2015-2016 Academic Year: Guidelines and Requirements for the Senior Honors Thesis

(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, at least one of whom is a faculty member in the School of Public Health, with interest and expertise in the project topic, work closely with the student as his/her Honors Thesis Advisors, providing mentoring and oversight throughout the project. 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 second 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 12 courses for the Public Health concentration, at least 10 of which are taken for a grade. The student must achieve a balance of A’s over B’s (i.e., at least 6 out of 10 graded courses). In addition to the successful completion of an Honors Thesis, the student must be in Good Academic Standing as defined by university rules.

(B.) Types of Honor Projects

There are several types of projects that can qualify for Honors. 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;

*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, and “carves out” their piece of the project for a thesis topic, implementation, and evaluation of a program relevant to the student’s area of interest;

Note: The IRB does not consider most 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 or consult with Dr. Lurie 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

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, 25-35 pages in length). 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.

(E.) Timeframe for Sign-up

Students planning to graduate in May of their senior year are required to submit a prospectus of the Honors project, which is 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, which is signed by an identified primary advisor, by the first Friday of December of their junior year. There are no exceptions to this rule. The second advisor must also be named, although a signature is not required. A template for the prospectus will be provided during the junior year. 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 concentration Honors Advisor.

Students who plan to spend the second semester of their junior year abroad should identify a topic and their primary and second advisors before they leave. Students cannot conduct research while abroad and then try to find a faculty member who will accept the project. It is important to understand that the role of the Advisors is to mentor the student and provide input into the design and implementation of the project, and not merely oversee the writing of a thesis based on already-collected data.
(F.) Advising

Both the primary and second advisors are typically members of the Brown faculty, and at least one must also be a faculty member of the School of Public Health. 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 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. A grade of INC will disqualify the student from Honors.** “Deliverables” should be specified by the student and advisors. The list of deliverables must be filed with the Honors thesis director by the end of September (May Grads) or February (December Grads).

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 advisor and the second advisor, and should also be clear to the student.

(G.) Planning and Scheduling the Thesis

Students and advisors are strongly encouraged to document the terms of the Honors Thesis in the form of a work plan that assigns target completion dates for all major tasks involved in implementing the project and writing the thesis (keeping in mind that the student must receive grades for both semesters). That is, specify the “deliverables” up front, thus avoiding a common tendency to procrastinate in the absence of deadlines. **Set up a regular schedule of meetings between advisor and student (every two weeks is advised).**

(H.) Departmental Deadlines and Presenting

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 mid-April. Oral presentations are generally scheduled in mid to late April, for May graduates. For .5 students, the oral presentation occurs in November. Since Research Day is in April, this option for presentation is not available to .5 graduates.

Revisions to the thesis may be required based on the comments and suggestions of the audience and advisors. **The final copy, with a Public Health Honors Thesis cover page (see attached template) signed by both advisors, is due to the Department on May 1. Your advisors may also want a copy of the final thesis so you should inquire accordingly.**
Honors Thesis Title

by

Student Name

Date Submitted, 2015

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) _______ (signature of secondary advisor) _______
(Primary Advisor’s Name Typed) (Secondary Advisor’s Name typed)
Primary Advisor Secondary Advisor