

The Honors Thesis and the French or Spanish Major

Description of an Honors Thesis

The honors thesis provides honors students the unique opportunity to engage in a high-quality study of a carefully defined question or problem over the course of 1.5 to 2 years. Based in research, this problem may be critical, experimental, applied, or creative in nature, and should represent an effort to make an original contribution to the field. In an honors thesis, students work with a faculty mentor to explore a topic in their major area(s) of study. In all cases, the honors thesis is a substantial project that goes beyond normal requirements of the major and represents students' best work in their discipline. Each thesis demonstrates critical thinking, mastery of disciplinary material, clarity in communication of complex ideas, and professionalism in production.

The Honors Thesis and Advanced Study for French and Spanish Majors

An honors thesis goes significantly beyond what is produced in the French senior seminar and in the second 4000-level Spanish course. Whereas it may be related to research from these courses, honors research is more advanced and developed. It may be conducted in various areas, including but not limited to linguistics, literary analysis, cultural studies, translation, film, phonetics, applied language research, or field-based research (for second language teaching licensure majors, for example). It may also involve faculty co-mentors from across disciplines and departments. Students writing honors theses are encouraged to take the second 4000-level Spanish course or French senior seminar during their *junior* year unless they are studying abroad in the target language for the full academic year.

Language

Theses are most often written in the target language, but they may be written in English when the research combines several disciplines or majors outside the Department of World Languages and Cultures (e.g. a student with a double major in Spanish and History writing a thesis on historical and literary representations of the Spanish Civil War).

Structure

In terms of length – quantity does not guarantee quality. Still, there is consensus that an acceptable, well-developed honors thesis in Spanish and French should be at least twice the length of a seminar paper. In all cases, the honors thesis must adhere to disciplinary expectations regarding primary sources and citation. It should be a body of work that defines the topic clearly, connects and inter-relates research, positions the topic within the field, reviews previous work in the area, and utilizes appropriate methodology or critical tools of analysis to advance an original interpretive thesis.

Time Frame

While determination of an appropriate time frame for researching and writing the thesis is best left to each student and mentor(s), students are strongly encouraged to identify the probable area of research and meet with their faculty mentor(s) before studying abroad.

Selection of Mentors

A successful honors thesis depends not only on pairing student interest and faculty expertise but also on supportive mentoring relationships. In general, the Department of World Languages and Cultures advocates a process in which the student asks a full-time continuing WLC faculty member to serve as a mentor based on his or her experiences in Spanish/French courses. When a potential mentor has been identified, the student should meet with the faculty mentor to 1) discuss the feasibility of the topic; 2) verify that the faculty member's expertise is compatible with the topic; and 3) ask if the individual is available to serve as mentor. All topics will require formal approval by the appropriate language section in consultation with the chair of the WLC department.

Elective Credit in French or Spanish

For students who have taken 8 hours of HNR 4998 and who have met all the requirements of the Honors thesis (proposal review by the Honors Advisory Committee, presentation of progress, thesis defense and submission of manuscript), 4 semester hours may count as upper-level elective credit in French or Spanish.