

School of Public Health
BSPH Honors Thesis Requirement and Guidelines

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1. Why Complete an Honors Thesis?

The honors thesis provides students with opportunities to engage in scholarship and professional activity that cannot be paralleled by any classroom experience. Preparing a thesis allows students to explore a topic thoroughly, generate new knowledge and contribute to their fields of study. The thesis can satisfy intellectual curiosity, promote creativity and intellectual maturation, and expose students to expectations similar to those in graduate school, professional school and various career positions. The thesis encourages students to develop several important academic and professional skills, such as critical analysis, oral and written communication, problem solving, and time management. The thesis also affords students the opportunity to develop a professional working relationship with their professors, which can help to enrich their intellectual development. The thesis improves student marketability by providing students with advanced academic experience, detailed meaningful reference letters from their mentors, and tangible products to show admissions committees and prospective employers. Students who successfully complete an Honors Thesis will be eligible for Graduation with Distinction.

2. Eligible Students

Eligible students are junior or senior honors students who have completed at least 18 hours of upper division classes. Non-honors students that meet the Honors College Requirements (i.e., minimum 3.3 GPA and in good standing) are also eligible. Students who do not meet these requirements may submit a petition to the Undergraduate Program Director to waive the requirements. This petition should include a letter of recommendation from the prospective mentor.

3. Eligible Mentors

Any full-time faculty member in the School of Public Health may supervise an honors thesis that focuses on public health.

4. Overview of the Honors Thesis Process

The three models for the honors thesis in public health are described below. Utilizing any one of the models, students must make an original contribution to the field of public health. The thesis must be conducted in collaboration with a faculty mentor, and must involve more effort and sophistication than would be expected from a classroom assignment.

Model 1: Empirical/Original Research

With this option, students collect and analyze original data to address a research question. The written product includes an Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results (including figures and legends), Discussion, and Reference Section. The amount of time devoted to the data collection, analysis, and writing is more substantial than that expected in a 1-semester class. The mentor determines whether a research proposal is necessary and evaluates the proposal if submitted.

Model 2: Literature Review

With this option, students do a critical analysis of published empirical literature on a particular topic in a public health-related field. This review summarizes a body of information and provides an original synthesis that organizes the information in a novel way (e.g., a new interpretation of the findings, a timeline of the progression of knowledge, new emerging themes). The goal is for the student to demonstrate comprehensive sophisticated knowledge of the current literature on a topic.

Model 3: Alternative Project*

A student may propose an alternative final product, subject to approval by the thesis mentor and the Director of the Bachelors Program in Public Health. If an alternative product is agreed upon, the thesis mentor and an additional reviewer(s) (a faculty member or professional in the area of

study) identified by the mentor, must create an evaluation rubric prior to the student beginning work on the alternative project. *A substantial written component must accompany any alternative project.

NOTE: All models for the written thesis will be accompanied by an oral presentation. The presentation must summarize the written thesis. Length of the presentation should be determined with the faculty mentor. There should be a question and answer period following the presentation. Presentations will be open to all faculty and students. The mentor and additional reviewer(s) must be present at the oral presentation.

5. The Product

It is expected that the length of the honors thesis will be approximately 20 double-spaced pages with 1-inch margins; not including references (exact length may vary). Writing style and other formatting requirements will be decided in consultation with the faculty mentor.

6. Timeline

Students may apprentice with their mentor for at least 1 semester prior to considering to writing a thesis. **The empirical/original research thesis usually takes 2 semesters to complete and the literature review takes 2-6 months.** The duration often depends on the amount of time needed to 1) review relevant literature, 2) develop a research question or hypothesis, 3) obtain approval where applicable from the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) for research involving non-human animals) or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research involving human subjects, 4) develop data collection tools, 5) conduct the research and analyze results, and 6) write the thesis.

During the process of thesis writing, students are expected to meet regularly with their faculty mentor at least twice a month to set goals and deadlines, discuss progress, review the work and receive feedback.

7. Product Evaluation

The research mentor and 1-2 reviewers selected by the mentor will evaluate the thesis. The additional 1-2 reviewers may be a faculty member in any department or a professional in the area of study. The mentor will work with the additional reviewer(s) to set deadlines for the submission of the thesis to the additional reviewer(s) and for the additional reader(s) to submit the evaluation to the mentor. Both the mentor and reviewer(s) will use a rubric to evaluate the thesis (both written and oral components) (See Appendix A). The mentor and additional reviewer(s) will consult with each other to determine the final grade, and the undergraduate program director will determine the final grade in cases where the mentor and additional reviewer(s) cannot agree.

8. Course Work

Students must enroll in at least 3 credit hour of PH 4880 (Honors Thesis II) the semester that they complete their thesis (3-6 are possible). Students have the option to enroll in PH 4870 (Honors Thesis I) for another 1-3 credit hours the semester before they complete their thesis. The exact number of credit hours depends on variables such as the amount of room in the student's schedule, financial constraints, and/or mentor requirements. The timetable for the research and writing is not necessarily limited to one or two semesters, however. For example, if a student is doing study abroad work as a volunteer or as part of a class project, they may continue to build on this work in the honors thesis.

9. Deadlines

The faculty mentor will impose deadlines along the way for components of the project and drafts of the thesis. No later than three weeks prior to the last day of classes, the student will turn in a complete draft of the honors thesis to their faculty mentor and the second reader. The faculty member and second reader will evaluate the thesis using the rubric found at the end of the document. The student will then revise the thesis based on feedback from their committee members, if required. The final approved thesis must be submitted to the Undergraduate Public Health Director no later than the last day of final exams during the semester in which the thesis is completed. Students must also notify the Honors College that they have successfully completed their honors thesis by completing the Certification of Successful Completion Form (<http://honors.gsu.edu/certification-successful-completion-honors-thesis/>). This form is due by the last day of final exams during the semester in which the thesis is completed.

Students are required to enroll in at least 3 credits of PH 4880 the semester they intend to complete their thesis. Students may elect to enroll in PH 4870 during the semesters prior to that, if they are actively engaged in thesis activities. The exact number of credit hours and whether to enroll in PH 4870 depends on variables such as the amount of room in the student's schedule, financial constraints, and/or mentor requirements. In order to enroll in the honors thesis course, students must receive approval from their mentor.

Students must notify the Honors College of their intent to conduct an honors thesis by completing the online Intent to Conduct a Thesis Form (<http://honors.gsu.edu/intent-conduct-honors-thesis/>), which requires that students: 1) Identify the faculty member who has agreed to supervise their project; 2) Write a 200-word summary of their project, and 3) Provide a tentative title for their project.

If a student needs to register for PH 4870, then this form is due April 1 for summer registration, August 1 for fall registration, and December 1 for spring registration. Students who do not need to register should submit this form as soon as they begin the thesis.

NOTE: Students MUST register for at least 3 credit hours of PH 4880 the semester that they intend to complete their thesis.

10. Proposal and Authorization

In order to obtain approval from the Undergraduate Public Health program to perform an honors thesis, the student must be enrolled in or have completed one semester of PH 4870 or any other 4000 level public health course with the research mentor. Students must register for PH 4880 the semester they submit their thesis.

The student must submit a proposal (1–2 pages) to the research mentor and the Director of Undergraduate Public Health program and the Undergraduate Public Health Honors Advisor, prior to the semester they plan to register for PH 4880

The research mentor in consultation with the Undergraduate Public Health Honors Advisor and the Director of Undergraduate Public Health, will evaluate the proposal and approve the student to submit an intent to Conduct a Thesis Form so that they may register in either PH 4870 or PH 4880. The exact number of credit hours for PH 4870 will depend on variables such as the amount of room in the student's schedule, financial constraints, and/or mentor requirements. Students enrolled in PH 4880 will earn 3 credit hours.

11. Required Attendance at Honors Thesis Sessions

Students are required to attend three 2-hr sessions led by the Honors College Thesis Team each semester that they are working on their honors thesis. The three sessions are held at the beginning, middle and end of the semester. The last session is the Thesis Pitch, which is an oral competition event where students have 3 minutes to communicate the importance of their research. Presenting at the Thesis Pitch is voluntary, but attendance is required.

12. Undergraduate Research Conference

All students working on an Honors Thesis are encouraged to share their research with the wider Georgia State University community by participating in the Undergraduate Research Conference, which is held annually in the spring.

13. Honors College Support

Honors College students participating in Honors Thesis are eligible to borrow a laptop computer from the Honors College for the semester, contingent on availability. These students may also apply for financial support to present at conferences and purchase supplies for their research. In addition to the three required sessions, there are several workshops held in the Honors College each semester to provide support to Honors College students engaged in research and these activities.

The Honors College Research Program Coordinator is available to advise students and their mentors.

14. Questions

Contact the Director of Undergraduate Public Health, the Undergraduate Public Health Honors Advisor, and/or the Honors College Undergraduate Research Program Coordinator.

Appendix A. GSU BSPH Honors Thesis Rubric

Please provide a rating of 1 = excellent, 2 = satisfactory and 3 = unsatisfactory for the following:

| Skill | Rating | Comment |
|---|--------|---------|
| Stated a clear, novel, and specific research question (or hypothesis) | | |
| Used appropriate methods to answer research question/hypothesis | | |
| Demonstrated an understanding of relevant literature, terminology, and theory | | |
| Demonstrated understanding of the scientific method or scholarly inquiry | | |
| Critiqued and analyzed relevant studies and presented an integrated synthesis | | |
| Analyzed information or data collected using appropriate research methods | | |
| Drew appropriate conclusions supported by evidence | | |
| Demonstrated understanding of results and their interpretation | | |
| Communicated effectively in written form | | |
| The writing was consistent with the chosen style and free of typographical and grammatical errors | | |

Recommended grade: _____