

**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
NIPISSING UNIVERSITY**

GUIDELINES FOR HONOURS THESIS STUDENTS

The purpose of these guidelines is to give you an idea of how to successfully complete an honours thesis. In particular, the guidelines address:

- The purpose of an honours thesis
- What is expected of an honours student and supervisor
- General thesis structure (e.g., length, format, due date)

Please keep in mind that these are guidelines. If you have any questions or would like clarification on any points, please ask your supervisor. In addition, we welcome any suggestions you might have on how the guidelines or the honours program in general might be improved, your input is welcome.

THE PURPOSE OF AN HONOURS THESIS

Most undergraduate courses are highly structured. While students may focus on a particular subject, this occurs within a process of half or full-year courses. As a result, when students conduct independent research in classes, it is usually within relatively narrow bounds of topic breadth and time allowed.

In doing an honours thesis, you can explore concepts and settings of particular interest, while having sufficient time to research and reflect upon your findings. The experience gained from doing an honours thesis will ideally give you insight into how to form questions, review current literature, collect and analyze data, synthesize results and present your findings. Another important component of doing an honours thesis is interacting with your thesis supervisor at every stage of the research and writing process.

The honours experience in turn gives you an idea of what postgraduate education or a career in academia involves. A thesis also serves as a solid grounding in a particular topic that can be developed further at the Master's or Doctoral level.

IDENTIFYING A RESEARCH TOPIC

The process of finding a research topic is different for every honours thesis. However, all successful research topics share the following characteristics:

- the topic and the specific focus is valid;
- the timeline is feasible;
- the topic and focus is interesting enough to sustain the effort required and result in a rewarding experience

Does my honours research have to involve data that I collected myself?

Your thesis should be the outcome of original research. This can come from collecting and analysing data from the field. However, other activities can also be considered as original research:

- Analysing a dataset collected by others
- Taking an already-analyzed dataset, and analyzing it in a different way
- Conducting a literature survey

It is important to note that the last type (the literature survey) is not simply an extra-large term paper. A term paper is usually a logical assembly of facts and arguments arrived at by others. By contrast, a literature survey requires a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical frameworks that form the basis of a thesis, and how these frameworks help understand the literature you consult.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF AN HONOURS STUDENT AND THEIR SUPERVISOR?

It is reasonable to expect that both the student and their supervisor should be:

- Available for scheduled meetings during the academic term;
- Respond to inquiries in a reasonable amount of time;
- Transparent, consistent and honest;
- Able to meet deadlines agreed upon by the supervisor and the student.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF AN HONOURS STUDENT?

- The ability to conduct independent research, as well as work independently (but see below)
- The ability to say “I don’t understand”
- The ability to say “I need help”

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF AN HONOURS SUPERVISOR?

- Only take on as many honours & directed studies students as can be reasonably accommodated so that the supervisor can perform their duties adequately;
- Willingness to challenge student intellectually as well as ensure that a specific research idea is feasible;
- Provide regular feedback;
- Review drafts and provide constructive comments.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THINGS ARE NOT WORKING OUT BETWEEN STUDENT AND SUPERVISOR?

There are many reasons why a student, supervisor or both may choose to end an arrangement. Ideally, if both are meeting the expectations described above, then outright personality clashes should not be a cause of conflict.

Other potential factors include:

- Supervisor or student are unable to meet expectations, due to unanticipated academic or extracurricular demands;
- Chosen thesis topic becomes unfeasible.

Ideally, the first strategy is to find a workable solution within the current arrangement: (e.g., bring in an extra supervisor, tweak the research question). If this isn't possible, then the next step is to contact the Chair of the Department of Geography for guidance.

THESIS PROPOSAL (due October by the latest)

The thesis proposal is a simple document, outlining what research question you want to explore and how you plan to go about it. Your question and/or method may change over the course of the year, and that's fine. However, the thesis proposal is the opportunity to organize your thoughts on paper to discuss with your supervisor.

- At least 3 pages
- General structure:
 - Introduce your research topic,
 - Why it is important,
 - What is known already in the literature
 - How you will collect your data (Method)
 - Timeline (what you will do from September until April)
- Distributed to your supervisor and second evaluator

GENERAL THESIS FORMAT

- Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Results, Conclusion
- Your thesis should be typed using a word processor.
- Pages numbered (starting after the title page).
- The title page should be just that: No need for images.
- Please use 12 pt. Times New Roman font, 1.5 space.
- Use the default page margins: 1.25 cm. on left and right sides of page, 1 cm. top and bottom of page.

And of course, please, please make sure that you check your grammar and spelling (saying "the spell-checker didn't catch it" is NO excuse!).

CITATION FORMAT:

We all have our own standard formats that we're used to; just pick one and be consistent. The Library should be able to advise you on the formats typically used in theses.

THESIS LENGTH:

While there are general standards on what a thesis should consist of, there is no fixed upper or lower limit on thesis length. Different research activities result in different results. For example, many hours of research in the field may result in a large amount of data that are best summarized in a short table. Hence, the overall amount of writing may be limited. By contrast, research based on a literature survey (i.e., using secondary written data), does not normally have a lot of space taken up by tables, figures and diagrams.

Roughly speaking, a thesis should be between 30 and 50 pages long. Please note that this does not include your list of references, tables or figures. Approximate expectations should be made clear by the supervisor, based on ongoing consultation with you.

THESIS DUE DATE:

Please note that if you wish to graduate by a certain date, you must submit your thesis to your supervisor well in advance of grades being due (at least 2 weeks).

Public Seminar (early March)

The ability to conduct independent research is only half of the scholarly experience! In early March of each year, all honours students are expected to present on their honours thesis research. Please note that this does not mean you have to have completed your research.

The proceedings will reflect what you would expect at an academic conference: Each student will present a 15-minute talk on their topic, in particular their research questions and results. After the presentation, the floor will be open for questions from the audience.

Reporting your findings to a public audience is an opportunity to gain:

- practice for future presentations (esp. conferences);
- ability to link broad concepts to your work;
- exposure to your peers:-insight into what work they are doing, chance to ask questions, pushing the boundary of inquiry further and perhaps identify linkages with other people's work;
- Hopefully a well-deserved sense of accomplishment and recognition of the effort you put into your thesis

Thesis Grading:

Your thesis will be assessed by your supervisor(s) and one other professor from the department.

Grading Rubric

Proposal	15%
Thesis	85%
Public Seminar	Pass/Fail

A TYPICAL TIMELINE FOR HONOURS STUDENTS

YEAR THREE

January	February	March	April
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin thinking about <u>general</u> areas of research you might be interested in exploring • Approach faculty who you think may be able to supervise honours research in one or more of these areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feb 15th: Formal agreement between student and supervisor • Register for honours course • Supervisor identifies second evaluator 		
May	June	July	August

YEAR FOUR

September	October	November	December
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis Proposal Due 		
January	February	March	April
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public seminar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit final draft to supervisor and identified second reader for grading