

**Honors Thesis: UO Environmental Studies Program**  
**Overview and Frequently Asked Questions**  
July 2018

**A. Overview**

Students majoring in Environmental Studies (ENVS) and Environmental Science (ESCI) are encouraged to participate in the Environmental Studies Program Honors Program. Writing a senior thesis is good preparation for future professional positions and graduate studies. It provides an opportunity to develop your research and writing skills. Graduating with honors demonstrates a high level of initiative and ability to work independently. An honors thesis is a way to become an expert on a topic of interest and gain recognition for your outstanding academic work.

To graduate with ENVS honors, a student must:

1. Have a 3.3 overall GPA and a 3.5 GPA in classes required for the major.
2. Complete a research-based thesis or creative project conducted under the direction of a faculty advisor. Due to the breadth of potential research topics, students can do original laboratory or field-based research, library-based research, or a creative project.

In summary, our requirements are:

1. Meet with your faculty academic advisor
2. Secure a faculty thesis advisor
3. Complete your prospectus
4. Take ENVS 401: Research (4 credits) (not required for Clark Honors College students)
5. Take ENVS 403: Thesis (4 credits)
6. Give a public presentation
7. Obtain approval from your faculty thesis advisor
8. Submit your approved thesis to ENVS for uploading into Scholar's Bank

See below for a more detailed description of these requirements.

**B. Timeline**

Most students complete their research and writing during their senior year. However, the timeline is flexible if you are conducting research during the summer. Here is a typical schedule:

***Fall Quarter***

- a. Determine your topic or area of interest
- b. Meet with your faculty academic advisor
- c. Identify and secure your faculty thesis advisor
- d. *Optional*: start working on your prospectus

***Winter Quarter***

- a. Register for 4 credits of research (ENVS 401)
- b. Submit prospectus to your faculty advisor
- c. Complete research

### ***Spring Quarter***

- a. Register for 4 credits of thesis (ENVS 403)
- b. Make arrangements for oral presentation
- c. Finalize and submit approved thesis to ENVS

### **C. Description of Requirements**

#### ***1. Meet with your academic advisor, and 2. Secure a faculty thesis advisor***

Sign up for an advising appointment (see ENVS website for instructions, <http://envs.uoregon.edu/undergrad/advising/>), to meet with Brittany McFall to have your topic approved, discuss how the credits fulfill major requirements and brainstorm potential faculty thesis advisors if needed. Be prepared to discuss timelines and other logistics.

Your topic must be environmentally related and interdisciplinary. In other words, you should look at an environmental topic from more than one perspective. For example:

- If you are examining international policies that address climate change, you could include a short discussion of climate science.
- If you are researching the ecology of an endangered species, you could discuss management implications of your findings.

Students enrolled in Clark Honors College (CHC) may complete a single thesis for both CHC and ENVS as long as the content is environmentally focused.

You will ask a faculty member who has expertise in your topic to serve as your advisor. Some students work in a professor's laboratory, conducting their honors research within the framework of the laboratory's work. Other students conduct their own independent research under the guidance of a faculty advisor. Some students complete honors theses linked to their study abroad programs or Environmental Leadership Program projects.

#### ***3. Complete your prospectus***

In order to become familiar with the literature and articulate your intended methods, you need to write a 6-8 page prospectus (double-spaced except for bibliography section). The purpose of the prospectus is to ensure that students have done appropriate background work to be successful in the research phase. Depending on the nature of your research, you may wish to complete this step either just prior to taking ENVS 401 (e.g., if you are doing summer field work) or while you are taking ENVS 401 (e.g., as your first assignment). You will submit your prospectus to your faculty thesis advisor, so we recommend that you check in with them to determine the best approach.

The first step is to conduct a literature search to 1) become familiar with what is known and not known about your topic, 2) write your prospectus introduction, 3) refine your methods, and 4) find literature that might be helpful as you write your thesis. We recommend a minimum of 15 high-quality, peer-reviewed sources. The UO Libraries webpage has advice on conducting a literature search and has links to free literature management software <http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/c.php?g=367264>.

Although the prospectus structure may vary by discipline and topic, we recommend the following outline. However, you may include different content as approved by your faculty advisor.

- 1) Introduction – The introduction should summarize essential background so the reader can understand the context, purpose and methods for the thesis. The Introduction should synthesize and cite literature in the bibliography.
- 2) Research questions or project goal – Summarize what hypotheses you plan on testing, what questions you hope to answer or – for creative projects – what goals you hope to achieve.
- 3) Methods – What specific methods will you use to answer those questions or achieve those goals?
  - If you are conducting research that involves either people or animals, talk with your faculty advisor to determine if you need to submit your project for review from the UO Institutional Review Board or the UO Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee.
- 4) *(Optional)* Preliminary Outline or Product – What will your thesis or project eventually look like? What sections will it have?
- 5) Timeline – When will you conduct your research and complete your thesis? Include all benchmarks and check-in points (in other words, work with your faculty thesis advisor to create agreed-upon deadlines).
- 6) Bibliography – Include a list of resources that you have consulted or that may be of use to you as you conduct your research.

#### **4. and 5. Take ENVS 401 Research (4 credits) and ENVS 403 Thesis (4 credits)**

For ENVS honors students not in Clark Honors College, we require that you take 4 credits each of ENVS 401 (research) and ENVS 403 (thesis), both of which may count towards your major requirements, depending on the research topic. You will work with your faculty academic advisor to determine how these credits might count towards your major requirements.

CHC students may substitute HC 477 Thesis Prospectus for the ENVS 401 requirement, but need to register for ENVS 403.

The intent of these credits is to ensure that students have time in their schedules to dedicate to research and writing. The expectation is that you will spend approximately 12 hours/week working on researching, then writing, your thesis. Your faculty thesis advisor serves as the instructor of record and determines what a passing grade constitutes (ENVS 401/403 credits are always P/N). Example assignments might include short updates, data summaries, preliminary analysis, detailed thesis outline, draft thesis, etc.

To be approved to register for ENVS 401 and 403, pick up an independent study form from 144 COL. Complete the form, ask your faculty thesis advisor to sign it and return it to 144 COL for your faculty academic advisor to sign. You will be notified when you are cleared to register.

We do not have any formatting requirements for your completed thesis other than we require a cover (title) page and approval (abstract) page that is signed by your faculty advisor. The Honors Cover and Approval Pages templates are available on the ENVS website, <http://envs.uoregon.edu/undergrad/honors/>. Clark's Honors College students will follow CHC cover page and formatting requirements.

Students often want to know how long a thesis should be. Because the typical page number varies by topic and discipline, we do not have an official minimum or maximum number of required pages. An honors thesis represents a shift to professional writing: away from "how long is the assignment" to "what information is needed to answer the central question(s) of my work." We recommend that you look at past undergraduate theses to see how other students have written about their topics (see Scholar's Bank, <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/>). In addition, there are some older paper theses available in 144 COL.

#### **6. Give a public presentation (defense)**

You will give a public presentation summarizing your work. Your faculty thesis advisor must be present, and you may invite anyone else. Student presentations are usually 20-30 min with 20-30 min of questions. Your faculty advisor will introduce you and lead the question-and-answer session. CHC students may count their CHC thesis defense for this requirement by inviting the ENVS community to attend their presentation.

Please schedule your presentation to occur before the end of week 10 of the term you are finishing your thesis. It is up to you to schedule a time and secure a room. If you wish, you can work with the ENVS Academic Advisor or Student Advisors (SAs) in 144 COL to reserve 249 COL. We recommend that you reserve the room for a total of 1.5-2 hours (0.5-1 hour to set up and practice, then 1 hour for your presentation session including Q&A. A few minutes before your room reservation time, go to 144 COL and ask the ENVS Academic Advisor or the SAs to assist you in unlocking the door and connecting to the wireless projector. Since the projector is wireless, you need to either borrow an ENVS computer or visit 144 COL to get the projector software installed on your computer (see the ENVS Undergraduate Coordinator or SAs for more information). You are not required to use 249 COL and you may secure your own room on campus.

At least one week before your presentation, send the SAs ([ecopeers@uoregon.edu](mailto:ecopeers@uoregon.edu)) a flier announcing your presentation so they can advertise it to the Environmental Studies community. The flier should include your name, thesis title, and date, time and location of your presentation. **Please note:** even though we will advertise your presentation, it is your responsibility to build your audience. Consider inviting your friends, family and anyone who has assisted you with your work!

**7. Obtain approval from your faculty thesis advisor, 8. Submit IRB closure form if applicable and 9. Submit your approved thesis to ENVS for uploading into Scholar's Bank.**

Once your faculty thesis advisor has approved your thesis, ask them to sign the approval page (available at <http://envs.uoregon.edu/undergrad/honors/>). Append this signed page to the beginning of your thesis.

Lastly, email the following to the ENVS Undergraduate Coordinator:

1. Your approved thesis in pdf format. Please submit a single document that includes the cover and signed approval pages. Do NOT submit the forms separately.
2. Permission Form for Student Submissions to Scholars' Bank (available at [https://library.uoregon.edu/diglib/irg/student\\_permission](https://library.uoregon.edu/diglib/irg/student_permission)).

Your thesis will be posted in Scholar's Bank to be permanently accessible, available and searchable through the UO libraries, <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/>. If you are in CHC, you only need to submit your thesis to CHC (follow their instructions).

#### **D. Other Opportunities**

Resources for research:

1. Hill Fund for Undergraduate Research – You can apply for up to \$300 for materials or travel required for your research or for you to present your findings at a conference, <http://envs.uoregon.edu/undergrad/resources/>.
2. Other opportunities are available through the UO's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program <http://uop.uoregon.edu/>.

Consider sharing your findings with a broader audience!

1. UO Undergraduate Symposium – You can give a presentation or show a poster at this annual event celebrating undergraduate research and creative work, <http://undergradsymposium.uoregon.edu/>.
2. Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal – You can gain experience with the peer-review process and publish your findings through this undergraduate-led journal, <http://ourj.uoregon.edu/>
3. Ecotone – Some research or creative projects may be appropriate for publication in Ecotone, the literature journal of the UO Environmental Studies Program, <http://envs.uoregon.edu/reference/publications/ecotone/>.

#### **E. Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q: Do I need a second reader?**

A: No, ENVS honors students who are not enrolled in CHC do not need a second reader or a committee, only one faculty advisor. CHC students must follow CHC requirements.

**Q: Do I need to get any paperwork for my faculty advisor to fill out during/after the presentation?**

A: You simply need an approval page (available on the ENVS honors website) signed by your advisor. Be sure to follow append your signed approval page to your thesis for final submission to the ENVS Academic Advisor.

**Q: Are there particular formatting requirements? Similarly: Are there requirements for the abstract page and cover page aside from them being signed by our faculty advisor (e.g., formatting, length of abstract, etc?).**

A: Other than the required cover and signed approval pages, we do not have a strict set of prescriptive formatting guidelines because our students can work with faculty members from many disciplines. Therefore, we count upon the faculty thesis advisor to uphold disciplinary standards. However, ESCI majors presenting research findings can expect to follow a standard scientific paper format: Abstract, Table of Contents, List of Figures and Tables, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Literature Cited. You may also wish to add an Acknowledgements section. There is no official length on abstracts but a common limit for scientific journals is no longer than 300 words.

**Q: Is the thesis typically formatted single or double spaced?**

Check with your faculty thesis advisor, but a thesis is typically double-spaced.

**Q: Can I include pictures and figures in my thesis?**

A: Yes, graphic elements are a common component of theses regardless of discipline.

**Q: In the instructions online, it says the defense is due by week 10 and the thesis needs to be submitted to Environmental Studies by the end of finals week. Does this mean the thesis can be turned in after the defense?**

A: Yes, it is typical to submit the thesis after the defense. This allows you to incorporate any important feedback from the defense.

**Q: Do I have to collect my own data?**

A: No, a thesis can consist of library research or creative work. For projects in the natural science disciplines, the ability to collect original data is valuable, but we leave the amount and type of data to the discretion of the student and faculty advisor.

**Q: What if my results aren't significant?**

A: Results don't have to be "positive" to be meaningful, as you can learn just as much from non-significant results. In fact, negative results may require you to apply important critical thinking skills.