



**2023-2024 Academic Year:
Guidelines and Requirements for the Senior Honors Thesis**

| SUBMISSION | DATE DUE |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Final honors thesis (for seniors/Dec. 2023 grads) | Friday, Dec. 1, 2023 by 5pm |
| Final honors thesis (for seniors/May 2024 grads) | Friday, May 3, 2024 by 5pm |
| Honors prospectus (for juniors; December 2024 grads) | Friday, Dec. 1, 2023 by 5pm |
| Honors prospectus (for juniors; May 2025 grads) | Friday, May 10, 2024 by 5pm |

(A) Overview

Successful completion of an Honors Thesis is required to graduate with honors in the Public Health concentration. The vehicle for this project is Honors Thesis preparation course number PHP1980, to be taken in the Fall and Spring semesters of the senior year. Two Brown faculty members, both of whom are typically affiliated with Brown and at least one of whom is a faculty member in the School of Public Health (SPH), with interest and expertise in the project topic, work closely with the student as their Honors Thesis Advisors, providing mentoring and oversight throughout the project. If a student wants to include an advisor from outside of Brown, the situation should be discussed with the Director of Undergraduate Studies. One faculty member is the primary advisor, who is the sponsor of the PHP1980 registration and will provide the majority of direction and oversight. Both the primary advisor and the secondary advisor must approve the thesis as being of Honors quality in order for the student to graduate with Honors. It is also necessary to make a public presentation of the thesis, as noted below.

In addition to two semesters of PHP1980 (the Honors project itself), the student must successfully complete 11 courses for the Public Health concentration. **The student must achieve a balance of A's over B's.** In addition to the successful completion of an Honors Thesis, the student must be in Good Academic Standing as defined by university rules. This must be the case when the student applies to the honors program, and must be maintained throughout their senior year.

(B) Types of Honor Projects

There are several types of projects that can qualify for Honors Thesis. **Regardless of type, all projects should be based on one or more empirical and/or policy-related research questions, which are also grounded in a conceptual framework that guides the project.** Among the possible types of projects are:

- a project involving primary data collection by the student. Collected data can be quantitative (e.g., a survey research project) or qualitative (e.g., as in an ethnographic study) in which open-ended interviews are conducted. Submission of an [IRB protocol](#) is likely for primary data collection. See below for more details on IRB.
- a project, based on secondary data analysis, in which the student answers original research questions based on quantitative data or qualitative data already collected by other researchers (e.g., government data, data collected by the student's advisor, etc.);
- a policy analysis, which may consist of a combination of a review of existing literature, government documents, interviews with key informants and/or government officials, etc.
- a program-based thesis, in which the student participates in the development or evaluation of a program, and "carves out" a piece of the project for a thesis. This might be characterized as the implementation or evaluation of a program.
- a literature review, which may take the form of a traditional narrative review describing the state of science on a particular topic. This form requires substantial input from advisors regarding the scope, search terms and writing style (e.g. synthesis or annotated bibliography). A literature review may also be a more structured review, which examines literature using well described methods to answer a specific research question.

All students are expected to complete the basic [CITI Online Training](#) in human subjects during their first semester of PHP1980. Students should complete the training as early in the first semester as possible, and then upload their certificate of completion to Canvas. Completion of CITI online training is required regardless of the need for IRB approval for the thesis work.

Note: The IRB does not consider some student projects that handle researching human subjects appropriate for IRB review. If your project deals with human subjects, you will need to meet with your advisor and consult the IRB to discuss the details of your project and determine whether an IRB application is necessary or consult with Dr. Risica to talk about the best practices.

(C) Honors Topic

The topic of the Honors Thesis is often based on prior coursework or projects in an area of interest to the student. While it is desirable to build on previous work, **the Honors Thesis must represent new work.** A student may also derive their thesis from their advisor's or other faculty member's project, **but it is imperative that the student carve out his/her own research question from the larger project.**

(D) Thesis Format and Length

There is no single required format for the thesis. However, most are prepared in a format similar to that of a book (e.g., with chapters) or in a format similar to a paper prepared for publication in a research journal (e.g., with distinct sections including Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion). Often the nature of the project determines the format of the thesis. The format of the thesis should be agreed upon in advance by the student and advisors.

Book format theses are typically 50 pages or longer in length and research paper format theses typically 25-35 pages in length. Note that the stated length is not a requirement. It is up to the advisor to determine if a student has successfully completed the planned objective of the thesis regardless of the length. Substance matters more than length.

(E) Timeframe for Sign-up

The program hosts a Junior Honors meeting in November for any junior concentrator considering the Honors track. Students are encouraged to attend this meeting.

*Students planning to graduate in May of their senior year (May 2024) are required to submit a prospectus of the Honors project, signed by an identified primary advisor, by the **first Friday in May of their junior year**. Students planning to graduate in December are required to submit a prospectus of the Honors project, signed by an identified primary advisor, by the **first Friday of December of their junior year**. The second advisor must also be named, although a signature is not required. A template for the prospectus can be found [here](#). It should be noted that students cannot substantially change the topic of the project as it is described in the approved prospectus, unless approval is obtained from the Honors Director.*

***The role of the advisors is to mentor the student throughout the entire thesis process, including the design and implementation of the project, and not merely oversee the writing of a thesis based on already-collected data. Students who plan to spend the second semester of their junior year abroad should identify a topic and their primary and secondary advisors before they leave.** Students may not conduct research while abroad unless the project is approved as a thesis prior to departure. Students may not conduct research then try to find a faculty member who will accept the project.*

(F) Advising

Typically, both the primary and secondary advisors are members of the Brown faculty, and at least one must also be a faculty member of the School of Public Health (SPH). If only one of the two advisors is associated with SPH, in most cases, the SPH faculty member would serve in the role of primary advisor. Exceptions are sometimes allowable, with permission, but all deviations from this norm must be approved by the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

The primary advisor is typically the individual who most directly mentors the student through the process of developing and completing the Honors Thesis. **It is the primary advisor's responsibility to assist the student in: 1) defining the project, 2) setting deadlines for task completion, 3) monitoring the student's progress throughout the course of the project period, and 4) assigning grades for both semesters of PHP1980 (see Section (G) below for more details).** A grade of INC will disqualify the student from Honors.

The role of the second advisor can take different forms, ranging from full participation as a mentor to simply reviewing and commenting on the first completed draft of the thesis, and anywhere in between. Expectations of the role of the second advisor should be clear and agreed upon in advance by both the primary and secondary advisor, and should be clear to the student as well.

(G) Planning and Scheduling the Thesis

It is highly recommended that students and advisors document early in Fall Semester (for Spring graduation) a work plan, including the terms of the Honors Thesis completion. Students and their advisors establish "deliverables" with target dates for all major tasks involved in implementing the project and writing the thesis. Students then meet with the advisor regularly to review progress on those tasks and the planned timeline. Students must receive grades for both

semesters, but the balance of these tasks between semesters is determined by the student and advisor(s). A grade of incomplete (INC) is not allowed. Though changes in the plan can (often) occur, documentation of this planning and agreed timeline will avoid a common tendency toward misunderstanding and / or procrastination in the absence of deadlines.

All Honors students will register for PHP1980 as an independent study with their thesis advisor for two semesters, typically fall and spring of their Senior year. PHP1980 is an approved Writing-Designated (WRIT) course, therefore, during the first semester (Fall if graduating in May) must meet the following objectives. Thesis advisors must:

- require at least two written assignments of any length and in any language;
- provide students with substantive feedback on each writing assignment (for example, students may draft and revise a written assignment or may simply be able to apply feedback on their writing to later assignments); and
- provide instruction, feedback, and guidance in either disciplinary or academic writing conventions.

As written feedback on drafts is the primary criterion for the designation and students must satisfy the writing requirement by the end of the 7th (or penultimate) semester, advisors must ensure that students undergo adequate writing and revision based on substantive feedback in the first of their two semesters of PHP1980. Written assignments will typically consist of a section of the thesis paper and feedback can be in the form of viewable tracked changes in Microsoft Word, or scanned written feedback submitted as a PDF, etc. **Two written assignments with feedback must be submitted to the Director of Undergraduate Studies, Patricia Risica (cc Kira Philips) by the end of the student's seventh semester.**

(H) Departmental Deadlines and Presenting

All students must present their thesis to the public. Students graduating in May have two possible venues for presenting their thesis. They may either present their work orally to an audience of faculty and their peers, or they may choose to present via poster, which would be submitted for presentation at Public Health Research Day in early-April (scheduled during [National Public Health Week](#)). Oral presentations are generally scheduled in mid to late April, for May graduates. For students graduating in December, the oral presentation occurs in November. Since Research Day is in April, this option for presentation is not available to December graduates.

Revisions to the thesis may be required based on the comments and suggestions of the audience and advisors. **The final copy of the thesis, with a Public Health Honors Thesis cover page (see attached template) signed by both advisors, is due to the Department on Friday, May 3, 2024 (email to Patricia Risica and cc Kira Philips). Advisors may also want a hard copy of the final thesis so students should inquire accordingly.**

Honors Thesis Title

by

Student Name

Date Submitted, 2024

Honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduating with the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in the Public Health Concentration, School of Public Health, at Brown University

(signature of primary advisor)
(Primary Advisor's Name Typed)
Primary Advisor

(signature of secondary advisor)
(Secondary Advisor's Name typed)
Secondary Advisor