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School of Languages and Cultures

Honours Workshop Booklet

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PLANNING YOUR HONOURS YEAR

Dr Michele Ford, Department of Indonesian Studies

For some students, Honours is preparation for further study at the doctoral level. For others, it is an opportunity to develop valuable graduate attributes which give them a strong advantage in the job market. For others still, it's purely and simply a chance to immerse themselves in a topic that they find fascinating.

Whatever your motivation, it is important to plan to make the best of the opportunities offered to you in the Honours year to build your skills and knowledge (and in the process maximise your chances of achieving an excellent Honours mark). Honours is a challenging program that will offer you the chance to grow both as a scholar and as a person. You need to be very organised and make your study your first priority during this busy time. If you do this, your time in your Honours program should be both enjoyable and extremely rewarding.

Getting your head around Honours

Honours students are part of a department's research community. In terms of an actual program of study, the Honours program varies from department to department within the School of Languages and Cultures. However, in all cases it combines advanced level coursework with the opportunity to produce a substantial piece of research, the findings of which are presented as a thesis. At the Honours level, you are challenged to take much more responsibility for your learning than was required of you as an undergraduate. It is important to strike a balance between the coursework and thesis components of your Honours program. It is quite common for Honours students to focus too closely on one or the other and thus not performing as well as they may otherwise do overall. There is no point writing a fantastic thesis and only getting a so-so mark in your coursework. Equally, it makes no sense to perform brilliantly in your coursework if your thesis isn't brilliant too.

As a beginning researcher, you will also be accorded privileges (but also responsibilities) that you did not have as an undergraduate. This may entail attending or contributing to departmental seminars or even helping out with the organisation of the Department's social events. You will also now have opportunities to begin developing your research networks both within the university and further afield. These kinds of activities are a vital part of your professional development and should be taken very seriously.

As you can imagine, it requires a lot of proactive planning to make all these elements come together. It is important to plan for success and not failure. And since only you know exactly how you work, the onus is on you to make it happen. You will still be given firm and regular deadlines for the coursework component of your Honours program, but it is pretty much up to you to ensure that the thesis gets done. You will be guided by your supervisor and may have some input from your peers, but ultimately responsibility for ensuring that you meet the milestones required to complete your Honours thesis before the final due date is your own.

Managing your supervisor

Probably the biggest challenge of your Honours program is learning how to manage your supervisor. Academics are very busy people. In addition to their undergraduate teaching, their supervision of people like you and their own research, they often take on responsibilities within academic communities at national and international levels. But even the busiest academic is always very happy to find time for a keen, focused and diligent Honours student. As Honours is not compulsory we have no intention of dragging anyone kicking and screaming through the Honours year. This doesn't mean that you always have to know where you're going or present perfect work (in fact if you did, we'd be worried). But it does mean that you have to put the hours in and take responsibility for your own learning.

In an early meeting with your supervisor, you will need to establish a series of milestones. It is important to consider your coursework deadlines when planning for your thesis. However, one of the biggest traps for full-time Honours students is the temptation to focus too much on your coursework

deadlines in the first semester and to leave the thesis to the second semester. It is much more likely that you will produce a first-class thesis if you start on it as soon as possible, even if you can only devote limited time to it at certain stages of your Honours program. Once you've established these milestones, set up some good filing systems and whatever else you need to help you streamline your research. Speak to some former Honours students to get some ideas about how to do these things.

Perhaps the most vital aspect of the supervisory relationship is keeping communication channels open. Honours seldom goes precisely to plan, and there is no shame in having to adjust a milestone or seek assistance. The worst thing you can do if you find yourself in a hole or suffering from writers' block is to stop communicating. Even if your supervisor can't help you with a particular issue it's good to let them know if something's going wrong. There are also excellent counselling services at the university if you feel you need some professional advice on non-academic matters or on managing the life-study interface. For more information, see:

http://sydney.edu.au/current_students/student_services/health_welfare/counselling.shtml

Working with your peers

Honours can be a really sociable time or very isolating. The best way to ensure that you have a good experience is to establish networks with your peers. This might be something as simple as having a regular get-together to discuss how Honours is going. Or you may find someone who is a good 'study-buddy', who you can spend time with. There may be other students in your department who you can team up with. You might also find students in other departments who share similar research interests. In some departments, you will be required to enter into more formalised group supervision relationships that require you to read and comment on other students' work.

Creating a healthy working environment

Honours is a marathon not a sprint. Although your study needs to be your first priority, this doesn't mean that you should study all the time. Make sure you quarantine time for exercise and a social life – a well-balanced life will make you more productive, not less.

For more tips on planning for and making the best of your Honours experience, see:

http://sydney.edu.au/arts/indonesian/docs/A_to_Z_of_Honours.pdf.

WHAT IS A THESIS?

RESEARCH IN YOUR HONOURS YEAR

Dr Antonia Rubino, Department of Italian Studies

A thesis is not just an extended essay... It is...

- An in-depth study of your research problem, which can be based on library work, archives or fieldwork (in which case you need permission from the Ethics Committee)
- The presentation of a 'thesis' (argument) based on that research
- A dialectic between reading and writing (these two processes go concurrently)

Choosing and researching your topic

- Choose a feasible project: in terms of topic (keep it narrow), time, available resources and what can be argued
- Start researching your topic early, considering all available resources (e.g. primary sources; bibliographical resources; other materials accessed through Internet)
- Read critically and assess your sources (i.e. establish your major authors)
- Remember that your thesis must demonstrate an ability to conduct research in a systematic and well documented fashion

Planning your writing

- Start writing early. Remember that writing is a process. It includes note taking, planning a section in point form, drafting chapters and constant revision
- Draft a Table of Contents early (but be prepared to modify it)
- Think of chapter titles, headings and subheadings (these may also change)
- Keep an eye on number of words in each section/chapter

Structuring your thesis

A thesis generally consists of the following sections (the order may change according to the different disciplines):

- Introduction (stating the topic and research questions)
- Review of literature
- Theoretical framework – research questions – methodology employed
- Data analysis (text / empirical data / corpus)
- Discussion of findings
- Conclusion

Remember!

- Pitch your project in the context of existing work
- Focus your review of literature in the light of your research question(s)
- Explain clearly your choice of tools of analysis (theoretical framework and methodology)
- Plan and write the body of the thesis first, leave conclusion and introduction until last

A thesis as recursive work

Your thesis grows gradually and at different times in the various sections, hence you need to go back to some components after revision of others. Chapters are work in progress until (almost) the end, so be prepared to modify what you have written

Presentation is important!

- Proof read your work carefully – you could also ask a peer to look over your text with a critical eye.
- Ensure that all your references are appropriately sourced and that they are presented consistently (check your Department's policies regarding bibliographic criteria)
- Check that all references are in the bibliography - use EndNote, which is available free to all students from <http://libguides.library.usyd.edu.au/endnote>
- Use visuals if you can and if they are relevant
- Take the time to read other (good) theses completed in your Department

Finally, expect that writing a thesis will be hard and at times frustrating, but in the end extremely rewarding! And by the end you will have developed many useful skills.

SOURCES ON ACADEMIC WRITING

Dr. Birte Giesler
Department of Germanic Studies

Books:

- Bailey, Stephen: *Academic writing: a handbook for international students*, London, New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Crème, Phyllis: *Writing at university: a guide for students*, Buckingham [u.a.]: Open University Press, 2005.
- Davis, Jason: *Effective academic writing 3. The essay*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Johnson, Andrew P.: *A short guide to academic writing*, Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2003.
- Meloy, Judith M.: *Writing the qualitative dissertation. Understanding by doing*. Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1994.
- Murray, Rowena: *How to write a thesis*, Berkshire, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003.
- Oshima, Alice: *Introduction to academic English*. White Plains, NY: Pearson/Longman, 2007.
- Oshima, Alice: *Writing academic English*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman, 2006.
- Savage, Alice: *Effective academic writing*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Teitelbaum, Harry: *How to write a thesis: a step-by-step guide to writing research papers, term papers and theses*, New York : Prentice Hall, 1982.
- Trimmer, Joseph F.: *A guide to MLA documentation. With an appendix on APA style*. Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1996.
- Turabian, Kate L.: *A manual for writers of research papers, theses, and dissertations. Chicago style for students and researchers*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Guide on Referencing:

- Gibaldi, Joseph: *MLA style manual and guide to scholarly publishing*, 2nd Edition, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1998.

Electronic Resources:

Academic writing: interdisciplinary perspectives on communication across the curriculum, Fort Collins, Colo.: Colorado State University, under: <http://wac.colostate.edu/aw>.

This is a guide for graduate students writing a thesis or dissertation and aims to help them in thinking through the many aspects of preparing, writing and presenting a thesis or dissertation. The topics are organised into the following chapters: thinking-about-it stage; preparing the proposal; writing the thesis or dissertation; the thesis or dissertation defence. The guide is also available as a PDF file for printing.
<http://www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes/>

HONOURS THESIS: HOW TO MEET ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Dr Michelle Royer, Department of French Studies

Dr Yiyang Wang, Department of Chinese Studies

Deadline for the submission of your thesis: Check with your Department as deadlines vary according to assessment procedures of individual departments.

When writing your Honours Thesis think of what examiners will look for. Here are some useful questions for you to consider. Your aim is to be able to answer positively to all the questions.

I- Honours Thesis: Scope, originality, strength and clarity of argument, documentation, and research skills demonstrated.

General

1. Is the topic clearly defined? Does the title reflect the topic?
2. Is the choice of topic appropriate for an Honours Thesis?
3. Is the topic adequately justified in terms of the field?
4. Is its scope clearly defined in terms of the corpus of texts, the range of documents or the range of data to be scrutinised?
5. Are primary and/ or secondary sources adequately used and referenced in the bibliography?
6. Are the relevant key terms clearly defined?

Quality of argument, methodology, organisation of thesis

The following are what examiners think of as "positive" criteria.

1. Is the argument well developed?
2. Is compelling and relevant evidence used to support the argument?
3. Is the evidence introduced at the most helpful points of the argument? Does it prove what it purports to prove?
4. Is the informing theory, methodology or theoretical framework well identified and explained?
5. Does the thesis demonstrate knowledge of previous literature or intellectual endeavour in the field?
6. Does the thesis demonstrate critical analysis of the material it works with?
7. Is the thesis well structured? Is the division into chapters and/or sections rational and helpful? Are the chapters/sections optimally ordered?
8. Does the introduction orient the work for the reader, and the conclusion account adequately for the work undertaken and the results achieved?
9. Does the conclusion open up a direction for further research?

II- Language: Fluency, accuracy, and appropriateness.

1. Is the thesis readable (concise, accurate), and clear in meaning?
2. Is its standard of language / register appropriate?
3. If the thesis is written in a language other than English, are language structures correct, grammatical and spelling rules respected?

III- Presentation: Layout, respect of bibliographical conventions, typographical accuracy etc.

1. Does the thesis have a clear and detailed table of contents?
2. Is the presentation of the thesis appropriate (margins, spaces, font, etc.)?
3. Is the thesis well written in terms of spelling and typographical errors, punctuation, etc.?
4. Is the style of footnoting consistent?
5. Is every source quoted in the text and footnotes also listed in the bibliography?
6. Is the bibliographic list consistent?
7. Are websites and other sources listed systematically?

HONOURS CLASS 1

Remember! Work that meets the above criteria can expect to do very well. However, the very top work is distinguished by some special qualities. In order to award Honours Class1, examiners will ask the following questions:

1. What qualities of originality does the thesis display?
2. Could the thesis, or parts of the thesis, be submitted for publication in a scholarly journal in the field?
3. Has the student demonstrated high ability to undertake postgraduate research study (MPhil and PhD)?

Attention!

Ask yourself the following questions, if you answer "yes" to them, it means the quality of your work needs improving.

1. Is the existing secondary literature relied on or accepted too uncritically?
2. Are the sources one-sided?
3. Is the thesis limited to mere description and basic analysis of the data or principal texts?
4. Does the conclusion merely restate the aims of the thesis?

Please remember the University Plagiarism Policy

http://sydney.edu.au/arts/academic_integrity/plagiarism_dishonesty/index.shtml

Good Luck!

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Dr. Nijmeh Hajjar
Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies

What's after Honours?

PhD (for students with Honours Class I or II)

What is a PhD? Independent research under supervision

What would you need?

- Bachelor Degree with Honours Class I or II 1 in a relevant subject area,
- A suitable research topic (discuss with relevant department), and
- A research proposal of 1,000 words

What's involved?

Research, and

- Write a thesis of 70,000-100,000 words on a topic approved by the department (candidate's own research).
- Some departments may also specify some coursework requirements (eg language).

How long?

3-4 years full time

- 3-8 years part time

The Research Training Scheme (RTS) provides Commonwealth funded Higher Degree Research students with an entitlement to a HECS exemption up to a maximum period of four years full time equivalent for a doctorate.

For more information on the PhD:

http://sydney.edu.au/arts/current_students/postgraduate_research/index.shtml

MPhil (for students with Good Honours)

What is MPhil? Research under academic supervision

What would you need?

Bachelor Degree with good Honours in a relevant subject area

- A suitable research topic (discuss with relevant department), and
- A research proposal

What's involved?

Capacity for original research, and critical ability

- Write a thesis of 40,000-60,000 words on a topic approved by the department (candidate's own research).
- Some departments may also specify some coursework requirements (eg language).

How long?

- 1-2 years full time
- 2-4 years part time

The Research Training Scheme (RTS) provides Commonwealth funded Higher Degree Research students with an entitlement to a HECS exemption up to a maximum period of two years' full time equivalent for a Master of Philosophy degree.

For more information on MPhil:

http://sydney.edu.au/arts/current_students/postgraduate_research/index.shtml

Don't just dream. Think.

Scholarships for Postgraduate Study

The **Australian Postgraduate Awards** (APA) scholarships are awarded to students of exceptional research potential to undertake a higher degree by research at an Australian university. The scholarships are provided to assist with general living costs.

The **University of Sydney Postgraduate Awards** (UPA) which are similar to APA in terms of tenure and benefits.

For more information, visit: <http://sydney.edu.au/scholarships/research/>

Departmental Scholarships

In addition to scholarships and Postgraduate Research Support Scheme, available to University of Sydney students, several departments and programs offer special scholarships and prizes to Postgraduate research students. Check the postgraduate pages of your department's website.