

SCHOOL OF THEATRE AND DANCE
GUIDELINES FOR HONORS THESES (Revised November 2013)

I. PURPOSE

This document outlines the procedures that are to be followed in preparing an honors project. It is a supplement to the policies and procedures provided by the Honors Program.

II. THE HONORS THESIS PROJECT

The Honors Thesis Project in Theatre and Dance allows for advanced research and creative investigation into a specific topic. Since it develops through many stages in close consultation with faculty, it provides undergraduates with research and creative experiences that are often not available until graduate school or work in the professional disciplines. It can serve, therefore, as preparation for graduate school and professional work.

All parties are reminded that according to the Honors program, Honors theses are expected to resemble Masters theses in terms of scholarship or creative activity.

III. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Students must have a minimum of a 3.25 GPA in the major in order to qualify to undertake an honors thesis and register for THEA499a or DANC499a. They must also maintain a 3.25 GPA during the entirety of the project. The thesis advisor will verify that the student meets these requirements each semester before allowing them to register for 499. If a student's GPA falls below 3.25, the student's committee reserves the right to terminate the thesis after evaluating the student's progress on the project.

Theatre and musical theatre concentration students must have completed 211 and at least one theatre history course (315, 316) before beginning the project. In addition, theatre and musical theatre concentration students who wish to pursue an honors thesis in musical theatre must complete THEA 357 before beginning the thesis project.

Faculty recommend that theatre and musical theatre concentration students take 481 early in the process of the honors project (ideally spring of their Junior year), successfully completing it before beginning the B portion of the project. The honors thesis substitutes for the thesis component of Senior Seminar in Theatre (THEA 441). Theatre and musical theatre concentration students are required to enroll in THEA 442 Senior Seminar and complete the non-thesis components of that course.

Dance concentration students must have completed DANC 248 and DANC 245 before beginning project. Faculty also recommend that dance students take DANC 345 early in the process of the honors project (ideally in the fall or spring of their junior year), successfully completing it before beginning the B portion of the project.

All Honors Programs students are required to do an Honors Thesis Project. Students who are not enrolled in the Honors Program, however, may also do an Honors Thesis Project by meeting the eligibility requirements for entry into the Honors Program. These include a cumulative GPA of 3.25 and sufficient evidence of initiative, originality, and intellectual maturity to warrant registration in a Honors Thesis Project.

IV. STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF AN HONORS THESIS PROJECT

A. Contacting the Honors Office

Students should review the Honors Program's description and requirements of the Honors Project at <http://www.jmu.edu/honorsprog/shp.shtml>. They must contact the Honors Office (107 Hillcrest House, 8-5535, honors@jmu.edu) at the beginning of their junior year or earlier to obtain:

- an application form (also available at the link above)
- a copy of the Senior Honors Project Handbook (also available at the link above)
- information on scheduled Honors orientation meetings.

They should also attend the project workshops offered by the Honors Program staff in September and February of their junior year.

B. Establishing a Research Topic

Students should identify a research topic that will sustain their interest for the course of the project, can be researched, and is appropriate to the scope of an advanced undergraduate research project. Preliminary research will be necessary to make these assessments. Consultation with the faculty project advisor will help narrow, guide, and in some cases determine a topic.

C. Identifying a Faculty Advisor

Before or early in their Junior year, students should contact the faculty member whose expertise most closely supports their chosen research topic to see if they are willing to support a thesis student. In some cases, students may approach a faculty member with whom they work well as advisor before determining a final research project topic and enlist his/her advice from among topics in which the student is interested. In all cases, these communications before beginning 499A in the second semester of the Junior year should help refine the topic and establish the feasibility of research.

It is the responsibility of the faculty advisor to ensure that any non-Honors program student who requests to do a Honors Thesis Project has a cumulative GPA of 3.25 or higher in the term before registering for THEA/DANC 499A, has or will have completed the courses required by the Major for beginning an Honors Project, and exhibits sufficient initiative, originality, and intellectual maturity as well as available time to warrant registration in an Honors Thesis Project. Faculty advisors are advised to request copies of student degree progress reports for verifying the GPA and course requirements and to ask about student extracurricular activity and work schedules **before** taking on a student. Faculty advisors must also decide if and when a student must complete other cognate and Theatre or Dance course requirements to do their particular honors projects.

D. Composing a Committee

It is the student's responsibility, in coordination with their thesis advisor, to establish a committee. THEA/DANC499A students must meet with their advisor no later than the end of the third week of the semester to verify those faculty members that the student will ask to serve and to further define the thesis topic. The Committee should be finalized by the fifth week of classes.

Honors thesis committees are comprised of three faculty members. The chair must be a full-time member of the School of Theatre and Dance. Only one member may be from outside the STAD.

One-year and adjunct faculty may not serve on honors thesis committees, although students are encouraged to consult with one-year/adjunct faculty whose expertise is relevant to the student's topic.

The committee chair is responsible for ensuring that committees include members with the expertise appropriate to the student's thesis topic. It is particularly important that the committee chair have methodological and substantive expertise that will allow the student to successfully complete his/her research.

Department faculty are expected to serve on honors thesis committees when asked by the student or the honors thesis advisor to do so (unless they can provide reasonable justification for refusing). In making these requests, the student and advisor should be sensitive to the number of thesis committees to which each faculty member is already committed as well as to other faculty commitments.

Advising or serving as reader on a thesis should be included under "Teaching" for purposes of evaluation for tenure, promotion, and yearly review.

V. PRODUCTION THESIS PROJECTS

Students in the School of Theatre and Dance may engage in a production project as a part of their honors thesis. Such production projects might include choreography, directing, playwriting, design, or acting.

If a production project is a part of the honors thesis:

- a. the production project must be substantial in scope;
- b. the production project must address particular aesthetic questions or issues;
- c. the student must design the objectives and steps of the production project in consultation with the thesis advisor;

- d. the student must do significant research into the style, concepts, history, subject, etc. of the project as agreed with the advisor;
- e. the thesis must include significant written material explaining the aesthetic questions or issues, detailing the significant research, describing the substantial production project, and summarizing the outcomes of the project.

VI. TIMELINE AND GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Fall of junior year. No formal course. 0 credit hours.**

Student will determine a thesis topic and faculty advisor and fill out all necessary Honors Program forms.

2. **Spring of junior year. THEA/DANC 499A. 1 credit hour.**

The faculty advisor and student finalize the general nature of the project, select two readers, establish a time frame for the project, and complete the formal thesis proposal. The faculty advisor and student develop a research project that can be done within the scope of three semesters and work out a mutually acceptable schedule for carrying out the research, project work, writing, and all other activity required to complete the project. The advisor and student should meet a least three times to prepare these materials.

It is the responsibility of the student to complete a thesis proposal with the following sections: Introduction, Methods, Timeline, and References.

The **introduction** must place the proposed research or project in a broader theoretical or conceptual context and explain why the research or project is important in terms of theory, application and/or generation of new knowledge. It must also describe what is currently well established in the broader area, identify unanswered questions that relate to the proposed research, and indicate how the proposed research will answer those questions or fill in a gap in our knowledge. The introduction should finish by explicitly stating the hypothesis or question being addressed or the objectives of the research or project.

The **methods** section should describe the methods in sufficient detail for readers to evaluate their adequacy, feasibility and appropriateness for the tasks in question.

The **timeline** should outline when major aspects of the research will be accomplished, when writing will commence, and when drafts of sections will be submitted to the advisor.

References. School of Theatre and Dance thesis proposals are generally at least 800-1000 words long, and have a minimum of five references to journal or review articles and an equal number of references to monographic works, which must be properly cited and referenced. The writing style must be polished and free of typos. A final draft of the proposal must be submitted to the advisor for comments at least five days before the Honors deadline. A fully revised version of this proposal must be received and approved by the faculty advisor and readers and submitted to the Honors office by April 1.

It is also the responsibility of the student to complete and submit a Senior Honors Project application to the Honors program office (107 Hillcrest House, 85535, honors@jmu.edu) by the April 1 deadline. Please use forms downloaded from <http://www.jmu.edu/honorsprog/forms.shtml> as out-of-date forms will not be accepted. The Senior Honors Project application must be approved and signed by the student's advisor and readers, the school director, and the college dean before submission. Acceptance into the Honors program is determined solely by the Honors Program director. Acceptance letters are sent to the student, advisor, school director and college dean.

It is the responsibility of the faculty advisor and readers to ensure that the proposal complies with their expectations for scholarship or creative activity before they approve it. If the proposal is not approved and submitted on time, it is the responsibility of the faculty advisor and readers to disallow the student to register in THEA/DANC 499B. The faculty advisor will assign a grade for THEA/DANC 499A based on his/her own rubric for assessing progress made in research, proposal writing, and the ability to meet deadlines and respond to requested revisions.

It is the responsibility of the faculty advisor to verify that all students registered in THEA/DANC 499A have current GPAs above 3.25.

3. **Fall of senior year. THEA/DANC 499B. 3 credit hours.**

Spring of senior year. THEA/DANC 499C. 2 credit hours.

THEA/DANC 499B usually involves research or production activity and the beginning of writing, culminating in a first draft or extensive and detailed outline.

THEA/DANC 499C usually involves completing the writing, responding to revisions requested by the faculty advisor and readers, and preparing the final document for submission to the Honors Program. The faculty advisor and student should meet seven or eight times each semester (about every two weeks). In some cases student meetings with readers, other faculty mentors, or outside sources may substitute for advisor meetings as long as communication with the advisor on progress is maintained. THEA 499C also requires enrollment in THEA 442 Senior Seminar and completion of the non-thesis parts of that course.

It is the responsibility of the student to comply with the committee's instructions according to the schedule arranged in THEA/DANC 499A, respond to all requests for revisions, and otherwise fulfill the committee's expectations for research and scholarship activity. The student must also submit the completed and approved thesis to the Honors office by the deadline set by the Honors office.

It is the responsibility of the faculty advisor and readers to ensure that students are given unambiguous instructions and a clearly defined schedule for completing various drafts of the thesis, and that they return their comments on each draft on a timely basis to the student. The faculty advisor will assign a grade at the end of each course based on his/her own rubric for assessing the progress made, the quality of the final product, and the ability of the student to meet deadlines and respond to requested revisions. Under no circumstances can a

faculty advisor assign a grade for THEA/DANC 499C until the thesis has been completed, approved by the committee, and accepted by the Honors office.

If a student's GPA drops below 3.25 after completing THEA/DANC 499A, the student's continuation in the honors project is at the discretion of the faculty advisor and readers, and will be based on their judgment of the student's ability to increase their GPA to 3.25 by the end of THEA/DANC 499C.

VII. PROBLEM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Students, faculty advisors and readers who have any complaint or dispute regarding the performance or completion of any obligations regarding an Honors Thesis Project should consult the School of Theatre and Dance honors liaison or the school director for advice on resolving the problem.

Students wishing to change advisors for whatever reason are recommended to consult the school honors liaison or school director. Students wishing to discontinue their honors project should address the issue with their faculty advisor.

Faculty advisors are free to terminate an Honors project upon unsuccessful completion of THEA/DANC 499A or THEA/DANC 499B (as indicated by a grade of C or lower), on the basis of the student making insufficient progress, failing to meet weekly time commitments, deadlines, or proposal/thesis requirements, or showing irresponsible, unethical or negligent behavior.

VIII. CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

A. Although theses will vary in precise structure and number of chapters, every thesis must contain the following sections:

1. Abstract: The title of the thesis must be followed by a one-paragraph (maximum 300 words) abstract that summarizes the research question, theoretical argument, production project and/or hypotheses, research approach, and results.

2. Introduction: This section identifies the question the researcher is posing and explains why that question/problem is an important topic. The introduction should also provide a brief overview of the paper's structure.

3. Literature or Performance Review: This section summarizes all of the major contributions in the areas of theory, research, and practice by artists and/or researchers in this field. The purpose of this review is to demonstrate that the student has mastered the prevailing research or praxis, and is familiar with how researchers and/or artists present, examine, utilize, or analyze the relevant concepts. A literature or performance review is not a long string of direct quotations from various authors; rather, the student must demonstrate his or her own understanding of this material by summarizing, analyzing, comparing, organizing, and critiquing these works in their

own words. It is particularly important to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, insight, and utility of current research or performance related to this topic, rather than simply reciting others' works. Are there gaps in the literature? Unresolved controversies? Poorly defined concepts? In short, a thorough review will not only describe but critically assess the current state of the literature or performance context.

4. Project Design: The length and precise content of this section will vary based on the nature of the questions being posed. However, this section must specify in detail the methods the student will use to investigate the questions. The thesis is not a book report. The student must make an original contribution to the discipline, and this requires having a research or production question that can be tested or evaluated in a systematic manner.¹ This section details those systematic methods.

5. Discussion and Analysis of Findings: One or more chapters examine the aspects of the topic and present an analysis of the research, case studies, production experience or application of the model/theory.

6. Conclusions: This section summarizes the results of the analysis or production project and discusses the implications of these findings. Where relevant, students should tie their findings back to the theoretical arguments and controversies highlighted in the review section. Depending on the topic and methods used, the conclusions section may include conjecture on future trends or suggestions for further research or development of practice.

7. Works Cited: The works cited will only contain works actually cited in the thesis. It must include at least 25 sources for a scholarly thesis, and at least 18 sources for a production thesis project. Writers may include a Works Consulted section at the end of the works cited for those works that informed the research but were not cited directly.

IX. OVERLAP BETWEEN THESIS PROJECT AND OTHER CLASSWORK

Students may not turn in, for credit in other classes, portions of the thesis that are substantially unaltered. Students may not count for credit in other classes production work that is the subject of the thesis.

Students may, with the permission of both their thesis advisor and the professor teaching the course in question, turn in for course credit material that is related to the thesis project but differs substantially from the material contained in the thesis.

¹ “Original contributions to the discipline” could include (but are not limited to): testing an existing theory using new data, cases, or applications; synthesizing existing theories to create a new theoretical framework and then testing hypotheses drawn from this new framework; examining a fresh interpretation of a specific text, approach/style, concept or principle; or establishing new knowledge through research into a new or sparsely investigated area.

X. GRAMMAR AND STYLE

All work must be spell-checked before being submitted to the student's thesis committee.

The thesis is a formal project. Therefore, students will spell out numbers under ten, avoid contractions, and make sure all sentences are complete, grammatically correct, and syntactically coherent.

Any tables, charts, or images reproduced in the paper must include information about the original source within the table/chart/image. Similarly, if the student produces tables, charts, or images on their own, any data source used to create these items must be cited as part of the table/chart/image.

Unless otherwise specified by the student's committee, the citation style in the thesis must conform to the most recent edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Parenthetical or Endnote form may be chosen, but whatever the choice, a works cited is required.

XI. GENERAL RESEARCH GUIDELINES

Because the purpose of the literature or performance review is to portray the state of research on the topic, it will consist primarily of academic sources. An academic source is a book or article whose primary audience is academics, rather than the general public. (This typically means articles that appear in peer-reviewed journals and books published in academic or other scholarly presses). Magazines, newspapers, and books written by non-academics are not considered academic sources. However, the use of reviews or critiques of original productions or performances is entirely legitimate and encouraged.

Students should know the identity and qualifications of all persons cited in their thesis. Further, persons cited in the thesis should possess the appropriate qualifications for whatever claim they are making. While using the Internet is an acceptable strategy for conducting research, students must adhere to the same rules for other sources when using the Internet. This means that websites hosted by unknown individuals or those whose expertise in the area cannot be determined will not be cited, or used, in a thesis.

Students will avoid using Wikipedia for the reasons discussed above. Authors are not clearly identified by Wikipedia, nor will the student, in most cases, be able to ascertain the qualifications of any Wikipedia contributor.

It is not appropriate to use the works of one author to summarize the work of another author. Rather than relying on Marvin Carlson's characterization of Philip Auslander's research or theories, for example, the student should read Auslander and

cite the original work. Thesis advisors may consider exceptions if the work is obscure and unavailable, not in English, or otherwise unobtainable by the student.

NOTES:

Theatre and musical theatre concentration students must have completed 211 and at least one theatre history course (315, 316) before beginning the project. Faculty recommend that students take 481 early in the process of the honors project (ideally spring of their Junior year), successfully completing it before beginning the B portion of the project. The honors thesis substitutes for the thesis component of Senior Seminar in Theatre (THEA 441), but students are still required to enroll in THEA 442 Senior Seminar, one credit, concurrently with THEA 499C and complete the non-thesis components of that course.

Theatre and musical theatre concentration students must have completed 211 and at least one theatre history course (315, 316) before beginning the second semester of the project. *In addition, theatre and musical theatre concentration students who wish to pursue an honors thesis in musical theatre must complete THEA 357 before beginning the thesis project.*

Faculty recommend that *theatre and musical theatre concentration* students take 481 early in the process of the honors project (ideally spring of their Junior year), successfully completing it before beginning the B portion of the project.