

The Nature and Purpose of Honours in the Faculty of Arts

I. THE NATURE OF HONOURS

Honours is an intensive program of advanced study with research at its centre. Students undertake coursework, usually within the framework of seminar classes, and research and write a substantial thesis on a topic that they work out in collaboration with a supervisor who is a specialist in the relevant field. Where pass degrees provide students with the opportunity to explore a range of fields and major in one or more, Honours requires them to take advanced classes in one discipline or area of study and to apply the methods of a discipline actively, in research of their own. Work at Honours level is challenging and entry to Honours is selective. Students need to have completed 48 credit points (normally, eight units of study) at an average of Credit or better in the subject in which they intend to take Honours.

These remarks reflect principles set out in the Academic Board Policy on Awards with Honours (effective 19 April 2007):

1. Honours degrees are offered to provide research training opportunities to students demonstrating special proficiency, and the ability for further study and research within a discipline.
2. Honours courses exist to attract and stimulate students of high ability in a discipline.'

These principles emphasize the disciplinary focus of an Honours program. Honours students in the Faculty of Arts engage in depth with the problems and research processes of a discipline (such as Philosophy) or a coherent interdisciplinary subject area (such as International and Comparative Literary Studies). Students who wish to take joint Honours in two programs must work with the Honours Coordinators of both departments to devise a plan of study that has a level of coherence comparable to that of Honours taken in a single program. Students who wish to continue studying a variety of subjects in more depth than a pass degree permits should consider a Master's degree rather than Honours.

Honours degrees in the Faculty of Arts are Appended Honours degrees, to use the terminology of the Academic Board Policy on Awards with Honours. That is, Honours consists of an extra year's full-time study appended to the pass degree. This arrangement contrasts with Integrated Honours degrees, 'where the Honours material is incorporated into the base degree'. Many departments and programs expect incoming Honours students to have completed advanced Senior units designed to prepare students for the challenges of Honours. These are sometimes referred to as 'Honours-entry' units, but it is important to note that they are not *part* of an Honours program.

Honours programs in the Faculty of Arts involve a mix of seminars and a thesis. Some programs also require additional work in forms appropriate to the discipline in question (placements, for example). The training the coursework provides reinforces but does not replicate that of the thesis. Seminars can complement a student's thesis work in ways that are all the more stimulating for being oblique.

Every Honours program in the Faculty of Arts requires students submit between 30,000 and 39,000 words of written work or its equivalent. The two typical workload models for Honours in the Faculty are as follows:

- three seminars and a shorter thesis (12-15,000 words)
- two seminars and a longer thesis (18-20,000 words)

These guidelines concerning consistency of student workloads were set out in the review of Honours in the Faculty of Arts chaired by Professor Glenda Sluga in 2007 and endorsed by the Faculty Board in 2008.

II. THE PURPOSE OF HONOURS

The Honours year is both a capstone to an undergraduate degree and a preparation for postgraduate study.

For some students, Honours is the culmination of their formal education, an experience that extends their intellectual range; hones their skills in research, analysis, and communication; and helps them develop the body of personal and professional skills needed to see a major project through to completion.

For other students, Honours is the first step on the path to careers as professional researchers and academics. An Honours degree is not the only pathway to a PhD for Australian students. Students who complete Master's degrees with a substantial research component can be as competitive as Honours graduates for doctoral places and scholarships. Nevertheless, Honours remains the primary pathway to PhD study for Australian students, because of the high standards for entry into Honours and the premium placed on research.

These two rationales for Honours are distinct but not conflicting. The training in critical analysis and self-directed research that the Honours year offers is what makes it a valuable qualification in careers outside the academy as well as within it.

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