

The Honors Handbook

McMurry University

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THE HONORS HANDBOOK

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I. A Summary of the McMurry University Honors Program

The McMurry University Honors Program includes two distinct tracks designed to enrich the academic experience of our most outstanding students. *Every McMurry student with a 3.25 GPA is considered an honors student and encouraged to take honors courses.* In order to graduate from the Honors Program, a student must be admitted to and complete all the requirements of one of the following honors tracks:

- A. University Honors:** This is a four-year honors track which students may enter only as incoming freshmen. The top two incoming University honors students receive full-tuition scholarships for four years at McMurry. Thirty other outstanding applicants receive Trustee Scholarships. The scholarships are awarded through a competitive process requiring an essay, letters of reference, and an interview on campus. Applicants must have test scores of 27 ACT/1220 SAT or stand in the top 5% of the high school class. The deadline for application is February 1 of the calendar year in which the student enrolls at McMurry. University Honors students will earn honors credit in Freshman Seminar and in twelve hours of other course work taken before the senior year. In order to continue in this track and retain an honors scholarship, students must maintain a 3.25 GPA for their honors work and a 3.5 GPA for all McMurry course work. During the senior year, University Honors Students complete an honors thesis in their major field or in an interdisciplinary area. The University Honors track is open to students in all majors.

- B. Departmental Honors:** This honors track is designed for students who wish to develop an advanced level of competence in their major field. Students must have a 3.25 GPA* and have completed 60 semester hours of college work in order to apply for admission. Students will earn 7 hours of honors credit, normally including 3-6 hours of honors courses in the department and a 1-3 hour honors thesis in the major field. Students in all majors may participate in Departmental Honors. (**A GPA higher than 3.25 is required for admission to departmental honors in Business, Communications, Curriculum and Instruction, Music, and Nursing. It is possible to apply for admission to Departmental Honors in Music after completing 30 hours of college work.*)

II. The University Honors Program

The mission of the University Honors Program is to attract outstanding students to our campus, provide them an educational experience appropriate to their abilities, and thereby enrich the

academic life of the entire McMurry community.

A. Admission Requirements and Procedures:

Students may enter this track as incoming freshmen. With the approval of the honors director, transfer students may also apply. Applicants must have test scores of at least 27 (ACT) or 1220 (SAT) **or** standing in the top 5% of the high school class. They must be admitted to McMurry by February 1 of the calendar year in which admission is sought, and complete the University Honors Program application form by that date. Application requirements include: the submission of high school transcripts; three letters of recommendation (two from teachers or counselors and one from another adult with knowledge of the applicant's aptitude for success in college); a typed essay (two to three pages long) in response to the question indicated on the application form; and a summary of the student's academic and extracurricular achievements. Copies of the application form are available from the Office of Admissions.

Students submitting worthy applications will be invited for an on-campus interview in February with a team of faculty members. Through a standardized evaluation process, the honors committee will identify the top two applicants, who will receive full-tuition scholarships for four academic years at McMurry and be designated as University Honors Scholars. A student who withdraws from the University Honors track would lose automatically that portion of his or her financial aid, but when eligible would retain scholarship aid that is not connected to the program.

B. Graduation Requirements:

University Honors students will earn at least 17 hours of honors credit during their four years at McMurry. They will earn honors credit in Freshman Seminar and in 12 hours additional hours of honors work taken before the senior year. These hours may be earned in honors courses or individual honors contracts negotiated between the student and the professor in a regular class. Students will also earn 4-6 hours of credit during the senior year by completing an honors thesis. Regardless of the focus of the thesis, students will be designated as graduates with University Honors on all transcripts and diplomas. *University Honors students must meet all requirements for Departmental Honors in the fields in which they write their theses.* The honors subcommittee will create an *ad hoc* committee to determine the course requirements for a student who wants to do a truly interdisciplinary thesis. In order to ensure their timely progress toward graduation, the honors director will work closely with faculty members who are advising honors students.

Both the thesis proposal and the thesis itself will be evaluated by the advising faculty member, another member of the department in which the thesis is written, and another member of the faculty from outside the department who is appointed by the honors program director. Upon the request of the advisor and student, additional faculty may be added to the reviewing committee, including outside readers from other institutions. In the case of an interdisciplinary thesis, the honors director will appoint at least three appropriate faculty members to oversee the project. *Theses written in both honors tracks will be supervised according to the above procedure.*

In order to remain in the University Honors Program, students must maintain a 3.5 GPA for all

course work at McMurry and a 3.25 GPA for honors work. Any student whose GPA is below the standards outlined above will be dismissed from the University Honors track and lose the portion of his or her financial aid that is connected to participation in the program. The GPA will be determined at the end of the spring term, and students may be dropped from the program at that point. A University Honors student whose GPA between 3.25 and 3.49 may enter a probationary period by taking courses at McMurry during May term, summer school, and one long semester. If the student is able to raise the GPA to the required levels by the end of the long semester, he or she may continue in the University Honors track and retain an honors scholarship. *A student may use this probationary option only once during his or her tenure at McMurry. Only courses taken at McMurry will count toward the computation of the student's GPA for these purposes.* A student who loses an honors scholarship may regain it by raising his or her GPA to 3.5.

In order to retain their honors scholarships, University Honors students are expected to make normal progress toward graduation from the program, including the preparation of an honors thesis. Such progress will include taking two honors courses or contracts per academic year. It will also include working closely with faculty members in the student's major field during the junior year in preparation for the completion of the thesis in the senior year. Barring extraordinary circumstances, any student who does not progress toward graduation at this rate is subject to expulsion from the program and loss of the honors scholarship. Any honors student who is guilty of cheating or other conduct antithetical to the values and aims of the honors program is subject to expulsion from the program and loss of the honors scholarship. The final decision on expulsion and loss of scholarship will be made by the honors program director in conjunction with the VPAA. Students dismissed from University Honors who retain a GPA of 3.25 may take honors courses and apply for admission to departmental honors.

C. Honors Contracts:

Honors contracts enable University Honors students to earn honors credit in normal courses by completing additional assignments that will enrich significantly the student's educational experience in the course. Honors contracts require one of the following: research beyond normal course assignments; critical thinking and analysis (whether oral or written) not required in regular course work; creative projects beyond the regular requirements of the course; the study of topics or texts beyond the scope of the regular course; or other assignments that substantially enrich the academic experience of the student beyond what is required in the regular course.

Due to administrative and financial considerations, there will be a limited number of honors contracts approved each semester by the director of the honors program. Honors students must complete the official "Honors Contract Application Form" available from the director to apply for a contract. The following criteria will be used to approve honors contracts: (1) the contract must possess at least one of the characteristics identified in the preceding paragraph; and (2) approval of the contract must be necessary for the student to make normal progress toward graduation in the University Honors track. Since the review of applications for contracts will usually begin during the preregistration period, students are advised to submit their applications during the first week of preregistration.

Students must earn a grade of B or higher in the course in order to receive honors credit for the contract. Normally, the supervising faculty member for an honors contract will also be the instructor of the course in which the student is enrolled. Subject to approval by the honors director and the course instructor, another faculty member who is competent in the course's subject matter may supervise the student's contracted honors work. A student who does not complete the requirements of a contract within the semester will normally not receive honors credit for the contract. In extraordinary circumstances and subject to the approval of the supervising faculty member and the honors director, however, it will be possible for the student to complete the contract and receive honors credit for the course during the next semester.

Applications will not be approved for honors contracts after the last day to add a course in the semester. Students will not receive honors credit for contracts that are not completed to the satisfaction of the supervising faculty member. Failure to complete the contract satisfactorily will impact the student's grade for the course according to the provisions agreed upon in the contract itself. It is the responsibility of the supervising faculty member to inform the honors director of the student's successful fulfillment of the contract by the end of the semester. Students applying for an honors contract must complete the "Honors Contract Application Form," a copy of which is included in the appendix of *The Honors Handbook*.

III. The Honors Thesis

The honors thesis is the pinnacle of academic achievement on our campus, and provides a fitting capstone for the undergraduate studies of our finest students. McMurry honors theses have won national and regional awards, and play an important role in preparing honors students for success in graduate and professional school. Work on the honors thesis will normally begin during the senior year. *A student who has compelling reasons to begin the thesis in the junior year and/or to complete the thesis before the semester in which he or she graduates may petition the director of the honors program for approval of an alternative schedule.*

The requirements for the honors thesis are identical in both tracks of the honors program. Each thesis will conform to the following standards:

Minimum Length: 6500-8000 words (25-30 typed pages)

Purpose: To demonstrate mastery of the skills necessary to do outstanding scholarly work in the student's academic discipline at the undergraduate level. The honors thesis will display the student's ability to accomplish at least one of the following aims: interpretation and analysis of scholarly sources, laboratory experimentation and research, and creative work in literature and the arts.

Audience: The honors thesis will be directed to the community of scholars in the student's academic discipline, and should be written in a style accessible to other honors students in that field.

Bibliography: The bibliography of the thesis will be appropriate to the discipline and demonstrate the student's familiarity with standard works in the subject area. Since this is an

undergraduate thesis, an exhaustive review of relevant scholarly sources is not required.

Direction: Both the thesis proposal and the thesis itself will be evaluated by the advising faculty member, another member of the department in which the thesis is written, and another member of the faculty from outside the department. Upon the request of the advisor and student, additional faculty may be added to the reviewing committee, including outside readers from other institutions. In the case of an interdisciplinary thesis, the honors director will appoint at least three appropriate faculty members to oversee the project.

Composition: All drafts of the proposal and of the thesis itself should be grammatically correct when they are presented to the thesis committee. Proposals and theses with errors in grammar and composition will be returned to the student for correction. These corrections must be completed to the satisfaction of the committee before the thesis is evaluated as an honors project. A student whose thesis review is delayed by such corrections may find it impossible to meet the deadlines and graduate from the honors program. Since the thesis will be permanently on record in the McMurry University library and may be presented to a regional or national audience or become part of the student's application for graduate study, the highest level of care is in order when preparing the final draft. Students are to follow the guidelines for style accepted in the academic discipline in which the thesis is written, and may wish to consult sources such as *The MLA Handbook*, *Turabian's Guide to Writing Research Papers*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, and *The Little, Brown Handbook*.

Oral Presentation and Grading: Candidates for graduation in all tracks of the honors program must make a public presentation of their theses in a forum sponsored by the honors program. All of the students graduating in honors during a given semester will normally present their theses in the same forum. During a semester when a large number of honors students graduate, it may be necessary to sponsor more than one forum. For the presentation, each student will describe his or her thesis work and respond to questions from the audience for a total of 30 minutes. The presentation occurs after the thesis committee is satisfied with the final draft of the thesis, and accounts for 20% of the student's final grade on the project. Following the presentation, the thesis director will assign a grade to the thesis which will account for 60% of the final grade. The other members of the thesis committee will assign a grade to the final draft, which counts for 20% of the student's grade.

Final Submission: At the conclusion of the oral presentation, honors students will provide a single copy of the thesis to the director of the honors program. McMurry University will provide acid-free paper for the bound copies and will bind four copies. Two copies will be placed in the library, one in the appropriate academic department, and the fourth copy will be presented to the student. The final copy should be typed double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides of the page. The final copy will include the following items: title page, signature sheet, abstract, acknowledgments, table of contents, body, an appropriate listing of notes and/or bibliography for the academic discipline in which the thesis is written, and the student's *curriculum vitae*. The McMurry library has copies of all honors theses completed at the University, which may serve as examples.

IV. Policies and Deadlines for Honors Proposals and Theses

Spring Graduation:

Students intending to graduate during a spring semester must submit a thesis proposal to their thesis committee by **September 15**. In order for the student to begin work on the thesis, the proposal must be approved by the thesis committee no later than **October 1**. It is the responsibility of the thesis director to notify the honors program director of the approval of the proposal by that date.

A sample proposal is included in the appendix of *The Honors Handbook*. The particulars of the proposal will vary by discipline, but each must include a clear statement of the purpose and methodology of the proposed study and a discussion of relevant scholarly literature.

The thesis committee will meet with the student to discuss approval of the proposal. After a verbal presentation by the student of the proposal, the committee will make one of the following recommendations: (1) Accept: the honors candidate may proceed with the project taking into consideration the suggestions of the committee; (2) Accept conditionally: major revisions indicated by the committee must be completed by **October 15** in order for the proposal to be acceptable; (3) Reject: the proposal is not acceptable to the committee.

March 1 is the deadline for submission of a complete draft of the thesis to the thesis committee. The committee will meet with the candidate before spring break to make one of the following recommendations: (1) Honors quality work--the thesis is of honors quality and ready for oral presentation; (2) Honors quality work with need for revision--revisions specified by the committee must be completed by **April 1** in order for the thesis to be of honors quality; (3) Not honors quality work: the thesis is clearly not of honors quality. **April 1** is the deadline for completion of all revisions required by the thesis committee. If the committee does not approve the revisions, the thesis will be not be considered honors quality work.

It is the responsibility of the thesis director to inform the honors program director of the recommendation of the committee. It is also the responsibility of the thesis director to change with the registrar the designation of "honors thesis" to "directed study" for projects which are not deemed to be honors quality work.

Oral presentations of theses will be completed by the beginning of the final examination period, and will be held in one or more forums sponsored by the honors program.

Fall Graduation:

The policies for approval of honors proposals and theses are identical for spring and fall graduates. The deadlines for fall graduates are as follows:

The proposal will be submitted to the thesis committee no later than **February 15**, and the approval meeting will occur no later than **March 1**. All revisions of the proposal must be completed to the committee's satisfaction by **March 15**.

October 15 is the deadline for submission of a final draft of the thesis to the committee. The committee will meet with the candidate to make a recommendation on the thesis no later than **November 1**. **November 15** is the deadline for completion of revisions.

Oral presentations of theses will be completed by the beginning of the final examination period, and will be held in one or more forums sponsored by the honors program.

August Graduation:

The honors program does not encourage students to complete a thesis during the summer. When extraordinary circumstances make August graduation necessary, the student, thesis committee, and director of the honors program will work together to establish appropriate deadlines. With the exception of different deadlines, the policies outlined above will remain in place for August graduates.

V. Departmental Requirements for Honors Theses

The requirements for admission to and graduation from departmental honors are listed in the current McMurry catalog.

Each academic department determines the prerequisites for writing an honors thesis in that discipline. Regardless of which track of the honors program a student is in, he or she must meet the requirements set by the major field. In the case of an interdisciplinary thesis, the honors program director will appoint at least three appropriate faculty members to determine the course requirements for the student and oversee the thesis. *In all cases, it is the responsibility of the student to be aware of the requirements for graduation from the honors program and to be in touch with the honors program director whenever questions arise.*

In order to receive the approval of an academic department for admission to its honors program, a student must complete the "Application for Honors Program" form with the endorsement of the head of the appropriate department. In order to begin work on an honors thesis, a student must complete the "Honors Thesis Proposal" form with the endorsement of the student's thesis committee. These requirements apply to students in both tracks of the honors program.

In order to graduate from either track of the honors program, a student must earn at least seven hours of honors credit and maintain an overall and major field GPA of at least 3.25. The following departments require a GPA higher than 3.25 for their honors students: Business, Curriculum and Instruction, Music, and Nursing.

