

Psychology Honors Program Survival Guide: Navigating Your Way Through the Thesis

Suggested Timeline

Junior Year (Spring):

- ✓ Set a thesis topic, research relevant literature
- ✓ Find a faculty sponsor
- ✓ Submit H195A form for the fall
- ✓ Take Psych 101 (if not already completed)

Summer between Jr. and Sr. Year:

- ✓ CPHS paperwork (if applicable)
- ✓ Work on the design of the project

Senior Year (Fall:)

- ✓ Submit application for RPP (if applicable)
- ✓ Begin running your experiment
- ✓ Analyze data
- ✓ Submit H195B form for the spring

Senior Year (Spring):

- ✓ Finish data collection/analysis
- ✓ Write your thesis
- ✓ Turn in thesis (2 weeks before end of semester)

Advice from Past Honors Students

- ☞ Choose a project that you are truly passionate about.
- ☞ Find a faculty sponsor who has time for you, who can be attentive to your needs.
- ☞ Look at the data as you go along to see if there are any significant effects and change what you need to in order to make it better.
- ☞ When you start writing your thesis, try writing a minimum of 30 minutes a day to maintain momentum and to be as efficient as possible.
- ☞ Don't let yourself fall victim to senioritis!
- ☞ Stay on top of your project because it's easy to fall behind!

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

“What Can I Do For My Thesis?”

There are two routes to completing a thesis project:

- (1) An original, empirical project, or
- (2) A critical analysis of previous literature.

“Do I Meet the Necessary Requirements?”

- 1) Must have a 3.5 Psychology GPA—includes lower division pre-requisites and upper division classes
- 2) Must be enrolled in H195A/B for two terms (independent study units from your faculty sponsor, 1-3 units per semester)

“What if I don't meet the GPA requirement?”

Any Psychology major may write a thesis but you must meet the 3.5 GPA in order to be eligible to receive Honors in the major.

“Is Psychology 199 a prerequisite for writing a thesis?”

No, but it is extremely beneficial to have some research experience before embarking on a thesis. Many students do so by working as a Research Assistant and receiving Psychology 199 credit.

“What is H195 A/B?”

The H195 series is ***mandatory*** for completing an honors thesis. It is not a formal class, but rather, independent, variable research units (similar to Psych 199). Your sponsor will assign you a letter grade for both semesters at the end of the year. A description of your project and form signed by your sponsor are required to enroll. You must be enrolled in H195 for two semesters and a separate form must be turned in for each semester.

“What is H194 A/B?”

The H194 series is an ***optional***, though recommended yearlong honors seminar that begins only in fall. You may enroll only through application. In the fall semester, the

seminar concentrates on issues of research design, ethics, and data analysis using statistical packages. The spring semester focuses on oral/written presentations of the thesis projects and feedback on thesis drafts.

“How Do I Choose My Thesis Topic?”

Though some students have a clear idea of what they want to do, others are unsure of how to begin. If you fall in the latter category, the first thing to do is decide on a general topic of interest. Once that has been determined, you can: (a) read the current literature to see where further research is needed on your topic of interest or (b) talk to your faculty sponsor about any spin-offs of current projects in the lab that you might be able to take on as your own.

“How Can I Find a Faculty Sponsor?”

There are a few methods for finding a faculty sponsor for your thesis:

- (a) Asking the principal investigator of a lab you are currently working in. This works if the topic of interest for your thesis aligns with the lab’s research.
- (b) Asking a faculty member you have not worked for. Choose a professor whose research interest aligns with your thesis topic. Set up an appointment to talk to them about sponsoring your project.

If you find a mentor that is not a UC Berkeley faculty member (for example, a researcher at UCSF), you must still find a UC Berkeley faculty member who will sign off as your sponsor.

“If I Ask a Professor to be My Sponsor, What Am I Asking Him/Her to Commit to?”

Faculty Sponsor involvement varies from person to person. At the very least, they will sign your H195 forms, assign your grade for H195 at the end of the year, and will read and evaluate your thesis. Anything else is up to you and your sponsor. Your sponsor may be able to clarify theoretical questions you have on your topic of interest. He/she may be able to help you develop your research design and submit your CPHS paperwork. Your sponsor is there as a resource for you and it is your choice as to how you use that resource.

“What is CPHS?”

CPHS stands for the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects. If your thesis project involves working with human subjects, you must submit a protocol to the committee and receive approval before you can conduct your experiment. More information can be found on <http://cphs.berkeley.edu>.

“How do I find funding for my project?”

You can first try your faculty sponsor and see if he/she has any funds available for you to use. Also available is the Swan Research Award through the Psychology Department (deadline in Fall). Otherwise, you should apply for funding as soon as possible (check out <http://research.berkeley.edu> for funded research programs, grants, and fellowships).

“What Format Do I Use to Write My Thesis?”

Your thesis should be written according to the style formulated by the American Psychological Association (APA). APA Publication Manuals are available in the Student Services Office for students to check out. Copies of previous honors theses are available for students to see as well.

Your thesis should also include an abstract of approximately 200 words. A sample copy of the title page may be obtained from the Undergraduate Advisor.

“What Happens When My Thesis is Done?”

You will submit one copy to your sponsor and one to the Student Services Office (SSO) two weeks before the end of the semester. The copies you submit of your thesis should be bound using a velo, tape, or comb binding; this can be done at any of the copy places around campus. The SSO will give a copy of your thesis to your second reader. Your faculty sponsor, in conjunction with your second reader, will decide whether your project merits “Honors” or “Highest Honors.” This merit will appear on your transcript. If you would like to submit an additional copy of your thesis to the SSO, it will be made available as a resource for future honors students.