

**The Honors Thesis**  
**Department of Environmental Studies**  
**Revised October 2024**

As an interdisciplinary department, Environmental Studies honors theses reflect the diverse needs and interests of our majors. Students have the option of completing a thesis project based on their own original research, or one that synthesizes and integrates published research to develop a new hypothesis, paradigm, or perspective that is uniquely their own. This choice is available to students completing the B.S. degree in Environmental Studies, the B.S. degree in Environmental and Ecological Science, or the B.A. degree in Environmental and Sustainability Studies.

### **Research Mentors**

Students may choose a mentor from the ENS faculty listed on the [departmental web page](#). Alternatively, with approval of the Environmental Studies Department Chair, students may choose a faculty mentor from a different department who has expertise in environment-related methods or thematic topics. As the major is interdisciplinary in nature, spanning the sciences, social sciences and humanities, choice of mentor is especially important in matching student interests to faculty mentor expertise. We encourage students to discuss alternatives with their Advisor and several faculty members. If potential mentors are outside of the ENS Department, we encourage students to schedule a meeting with the ENS Department Chair in their sophomore year to discuss.

### **What constitutes acceptable thesis work?**

The Honors Thesis must be original work consistent with disciplinary expectations of the mentoring faculty regarding originality, sources, citations and style of writing. Students choosing an option of empirical research will be expected to use a research paper format as consistent with peer-reviewed scientific or social science journals in the sub-discipline. Students choosing an option of non-empirical research will defer to their research mentor for the format of the thesis, which should be in line with sub-disciplinary professional standards.

There are no formal length requirements for ENS theses. Historically, completed theses in ENS have ranged from 40 to 120 total pages including title page, acknowledgements, table of contents, main body, citations, tables/figures, and appendices (where appropriate). We expect extensive reference to the literature. As such, we require a minimum of 25 citations. Historically, ENS theses have averaged over 60 citations. Students should explicitly discuss expectations for the thesis with their mentor throughout the mentor-selection, research, and writing process.

We invite students to browse completed ENS theses on the [library webpage](#) to get a sense of scale and expectations. A list of completed theses as of the date of this document is included at the bottom of this document.

## **Honors mentor expectations**

The ENS Department defers to the mentor to define thesis expectations beyond the broad guidelines of this document. It is the responsibility of the mentor to ensure expectations are clear for students. Mentors should communicate with faculty thesis readers in advance to explain the expectations they have set. New faculty members who are mentoring their first thesis should consult with the Department Chair and senior colleagues in the department in addition to following Honors Program guidelines.

## **Registration for Honors Credits and integration into the Environmental Studies Curriculum**

Per Honors Program requirements, students should complete 8 sh of HNR 4998 during their junior and senior years. If students and mentors would like to begin research in the sophomore year, they may optionally register for 1-2 s.h. of ENS 4999 Undergraduate Research.

The timeline of HNR 4998 credits should be negotiated in advance between student and mentor. The timeline to complete the research should take into account any plans for study abroad. If both student and mentor agree, research can be conducted during summers, but that is not expected.

A traditional timeline is:

- 1-2 sh of HNR 4998 during the fall of the junior year, at which time the research project is proposed,
- 2-3 sh of HNR 4998 during the spring of the junior year, for a total of 4 sh during the junior year.
- 2 sh of HNR 4998 both fall and spring semesters of the senior year, with the senior year focused on analysis, writing and presentation(s) at appropriate venues.

## **HNR 4998 Course Substitutions**

Development of a quality Honors Thesis requires a significant amount of time and effort on the part of the student. As such, students can count 6 s.h. of HNR 4998 towards their Major.

Two s.h. of HNR 4998 counts as the “Research or Internship” requirement for all majors in the department.

Four s.h. of HNR 4998 can count towards an appropriate elective category within the major.

- B.S. in Environmental Studies: 4 s.h can count towards the Environmental Values/Communication, Policy/Planning/Management, or Science/Analysis categories.
- B.S. in Environmental and Ecological Science: 4 s.h. can count towards the Management Design/Analysis, Social Science/Humanities, or Ecological Processes categories.
- B.A in Environmental & Sustainability Studies: 4 s.h. can count towards the Concentration.

The appropriate elective category to apply HNR 4998 will be determined by the Department Chair and will be based upon the thesis topic and in consultation with the supervising faculty mentor. This elective category should be determined by spring of junior year so students can implement it within their graduation planning process. The Department Chair will complete the Registrar's Substitution Exception forms after the appropriate number of s.h. have been completed.

### **Statement on ENS Senior Seminar**

The Environmental Studies Department does not allow Honors research to count in place of ENS 4970 Senior Seminar: Environmental Assessment and Project Development. Student Learning Outcomes for that course focus on applied collaborative group projects. An individual Honors research project does not replicate those Student Learning Outcomes.

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List of Honors Theses produced by students in the Environmental Studies Department, or its predecessor, the Environmental Studies Program:

2008 Alexander Ganly Hopkins (Dr. Heidi Frontani) Environmental Studies  
Fishing Livelihoods and Marine Protected Areas in the United States Virgin Islands: A Community-Based Approach to Fishery Conservation

2009 Breanna C. Detwiler (Dr. Rebecca Peters) Environmental Studies  
Examining the Contributions of Community Gardens to Social Capital

2010 Katrina Folsom (Dr. Ryan Kirk) Environmental Studies  
Residential Water Use and Conservation in North Carolina: Patterns and Policies

2012 David Muñoz, (Dr. Mike Kingston) Environmental Studies  
The Impact of Human Scent on the Efficacy of Camera Trap Surveys in the Piedmont of North Carolina

2013 Kristen Conroy (Dr. Ryan Kirk) Environmental Studies & Ecological Sciences  
Nutrient Retention Monitoring and Modeling of a Suburban Stormwater Detention Basin in Burlington, NC

2013 Oliver Frey (Dr. Sharon Spray) Environmental Studies/Political Science  
Suppressing Cycles of Chaos: The Kimberley Process and Diamond-Driven Conflict in Africa

2016 Jennifer Archis (Dr. Amanda Chunco) Environmental & Ecological Science/Biology  
Predicted Impact of Climate Change on the Geographic Range of the Eastern Coral Snake (*Micrurus fluvius*)

2016 Sarah Gilley (Dr. David Vandermast) Environmental & Ecological Science  
Carbon Sequestration and Changes in Aboveground Biomass on the Elon University Forest

2017 Cassidy Levy (Dr. Amanda Chunco) Environmental & Ecological Science  
Correlates of Dung Beetle Introduction to Australia

2017 Joseph Brian Meko (Prof. Steve Moore) Environmental Studies  
Reuse of Impaired Wastewater through a Multitrophic Ecological Machine

2018 Sarah Clark (Dr. Janet MacFall) Environmental Studies  
Assessing the Impact of Citizen Science Participation on the Environmental Attitudes of  
Volunteers

2018 Julia Needham (Dr. Amanda Chunco) Environmental & Ecological Science  
Patterns in Hybridization between Native and Invasive Species

2020 Sarah Hope Dolce (Amanda Chunco) Environmental Studies/Biology  
A strange new world: hybridization in the anthropocene

2023 Lucy Garcia (Dr. Ryan Kirk) Environmental and Sustainability Studies  
Investigating Displacement in Burlington, NC: A critical geographic analysis of the historic  
Black Bottom district

2023 Hannah Miller (Dr. Michael Strickland) Environmental and Sustainability Studies/English  
Communicating a Crisis: Case Studies of Rhetorical Strategies for Modern Climate  
Communication by Experts

2024 Akani Bey (Dr. David Vandermast) Environmental & Ecological Sciences  
Land Use Change and Carbon Storage at Cane Creek Park Mountains Natural Area

2024 Eliana Olivier (Dr. Leyla Savloff) Environmental & Ecological Science  
Toxic Incarceration: Environmental Injustice in Immigrant Detention Centers