A grayscale photograph of two students, a woman and a man, sitting at a wooden desk in a study area. The woman is on the left, looking towards the right. The man is on the right, smiling and looking towards the left. They are both holding pens and looking at papers on the desk. A large, ornate desk lamp with a conical shade is positioned in the center of the desk. In the background, there are large windows showing a view of a campus with buildings and trees. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE STUDENT GUIDE TO THESES & CREATIVE PROJECTS

RESEARCH & CREATIVE PROJECTS

HONORS THESIS GUIDE

The capstone experience of the Honors College curriculum is the thesis, conducted across two consecutive semesters. This unique opportunity allows students to conduct scholarly research or a creative project (with a written component) under the direct guidance of faculty mentors. The purpose of the thesis or project is to prepare the student for graduate or professional school, to provide an opportunity for the student to complete a scholarly or creative project of significant proportions, and to gain a new perspective on knowledge by becoming a contributor to the recognized knowledge in a particular field of study.

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HONORS THESIS TIMELINE

Remember that the Honors Thesis requires at least two semesters to complete. Ideally, the Honors Thesis should start by enrolling in UH 4900 in the spring of your junior year (i.e. three semesters before graduation). This provides you the opportunity to work on your project over the summer and complete the thesis in fall of your senior year. Alternatively, students may complete the project in their last two semesters, but this does not allow as much flexibility in the timeline of the project. Please review your thesis timeline with your honors advisor.



SUMMARY OF STEPS IN THE THESIS PROCESS

BEFORE YOU CAN ENROLL IN UH 4900

- ☐ CHOOSE TOPIC
- ☐ READ THESIS GUIDE & BOOKS
- ☐ DISCUSS THESIS IDEAS WITH POTENTIAL FACULTY THESIS DIRECTORS
- ☐ CHOOSE A FACULTY THESIS DIRECTOR
- ☐ SELECT TENTATIVE TITLE FOR PROJECT
- ☐ COMPLETE HONORS AUDIT WITH HONORS ADVISOR





UH 4900 DEADLINES

- ☐ PROPOSAL DRAFT DUE TO HONORS **5** WEEKS AFTER THE SEMESTER STARTS
- ☐ COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULED TO DISCUSS PROPOSAL (REVISIONS MAY BE NEEDED)
- ☐ REVISED PROPOSAL AND FORMS FOR UH 4950 DUE WEEK **13** OF THE SEMESTER




UH 4950 DEADLINES

- ☐ THESIS DRAFT DUE TO HONORS **9-10** WEEKS AFTER THE SEMESTER STARTS
- ☐ DEFENSE MEETING SCHEDULED (POST DEFENSE REVISIONS MAY BE NEEDED)
- ☐ REVISED THESIS (ON SPECIAL PAPER, WITH SIGNATURES) AND FORMS FOR UH 4950 DUE THE LAST DAY OF CLASSES FOR THE SEMESTER

TO ENROLL IN UH 4900

-  DECIDE ON YOUR TOPIC AND FIND A THESIS DIRECTOR
-  COMPLETE ONLINE ENROLLMENT FORM
-  CHECK EMAILS FOR ENROLLMENT FORM APPROVAL
-  REGISTER ON PIPELINE

TO ENROLL IN UH 4950

-  COMPLETE ONLINE ENROLLMENT FORM
-  CHECK EMAILS FOR ENROLLMENT FORM APPROVAL
-  REGISTER ON PIPELINE



HOW EARLY SHOULD I START ON THIS PROCESS?

You should start to think of possible ideas for your thesis as early as your sophomore year. Students in some majors (such as Education, Nursing, or Social Work) may need to start their thesis earlier due to time constraints in their senior year. Consider the sophomore year a chance to mull over what interests you have and what might be worth exploring further. Use this time to brainstorm ideas. There are several ways to choose the topic for your thesis. Some students choose to join research already being conducted within their departments, and others create their own research topic or creative project.

As you think about what you would like to pursue as your topic, start by looking at the following items:

- Research already being conducted in your department.
- Building on previous research you have conducted in other classes.
- Research related to future graduate study or career plans.
- Topics or programs about which you are passionate.
- Creative projects (reflect on previous experience or areas of interest).

JOINING EXISTING RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

To find research options within your own department talk to your professors, major advisor, or department chair. Look through the department websites or newsletters. Talk with fellow classmates. Go to lectures or presentations hosted by your major/minor departments. Also, the departments or Honors College will occasionally send out announcements from faculty members looking for students to help with research.

Some departments have established criteria in place that you must meet before you can join a research project. For example, in the Biology and Chemistry departments, you will be required to complete certain pre-requisite courses before you can join most research labs. Be sure to start the process early by talking to professors or departments to find out which options are available, as well as the specific courses and any additional steps you may need to complete before you are eligible to join a research lab. Typically, students will first join a research project (often at the end of their sophomore year or beginning of their junior year) and then spend a summer or semester in the research lab/project before settling on their specific thesis topic.

Students majoring in Physics or Astronomy will not go through the Honors thesis process. Please contact the Physics department for further information.



“CHOOSING YOUR OWN TOPIC MAKES THE THESIS DIFFERENT FROM ANY COURSE YOU HAVE EVER TAKEN. YOUR THESIS IS DIFFERENT BECAUSE YOU HAVE SO MUCH FREEDOM. THIS FREEDOM IS CHALLENGING, BUT IT ALSO MAKES YOUR THESIS THE MOST PERSONAL PART OF YOUR EDUCATION.”

(LIPSON, 2005)•

CHOOSING YOUR OWN TOPIC

Remember that your goal at this time is not to find a single topic but to collect multiple ideas. As you begin to brainstorm, think over the various classes you have taken. Which issues fascinated you? Which ones did you want to learn more about? Which paper topics were most rewarding to work on? Scribble down your answers. See if you can expand on any of them. Why did these topics intrigue you? Which aspects were most interesting? Do the same for any other areas listed on the worksheet on the last page of this guide.

Try not to censor yourself. Nobody is judging you. Nobody is grading you. The goal is simply to generate ideas. Over time, review your ideas, see what still intrigues you, and toss out what no longer does. See if your ideas fall into two or three groups, and if they do, organize them that way, under a few major topic headings. If a few ideas keep cropping up, make a special note of that. Bounce ideas around with professor, friends, and your honors advisor. As you discuss your ideas, you will understand them better and further define the topic you wish you pursue for your thesis.

CREATIVE PROJECTS

Creative, or professional, projects are particularly popular among students in the arts, but they are not limited to this group. In recent years, students have performed, taped, and explained plane maneuvers designed to educate readers on plane safety; developed manuals; written novels or plays; written cookbooks for children; created or performed a musical selection; directed a dance designed to teach math to participants; retraced an early plane flight across the U.S.; recreated an ancient astrological display; or created visual works of art. It is important to choose a project that can be completed in two semesters and about which one can generate a written narrative explaining and interpreting the significance of the project – this is called the “academic written component” and is required of all creative projects. A creative project should not be viewed as a substitute for an academic project but as an alternate approach to accomplish a scholarly objective.



PICKING YOUR TOPIC SUMMARY

FIRST

- Continually brainstorm ideas (use worksheet on next page).
- Review previous honors thesis projects.
- Look at research already being done in your department.
- Review faculty profiles on department websites and talk with your professors or department chairs.
- Build on previous research (save papers and projects you enjoyed).
- Review causes or programs about which you are passionate.
- What kind of research is relevant to your future studies or career?
- What kind of previous experience do you have that relates to creative projects?

SECOND

- Decide on a topic, start reading articles/books on your topic.
- Speak with professors in that area of expertise.
- Think about the methodology of your project.
- Make notes as you go along.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Honors College recommends the book, *How to Write a BA Thesis* by Charles Lipson. Lipson's book, which is available in the Honors College Library, is very thorough, demystifying the ambiguity of the thesis process and providing simple solutions to the most common pitfalls.

An archive of theses is kept both in the James E. Walker Library and in the Thesis Defense Room in the Paul W. Martin, Sr. Honors Building (HONR 203B). However, you cannot remove any theses from these libraries to take home and review. Effective as of Spring 2015, students can also view completed thesis projects in MTSU's online repository, JEWLScholar, which provides an electronic version of theses for students to reference.

VIEWING THESES IN JEWLSCHOLAR

1. Go to the JEWLScholar website: <http://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/handle/mtsu/3>.
2. Click on Honors College Theses under the 'Collections' in this collection heading.
3. You can then browse the Honors College Theses by issue date, author, title, or subject or you can search within the Honors College Theses collection by using the search box.

Some parts of this guide are adapted from "How to Write a BA Thesis" by Charles Lipson (2005).

THESIS TOPIC IDEAS – HOW TO START BRAINSTORMING IDEAS

Career goals
Graduate school study
Major(s)
Areas within major that are most interesting to you <i>(i.e. specific theories, research, time periods, authors, styles, etc.)</i>
Minor(s)
Areas within minor that are most interesting to you <i>(i.e. specific theories, research, time periods, authors, styles, etc.)</i>
Other academic interests
Other outside interests (i.e. travel, photography, art, writing, etc)
Social causes about which you are passionate
Community groups with which you work
Social/Research needs you have identified
Previous research papers/projects you have completed and upon which you want to build

CHOOSING A FACULTY THESIS DIRECTOR

Every honors thesis project needs a faculty thesis director. The director is a critical part of the thesis process.

Directors can be an honors faculty member, but they do not have to be. In fact, many students choose directors who have never taught an honors course. These directors may be professors who already know them and who, ideally, have some expertise in their thesis subject area. Depending on your thesis subject matter, you may need to seek out a professor from a department with whom you are unfamiliar. This is particularly true in the case of interdisciplinary thesis topics and projects that fall outside your major course of study.

It is important that both you and your faculty director understand each other's expectations at the outset of the project. Your faculty director should provide guidance in research and establishing methodology and will be responsible for recommending your final grade at the conclusion of the project. However, this is your project and you are primarily responsible for staying on-track, communicating with your director, and developing the project. **You should, therefore, meet with your faculty director regularly throughout the course of your project.** Given that work on the thesis typically covers at least two semesters, make sure your director is planning to be on campus and accessible to you throughout that time. You are expected to remain in close contact with your faculty director. We recommend meeting at least twice a month.

**THE GREATEST CAUSE
OF THESIS ANGUISH
IS INADEQUATE
COMMUNICATION
BETWEEN STUDENTS
AND FACULTY
DIRECTORS.**

Writing should be submitted for review on a regular basis, and you should expect corrections or suggestions for revisions. You must allow a reasonable amount of time for the faculty director to review your work, particularly immediately prior to the deadlines to turn in your proposal and final thesis.

Keep your appointments, especially if you are having difficulty with your project. The greatest cause of thesis anguish is inadequate communication between students and faculty directors. If problems arise, please also contact your Honors College Advisor.

Finally, always remember that if a faculty member agrees to work with you, they are voluntarily giving up their time to help you. This is considered extra work for them. Be thankful for their investment of time and effort in you and your project and respectful of their schedules and other priorities. Their experience of working with you will influence how they feel about working with other honors students on future thesis projects.

A photograph of four people standing in a library. From left to right: a man with a grey beard wearing a blue button-down shirt and khaki pants; a man with short grey hair wearing a plaid button-down shirt and khaki pants; a woman with long dark curly hair wearing a blue blazer over a blue top and a gold medal around her neck; and a man with a beard wearing a grey suit, white shirt, and blue tie. They are all smiling. The background is filled with bookshelves containing many books.


**A MAJOR STEP IN STARTING
THE HONORS THESIS IS THE
SELECTION OF A FACULTY
THESIS DIRECTOR**

FINDING A THESIS DIRECTOR

Faculty really dislike being asked at the last minute to direct a thesis, so it is best to approach a potential director as early as possible. That way, the two of you can plan your thesis and arrange the best semesters in which to enroll in UH 4900 and UH 4950.

Typically, students will settle on a thesis topic before attempting to locate an appropriate faculty director. Please review the “*Choosing your Honors Thesis Topic*” section for more information about how to choose your topic. Occasionally, it may be difficult to find a faculty member willing to work with you on your proposed topic. If this problem persists during your search for an director, you may find it necessary to alter or completely change your topic. Be open to faculty feedback during this process; they may have concerns about your preparation for the type of work you are proposing, or the timeline to complete your project. Sometimes, honors students wish to tackle thesis projects that are better suited to graduate study. A faculty director can help you refine your project to the appropriate level.

Here are some general tips for approaching a prospective faculty director:

- 
- Identify potential directors and approach them early in the semester before the semester in which you need to take UH 4900. For a fall enrollment in UH 4900, you should talk to a potential director in February of that year. For a spring enrollment, you should talk to a potential director in September. Meeting with faculty at the last minute will reflect negatively on your ability to meet deadlines and stay on-track.
 - Make an appointment rather than just dropping in. Do not depend solely on email. In-person meetings are better to make sure that both you and the faculty director understand the project and your roles.
 - It helps if the professors already know you from a previous class. If they do not, they will wonder why you are asking them to do this work. Be up front about why you are there. If you have selected a topic, you should be able to articulate its rationale and tell the faculty member why you think they would be a good fit as an director on that project. If you have not selected your topic but think this professor might be helpful in finding one, let them know you are there to discuss possible ideas and explain why you think the professor might be helpful.
 - NEVER say to a potential faculty director, “You’re my last resort,” “I can’t think of any one good to work with,” or “If I don’t get a thesis director today, I won’t graduate on time.” Similarly, any kind of negative attitude about the thesis (“I don’t really want to do this project”) creates an immediate disincentive for that person to work with you. DO say how excited you are to be working on this project, what you think you’ll get out of it, etc. If a professor agrees to advise you on your project, express your gratitude and say you are looking forward to working with him or her.
 - Let the potential directors know that the Honors Thesis Guide as well as a FAQ for faculty directors is available on our website: <http://mtsu.edu/honors/thesis.php>. Additionally, they may contact the Dean of the Honors College for further questions about the thesis process if they have not directed a thesis before.

- If the professor declines the offer, thank the professor for his or her time and ask if the professor has any recommendations of someone else who might be a good fit for you. Faculty may say “no” for many legitimate reasons: they may already be overburdened, they may already be directing one or more theses, they may not be available during the semester you need to work on your thesis, or they may not think they are a good fit for your topic. They will almost certainly tell you why they can not work with you. Do not take a "no" answer personally. This is why you've started early, so that you still have time to approach someone else.
- Sometime the initial faculty member you contact may not be willing to be the main director but is willing to be a second reader. Keep in touch with that professor regarding your project and confirm that he or she is still willing to serve as the second reader once you have found your primary faculty director.



SECOND READER

You are encouraged to also select a second reader prior to enrolling in UH 4900. Biology and Chemistry projects **must** have second readers. You may work with the second reader throughout your project or just receive their feedback at the point of reviewing your submitted thesis proposal and final thesis project. There are three main reasons for utilizing a second reader. First, the second reader is an additional voice to review your project and provide content specific input regarding your methodology, timeline, and resources or references. Second, a second reader can be a major asset particularly if you are pursuing an interdisciplinary thesis. In this case, the faculty director is chosen from one field while the second reader is chosen to represent the second field. The main director and second reader complement each other and, together, help guide you to the appropriate material from each discipline. Third, the second reader can be an added asset in the writing and proofreading process (e.g., correcting grammar and punctuation, suggesting changes in syntax, etc.).

Unlike the faculty director, a second reader need not be a tenure-track/tenured faculty member. You are free to choose any faculty member who has the required expertise in the discipline. The second reader also needs to be accessible to you during the entire thesis process and must attend and participate actively in your thesis defense.

CONTACTING POTENTIAL THESIS DIRECTORS

Some students find it daunting to contact potential thesis directors, especially if they have not had the professor previously in class. Often this is the first-time students attempt to reach out to faculty members in this capacity. Here are some further suggestions and tools to help you through the process.

Have a thesis topic in mind but be willing to adjust your ideas as needed.

If you have not put in the time to think about the basic aspects of your thesis project, you cannot expect that a professor will give up their time to have a meeting with you or will agree to advise you on your project. Be clear if you are meeting with someone to brainstorm or to refine your ideas regarding a thesis. Do not come to a meeting with the thought that the faculty will tell you what your thesis topic should be or list for you, step by step, how to complete it. This is your project and you need to take responsibility for thinking about the topic, rationale, and methodology. At the beginning, this can be very basic; you will refine and revise some of your ideas as you work with your faculty director. Be prepared to revise your topic as needed and know that any constructive criticism is meant to improve and strengthen your project.



Your initial meetings should be considered introductions to discuss your idea. Do not ask a professor to be your director over email without ever having talked to that professor beforehand about your project. You may find through your in-person discussions that the professor is not a good fit to be your director but that he or she can still provide you with information that helps you to formulate your thesis topic further. The professor may even be able to recommend another professor who may be a better fit.

Find a faculty member who has a research background in your topic area.

This means doing some background work on checking their research interests. Most MTSU department websites have a section for faculty profiles. Some have specific sections for research. You may need to talk with several professors, or the chairs of departments to find an director if you cannot find the information on department websites. Professors will not want to work on thesis projects that are not related to their own disciplines and areas of expertise. They may ignore your attempts at contacting them if they find that your thesis topic does not relate to them. Doing your background research before hand will help to eliminate unnecessary contact.

First Impressions matter.

Never send one blanket email to multiple professors. Each email you send should be sent individually and be specific to the faculty member whom you are contacting.

Email Etiquette: Remember to treat your emails as professional correspondence and not as long text messages. If you send an email like this: “so hey I want to talk with you about being my thesis director when can we meet” (no punctuation, no name, or other information provided), be prepared for them to ignore your email. You also don’t want your initial emails to be too long either. Practice summarizing your potential thesis topic in one paragraph before contacting professors. Treat this as a business correspondence. Review the sample email on the next page. Professors receive the same amount of junk email, and possibly more than you receive every day. Make sure that your communication shows respect and professionalism.

Time to Respond: Give professors a week to reply to your email. If you do not receive a reply, then send them the email again and also call them to let them know that you have sent them an email. In your phone message, be courteous and understanding of the fact that they receive a lot of emails and you just want to make sure that they have seen your message – showing impatience will reflect poorly on you. If you still do not receive a response then you should move on to a new professor. You cannot wait for several week or months for a response since time is of the essence.

This should go without saying, but if you make an appointment be sure to show up for it on time. Forgetting the appointment, coming in late, or being unprepared will also reflect poorly on you. You may not receive a second chance to talk with the professor further about your project.

- **Be prepared to talk with several faculty members.**

You may be lucky and find the perfect faculty director on your first attempt (many students do). Some students, though, end up talking to several professors before they finalize their thesis director. This is why it is very important to start this process early.

Don't give up hope! If a faculty director is not a good fit for your project (and there may be several reasons why they are not), then ask if they can recommend another faculty member in their department. You can also talk to the chair of the department about your project and your attempts to find a thesis director. The chair may be able to help you get in touch with potential directors. If every faculty member has concerns about your thesis topic, you should be willing to look at a new topic. You may be attempting to take on a project that is not suitable for the honors thesis or appropriate for someone with your academic background. If a faculty member does not think you are prepared for the subject matter, the faculty will not want to take on this project as it will require more time and effort on their part.

- **Finally, remember that this is a chance to practice professional life skills.**

If you plan to go to graduate school, the process to reach out to potential graduate programs will be very much like this process. You also learn solid professional skills such as business communication, interacting with people in higher positions, marketing yourself and your ideas to new people, how to deal with potential rejection, and how to accept criticism and adjust your plans accordingly. You can reflect back on this process when applying for jobs as well as graduate school. Students who are truly motivated to complete an honors thesis will find a thesis director.

SAMPLE INITIAL CONTACT EMAIL

Dear Dr. (or Professor if they don't have a PhD) XYZ,

I am (your name). If applicable: You were my professor for (class) in semester/year.

I'm currently a (sophomore/junior/senior) and majoring in (your major) [if relevant add minor info]. I am also pursuing Honors graduation requirements and have started to look at possible thesis ideas.

I see from your department profile that you have research interests in (research interests). *Make the connection of how this relates to your project idea. Brief paragraph about your thesis idea. Include: why it interests you, what previous research/experience you have in this field, and what benefit you hope to gain from this experience.*

I would be grateful for the opportunity to talk with you about my project so that I can refine my ideas further.

Would it be possible to schedule an appointment to meet with you, or to come to your next available office hours? I look forward to your reply.

Respectfully,

First and Last Name & M#

THESIS TUTORIAL

UH 4900

WRITING YOUR THESIS PROPOSAL

The Honors Thesis Tutorial, a one-credit hour pass/fail course (UH 4900), results in the completion of your thesis proposal. This course also provides you a transition from the comfortable confines of traditional course work to the rigor, ambiguity, and excitement of independent research. Ideally, you should register for UH 4900 the second semester of your junior year. The tutorial's objectives include narrowing the topic, formulating a thesis question, collecting a working bibliography, writing the proposal, and submitting it to your thesis committee for approval.

ENROLLMENT

To enroll in UH 4900, you must be honors eligible (an overall GPA of 3.25 or higher) and on-track to complete either the full honors diploma requirements or the honors associate. You must have decided on a topic. Keep in mind that the topic must be in a field reflecting your academic preparation but does not have to be in your major. Before registering for UH 4900, you need a faculty member who has agreed to serve as your thesis director and a tentative title for your project. A second reader to serve on your committee is highly recommended but not required for all projects.

UH 4900 requires a permit for registration. To obtain the permit you must complete the [online](#) enrollment form. This form must be completed and then be electronically signed by you and your faculty director. Once each of you has completed your portion the UH 4900 form will automatically be forwarded to your Honors College Advisor to process. When the form is processed, you will be given the CRN (course reference number) that you will use to officially register for UH 4900 on Pipeline. Some scholarship students have deadlines to submit these forms, for other honors students it's recommended to turn them in no later than finals week in the semester prior to your enrollment. Enrollment forms are found here: <https://mtsu.edu/honors/forms.php>.

PROPOSAL STAGES

Once you have enrolled in UH 4900 the Honors College will form your thesis committee, which will consist of you, your thesis director, the second reader (if applicable), and an administrative chair for your thesis. The Chair is often either the Dean or Associate Dean of the Honors College but some projects will be chaired by other faculty members who are selected by the Honors College. Biology and Chemistry projects are chaired by faculty members of those departments.

Thus, your goal in UH 4900 is to submit a proposal that will pass your committee's review. Your committee is dedicated to helping you meet this goal and will therefore meet with you once during the semester to review your work and provide feedback. The deadline for submitting the first draft of your thesis proposal (on D2L) is usually mid-February in the spring or early October in the fall. The actual due dates are posted each semester and will be made known to you at the time of registration. The Honors College will then arrange for the meeting of you and your committee within 1-4 weeks after this deadline. You will continue to revise the proposal based on your research, conversations with your faculty director, and feedback from your committee, but strive to submit the best possible proposal early in the semester.

Once you have met with your committee, you will integrate their feedback with any input from your faculty director and create a revised proposal that you will then resubmit by mid-April or mid-November. This revised final proposal, due in the Honors office, should again be submitted on D2L. This final proposal will be given to your Honors administrative committee member for their final review and approval.

PROPOSAL FORMAT

While every person, every committee, and thus every proposal is unique, there are some common traits of successful proposals of which you should be aware. Proposals should be 8-10 pages long (including title page, references, or appendices). They must be clear, scholarly, and succinct. Remember that the Chair of your thesis committee (and sometimes your second reader) is from a diverse group of faculty. Your proposal needs to communicate your scholarly plan to people who may very well be unfamiliar with the esoteric jargon of your discipline. Although your proposal should follow some of the formatting guidelines of your discipline (particularly citations), the Honors College requests that proposals follow a fairly consistent format as outlined on pages 19-20 or pages 21-22, depending on if your project is research-based or creative.

The timeline need not be set in stone, but it is important because it will enable you and your faculty director to gauge whether you are on track during the process. In most cases students should have a relatively clear outline of the central sections and chapters that they intend to write and when they intend to write them. Even in theses that depend on the successful completion of a scientific experiment or the completion of surveys, students should begin documenting their procedures early. (See timeline examples on pages 36-38).

After your initial proposal meeting, your full committee (second reader and chair) will not meet again until you defend your thesis in the following semester, so it is imperative that you continue meeting regularly with your thesis director to ensure the successful completion of your work.

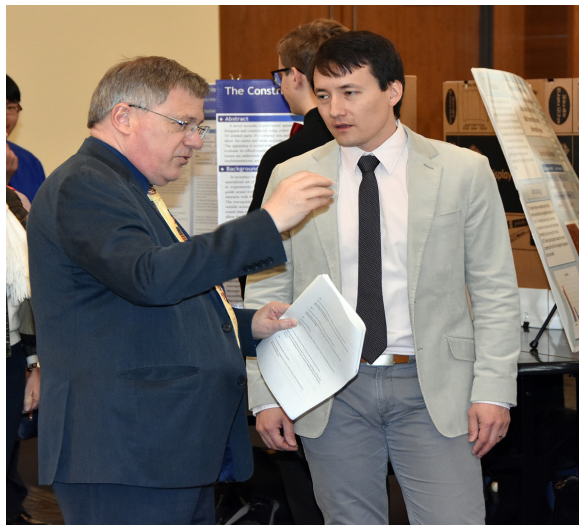
MOST COMMON MISTAKES

The most common proposal problems are

1. A vague thesis statement (it should be clear and succinct).
2. An overly ambitious topic that is more appropriate for a book or encyclopedia than for a thesis.
3. An unrealistic timeline.
4. Formatting issues such as typos or grammatical errors.
5. Students wait too long to start the IRB approval process and experience delays in starting data collection.

REVIEWING PREVIOUS THESES

- Research Proposal Examples can be found in this guide on pages 28 and 29.
- Creative Proposal Examples can be found in this guide on pages 30 and 31.
- Timeline samples can be found in this guide on pages 36-38.



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

IRB Home: <https://mtsu.edu/irb/index.php>

IRB Guide: <https://mtsu.edu/irb/guide.php>

The following workflow has helped many researchers submit clear research protocols:

1. If you are student, request a faculty director who best suits your research goal to be your mentor. Please note that the students cannot directly apply for a protocol.
 - a. This is not done to prevent students from applying, but to protect them from institutional liabilities in case the protocol is non-compliant.
 - b. If a protocol is found non-compliant, all or a portion of the data could become invalid thereby affecting the students' academic status.
2. Complete your CITI training first – students and faculty both have requirements. Visit <https://mtsu.edu/irb/requirements.php> for more information.
3. Work on your informed consent. Although the informed consent is a document, it is essential to note that the consent process is a conversation. Once the researcher determines what activities and procedures require informed consent, then it will be clearer what can be done and what cannot be done. Assess the risks and discomforts to be experienced by the participants and disclose that in your informed consent. Any additional information, such as demographics, personal behavior and other types of information you plan to collect from them needs to be disclosed up front.
4. Determine your participant pool and how you plan to recruit/enroll them.
5. Determine what type of survey or research instrument you will use that would comply with the consent process and still be able to answer your research questions.
6. Develop a research protocol (a step by step flow of various procedures and practices) to comply with all of the above.
7. In situations where you need assistance or help, recruit or invite co-investigators to work with you. Ensure they have CITI training (Social and Behavioral Research training course) and supplemental modules as required by your study and participant types.
8. If your study is conducted at a physical location other than MTSU, then letters of permission on a valid verifiable format (such as letterheads) must be attached with your application. Emails and other types of correspondences will not be accepted.
9. Start filling out your forms.
10. Speak to other students and faculty who have a successful human subject research program.
11. Request a meeting with the compliance staff to go over specifics of your research plan and what type of regulatory challenges you are likely to face. Phone: 615-898-2600 or email: irb_information@mtsu.edu.

See also:

IRB Policy Summary: <https://mtsu.edu/irb/docs/PolicySummary.pdf>

IRB Frequently Asked Questions: <https://mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/StudentProjects.php>

REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF THE RESEARCH-BASED THESIS PROPOSAL

FORMATTING

Proposals should be typed, double-spaced, using 12-point font, and paginated with one-inch margins. Format style is based on your discipline. Discuss with your thesis advisor if you should use MLA, APA, Chicago, etc. The Proposal should be 8-10 pages total (suggestions for length of each section are listed below). Pages must be numbered.

TITLE PAGE - 1 PAGE

You may use the template found in D2L.

- Contains short, descriptive title of the proposed thesis
- Author, institution, and thesis director
- Term

INTRODUCTION - 2-3 PAGES

This section sets the context for your proposed project and must capture the reader's interest.

- Explain the background of your study, starting from a broad picture narrowing in on your research question.
- Review what is known about your research topic as far as it is relevant to your thesis.
- Cite relevant references; use primary and secondary sources.
- The introduction should be at a level that makes it easy to understand for readers with a general background in your discipline.
- Define any terms that may be unfamiliar to those outside of your discipline.
- If you are stuck on this section, try writing it last. Your best overview of the project will most likely come after you have written the other sections of your proposal.

THESIS STATEMENT (OR HYPOTHESIS) AND RATIONALE - 1/2-1 PAGE

In a couple of sentences, state the purpose of your thesis.

- This statement can take the form of a hypothesis, project statement, or goal statement.
- The thesis statement should capture the essence of your intended project and also help to put boundaries around it.

Additionally, provide a persuasive rationale for your argument by answering the following questions:

- Why is your study important?
- To whom is it important?
- What does it contribute to its field or genre?
- Include research questions as applicable.

METHODOLOGY - 2-3 PAGES

This section contains an overall description of your approach, materials, and procedures.

- What methods will be used?
- How will data be collected and analyzed?
- What materials will be used?
- Include calculations, technique, procedure, and equipment as applicable.
- Describe untested and untestable positions, basic values, world views, or beliefs that are assumed in your study.
- Disclose any conceptual and methodological limitations.
- Please provide a tentative outline of the major sections (or chapters) that you anticipate writing.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF THE RESEARCH-BASED THESIS PROPOSAL (PAGE TWO)

DETAILED TIMELINE - 2-3 PAGES

Describe in detail what you plan to do from the date you turn in your proposal until the completion of your thesis project.

- List the stages of your project.
- Indicate deadlines you have set for completing each stage of the project, including any work you have completed already.
- Think about any particular challenges that need to be overcome and allow for extra time to complete each stage.

TERMS/DEFINITIONS – AS NEEDED

WORKS CITED/BIBLIOGRAPHY - 1-2 PAGES

- Cite all ideas, concepts, text, and data that are not your own.
- If you make a statement, back it up with your own data or a reference.
- All references cited in the text must be listed.

APPENDICES – AS NEEDED

- Include photos, survey instruments, IRB/IACUC approval letter, etc.

TIPS

FIGURES

- Figures serve to illustrate important aspects of the background material, sample data, and analysis techniques.
- A well-chosen and well-labeled figure can reduce text length and improve proposal clarity.

GRAMMAR/SPELLING

- Poor grammar and spelling distract from the content of the proposal. The reader focuses on the grammar and spelling problems and misses key points made in the text. Modern word processing programs have grammar and spell checkers. Use them and then proof read the document again to catch what the word processor may have missed.
- Read your proposal aloud, then have a friend read it aloud. If your sentences seem too long, make two or three sentences instead of one.
- Simple wording is generally better.
- Strive for clarity and specificity.

REVISIONS

- You will be given a due date for your proposal to be turned into the Honors College (generally mid-February for spring term and mid/late September for fall term). Please note that this draft should be, to your eyes, in a finished state.
- Your director needs time to review your proposal BEFORE it is submitted to the Honors College. Ideally, he or she should have 2-3 chances to review your proposal before you submit it. This will give you and your director a chance to work out any major issues with your proposal before it is reviewed by the thesis committee.
- You will continue to revise your proposal based on your research, conversations with your director, and feedback from your committee, but strive to submit the best possible proposal early in the semester.
- It is crucial that you regularly meet with your faculty director throughout the semester, even after the final proposal has been submitted.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF THE CREATIVE THESIS PROPOSAL

Creative projects have more flexibility in their content and format but must include an academic component in addition to the creative project. The proposal should therefore reflect both the scope of the creative project as well as its academic component.

FORMATTING

Proposals should be typed, double-spaced, using 12-point font, and paginated with one-inch margins. Format style is based on your discipline. Discuss with your thesis director if you should use MLA, APA, Chicago, etc. The Proposal should be 8-10 pages total (suggestions for length of each section are listed below). Pages must be numbered.

TITLE PAGE - 1 PAGE

- Contains short and descriptive title of the proposed thesis
- Author, institution, thesis director
- Term

INTRODUCTION - 2-3 PAGES

This section sets the context for your proposed project and must capture the reader's interest.

- For a creative thesis or project-based thesis, your proposal should focus on what you plan to do and why this project is important to you and relevant to your major/interests/goals.
- Explain the background of your creative project, starting from a broad picture narrowing in on your specific project.
- Review what is known about your research topic (the academic component) as far as it is relevant to your thesis.
- Cite relevant references; use primary and secondary sources.
- The introduction should be at a level that makes it easy to understand for a general audience.
- If you are stuck on this section, try writing it last. Your best overview of the project will most likely come after you have written the other sections of your proposal.

THESIS STATEMENT (OR HYPOTHESIS) AND RATIONALE - 1/2-1 PAGE

In a couple of sentences, identify what you intend to accomplish with your creative project.

- This statement can take the form of a project statement or goal statement.
- The thesis statement should capture the essence of your intended project and also help to provide the necessary context for it.

Provide a persuasive rationale for your argument by answering the following questions:

- Why is your project important?
- To whom is it important?
- What does it contribute to its field or genre?

METHODOLOGY - 2-3 PAGES

Please DESCRIBE in detail what your project will involve, what the projected outcome or result will be, and how you will incorporate research-based works into your final thesis.

- **Academic component:** Explain how you will tie in the academic component to your project. Please provide a tentative outline of the major sections (or chapters) that you anticipate writing.
- **Procedures:** Explain how you will complete your project; using what medium.
- **The Completed Project Package:** Describe how you will present your final project: production, recordings, pictures, etc.
- **Production Schedule (if applicable):** Include any public performance, showing, or presentation schedule.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF THE CREATIVE THESIS PROPOSAL (PAGE TWO)

- **Unique requirements:** Provide details as to how each of the following will be handled; include cost estimates where appropriate): equipment, processing, technical assistance.
- **Evaluation:** Develop specific criteria for evaluation of completed project.

DETAILED TIMELINE - 2-3 PAGES

- Describe in detail what you plan to do from the date you turn in your proposal until the completion of your thesis project.
- List the stages of your project.
- Indicate deadlines you have set for completing each stage of the project, including any work you have already completed.
- Include public performance dates as applicable.
- Think about any particular challenges that need to be overcome and allow for extra time to complete stages.

TERMS/DEFINITIONS – AS NEEDED

WORKS CITED/BIBLIOGRAPHY - 1-2 PAGES

- Cite all ideas, concepts, text, and data that are not your own.
- If you make a statement, back it up with your own data or a reference.
- All references cited in the text must be listed.

APPENDICES – AS NEEDED

- Include photos, survey instruments, IRB/IACUC approval letter, etc.

TIPS

GRAMMAR/SPELLING

- Poor grammar and spelling distract from the content of the proposal. The reader focuses on the grammar and spelling problems and misses key points made in the text. Modern word processing programs have grammar and spell checkers. Use them, and then proof read the document again to catch what the word processor may have missed.
- Read your proposal aloud, then have a friend read it aloud. If your sentences seem too long, make two or three sentences instead of one.
- Simple wording is generally better.
- Strive for clarity and specificity.

REVISIONS

- You will be given a due date for your proposal to be turned into the Honors College (generally mid-February for spring term and mid/late September for fall term). Please note that this draft should be, to your eyes, in a finished state.
- Your director needs time to review your proposal BEFORE it is submitted to the Honors College. Ideally, he or she should have 2 to 3 chances to review your proposal before you submit it. This will give you and your director a chance to work out any major issues with your proposal before it is reviewed by the thesis committee.
- You will continue to revise your proposal based on your research, conversations with your director, and feedback from your committee, but strive to submit the best possible proposal early in the semester.
- It is crucial that you regularly meet with your faculty mentor throughout the semester, even after the final proposal has been submitted.

HONORS SENIOR INDEPENDENT STUDY RESEARCH OR CREATIVE PROJECT

UH 4950

COMPLETING YOUR THESIS

The Honors Senior Research or Creative Project (UH 4950) is an independent study course where you write and complete your thesis. You will work with your thesis director to complete the thesis. Theses and creative projects are expected to reflect effort that is at least equivalent to the effort a student would make for a three-hour, upper-division course (at least 9-12 hours/week). Therefore, credit earned for the thesis or creative project (UH 4950) amounts to three semester hours.

THE HONORS THESIS

A high level of quality in performance and thoroughness of execution is expected in all aspects of the Honors thesis/creative project. It should be carefully planned and completed with attention to detail. It must be presented in an appropriate, professional format. Any questions concerning the format of a particular project should be raised with the thesis committee when the original proposal is submitted in order to avoid misunderstandings at the time of completion. The style should conform to the style manual most appropriate to the student's discipline but should also attempt to appeal to the diversity of the committee members. If the student's discipline specifies no style manual, the committee might decide upon an appropriate style. Again, if you have any questions about formatting, consult with your faculty director, a member of your committee, and/or a member of the Honors College staff.

ENROLLMENT

Once your thesis proposal revisions are complete and approved by your Honors College administrative committee member, you are eligible to register for Honors Independent Research (UH 4950; three (3) credit hours) in the subsequent semester. The enrollment process for UH 4950 is very similar to that of UH 4900. The form may be found under Forms at <http://www.mtsu.edu/honors/forms.php>. Complete the online enrollment form. Once all signatures have been received, a permit will be entered and you may add the course to your schedule in Pipeline.

You will only officially meet with your committee once towards the end of the semester to defend your thesis. You are highly encouraged to continue meeting regularly (once a week is best) with your director. Also, your director will be required to complete a "Mid-Term Report" on your progress.

Remember that you are encouraged to enter this phase of thesis production during the first semester of your senior year so you have an additional semester to finish the project in the event that some extenuating circumstance delays completion of the project. Additionally, this approach provides you with time during the previous summer to augment your project.

Some students successfully complete the proposal on time, but lag in the completion of the actual thesis project because they have trouble adjusting to the increasingly independent nature of UH 4950. You must continue to meet regularly with your director and meet your timeline deadlines. While the deadline to turn in your final thesis draft is later in the semester (typically the end of October or end of March) you are encouraged to complete your research and start the writing of your thesis early in the semester (also utilize winter/summer breaks) so that you have enough time for revisions. Research and writing at this level often requires several rounds of revision before a final draft has been completed. Your committee only meets with you once at the final defense (remember that the committee includes you, your thesis director, your second reader, and the administrative chair chosen by the Honors College). Thus, it is your duty in conjunction with your thesis director to provide a clear, error-free final draft of the thesis for the defense.

Because science builds knowledge incrementally, theses involving scientific research are especially dependent on complete transparency. There is nothing wrong with submitting a thesis that describes and explains an experiment and its expected outcome while indicating that the outcome was not achieved. In such cases, it is important for the author to offer hypotheses as to why the experiment did not produce the desired result. Was the thesis flawed? Did the researcher make mistakes in carrying out the research? Was the research simply too limited to draw a conclusion? What might future researchers do to avoid the problem?

THESIS FORMAT

The final version of your thesis (or the written component of your creative project) should more strictly adhere to the professional formatting guidelines appropriate for your discipline (this is especially helpful if you plan to submit your work for publication in your field). Any questions about formatting should be directed towards your thesis director and members of your committee. Nonetheless, the Honors College does require a few additional formatting steps for the later purpose of binding the work (see the checklist on page 32 for more detail). Specifically, you should use a 1.5 inch left margin, include two blank sheets at the beginning and end of the thesis, include a title and signature page, and include an abstract or summary of the work. The 1.5" left margin is particularly important because without it, all of the thesis will not be visible to readers once it is bound. If you are doing a creative work, you still must include a written description of the project. However, that work should be augmented with pictures, a CD, a DVD, or some other medium that can be included in the final bound thesis (and which adequately conveys the final work).

NOTE: A more comprehensive check list can be found later in this guide on page 32.

The final, properly formatted version of your thesis should be submitted about one month before the end of the semester. Typically, this deadline is the end of October in the fall or the end of March in the spring (you will be given the exact deadline when you register). On this date, you are required to submit the final version of your thesis project on D2L. The Honors College staff will then arrange a defense, which will take place in the Thesis Defense Room of the Honors College's Martinelli Library (203B; where the thesis archive is located). Biology and Chemistry Defenses are held in the Science building. The defense will take place approximately one to four weeks after you submit the final work. Be sure to check your MTSU email regularly.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR THESIS DEFENSE AND CELEBRATION

1. Be prepared to give an overview of your project that is not so specialized that it will make sense to a multidisciplinary audience.
2. Be prepared to summarize and discuss your methodology, examples, and conclusions.
3. What lessons did you learn by doing this project?
4. Did the project turn out as you expected?
5. What did you discover about yourself by doing your project?
6. If you could start over, what would you do differently?
7. How do you think this experience will impact your future, especially if planning to go to graduate school?

THE DEFENSE

The term 'thesis defense' is almost a misnomer; while you need to be extremely well prepared for the event, the experience is not like a quiz, but rather like a high-level conversation among colleagues. The format of defenses varies; consult with your director and committee on this (also consult with the Honors College staff if you have any audio/visual needs). However, be prepared to converse and address questions from the committee for approximately 45 minutes. At the end of that time, you will be asked to leave the room while your committee deliberates your grade. After the deliberation, you will be asked to return to the defense room where the committee will share their evaluation and any requested revisions with you. If you pass, **we will peal the Honors College bells in your honor!** Many students invite friends and family to wait in or around the building to hear the tolling of the bells. Following the bell ringing ceremony, pictures will be taken with your committee and family members, if present. Biology, Chemistry, and Physics students may come to the Honors building after their defense to ring the bells and take pictures.

On rare occasions, students find that they need more than one semester to complete the thesis. You should understand that Honors Independent Research (UH 4950) is treated as a course which means that credit is awarded and a letter grade is given. If for unforeseeable reasons you cannot complete UH 4950 on schedule, you must drop or withdraw from the course to avoid getting a failing grade (F). However, a temporary grade of incomplete (I) may be given if you are not graduating at the end of the semester and intend to complete the project during the following semester.

INCOMPLETES AND FINANCIAL AID

Students are reminded in the planning of their two thesis classes (UH 4900 and UH 4950) that incompletes in either class can impact your current or future financial aid or scholarships. The Tennessee Lottery, in particular, is very strict and has many regulations. Students should direct their financial aid questions to the MT OneStop.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FUNDING

Students are eligible to apply for funding for research or creative projects called URECA grants, which range from \$500 to \$3,500. A faculty sponsor is needed to apply, and there are several options depending on the student's past academic experiences. Funding is available for summer, spring, and fall.

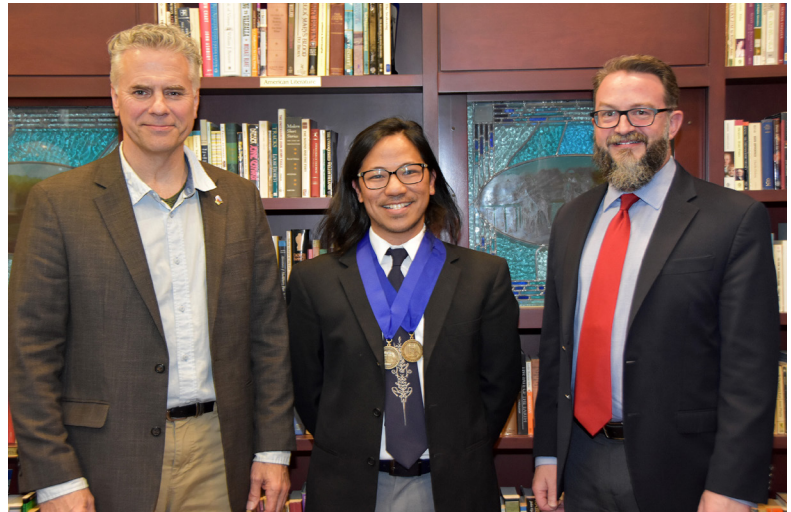
Details and specific requirements are available on the website at: <http://www.mtsu.edu/urc>.

The Honors College has some additional funding opportunities available. Please discuss any thesis related financial needs with your honors advisor.

THESIS DEFENSE ROOM ARCHIVES

Once you complete the defense and any requested changes, you need to submit a final version on D2L and a printed, signed copy on special cotton paper (which must be picked up in our office) to HONR 205 for archival purposes. This will be due the last day of classes each semester. This copy will be bound and paid for by the Honors College and will be kept in the Thesis Defense Room. If you wish to order additional copies for yourself, family, friends, and/or your thesis director (as a token of appreciation) the cost is \$35 each.

Again, the final revised version should be tailored to the formatting style set forth by your discipline's professional organization and also the requests of your thesis committee. As mentioned earlier, the Honors College has a formatting rules for binding purposes. In addition to the wider margins, blank pages, and signature page, the final archived version of the thesis must be printed on 20 lb., 100% cotton paper (available free from the Honors main office). Each of the final versions must have the original signatures of your director and the chair of your thesis committee. Thus, you will need to allow time to print your revised thesis, have it approved by your director and then signed before the deadline date. You will also be asked to submit an electronic (unsigned) version through D2L. If completing a creative work, you need to augment your written description with evidence of the project. For example, if completing a film, music or dance recital, submit a copy of the project on external storage devices for inclusion with your written thesis.



Finally, you may be asked to give a public presentation of your thesis or creative project to other Honors students and faculty on campus. The College generally invites approximately two to four students to present in the Honors Lecture Series (UH 3000) at the end of the semester.

THESIS ARCHIVES COLLECTION AT MTSU JAMES E. WALKER LIBRARY

If you wish to have your thesis archived and available at the MTSU James E. Walker Library electronic repository, you will need to sign the waiver agreement provided in your exit materials.

Honors College thesis archives collection are now preserved online through Walker Library's institutional repository called JEWLScholar and are indexed in the library's catalog. There are two ways to access the Honors Thesis collection.

One way is to visit <http://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu>. Under "Collections in JEWLScholar@MTSU" located in the center of the homepage, click on Theses and Dissertations. Select Honors College Theses to browse submissions from 2015 forward. These items are also searchable by author, title, subject, date, or keyword. When current students are preparing a thesis for submission, the Honors College will provide a form for the student to sign acknowledging the institutional repository as a platform for accessing the thesis online. If a student does not want his/her thesis preserved or discoverable online, then the student must indicate that on the Honors College thesis publishing agreement form.

The Honors College Theses collection is also discoverable in VuFind, (<https://find.mtsu.edu/vufind/Search/Advanced>), then select "MTSU Thesis" from the Collection section and type in "Honors" in the search box to locate all the Honors Theses in the library catalog. The MTSU Theses collection in the catalog includes Ph.D. dissertations, Masters theses and Honors theses. You can limit the search parameters to only include Honors theses by typing "honors" in the search box and clicking "Find" to repopulate with only Honors theses as depicted in the link at the bottom of this web page: <http://mtsu.edu/honors/thesis.php>.



The thesis archives prior to 2015 Spring, are printed copies maintained in Special Collections (4th floor) of the James E. Walker Library. These are also cataloged and depicted with the red arrow in the link at the bottom of the Honors thesis web page mentioned in the previous paragraph.

For instructions on how to navigate JEWLScholar and how to use your thesis published in JEWLScholar, visit this web site: <http://mtsu.edu/honors/docs/JEWLScholar-Instructions.pdf>.

GO BEYOND THE THESIS. GET YOUR WORK PUBLISHED!

Some students work with their thesis director to have their findings published in peer-reviewed journals within their field. You should always ask your committee about whether this is feasible for your thesis. Also, check out [Scientia et Humanitas](#), a peer reviewed journal dedicated to showcasing MTSU's very best graduate and undergraduate academic research.

Sponsored by the University Honors College, our journal has both print and electronic (open access) versions. Our mission includes demonstrating the breadth and quality of our student research. No less importantly, though, we also aim to inculcate young scholars into the professional world of peer review and publication. In the process, we promote interdepartmental faculty and student collaboration as well as public relations both on and off campus.

SAMPLE THESIS PROJECTS

RESEARCH-BASED PROJECTS

Farr, Justin: “The Mongrel Regime!: The Untold Story of Tennessee’s African American Policemen During the New South and Jim Crow Eras, 1867-1930”
History; Liberal Arts

This work deals with a most interesting topic in Southern history that has largely been overlooked: the presence of African American police officers on the South’s urban forces during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During my research, I have only been able to find around a handful of journal articles that have as their primary subject postbellum southern black police officers. Full length books on the history of blacks in southern American policing have been even scarcer. W. Marvin Dulaney appears to have written one of the only books on the complete history of African Americans in American policing in general, *Black Police in America*, which I call “the mother of all sources” on the subject. Dulaney gives an extensive history of black police. In his second chapter he takes his first deep look at postbellum black appointments that were made in the South, which started only a few years after the Civil War. More came during Reconstruction; however, both the frequency of appointments and number of black officers dwindled as the nineteenth century faded away and Jim Crow began to creep its head into the picture and later force its way onto the historical scene in the South. He calls these first black police officers “black pioneers,” and, for a number of reasons that I will discuss in this work, I concur with the title. Even still, Dulaney’s focus on the southern black officers between 1865 and the early 1900s is limited to only two chapters. To my knowledge, there is no book that exclusively deals with the presence of African American police officers in the South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. So, technically speaking, this thesis in your very hands, which is bound in hardback with all the proper trimmings of a book, is the first one that deals with this specific topic exclusively. Technically speaking. I know this is not a “book” in the same way Dulaney’s work is a book, only an undergraduate thesis project. But I will take the technicality and bask in all the proper glories. All other sources that I have read only briefly mention black officers in passing within a larger historical framework about something else.

Hulsey, Samuel: “Echando la Culpa: Social Barriers to Climate Change Adaptation in Peru’s Rio Santa Basin”
Spanish & Global Studies; Liberal Arts

Climate change affects a variety of natural resources, but its impact on water availability warrants the most concern. This issue highlights that systems developed to allocate water resources have a low capacity to adapt to shifts in hydrological regimes. Variations in water availability are most pressing in low-lying geographical areas surrounding the Peruvian glaciated mountain range, the Cordillera Blanca, where subsistence agriculture, hydro-electric projects, and coastal commercial farms compete for seemingly dwindling hydrological resources. In spite of documented glacial retreat and increasingly unpredictable seasonal rains, do popular claims of physical scarcity reflect the reality of water availability in this Andean basin? Do all actors view scarcity in the same way? How do contradicting views of the origin and legitimacy of scarcity impede adaptation measures in preparing for an envisioned future with significantly less water? These questions are addressed in the present study through qualitative research methods, particularly semi-structured interviews that were conducted (n = 28) highlighting perceptions of root causes of scarcity among actors in the Río Santa Basin. Interview data were analyzed collectively, allowing participants to be categorized into discourse coalitions based on expressed notions of causality of scarcity and recommendations for future adaptation policy. Inconsistencies and contradictions were highlighted among these expressed perceptions of participants, resulting in the identification of two distinct discourse coalitions. One group insisted scarcity is a purely natural phenomenon, while the other claimed it to be rooted in human activities.

**Rumble, David L.: “A Survey of Wounding Frequency Among Trees Found in Urban and Forested Environments”
Plant & Soil Science; Basic & Applied Sciences**

Trees are exposed to a variety of natural and/or anthropogenic factors that expose internal wood to the external environment, resulting in decay and tree failure. Urban trees are exposed to improper landscaping practices, pruning cuts, soil contamination, and even vandalism. Forest trees are less impacted by anthropogenic activities, but are still susceptible to weather-and pathogen-related damages. To compare these two environments, we measured eight types of common wounds in maple (*Acer* spp.), hackberry (*Celtis* spp.), ash (*Fraxinus* spp.), oak (*Quercus* spp.), and elm (*Ulmus* spp.). Urban environments surveyed included college campuses and industrial plazas; forest environments included state parks. All five genera of trees surveyed in urban environments exhibited higher frequencies of wounding in the number of open wounds, small wounds < 2 cm², girdling roots, open root wounds, and pruning cuts when compared to conspecifics in forest environments. We saw interspecific variation among eight surveyed metrics. Since wounded trees are more likely to fail, posing a risk to humans and property, a reevaluation of arboricultural management practices in urban environments is needed.

OTHER SAMPLE THESIS PROJECTS TO REFERENCE

Below is a list of some past thesis projects. We also keep a spreadsheet in the thesis defense room (HONR 203B) sorted by name and by major. Feel free to come by to view those that interest you.

Barnes, T. (2009). “Computational Analysis of the Intramolecular Interactions of Electronegative Atoms.” Thesis under the guidance of Dr. Preston MacDougall.

Emerson, S. (2010). “Learning New Rhythms: The Relationship between Music Aptitude and Second Language Proficiency.” Thesis under the guidance of Dr. Cyrille Magne.

Goertzen, E. (2012). “Impact of Treatments on Intestinal Parasite Load in Equines from Middle Tennessee.” Thesis under the guidance of Dr. Anthony Newsome.

Hayden, M. (2012). “The Study of Selenium Bioaccumulation in Tetragnathidae that Prey upon Aquatic Insect Communities Affected by Coal Fly Ash.” Thesis under the direction of Dr. Ryan Otter.

Newman, K. (2013). “Postmodern Conceptions of Political Authority: Reading Plato in Light of Nietzsche and Derrida.” Thesis under the direction of Dr. Robb McDaniel.

Quarles, J. (2012). “Snow White: A Comprehensive Literary and Cinematic Study.” Thesis under the guidance of Dr. Martha Hixon.

Slaven, C. (2011). “The Effects of Hand Holding on Perceptions of Dental Pain.” Thesis under the guidance of Dr. Gloria Hamilton.

Tilton, N. (2016). “Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of Unmanned Aircraft Systems Use by Nongovernment Organizations for Post-Disaster Needs Assessment.” Thesis under the direction of Dr. Nate Callender.

Whitaker, T. (2012). “An Alternate Approach to the Creation of Auxiliary Languages Informed by Creole Research Methodologies.” Thesis under the direction of Dr. Kevin Smith

SAMPLE THESIS PROJECTS**CREATIVE-BASED PROJECTS****Davis, Morgan: “Math Dance: Teaching Common Core State Standards of Mathematics Through Concert Dance and Creative Movement”****Math & Dance; Basic & Applied Sciences/Liberal Arts**

This study focuses on how participants understood specific Common Core State Standards of Mathematics over the course of roughly two months when they engaged in concert modern dance and creative movement used to teach these standards. Weekly instructional rehearsals yielded copious notes that show the participants’ growth in understanding, and pre and posttests in the form of concept maps demonstrate the participants’ understanding before and after they learned the standards through dance. In all cases, the participants seemed to have a deeper understanding of the standards at the end of the project, and they often had a more precise understanding of related mathematical concepts as well. Many of the participants showed a more positive attitude for mathematics by the end of the study.

Lester, Evan: “NASA FOCUS Lab Operations Manual”**Aerospace; Basic & Applied Sciences**

In 2010, Dr. Paul Craig, an aerospace professor at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), was awarded two National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) grants to create the NASA Flight Operations Center –Unified Simulation (FOCUS) Lab. Although the NASA FOCUS Lab has a solid reputation for preparing MTSU’s aerospace students for the aviation industry, the current quality of the lab is in jeopardy due to the high rate of lab staff turnover occurring within two years and lack of documentation that explains how to successfully operate the lab. Therefore, the NASA FOCUS Lab Operations Manual has been created, which contains information and procedures on how to successfully operate the lab that new and current lab staff members can study and consult while performing their roles during a simulation. Ultimately, the operations manual will sustain the current quality of the lab, prevent critical mistakes, and provide continuity when the staff turnover occurs.

Voorhies, Jay: “Melting Pot Rapunzel”**Psychology & English; Behavioral & Health Sciences/Liberal Arts**

“Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your long hair!” This memorable phrase likely comes to mind for many when they think of “Rapunzel,” the tale of a beautiful long-locked maiden imprisoned in a tower by a fearsome witch. However, this specific rendition of the folktale, one popularized by the German Grimm Brothers in 1812, was not the first of its kind, nor was it the last. Similar tales exist spanning from Italy and France, to Egypt and Malta, and as far back as the 17th century, likely even earlier. In this two-part thesis, Part One analyzes culturally distinct “Rapunzel” or Maiden-in-a-Tower tales from around the globe to support the overarching point that fairytales can maintain their central messages while also evolving and adapting to differing cultural standards. Part Two is my own Japanese-inspired rendition of “Rapunzel” based on popular themes in classic Japanese folklore and culture. The tale is written in free-verse form and includes original illustrations.

OTHER SAMPLE CREATIVE PROJECTS TO REFERENCE

Alexander, J. (2006). #39963. A documentary film under the guidance of Dr. Will Brantley.

Carter, K. (2014). "The Contributor: Changing Lives, Challenging Communities," a creative project under the guidance of Leon Alligood.

Cate, A. (2015). "Musical Arrangement of Claude Debussy's Children's Corner for Clarinet Choir and Percussion," a creative project under the guidance of Dr. Paul Osterfield.

Duncan, A. (2008). "The Multi-Faceted Flute: A Creative Project Exploring Recording Techniques for Solo Flute and the Flute Choir," a creative project under the guidance of Dr. Deanna Little.

Gober, P. (2012). "Experiments in Theatrical Direction: Devised Theatre and the Birth of Lady Parts," a creative project under the guidance of Dr. Deborah Anderson.

Green, H. (2007). "Genetic Heirloom," a creative project under the guidance of Dr. Michael Baggerly.

Hibdon, M. (2011). "McMinnville in the Civil War: Life under Occupation as Observed by L. Virginia French," a creative project under the guidance of Dr. Robert Hunt.

Parris, J. (2006). "You are Not Special," a short film creative project under the guidance of Dr. Bob Pondillo.

Ramos-Cintrón F. (2013). "Fractured Tales: A Movement Analysis and Performance of Fairy Tales and their Characters," a creative project under the guidance of Dr. Marsha Barsky.

Rodriguez, M. (2015). "Development of a Cookbook for Preadolescent Children," a creative project under the guidance of Dr. Janet Colson.

Willoughby, K. (2011). "Commercial Pilot Maneuvers and Their Importance in Pilot Training," a creative project under the guidance of Dr. Paul Craig.

THESIS FORMATTING GUIDE

Margins

- 1.5 in. left, 1 in. right and bottom margin for all pages.

Organization

- Two blank pieces of paper (not included in your page numbering)
- Title Page (see template)*
- Signature Page (see template)*
- Copyright page (if applicable)*
- Dedication page (optional)*
- Acknowledgments (optional)*
- Abstract (150 words or less)*
- Preface (optional)*
- Table of Contents*
- List of Tables (if applicable)*
- List of Figures (if applicable)*
- List of Plates (if applicable)*
- List of symbols and/or abbreviations (if applicable)*
- List of terms (if applicable)*
- Body of thesis (divided into chapters or sections - restart page numbers)
- Bibliography/reference/works cited (in alphabetical order)
- Separation page for titled appendices (if applicable)
- Appendices (if applicable)
- IRB approval letter (if applicable)
- Permission letter(s) for use of any copyrighted materials used in text (if applicable)

Font Requirements

- Times New Roman & 12 point font

Pagination

- Every page should be assigned a number, with the exception of the title page and signature page
- Front matter (noted above with an asterisk) is numbered using lower-case Roman numerals (iii, iv, v) centered at 1 in. from the bottom of the page.
- Beginning with Body of Thesis, restart numbering with Arabic numerals. Body page numbers should be on the bottom right, 1 in. from the bottom of the page and 1 in. from the right edge
- See further instructions: <https://mtsu.edu/honors/forms.php>.

Spacing

- Text must be double-spaced, single-sided
- Double space after the chapter/section number and after the chapter/section title
- Double space before and after headings within the text
- Triple space before and after tables/figures inserted between texts
- Table data, long quotations (40 words or 4 lines or more), and reference listings may be single-spaced. Long quotations should be formatted in block quotes.

Tables/Figures

- Tables/figures may follow the page on which they are first referenced or they may be included in a separate appendix
- Table/figure must be identified in the text by a number
- Table number and title must be typed above table; use Arabic numerals
- Figure number and caption must be typed below figure; use Arabic numerals
- Repeat table number and column headings if table is continued on another page
- If table/figure is taken from another source, you must cite that source below the table/figure

THESIS FORMATTING GUIDE

Miscellaneous

- Do not use running heads on each page.
- No widows or orphans. This means that when beginning a new paragraph at the bottom of the page, you must have two lines; if only one line appears, move that line to the top of the next page. Or if a paragraph ends at the top of the page, you must have two lines; if only one line appears, move an additional line from the bottom of the previous page.
- All page numbers in the Table of Contents, List of Figures, List of Tables, etc. must correspond with page numbers in the text.
- All footnotes begin on the page where they are cited.
- Endnotes or Footnotes are renumbered beginning with Arabic numeral “1” for each chapter.
- Chapter headings should appear in all capital letters in Roman Numerals.
- Italicize all statistical expressions.
- Space before and after equal sign (=), less-than sign (<), and greater-than sign (>).
- Space before and after periods in ellipsis (...).
- Always use the percentage sign (%) when preceded by a number.
- Indent number and flush any subsequent lines with the left margin when listing separate paragraphs in a series (i.e., serializations or enumerations).

Pick up cotton paper from the Honors College. Print however many copies you need and return the printed, signed copies to the Honors College. Keep in mind that you must print at least one copy for the Honors College to keep.



TITLE PAGE EXAMPLE

Post-Colonial Folktales of Cambodia

by
Jonathan Smith

A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
graduation from the University Honors College

Fall 2022

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Martha Hixon, Thesis Director

Dr. Ida Fadzillah Leggett, Second Reader

Dr. Philip Phillips, Thesis Committee Chair

SIGNATURE PAGE EXAMPLE

Post-Colonial Folktales of Cambodia

by Jonathan Smith

APPROVED:

Dr. Martha Hixon, Thesis Director
Professor, English

Dr. Philip Phillips, Thesis Committee Chair
Associate Dean, University Honors College

TIMELINE EXAMPLES

THESIS TIMELINE

(Sample 1)

4/5 – 4/19	Create permission forms and revise test instruments.
4/19 – 5/3	Submit revised test instruments to IRB and get changes approved. Prepare copies of permission forms to send home with children.
5/3 – 5/17	Get permission from parents of children being tested, prepare copies of test materials.
5/17 – 5/31	Train graduate students (from PSY 7530 – The Psychology of Reading and Reading Development) & research assistants to deliver tests to children. Check to be sure all testers have research ethics credentials on file with the office of compliance (IRB) – have testers trained with online course, if not.
5/31 – 6/10	Make final preparations for testing.
6/11 – 6/25	Collect data in Murfreesboro city schools summer reading camp.
July	If insufficient ELL data is collected in June, this month allows for a backup plan to collect ELL data from other Murfreesboro ESP sites and/or the elementary school at Saint Rose Catholic Church.
7/5 – 7/19	Initial data analysis. Work on literature review as needed and prepare initial outline of the discussion section. Contact authors of figures used in introduction for permission to reproduce in the thesis.
7/19 – 8/2	Make final revisions to methods section and appendices.
8/16 – 8/30	Enter data in Excel and SPSS. Calculate means, prepare graphs, initial draft of results section.
8/31/ - 9/13	Complete data analysis and finish the initial draft of the results section.
9/13 – 9/27	Write the discussion section.
9/27 – 10/11	Continue writing and editing, consult with committee members about revisions.
10/11 – 10/25	Revisions.
DEADLINE DATE:	Final revisions and submission.

THESIS TIMELINE

(Sample 2)

Mid-February:	Proposal Draft Due
Mid to late March:	Continue compiling secondary sources, complete any necessary revisions to proposal Revisions to final proposal due after committee meeting. Continue researching and reading secondary sources
Mid-April:	Complete annotated bibliography of secondary sources. Begin working on first chapter
Mid-May:	Complete first draft of Chapter 1 of thesis on “Ligeia” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”
Early June:	Finish revisions and edits of Chapter 1
Mid-June:	Complete first draft of Chapter 2 of thesis on “MS Found in a Bottle” and “A Descent into the Maelstrom”
Early July:	Finish revisions and edits of Chapter 2
Mid-August:	Complete first draft of Chapter 3 of thesis on “The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym”
Early September:	Finish revisions and edits of Chapter 3
Mid-September:	Complete introduction and conclusion of thesis
Early October:	Final revisions and edits of complete thesis
DEADLINE DATE:	Final thesis due
Mid-November:	Thesis Defense
Last Day of Class:	Final revised thesis due

TIMELINE EXAMPLES

THESIS TIMELINE

(Sample 3)

Since the success of this creative project requires me to fulfill several components of the design quickly and efficiently, I have developed a schedule which will allow me to remain organized throughout the entire process.

The written component of this creative project will consist of background research highlighting the steps and justification for the digitally animated short based on a review of pertinent literature. The literature review will include a brief historical overview of animation and transition to digital animation; examples of modern digital animation; and the art of digital animation. The method will be explained: choosing the story; interview with the author; choosing the style or “look” of the current project; digital animation techniques; voice casting, acquisition, and sound editing; and overall editing.

1. Mid-February – Obtain rights for story

Since the story is intellectual property, I was required to contact the owner of the story in order to obtain his permission to use it for my purposes. I have already contacted the owner and received his permission to use his story with the stipulation that I send him a copy of the project when it is completed.

2. Late February/Early March – Develop/refine script based upon story

Using the original story as a base, I will modify the dialogue and actions of characters to fit into my timeframe. Additionally, I will describe in detail the use of props and the movement of cameras and characters in order to facilitate the development of a storyboard later. Once the script is completed, I will present it to my director in order to receive his input and possible corrections or improvements. I will also begin on the literature review during this period.

3. Mid-Late March – Visual design

I will begin with the design of the three characters, making detailed sketches from many angles to obtain a sense of scale and proportion between both the characters and their environment. After I am satisfied with the design of the characters I will make conceptual drawings of both the basement and garden settings, making sure to note important color palette choices and lighting styles. Additionally, I will develop a story board to assist me with the future animation of my characters. After these have been polished to my liking, I will present them to my director for his input.

4. Early/Mid-April – Record voice actors

This process should take no longer than a week. I will recruit my voice actors for one of two days and obtain quality recordings of all of their characters’ dialogue. I will then spend a few days correcting any imperfections in the sound such as audio scratches or pops. After the audio has been sufficiently improved I will meet with Marc to play through the entire audio track and receive his input.

5. Late April – Character Design

Using my sketches as a starting point, I will develop the three characters using the Autodesk Maya software. In addition to their physical proportions, I will also be designing any and all textures that they will require at this point, such as clothing patterns and skin complexions. These will be developed using Photoshop. After the models have been successfully created and textured, I will add skeleton rigs to the models and create test animations in order to refine the characters’ personalities. I will then present my work to my advisor for any corrections or improvements that could be made.

6. May – Set Design

Following the successful design of my characters, I will move on to the design of the two sets. Using my sketches as a base, I will model, texture, and light the sets.

TIMELINE EXAMPLES

7. June – Animate

Using the storyboards I have previously developed, I will place and animate my characters, props, and cameras within my completed sets. Once the animations are completed, I will present them to my director for feedback.

8. Early July – Rendering

Following the animating process, I will begin to render the visual aspect of the movie. Rendering is a time-consuming process, and depending on the visual complexity of the film may take up to a week or more to complete. Following a successful complete render, I will show the completed visual component to my director for feedback. I will continue to work on updating my literature review, and start writing the method section.

9. Mid/Late July – Sound Design

Using my sound recording software, I will record real-life sounds using found objects in order to add realism and believability to my visual components. For sounds that I will not be able to record live, I will use the software to digitally create them. After the sounds have been created, I will place them in sequence and synchronize them with the visual component. I will then play both the visual and audio components side by side for my director in order to improve or correct any errors.

10. August/September – Composing/Finalization

After rendering out both the visual and sound components, I will composite the two together using After Effects, making sure to add final touches such as credits and scene transitions. I will then take the finished product to my director for any additional comments or concerns.

11. October – Written Component of Project

I will complete the written component of my project at least one week prior to the deadline so my director can review it and/or suggest revisions and still allow time to meet the deadline.



LINKS & CONTACTS

HONORS DEAN'S OFFICE:

- HONR 205, 615-898-2152

HONORS ADVISORS:

- Judy.Albakry@mtsu.edu, HONR 229, 615-494-8819
- Laura.Clippard@mtsu.edu, HONR 227, 615-898-5464

FORMS & TEMPLATES

- <http://mtsu.edu/honors/forms.php>

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & CALENDAR

- <https://mtsu.edu/honors/thesis.php>
- <https://mtsu.edu/honors/calendar.php>

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

- <https://mtsu.edu/irb/index.php>

THESES AVAILABLE ONLINE

- <https://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/handle/mtsu/3483>

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- https://mtsu.edu/urc/ureca/ureca_grant_overview.php
- <https://mtsu.edu/honors/scholarships.php>

PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITY

- <https://mtsu.edu/scientia/>