

Guidelines for The Department of French and Francophone

Studies Honors Thesis

(last revised: December 2017)

General Information:

Prior to writing an honors thesis, honors students are required by the Schreyer's Honors College to first submit a **thesis proposal** which outlines the scope of the research to be undertaken and identifies any "special needs" tied to this particular project, such as travel needs, access to human subjects, etc. This thesis proposal must be approved by the French and Francophone Studies honors adviser, the student's chosen thesis supervisor and the Schreyer's Honors College. (Note that the honors adviser cannot also serve as the thesis supervisor.) It is therefore recommended that the student have identified a specific thesis topic and found a thesis supervisor who has agreed to guide the student's research on this topic **one full year before the thesis is due**.

It is the responsibility of the student to approach a faculty member of the Department of French and Francophone Studies whose discipline is directly relevant to his/her chosen topic and ask this faculty member whether s/he would be willing to serve as thesis supervisor. Narrowing down the list of potential thesis supervisors should be done around the **mid-point of a student's Junior year**. Students who are unsure as to who to approach are encouraged to seek the advice of the French and Francophone Studies honors adviser.

The Honors College defines an honors thesis as "**a scholarly piece of writing in which the writer is expected to show a command of the relevant scholarship in his (or her) field and contribute to the scholarship. It should confront a question that is unresolved and push towards a solution.**"

Disciplines* and individual faculty will differ in their expectations regarding methodology, theoretical approaches, and presentation of findings. Nonetheless, the Department of French and Francophones Studies has set out the following general expectations of learning outcomes for honors thesis writers:

* The French and Francophone Studies faculty conduct research in three basic disciplines: culture, linguistic theory and literature.

1. The student's research and writing pertaining to the thesis project should be relevant to his/her individualized major track and represent an opportunity to integrate and deepen the knowledge acquired in the courses s/he took to complete the degree requirements.

2. A thesis ought to be more than summarizing the existing literature on a particular topic. It should make an **original contribution** to the field of study, present new findings in the form of new data, or give new, critical interpretations of existing analyses.

3. In addition, students writing an honors thesis are expected to **situate their research question and analysis** within the larger scholarship of their chosen discipline, and **clearly articulate the significance of their project** and its contribution in that context.

In sum, a student writing an honors thesis should clearly explain the rationale behind the project and its significance, thoroughly review the previous research on the topic, explain the methodology behind the inquiry, and carry out some line of inquiry that has not been pursued before.

Anatomy of the thesis:

In addition to its chapters, an honors thesis must include a title page, a signatory page, a table of contents, an abstract, and a bibliography. The **formatting requirements** that apply to all Schreyer Honors theses and the **standard thesis template** to be followed can be found at:

<https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/formatting.cfm>

The abstract:

An abstract is a (one to two page) summary of your thesis that should not be written before your thesis has been completed. It should be informative and written in language that academic readers outside your chosen discipline can understand. Your abstract should include the following information: **the problem or hypothesis discussed; why this problem is significant; the approach you took in solving this problem; the procedures you used; what you discovered; and where other researchers might go in this area in the future.**

The chapters:

While the overall length of your thesis and the number of chapters it will consist of will vary depending on the discipline you have chosen, a Schreyer honors thesis in French and Francophone Studies is likely to proceed through:

1. An **introductory chapter** containing a statement of thesis focus. What is your research question? What is the previous literature background? Why is this question important in light of the state of the discipline in this area? Is there some historical or cultural or scientific context that you consider crucial to understanding this problem?
2. A **chapter describing the methodology and/or framework**. What basic methods did you use to address your research question? Are these conventional in the field or did you use innovative methodology to shed new light on the issue? Did you encounter problems or shortcomings with the method(s) you chose?
3. One or several **chapters of findings and discussion**. What did you discover? Discuss specific evidence you have collected or generated through the examination of your primary and secondary sources. Describe your findings in a precise manner. Use cogent argumentation. Thrive to persuade your audience to adopt your conclusions on the subject. Lay out your evidence, interpret it for your readers and relate it to the larger field. Finally, give an honest evaluation of the robustness of what you have done. Did your assumptions introduce a certain bias that has implications for your conclusions?
4. A **concluding chapter**. Give a concise summary of your findings. Do not forget to mention the larger ramifications of your contribution. Finally, while you should not introduce new material that has not been discussed in the preceding chapters, it is a good idea to point to future research that may be spawned by your work.

Usage, style and proofreading:

An honors thesis is a **piece of scholarly writing** that will be **permanently archived** in the Schreyer's electronic thesis archive and the Penn State Library system. Thrive to use **academic language** (this means no colloquial expressions,

pronouns with a dubious reference, contractions, etc.). Go over each chapter carefully and **correct awkward phrasing, typos and grammar errors.**

If you are writing your thesis in French, please use a **French spell checker.** Recent versions of Microsoft Word allow you to check a French text for spelling and grammar by first setting the language to French in the Tools menu and then clicking on Spelling and Grammar. You can also use free online French spell checkers such as **BonPatron.com** or **reverso.net/spell-checker/French-spelling-grammar.**