The topic could be one that the student brings up to an FM or the student joins an FM's research project, either an already established project or a new project.

The student and FM determine the appropriate research methods. In a student-led project the student conducts the research (e.g. the data analysis) with some level of independence, while the FM gives feedback on the student's work and guides the student. In a faculty-led project the student and FM work together on the data analysis. In either approach, the thesis must be written by the student.

If the thesis will count for two majors, the topic has to connect both majors and must be approved by both HFLs. A "dual propose" thesis will likely have a longer Background/Literature review section to situate the research question in the relevant literatures and also a longer Discussion/Conclusion section to describe the relevance of the results for both fields. And it must meet the Economics expectations outlined in this guideline.

Suggested Structure of a Thesis:

Data-driven thesis:

- Abstract (150-200 words)—summarizes the research question, why it is important, what others have found, data/methods used by thesis, how the thesis findings add/alter earlier findings.
- Introduction—motivates the research project, referencing the key studies, and highlights gap(s) in the scholarship that the thesis aims to address
- Literature Review/Background—reviews relevant literatures (conceptual, methodological and/or empirical), and ends with a thesis question.
- Data/Methods—clear description of data and methods to be used to analyze the question
- Findings—report of research findings
- Discussion—summary of main findings and how they relate to the scholarship, contribution of the thesis (e.g. new results, a new measure), limitations/weaknesses of the study, and future research others could take up based on the study.
- Conclusion—implications of the thesis (practical/policy or empirical)

Theoretical/literature review thesis:

- Abstract (150-200 words)—summarizes the research question, why it is important, what is the debate, how the thesis adds/alters scholarship
- Introduction—motivates the research project, referencing the key studies, and highlights gaps in the scholarship

- Literature Review/Background—reviews theories/concepts on the research topic
- Analysis—Evaluation/synthesis of theoretical ideas
- Discussion—summary of main conclusion and how they relate to existing scholarship, contribution of the thesis (e.g. a new understanding of a conceptual problem), how the revised ideas might be tested empirically.
- Conclusion—implications of the thesis for future research or policy

WRITING QUALITY EXPECTATIONS

The thesis must adhere to basic writing expectations to be approved, including correct grammar, clear and spelling-error free writing. The American Psychological Association (APA) style is used in economics scholarly writing. See https://apastyle.apa.org/

For your reference, previous honors theses by students in Economics are available https://collections.lib.utah.edu/search?facet_department_t=%22Economics%22&facet_setname_s=ir_htca (requires university login).

LENGTH EXPECTATIONS The length of honors theses varies, but 20-30 pages (not including references/graphs/figures) is common in economics.

FORMAT EXPECTATIONS The Honors College has formatting requirements that must be met for a thesis to be approved https://d2vxd53ymoe6ju.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/20200616185445/Thesis-Formating-Doc-1.docx

KEY REQUIREMENTS & DEADLINES

Below is a summary of key requirements for the honors thesis to be approved. More information can be found at the Honors College's Thesis Completion Timeline and Checklist, and on the Thesis Mentoring Community Canvas course https://honors.utah.edu/thesis/

THESIS PROPOSAL FORM

By the fall semester of the senior year, the student must turn in a *Thesis Proposal Form* https://www.honors.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2022/06/ThesisProposalForm2022-FNL.pdf (signed by both the FM and HFL) to the Honors College. For students wishing to graduate in Spring semester, the due date for submitting the form is September 15.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES: PRESENTATIONS, PUBLICATION, AWARD

Writing an honors thesis provides the opportunity to present thesis work at the annual Undergraduate Research Symposium, publish in the Undergraduate Research Journal, and earn an Undergraduate Research Scholar Designation. The Honors College requires presentation of the thesis at either the Undergraduate Research Symposium or College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Student Research Day. Economics Department encourages presentation at both events.

- Undergraduate Research Symposium: https://our.utah.edu/events/undergraduate-research-symposium/
- Undergraduate Research Journal: https://our.utah.edu/for-students/undergraduate-research-journal/
- Undergraduate Research Scholar Designation: https://our.utah.edu/for-students/undergraduate-research-scholar-designation-ursd-2/

- College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Student Research Day (Look for announcement)

THESIS REVIEW, APPROVAL, & SUBMISSION

The thesis will go through a review, revise, and resubmit process at two levels: first with the FM and then with the Economics HFL. The student must ensure that there is sufficient time for revisions to be made at each step in the process by not waiting until last minute (or week) to submit the thesis to their mentor or liaison. Use the recommended timeline and the Honors College's Thesis Completion Timeline at https://honors.utah.edu/thesis/ or the Thesis Mentoring Community Canvas to help plan the thesis progress.

REQUIRED APPROVALS & SIGNATURES

The complete and approved final thesis is due by the last day of classes (not finals) of the Spring semester you are intending to graduate. Three electronic signatures are required on the thesis cover sheet:

- Thesis Faculty Mentor
- Economics Honors Faculty Liaison
- Economics Department Chair (signature only - no substantive review)

Notes:

- The Honors College Dean's signature is not required.
- The thesis will be marked as approved on DARS once student submits their final thesis document.
- In case the thesis is not finished in the semester the student registers for 4999, they will get a T (thesis) grade, which the HFL will clear once the thesis has been approved.

RECOMMENDED TIMELINE

This recommended timeline below assumes that the thesis does not require major revision at either stage of review. If you are unsure whether the thesis meets the FM's and Economics Department expectations, plan to complete each of the tasks below earlier. Be sure to also review the Honors College's suggested and required tasks, such as USpace Permission Form (required) https://d2vxd53ymoe6ju.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/20200616185918/USPACE_Spring2018forward.pdf and the Library Thesis Award submission (suggested). Students who have submitted a thesis by April 1, and who have a letter of support from their FM, are eligible for the Library Thesis Award.

March - Submit completed thesis draft to FM in early-to-mid March.

Late March - Revisions. Revise the thesis on the basis of the FM's feedback as many times as necessary to receive the FM's approval of the thesis.

Early April - Submit thesis draft approved by the FM to the FHA in the first week of April.

Early-to-Mid April - Make revisions based on the HFL's feedback. Once the revisions have been completed and the thesis meets the expectations outlined above, obtain electronic signatures from FM, HFL, the Department Chair.

The last day of Spring classes - Final Submission Deadline. One week before the grades are due is the final chance for the student to submit an electronic copy of the thesis with the three required signatures to the Honors College. The Honors College will provide you with an upload link for the electronic copy before this date.