

Department of Accounting Honors Thesis Guidelines

Overview

The senior honors thesis for accounting majors offers a unique opportunity to engage in a significant research project that must either make an original contribution to or expand upon an existing research topic in the field of accounting. This broad definition includes areas such as financial and/or managerial accounting, auditing, taxation, accounting information systems, accounting history, and forensic accounting. The project is expected to embrace legal research along with other established research methodologies suitable for academic investigation. The specifics of the project should be established in close consultation with a faculty mentor. Given that the Bachelor of Science in Accounting degree includes a comprehensive set of required courses and that most students aim to complete 150 semester hours to meet CPA exam eligibility, eight hours of HNR 4998 academic credit can count as elective credits toward this 150-hour requirement.

Mentor Selection

The mentor for an honors thesis in the Department of Accounting must be a faculty member within the department, selected in consultation with the department chair. The mentor must have expertise, research, or creative interests aligned with the proposed thesis project. A faculty member may supervise one new thesis project each year and may oversee up to two thesis projects simultaneously (one in progress and one new). The mentor is responsible for coordinating with the Thesis Committee members to oversee the project, with committee members assisting in reviewing intermediate and final work as necessary.

Students should be aware of which faculty members are available to serve as mentors and the types of theses those faculty members are competent to direct. Faculty members should also be familiar with the students interested in working with them and understand why the students are drawn to their specific topics.

While no formal departmental procedure is required for matching students with mentors, it is expected that faculty members will engage in careful and serious conversations with potential honors thesis advisees before agreeing to direct a thesis. These initial conversations aim to:

- 1) ensure that the student has an appropriate background and interest in the chosen topic, and
- 2) inform the student of other faculty members who may also be qualified to direct the thesis. Due to the expected low number of candidates, it is anticipated that the student will contact the department chair to initiate the mentor selection process.

Thesis Committee

In accordance with Honors Program guidelines, the thesis committee will consist of three Elon faculty members on long-term contracts who possess the background or expertise to contribute to the project and evaluate the work.

Thesis Description

The honors thesis must make a significant research or original contribution to the study or practice of accounting, extending beyond the scope of normal course work, ACC 4991 independent study, or ACC 4999 undergraduate research projects.

The thesis topic and nature are flexible; however, the thesis is expected to take one of the following four forms:

1. **Substantial Research Project or Developmental Project (Applied Thesis):** This may involve working with a business client to make a significant applied contribution to accounting practice.
2. **Original Empirical Study:** This involves applying accounting theory to appropriate data, structured as a publishable research paper, potentially presented at a regional or national accounting conference.
3. **Extensive Case Study:** This should take the general form of a Harvard business case, with thorough citations from relevant accounting articles and texts, addressing important questions and issues raised by the case.
4. **Legal Research Study in Taxation:** This could involve topics related to tax policy or the intersection of tax policy and tax applications, structured as a publishable research paper in a relevant tax or accounting journal.

Regardless of the chosen form, the thesis must adhere to established conventions for qualitative and quantitative research projects, including legal research, and follow format guidelines set by the Honors Program. The thesis should be structured as an academic article suitable for submission to an academic journal, incorporating appropriate theoretical concepts, research methodologies, literature reviews, and sections on the significance, historical context, and theoretical and methodological justification of the project, along with a bibliography and appendices.

Academic Credit/Timeline

The distribution of credit hours will be determined in consultation with the mentor. Thesis credit is typically not granted during the Winter Term, and a student is generally limited to a maximum of four hours of thesis credit per semester. The recommended timeline for completing the thesis is as follows:

- **Fall, Junior Year:**
 - Credit Hours: 0
 - Tasks: Choose a thesis topic, identify a mentor (in consultation with the Chair of Accounting), apply for research funding, and obtain IRB approval (if needed).
- **Spring, Junior Year:**
 - Credit Hours: 2
 - Tasks: Write the thesis proposal, submit it to the mentor and chair before April 15, and submit the proposal to the Honors Program by the end of the semester.
- **Fall, Senior Year:**
 - Credit Hours: 4

- Tasks: Establish a specific timeline for tasks, responsibilities, and meetings; conduct research; submit a rough draft by the end of the semester; and submit a progress report to the committee.
- **Spring, Senior Year:**
 - Credit Hours: 2
 - Tasks: Complete research, writing, and editing in consultation with the mentor and committee; submit the final draft to the committee one week before the defense; schedule the thesis defense before April 15 (formal presentation); and submit the final copy to the Honors Office by the date set by the Honors Program.

Thesis Defense and Presentation

The thesis defense must comply with the format and policies of the Honors Program. Additionally, an accounting major completing an honors thesis is required to deliver a formal presentation of their findings to the faculty, followed by a Q&A session with the audience.

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