



## CCC Guidelines for Honors Programs within the Concentrations

All departments should have clear requirements and deadlines for entry, submission, and awarding of honors. These requirements, approved by the CCC and published in the University Bulletin, should be posted clearly on concentration websites. Regardless of the size of the concentration, we recommend that advisors conduct a yearly information session with sophomore and junior concentrators to explain the benefits of completing an honors thesis project as well as the criteria for pursuing honors.

Honors criteria should include specific requirements for each of the major stages of the process: becoming an honors candidate; pursuing, completing and submitting the honors project; and evaluating the candidate's completed work. Such criteria must be aligned with the philosophical approach and policies of Brown's Open Curriculum.<sup>1</sup> Details about each stage follow.

### 1. Becoming an honors candidate

*The opportunity to pursue honors is a privilege. Students are selected to become honors candidates on the basis of a number of criteria, including: standing and grades in the concentration; support of a faculty advisor; and submission and approval of the proposed project. At some point before the program's published deadline for proposals, the director of undergraduate studies should review the academic records<sup>2</sup> of all concentrators and contact those students who are eligible, on the basis of their grades,<sup>3</sup> to pursue honors.*

*To determine whether students are eligible, advisors will verify that students:*

- Are in Good Standing
- Have completed a given proportion of the concentration requirements by the application deadline

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, as Brown does not calculate a Grade Point Average, concentrations may not use this criteria to determine Honors candidacy. Similarly, since the Faculty Rules allow any student to select the Satisfactory/No Credit (S/NC) grading option for any course, concentrations may not exclude courses taken S/NC from consideration for Honors, nor may they impose any limit on the number of courses that may be taken S/NC for Honors or for completion of the concentration more generally.

<sup>2</sup> According to Faculty Rules (2.4.III.G, p. 68), information about grades of "S with distinction" "will be made available to the student upon request, and also to members of the Faculty where reasonable need exists, as, for example, for purposes of nomination for post-graduate fellowships or election to academic honor societies." The Registrar is thus able to provide information about the achievement of students taking courses S/NC to departments who wish to make determinations about admission to their honors program.

<sup>3</sup> Concentrations should only establish grading criteria based on the number or percentages of grades of "A" or "S with distinction" (defined in the Faculty Rules as the equivalent of an "A") earned in the concentration.

- Have earned a majority of “A” grades in the concentration

*To pursue honors candidacy, eligible students will:*

- Secure a faculty advisor, and discuss plans for the proposed thesis project with the advisor well before the established deadline.
- Prepare a thesis proposal according to the advisor’s (and the program’s) specifications, and outlining the major research questions and methods to be used.
- Submit the proposal to the designated person by the established deadline.

*Note:* Concentrations should outline criteria for a good proposal, and set clear deadlines for receipt and approval of the thesis proposal. Some concentrations require proposals to be submitted by the end of the sixth semester; others allow students to submit at the beginning of the seventh semester. **We recommend a deadline no later than the third week of the seventh semester.** This will allow students admitted to the honors program to enroll in a required independent study course by the last day to add a course in the fourth week of the term.

*To determine the roster of honors candidates, the department or program will:*

- Review student proposals and determine which are worthy. This should happen no later than the fourth week of the seventh semester.
- Notify students that they have been accepted into the program, so that they may enroll in the required honors course or independent study.

## **2. Pursuing and completing the honors project**

*Once accepted as honors candidates, students will pursue a course of study that goes beyond what is expected of a regular concentrator. This would include:*

- Enrollment in two semesters of either an honors thesis course or an independent study course with the faculty advisor (student must register for these courses no later than the last day to add a course).
- Regular meetings with the faculty advisor (twice per month is recommended). If students are pursuing an independent study, it is advised that these meetings be set up at the beginning of the term, as in a course.
- Regular drafts turned in at clearly established intervals (e.g., first chapter or first stage of experimental research or creative work by December 1; a full draft by March 15)

*Note:* these dates are for May graduates; for December completers, the dates would be May 1 and October 15.

- A workshop or colloquium on conducting research in the discipline

*Note:* some concentrations require all students to take a required methods course or thesis preparation course in the junior year; other concentrations may require a thesis course for all honors candidates and therefore cover these questions in that way.

- Participation in informal seminars or writing groups to create community among researchers.
- Identification of a second reader, if stipulated by the program (see section 4 below for more on the role of the second reader)
- Submission of final revisions—in both electronic and physical form—to the appropriate personnel in the department by the established deadline. We recommend a deadline of no later than April 15 for May graduates and November 15 for December completers. This allows the advisor, the second reader, and other members of the department time to review the document and determine whether it merits honors by the Registrar's deadline.

### **3. Evaluating the submitted work of honors candidates**

*As a final step, the submitted projects must be judged worthy of honors by a representative body within the department or program. This requires not just the opinion of the advisor but also the views of other faculty within the concentration, following agreed upon rubrics as to what constitutes a worthy project.*

*To determine whether the student is worthy of honors in the concentration, the advisor should first enact a final review of the academic record to verify that the student:*

- Has remained in good academic standing throughout the academic year.
- Has had no violations of the Academic Code of Conduct during honors candidacy
- Has completed, or is about to complete, all requirements for the concentration
- Has produced a thesis that meets the department's expectations for honors work, and delivered it to the appropriate personnel in the department by the established deadline.

*To determine whether the student's work merits honors, the department or program should:*

- Agree on a set of standards for meritorious work, and publish these standards online, or as part of the honors program requirements. These might include expectations regarding the scope and originality of the project; the quality of writing or execution of creative work; the handling of citations or other sources; the extent of primary research, etc.
- Set up a review process for evaluating theses. In addition to the review and commentary by the primary readers, this might also include a discussion of thesis projects among the faculty; or a formal review by a committee of several faculty members; or a public defense. Deadlines for evaluation should be clearly stated.
- Establish a regular faculty meeting, at the end of the spring term (or fall, for December completers), where honors candidates are formally approved.
- Notify candidates that they have earned honors.

- Present to the University Registrar the names of candidates who have completed honors.

*Note:* In the near future, this will be done through the ASK online advising system via new functionality in the concentrations module. Students will be able to submit their thesis proposals via ASK, just as they have submitted their concentration declarations.

- If no public defense is required, schedule some kind of public event for the presentation of thesis projects, where faculty members and other members of the community can witness and enjoy the student work.

*Note:* Sophomore and junior concentrators might be invited to this event to create a pipeline for future thesis projects.

#### **4. A few additional thoughts**

##### ***On the roles of the primary advisor and the second reader***

The primary advisor:

- Ensures that the student has met all eligibility requirements for honors candidacy before agreeing to serve as the thesis advisor.
- Works closely with the student in developing the research project and a plan for its execution.
- Sets a regular meeting schedule with the student at the start of the term and works with the student to set a reasonable timeline with short- and long-term deadlines.
- Provides guidance on specific research methods, recommending additional coursework or referring the student to faculty with relevant expertise (this may include suggesting a second reader).
- Evaluates the progress of the research, providing direction and timely feedback on written drafts.
- Assesses the thesis and ensures that the student has met all final requirements before recommending honors to the concentration advisor or larger honors committee.

*If a thesis has a primary and secondary advisor, it is good practice to clarify for the student and for the advisors themselves the roles played by both. By comparison to the principal reader, the second reader:*

- Often plays a notably smaller role than the primary advisor, yet still provides input and guidance throughout the project – the particularities of this role should be defined by the advisor, the student, and the second reader.

- Provides an opportunity for students to receive critical feedback in areas where the primary advisor may not have expertise, particularly on interdisciplinary projects.
- May read fewer drafts than the primary reader, but should still offer feedback on comments on early drafts.
- Should discuss the student's progress periodically with principal advisor.
- Should establish a few regular meetings with student.
- Will provide a written evaluation to the concentration advisor and/or the primary advisor.

***On interdepartmental concentrations***

*In a similar vein, if the honors program itself is attached to a concentration run out of two different departments, then it makes sense to establish even clearer guidelines about the practices for honors projects, especially when the two readers may come from two different departments. In this case, the honors guidelines should:*

- clearly state the policies governing the awarding of honors, as above, with special attention to the situation of two departments.
- make honors criteria consistent with criteria for students in one or the other "home" department.
- Require that students have at least one reader from each department.