Advice to Current and Prospective Honors Thesis Advisors for Students in the Public Health Concentrations

Advising an undergraduate student on an Honors project and resulting thesis can be a very rewarding experience. It can also have pitfalls that make the experience less than enjoyable. The following advice is intended to help potential and current advisors avoid the most egregious of these pitfalls and to increase the odds of making the Faculty-Student collaboration beneficial for both participants.

1. Carefully review the Honors Guidelines distributed to students. You will thus be aware of what is expected of you when a student approaches you with the request to serve as an Honors advisor. Consult the Guidelines as needed.

2. To quote from the Guidelines, “It is the primary advisor’s responsibility to assist the student in defining the project, setting deadlines for task completion, monitoring the student’s progress throughout the course of the project period, and assigning grades for both semesters of PHP1980.” As the primary advisor, you should consult with the secondary advisor.

3. With regards to secondary advisors, “The role of the secondary 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 secondary advisor should be clear and agreed upon in advance by both the primary advisor and the secondary advisor, and should also be clear to the student.”

4. Some students will come to you with a project in mind, while others will need assistance in developing a project from scratch. It is up to you as to whether you work with them or not.

5. Be aware of the student’s skills, strengths and weaknesses before finalizing the project plan. For example, if a student wants to model the determinants of binge drinking among adolescents, but has never conducted analyses more complex than cross tabs, he/she will probably need your tutoring in multivariate regression techniques.

6. Schedule regular meetings with the student (every other week is advisable).

7. Set deadlines for completion of “deliverable” phases of the thesis and put these deadlines and deliverables in writing. They must be submitted to the Honors Thesis Director late September/early October. Some deadlines may be renegotiated, but you should not agree to unreasonable delays.

8. The Honors project is a two-semester endeavor, and grades are assigned at the end of first and second semester. We do not allow grades of “Incomplete” (INC). Project deadlines should include sufficient “products” by the end of the first semester of PHP1980 as a basis for assigning a grade.