



University Honors Program

Senior Thesis Information Packet

Senior year is right around the corner!

By the end of your experience in the University Honors Program, students will complete a Senior Thesis and take an Honors Capstone course.

A **Senior Thesis** is broadly defined as a substantial work of independent scholarship that culminates in a written product, presentation or performance. There are various ways to complete the Honors Senior Thesis which will be outlined in this packet. This research can be carried out within a student's department of major, or through the Honors Program.

The fundamental goal of a Senior Thesis is to develop students' intellectual self-determination and self-efficacy. A thesis must be student-driven meaning that the student is responsible for developing the research question (or appropriate equivalent), determining the plan of action, and carrying out the required work.

Students must complete the thesis under the supervision of any full-time GW faculty member. The student's faculty advisor serves as a subject matter expert who supports and encourages the student – and is responsible for evaluating (grading) the final product – but the advisor must not dictate the topic or process.

The **Honors Capstone** is separate from the Honors Senior Thesis as it is a 1-credit, pass/no pass course. The capstone invites students to re-engage with core questions and issues related to the Honors Program curriculum, reflecting on their learning in relation to enduring questions and challenges of our world. Each capstone option has a different theme and students can learn more about their options on the Honors Program website under 'Course Descriptions'.

Both the Senior Thesis and Honors Capstone can be taken in either semester in your final year and do not need to be taken in the same semester.

Finally, there are several ways to earn other forms of honors merit through GPA-based or departmental distinctions at GW. They are also outlined in this packet.

If you have questions about any of this information, please speak with an Honors Program Manager.

Best wishes for a successful senior year!



Option #1: Through Major or School

Honors students can satisfy the Honors Senior Thesis requirement by enrolling in a qualifying departmental course. A qualifying departmental course is one that requires students to engage in a substantial work of independent scholarship (as opposed to completing a standard term paper or project on an instructor-assigned topic).

Please note that if your major/department does not offer a research or independent study course, or if you are not eligible to enroll in a major/department course, or if you choose not to pursue one of the options below, then you must complete a thesis through the University Honors Program (Options #2 & 3). All requirements apply to students in special 5-year and 7-year programs as well.

To verify enrollment in any Senior Thesis course within your school/department of major, you must submit a **Senior Thesis Verification Form**. This form can be found on the Honors Program website under 'Forms and Documents' and needs to be turned in by the deadline set for the semester of enrollment. After the deadline, a petition will be submitted to ensure that the alternative thesis course is applied in Degree Map and you should see the alternative course in Degree Map as an 'in progress' course shortly after. Please note that a minimum grade of C- is required to fulfill the Honors Senior Thesis requirement. If a grade of C- or above has not been earned at the end of the semester, the course will not count as fulfilling the Honors Thesis requirement.

Below is a list of qualifying courses by school (or more information about what type of courses might qualify). Pursuing any of these options requires the submission of a Senior Thesis Verification Form.

GWSB: BADM 4001 Section 12: "Undergraduate Research" (credits may vary)

SEAS: For Engineering students, the final semester of the senior design project. Including: EMSE 4191 "Senior Project in Systems Engineering II"; BME 4925W "Biomedical Engineering Capstone Project Lab III"; CE 4342 "Senior Design Project II"; ECE 4925W "Electrical and Computer Engineering Capstone Project Lab III"; CSCI 4244 "Capstone Design Project II"; MAE 4152W "Capstone Design Project II"

Milken (Public Health majors only): PUBH 3995 (Undergraduate Research) or PUBH 4199 (Independent Study)

Corcoran: CFA 4090: "Fine Art Thesis I" and CFA 4091 "Fine Art Thesis II". This course is limited to bachelor of fine arts students. Please see the Corcoran website for more details.

ESIA:

- IAFF 4191 / IAFF 4191W: "Research Seminar": Research Seminar courses provide an opportunity for students to write a substantial research paper on an issue related to the general subject of the seminar. Please see the Elliott School website for more details.
- IAFF 4199: "Senior Thesis" fulfills the Honors Senior Thesis requirement. Students must register for this thesis option through ESIA. Please see the Elliott School website for more details.



- Elliott Dean's Scholars Program, a two-year-long research opportunity offering students support and guidance as you conduct independent research on contemporary international affairs topics. Please see the Elliott School website for more details.

CCAS: Many CCAS students complete this thesis requirement by enrolling in an alternative research or independent study course (or courses) offered by the department in which they are majoring. These courses are 3000 or 4000 level, with titles such as "Undergraduate Research", "Senior Thesis", "Independent Study", or "Directed Project." This course will require you, with the help of a faculty guide or mentor, to produce a substantial work of independent scholarship, typically in the form of a written product, presentation or performance.

Note that in some departments, these types of courses are limited to students pursuing "special departmental honors," and each department has different criteria for allowing the pursuit of special honors, so consult with your departmental advisor to make sure that you are eligible for course enrollment. Even if you do not ultimately receive special departmental honors, the course will count toward your Honors Senior Thesis requirement so long as you have completed the course with a C- or higher.

For you have questions, please contact a Program Manager.



Option #2: Thesis Through the University Honors Program

The Honors Senior Thesis allows you to complete an independent senior thesis on any topic of interest to you, not limited by your department of major. First, you must find a faculty advisor who is willing to advise you as you complete your senior thesis. Your faculty advisor can be *any full-time* professor at GWU. Your senior thesis requirement cannot be fulfilled with a part-time faculty member as your primary advisor, though you are welcome to collaborate with more than one faculty member when completing your thesis. If you're not sure if a faculty member can oversee your thesis, please check with a Program Manager. This faculty advisor will be responsible for grading your final product. Some students choose to organize a senior thesis committee, but this is not required, as only one faculty member will have the authority to assign your thesis final grade.

In selecting this option, students will be enrolled in **HONR 4198** (Honors Senior Thesis course). This course can be taken for 3 or 4 credits as a letter grade for either one or two semesters. Students can complete a thesis on any topic of interest. The product ("deliverable") of each thesis depends significantly on the field in which the work is being conducted and might include (but is not limited to) traditional research/analysis papers, the completion of lab work, or the development of computer programs, performances, or exhibitions. You are responsible for developing your thesis topic, form, scope, and grading criteria in consultation with your faculty advisor.

To be enrolled in HONR 4198, students must fill out an **Honors Thesis Contract**. The Honors Thesis Contract can be found on the Honors Program website under 'Forms and Documents' and needs to be turned in by the deadline set for the semester of enrollment. As part of the Honors Thesis Contract, you will submit a proposal outlining the nature of your project, your meeting schedule with your advisor, product deadlines throughout the semester, grading rubrics, and a breakdown of how your final grade will be calculated. The Honors newsletter and Honors website will announce the due date for the Contract form each semester.

After you have submitted the Honors Thesis Contract, the University Honors Program will confirm the agreement with your faculty advisor. Toward the end of the semester, the University Honors Program will also request your final thesis grade from that professor. Please consult an Honors Program Manager for more information about this process or option.

Option #3: Honors Entrepreneurial/Service Project

As a student-driven service project or entrepreneurial experience may be able to achieve pedagogical goals similar to a "traditional" Senior Thesis, the UHP is piloting in the Fall 2022 – Spring 2023 academic year a "Service Project or Entrepreneurship Senior Thesis Option." The deliverables for this option are almost limitless (events, business plans, policy documents, actual products, etc.) but the project outcome must mimic the scope of standard thesis deliverables and represent a similar time commitment over the semester:

3 credits = 112.5 hours total = 7.5 hours per week

4 credits = 150 hours total = 10 hours per week

During this pilot, students interested in this option must complete the following steps:



1. You must first arrange a meeting with Director Kung (bcobb@gwu.edu) during the semester prior to the semester in which the thesis will be started (in Spring/Summer 2022 for Fall 2022 projects or in Fall 2022 for Spring 2023 projects).
2. You will then meet with Director Kung to discuss a general plan/outline of the proposed work. At this point, you need not have secured any firm commitments from a faculty advisor (or service organization), but you should know who you would like to work with and have a concrete idea for the form of the final thesis “deliverable.” Director Kung will either give the project “move-ahead” approval or require revisions and arrange for a second meeting.
3. Once you have secured “move-ahead” approval, you must secure a faculty advisor. Note that since your thesis will be “non-traditional,” there may not be a GW faculty member who has expertise or experience in exactly what you will be working on. That’s okay! When choosing an advisor, it is most important that the faculty member be willing to provide general support and that they are comfortable evaluating a “non-traditional” deliverable. If your work is outside the expertise of your advisor, it would be appropriate for your advisor to arrange for an evaluation of the deliverable by a committee (which might include 2 or 3 other faculty or outside experts) but your advisor remains responsible for submitting your final grade.
4. Once you have a faculty advisor, you must complete and submit in collaboration with your advisor an Honors Thesis Contract by the standard due date. The contract must be completed in particular detail to describe (1) the driving need/reason for the proposed project and (2) the specific deliverable (the “expected final product”). If you are working with an established organization, you must include in this section a clear description of how your work will align with their needs and how your contribution to that organization will be *independent and student driven*.
5. If you are working with an established organization, you must also submit a “memorandum of understanding” (MOU) signed by a representative of that organization. The MOU should indicate the organization's willingness for you to complete your thesis work with them and attest to the independent nature of your work. Certainly, your work can be drawn from the needs of that organization but because the project must be *student driven*, it cannot simply have been assigned to you by that organization or be part of their standard day-to-day operation. For example, if you are working with an organization that provides tutoring, then simply being a tutor is not thesis-level but developing a new curriculum for students might be appropriate.

Project Resources:

- Nashman Center direct contact: Wendy Wagner (wagnerw@email.gwu.edu). If you are interested in working on a service project, please reach out to Dr. Wagner to set up a meeting to talk about your goals. Dr. Wagner will be able to help you identify organizations to reach out to and can make many direct introductions!
- Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service (<https://serve.gwu.edu/>)
- GW Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (<https://innovation.gwu.edu/>)
- Community Engagement Consulting (<https://serve.gwu.edu/community-engagement-consulting>)

Possible Funding Sources:



GW New Venture Competition (<https://newventurecompetition.gwu.edu/>)

Knapp Fellowship for Entrepreneurial Service-Learning (<https://serve.gwu.edu/knapp-fellowship-entrepreneurial-service-learning>)

GWupstart (<https://serve.gwu.edu/gwupstart>), including:

[The Clinton Global Initiative University - Commitment Maker Challenge](#); [Eco-Equity Challenge](#); [Projects for Peace](#); [Public Service Grant Commission](#)

Option #4: Enosinian Scholars Program

Limited to students accepted into the Enosinian Scholars Program

The Enosinian Scholars Program aims to prepare gifted undergraduates for advanced work in their fields and provides both financial backing and mentoring during the student's senior year. These students represent the most lively and committed scholars in a variety of fields, who come together in this program to share their work with faculty and peers.

Students apply in the spring of their junior year to participate during their senior year. The application process is simple, designed to take very little time, especially for those who have already thought about a research project for their senior year. The program looks for students who have a high grade point average within their discipline (typically 3.5 or higher), a clear idea for their senior thesis, and the strong support of a faculty member. Successful candidates are registered for HONR 4198 (Honors Senior Thesis), unless they are already registered for thesis credits within their departments.

Beginning in the fall semester of their senior year, participants meet regularly, as a group and individually, with the Enosinian advisor who is a GW faculty member. They also submit work to the Enosinian advisor leading up to their theses, including a statement of purpose, an annotated bibliography, an outline, and a selected segment of the thesis. With feedback during each phase, the student can confidently move forward toward completing the thesis in the course of the second semester. The Enosinian advisor also meets with each student's departmental thesis director and reader so that there is clear communication about the progress of the thesis.

At the end of the spring semester, all participants give an oral presentation and "defense" of their work. The examining board consists of the student's director, reader, and one reviewer from outside the GW community. If the thesis and the defense meet the standards of the Enosinian Program, the student becomes an Enosinian Scholar, a designation that appears on that student's transcript. Students who do not achieve GW Enosinian Scholar status but receive a passing grade from their advisors will get full credit toward graduation.

To learn more about the Enosinian Scholars Program, please visit: <https://honorsprogram.gwu.edu/enosinian-scholars>.

If you have questions about the [Enosinian Scholars Program](#), please contact Professor Joseph Trullinger (trullinger@gwu.edu) or an Honors Program Manager.



Forms of Honors Merit at GW

The Honors Program encourages students to pursue other forms of merit in addition to the Honors Program requirements.

University Honors Program Graduate

By completing the University Honors Program requirements, you will be listed as a graduate of the University Honors Program. To earn this distinction, you must:

- Graduate with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher
- Take at least 12 credit hours every semester
- Take the Honors Capstone course
- Complete a senior thesis which fulfills the Honors Senior Thesis requirement
- Fulfill all other Honors requirements and be in good standing with the program.

The “Honors Program Graduate” distinction will also appear on your transcript.

Latin Honors

Determined by cumulative GPA:

Cum Laude 3.40-3.59

Magna Cum Laude 3.60-3.79

Summa Cum Laude 3.80-4.0

This will appear on your diploma.

Special Honors in a Major or School

The requirements for special honors vary between departments and schools, so you should contact your major advisor for more information.

Research or independent study courses taken in the pursuit of special honors may fulfill your Honors Senior Thesis requirement. For more details, please consult with an Honors Program Manager.

This will appear on your transcript.