

*Lyon Gardiner Tyler
Department of History*

Honors Program Guidelines

2008-2009

HONORS PROGRAM

The History Department encourages superior history majors to pursue independent research and writing in the creation of an honors thesis. The honors thesis is a multi-chaptered, original piece of historical research that typically runs at least 45 pages, and no more than 100 pages, in length. Writing an honors thesis is an excellent opportunity for students to pursue their research interests and to work closely with a faculty member on a topic of historical importance. The research, writing, and analytical skills acquired in the composition of a thesis better prepare students for graduate work in history, law, business, and other professional schools or for future careers in other fields as well. Preparing an honors thesis is a serious undertaking; the most successful theses exhibit deep thought and a sustained argument about an important historical problem. Usually, honors theses are based on extensive research in primary historical sources and also reflect a keen understanding of the secondary literature. Depending upon the level of achievement, students may be awarded "Honors," "High Honors" or "Highest Honors" for the successful completion of thesis work.

Students who expect to write honors theses should consider fulfilling their colloquium or seminar requirement (History 490C/491C) in their junior year to gain the appropriate writing and research experience. The department is also experimenting with a research seminar designed for seniors and M.A. candidates that honors candidates may take during fall semester of their senior year. Ideally, students who intend to apply to graduate programs in history should write honors theses in the historical field they expect to pursue, since the thesis can testify to their ability to think critically, work independently, and understand complex primary and secondary literature.

The first step in pursuing honors is to think about a potential research topic and to carry out some preliminary investigations to determine whether that topic is feasible. (A subject could involve documents that lie in an inaccessible archive, for example, or require foreign language ability that the student does not possess.)

As a general guideline, students should gauge their interest in the honors program and their academic abilities between the start of their sophomore year and the beginning of their second semester as a junior. A minimum GPA of 3.0 on a cumulative basis by the end of the junior year, or a 3.0 for the junior year alone, is required for participation in the Honors Program. When a student has not met the GPA requirement for Honors, the student and the Department of History can jointly request the Committee on Honors and Interdisciplinary Studies (CHIS) to review the student's application. The CHIS will only hear appeals that come from both the student and the department. Exceptions to the GPA rule are rarely made, however.

The Department of History and the Charles Center provide funding opportunities to assist students undertaking honors research. Consult the department website for "Funding Opportunities for Undergraduate Research" (<http://web.wm.edu/history/undergrad/funding.php>) or the Charles Center website

(<http://web.wm.edu/charlescenter/index.php?id=1351>) for information about “Batten Scholarships for Pre-Honors Research” and other summer scholarships or contact the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies for more information.

Applying for Honors

Students meeting the minimum GPA requirements outlined above must:

- Identify a prospective thesis advisor. Faculty members customarily—and ideally—direct honors theses that are relevant to their own teaching and research interests. Also, it is unusual for faculty to agree to supervise an honors thesis when the student's coursework is unknown to them. Please note that instructors may not always be available to serve as a thesis advisor. They might be on research leave during all or part of your senior year, for example, or they may already be committed to directing other theses. (The Department does not recommend that any faculty member direct more than two thesis projects at the same time.) Should a faculty member be unavailable, the student should prepare a list of alternate thesis directors in consultation with the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies. Keep in mind that the privilege of writing an honors thesis is not guaranteed for any student.
- The student should consult with the potential thesis director early in the junior year and begin background reading and research prior to preparing a written project description and formally applying for admission to the honors program
- Submit the following materials for consideration to the prospective advisor at least two weeks prior to the beginning of pre-registration in the spring semester of junior year:
 1. a one-page prospectus, double-spaced, of the intended honors project. The prospectus should outline the problems or questions the student will address, as well as methods the student will employ;
 2. a one-page, single-spaced, provisional bibliography, which should address the availability of primary and secondary sources on the topic; and
 3. a recent transcript or degree audit report.

The prospective director of the thesis will notify the applicant of his/her decision to accept or reject the honors proposal by the Friday before fall pre-registration begins. If students are studying abroad or experience other circumstances that prevent them from adhering to this application process and its deadlines, they may submit the same materials listed above to the prospective faculty supervisor during fall registration of their senior year.

Complete the "Application for Admission to Honors Study," which is available in the Charles Center (Tucker basement) and on the Charles Center website. This form must be signed by the faculty member directing the thesis and either the Associate Chair for

Undergraduate Studies or the Chair of the History Department. To complete the application process, the student should submit copies of the application form, prospectus, preliminary bibliography, and transcript or degree audit report to the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies, and, as a final step, submit a copy of the application form to Gail Conner in the History Department office and the original application to the Charles Center. Ideally, these procedures should be completed by the end of the student's junior year in order to allow time during the summer for research. Only under unusual circumstances will students be admitted to the program as late as the add/drop period in the fall semester of their senior year. The Charles Center will formally notify students of their admission to the Honors Program during the summer between junior and senior years.

Registering for Honors

Applications for honors study will be processed at the Charles Center in early summer after spring grades are in. Charles Center staff will then create all of the appropriate Honors sections with permissions for specific students and notify students that they may register. Students must register no later than the last day of the add/drop period of the first semester in which the Honors work will be conducted.

Students who successfully complete History 495 in the fall will receive a grade of "G". Following the oral examination in the spring, a final grade for both History 495 and 496 will be determined by the thesis director in consultation with the examining committee.

Writing the Honors Thesis

Getting started. The honors thesis is an exercise in historical research and writing. The student is expected to go beyond secondary literature and undertake research in primary sources whenever possible. Thesis writers are expected to make substantial headway on their research in the summer before their senior year.

The first draft. Because the process of organization and writing is as important for a successful honors thesis as the underlying research, students are urged to prepare a first draft early (ideally, by mid-January of their senior year), so that proper attention can be given to composing a cogent and elegant thesis. Also, the work involved in structuring thesis chapters and revising prose should not be underestimated.

The role of thesis director. The thesis director can help the honors student with secondary literature, primary source interpretation, the nuances of an argument, and style. It is the student's responsibility to confer with the thesis director on a regular basis. Generally, the director and student meet once a week for progress reports and trouble-shooting on research and writing. As the student begins to write, it is important for the director to read every chapter as it is completed, instead of receiving the whole thesis at once. When the latter scenario occurs, the director frequently sees infelicities that the student does not have time to alter.

Deadlines and Important Dates

All honors students must keep the following dates in mind as they progress toward conclusion of their thesis:

- Mid-January. Ideally, the student should have completed a solid working draft of the thesis.
- February 1. After consulting the thesis director and other faculty members, the student must submit to the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies in History the names of faculty who have agreed to serve on the examination committee. The Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies will then forward the list to the Charles Center, which will formally appoint an honors examination committee.
- April 1. A draft of the entire thesis must be submitted to the thesis director. [Please note: This deadline, established by the Department of History, does **not** appear on the Charles Center's honors guidelines or timetable.]
- Two weeks before the last day of classes. Copies of the complete honors thesis must be distributed to members of the honors examining committee. The thesis must conform to the specifications outlined below, though it need not be on acid-free paper at this stage.
- Last two weeks of classes. The student must schedule the oral defense of the thesis to take place before the final day of classes for the semester if possible, or, at the latest, during the first few days of the final examination period.
- Last day of exam period. Two final corrected copies of the thesis, on acid-free paper and conforming to all specifications for the Honors thesis, must be submitted. After completing Swem Library's online submission form, the student should deliver one copy to the administrative offices in Swem Library and the other to the Department of History office. Final grades for History 495-496 will not be processed until both final corrected copies have been submitted.

The Department of History can arrange to have personal copies of the thesis bound at a cost of \$20 per copy, which includes shipping. The student must provide the necessary copies of the thesis printed on bond paper. The student may also order personal copies directly from the bindery at a later date, but at a higher cost.

For the specific dates and deadlines in any given academic year, please consult the Charles Center's website.

Oral Examination of the Honors Thesis

It is the student's responsibility to ask two other faculty members, besides the director, to act as an honors examining committee for the formal oral defense of the honors thesis. The director and one other faculty member come from the History Department, while the third committee member must be from another department or program (ideally, someone with research or teaching interests that are relevant to the thesis).

topic). Students must notify the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies of the proposed committee composition by February 1.

- If the committee finds the thesis provisionally acceptable, the student may schedule the oral defense. The defense should be scheduled during the final days of classes, or the first few days of the final examination period. After agreeing on a date and time, the student must then consult the Department of History staff, who will check the availability of the Departmental Library. If a student prefers a different location for the oral defense, the student is responsible for making the alternative room arrangements. The defense itself usually lasts between 60 and 90 minutes; its format consists of questions addressed to the honors candidate by members of the examining committee. Usually, faculty members ask the candidate about research, sources, conclusions, and implications of the honors work.

At the end of the session, the student is asked to leave the room while the committee decides on the level of honors to award (Honors, High Honors, or Highest Honors). In reaching its decision, the committee will be guided primarily by the quality of the honors thesis and by the student's performance on the oral examination. The student is then immediately informed orally of the committee's decision, which will appear in the Commencement program. Additionally, committee members will sign the student's title page to provide written documentation of the decision. Therefore, the student should bring his/her title page, printed on acid-free paper, to the defense. Once the title page has been signed, the student should bring it to the department office for administrative copies to be made. The thesis director also immediately informs the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies of the committee's decision.

Specifications for Honors Theses

All honors theses in History must meet the following material and stylistic requirements:

Length. The maximum length for an honors thesis in History is 100 pages, including notes and bibliography. Theses in excess of this length will be accepted only if prior approval has been granted by the thesis director and the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies no later than two weeks prior to the last day of classes.

- **Number of copies.** Two copies of the final thesis must be submitted by the last day of exams, one to Swem Library and the other to the History Department office. The copies must not be permanently bound in any form. If one copy contains original photographs, line drawings, signatures, or any other distinction, that copy is the one which must be submitted to Swem Library.
- **Quality of print.** All final copies must be printed on a letter quality printer, preferably a laser printer, using black ink.
- **Acid-free paper.** Both copies must be printed on white, 20-pound weight, 8-1/2" x 11" acid-free bond paper, such as Permalife or Archival Bond 25. The

paper must meet all current Swem Library requirements for bound material. Erasable bond and continuous feed paper are not acceptable.

- **Margins.** A margin of 1-1/2" must be provided on the left side of each page. All other margins must be one inch. Margins must also be maintained for all charts, graphs, and photographs.
- **Appearance.** Both copies must be clean, free of strikeovers, cross-outs, and obvious erasures (including use of opaque fluids and other methods of correction), and contain no handwritten additions or corrections. When special symbols or other textual additions are necessary, they may be carefully added in permanent black ink.
- **Illustrative material.** Photographs are preferred for all illustrative material. Xerographic copies may be included if clear and distinct, but they must be on acid-free paper. If mounted, photographs and other such materials must be dry mounted on acid-free 20-pound weight bond paper. The use of rubber cement or other glues is not permitted. Photographs that are 8-1/2" x 11" in size need not be mounted. When graphs or drawings are used, originals neatly drawn in permanent black ink on acid-free 20-pound weight bond paper should be included. Large graphs, drawings, or computer printouts must be reduced to 8-1/2" x 11" and submitted as xerographic copies on acid-free bond paper. Duplicating Services in Swem Library has the equipment and paper for such service.
- **Title page.** The title page must conform to the format prescribed by the Charles Center. A sample title page is attached. The title page must contain the original signatures of the members of the oral examination committee. Because some faculty members depart during the exam period to engage in research, students should obtain the appropriate signatures at or immediately after the scheduled oral examination.
- **Footnotes and bibliography.** Footnotes (or endnotes) and bibliography must follow the form described in the most recent revision of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). Citations must be numbered consecutively for each chapter and placed either at the bottom of each page (i.e., footnotes) or the end of the thesis (i.e., endnotes). The bibliography should be either annotated or preceded by a critical bibliographical note, according to the instructions of the thesis director.

Abandoning the Thesis

If it becomes evident before the end of the first semester that the student will not complete the honors project, the student and thesis director must either (1) withdraw the student from History 495, or (2) change History 495 to an appropriate alternative, such as independent study. This conversion is achieved when the thesis director

informs the Charles Center of the change, noting the appropriate number of credit hours, and the Charles Center subsequently notifies the Registrar's Office.

If it becomes clear during the second semester that the honors project will not be completed by the submission deadline, the student and the faculty director must (1) change History 495 and 496 to an appropriate alternative (procedure as above), in most cases independent study, or (2) declare an incomplete, which can only be done in extraordinary circumstances and which must have departmental approval.

In the case of converting History 495 and 496 to independent study, thesis writers must keep in mind that in order to receive academic credit, they will be required to turn in a substantial piece of written work (15-20 pp.) for each semester of an independent study course. As a result, students who decide to abandon the thesis in April, for example, literally might not have enough time to write the independent study assignments and therefore could compromise their graduation through a sudden shortage of history credit hours.

For students who request an incomplete in History 495 and 496, and win department approval of their request, firm new deadlines for the thesis's completion, submission, and defense must be agreed upon by the thesis writer and the faculty director, and those deadlines must be submitted to the Committee on Honors and Interdisciplinary Studies

Revised

May 6, 2004
May 18, 2004
August 15, 2006
February 4, 2008

Sample Title Page

THE RADICALIZATION OF THE STUDENT
NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in
History from the College of William and Mary in Virginia,

by

Richard E. Bird

Accepted for _____

_____ Director

Williamsburg, Virginia
May 2007