**AHIS UNDERGRADUATE THESIS GUIDELINES**

**(revised October 2024)**

The honors thesis offers students the opportunity to undertake a substantive research project under the guidance of our faculty during their junior and senior years. The exercise is ideal for those who intend to pursue graduate work in art history or any career (including curatorial or other museum-related work) that requires extensive writing, research, and reasoning skills. We envisage a thesis that focuses on a particular art work or set of works, a building, or an art institution; or that offers an extensive analysis of a methodological problem, a theoretical issue, or a historiographical development.

As you plan your schedule, keep in mind that:

* All AHIS majors are required to take the AHIS 494 proseminar (currently offered fall and spring) in their junior or senior year, preferably in junior year.
* Students intending to write an honors thesis should take AHIS 494 in their junior year, preferably in the fall semester.
* The honors thesis is completed over the course of two semesters. Students must enroll in two separate 2-unit classes, AHIS 495a (intensive reading for the thesis) and AHIS 495b (intensive writing for the thesis).
* Students planning to apply to graduate school in their senior year are advised to enroll in AHIS 495a in the spring semester of junior year and complete AHIS 495b in the fall of senior year, so as to have a completed thesis to use as a writing sample for applications.
* Students may also enroll in AHIS 495a and AHIS 495b during the fall and spring semesters of their senior year.
* The Provost’s Office offers [undergraduate research grants](https://academicprograms.usc.edu/services/undergraduate-research-and-experiential-learning/usc-provosts-undergraduate-research-fellowships/) each year with applications due in spring/summer. AHIS students have been successful in winning these grants for honors thesis research.

The Department of Art History has the following prerequisites for majors who wish to write an honors thesis:

* A minimum GPA of 3.5 in all USC Art History coursework and an overall minimum USC GPA of 3.5 (a USC honors requirement).
* The completion of at least one upper division class (a 300- or 400-level class, or an AHIS 490 – Directed Research course) in the field in which you wish to write your thesis is very strongly recommended.

**THESIS STEPS AND REQUIREMENTS**

**STEP 1. AFTER PREREQUISITES ARE MET AND BEFORE YOUR 495a SEMESTER:**

**a. Find a faculty advisor**

Is there a work of art or an issue you’ve touched on in an upper division AHIS course that you would like to explore further? You might ask the faculty member who taught that class if they would be willing to advise you in AHIS 495a and b to write an honors thesis. The advisor must be a faculty member listed as “Core Faculty” on the department website. The best time to do this is the semester before you intend to enroll in AHIS 495a.

**b. Complete the “Application to Work with a Faculty Advisor” form; submit form, writing sample, and STARS report to the DUS**

Once you have found a faculty advisor, complete the “Application to Work with a Faculty Advisor” form (here attached as Appendix 1).Once completed and signed, submit the form and the material below to the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) to receive D-clearance to enroll in AHIS 495a, a 2-unit class for intensive thesis reading.

Along with the form, you must also submit:

1) A copy of your STARS Report

2) A substantial writing sample that shows your research and writing skills to best advantage (for ex., a previous research paper or project)

The DUS will grant you D-clearance and be responsible for filing the form with the department.

**c. Enroll in AHIS 495a**

**STEP 2. DURING YOUR AHIS 495A SEMESTER:**

**a. Prepare a reading list and timetable**

Before the end of the add/drop period of your AHIS 495a semester, submit a robust list of readings you propose for AHIS 495a to the DUS. This reading list should be designed in consultation with your thesis advisor, to prepare you to research, propose, and write the thesis itself in AHIS 495b. This reading list must also include a timetable, made in consultation with your advisor, for completing the proposed reading and for writing and submitting the honors thesis proposal before the end of your AHIS 495a semester.

The DUS will be responsible for filing the reading list and timetable with the department.

**b. Complete the AHIS 495a readings and write the honors thesis proposal**

Complete the AHIS 495a readings and write the honors thesis proposal according to the previously submitted reading list/timetable. The proposal (3-5 pages) should provide an overview of the topic to be covered in the thesis, an outline of further research that will be undertaken, and a timetable for the execution of this work.

The faculty advisor will assign a final grade for AHIS 495a that includes an assessment as to whether or not the student is ready to receive D-clearance for AHIS 495b.

**c. Complete the “Honors Thesis Agreement” form; submit form and honors thesis proposal to the DUS**

Before the end of the final grading period of your AHIS 495a semester, complete the “Honors Thesis Agreement” form (here attached as Appendix 2). On this form, you will list the names of the two faculty readers (your primary advisor and a second reader chosen in consultation with the primary advisor). If an appropriate second reader cannot be found, the DUS will fill that role. Once signed and completed, submit the form and your proposal to the DUS to receive D-clearance to enroll in AHIS 495b, a 2-unit class for intensive thesis writing.

The DUS will grant you D-clearance and be responsible for filing the form and the proposal with the department.

**d. Enroll in AHIS 495b**

**3. DURING YOUR AHIS 495B SEMESTER:**

**a. Write your honors thesis**

You and your faculty advisor will decide on the timetable of the research project. The thesis is expected to be around 25-35 pages in length. The thesis will also include notes, bibliography, and illustrations (not included in the 25-35 page length requirement).

The faculty advisor is responsible for keeping the student on a tight schedule of producing an outline, as well as a partial and full draft of their project.\* The role of the second reader is to provide the student with feedback from a different perspective on the topic. Although the second reader will not assign any grade, they will consult with the primary faculty advisor about the student’s performance and offer advice on ways to improve the project.

**b. Submit your honors thesis**

The final draft must be completed by the fourteenth week of the semester in which you are enrolled in AHIS 495b in order to allow time for consideration by the faculty advisor and the second reader.\*\*

The thesis should be submitted as a Word document, not as a PDF.

The faculty advisor will assign a final grade for AHIS 495b. You must receive a minimum grade of 3.5 on your thesis and finish with an overall GPA of 3.5 to obtain honors.

Submit the final thesis to the DUS, who will be responsible for filing it with the department.

**c. Participate in honors thesis colloquium**

All students who write an honors thesis are expected to participate in an end-of-year colloquium to share their work. The event is meant to be a showcase attended by faculty, students, friends, and family members. The date and format will vary depending on how many students are involved, but you should plan to present your work in a 10-15 minute presentation.

*\*In the event that you plan to undertake your thesis project during a semester in which your faculty advisor is on sabbatical, you need to consult with the DUS and Department Chair to develop a plan on how to proceed. The second reader, the DUS, or another faculty member may take charge of the student’s project while the faculty advisor is away.*

*\*\*Any request for extension must be first approved by the faculty advisor and submitted to the DUS at least three weeks before the official deadline. A decision will be made by the DUS after consulting with the two faculty readers.*

**APPENDIX 1.**

**Application to Work with a Faculty Advisor**

**University of Southern California**

**Department of Art History**

**This form confirms that:**

1. The student has met with the faculty advisor to discuss the thesis topic.
2. The faculty advisor agrees to act as supervisor for the student’s honors thesis during the AHIS 495a semester.

**Student identification**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Student name: |  | | |
| USC ID: |  | | |
| Student email: |  | | |
| Degree objective(s): | |  | |
| Student status (Junior/rising senior): | | |  |

**Honors thesis information**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Proposed honors thesis topic: | |  |
| Semester start (Spring/Fall): | |  |
| Faculty advisor: |  | |

**Signature/Date**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Student: |  |
| Faculty advisor: |  |
| Director of Undergraduate Studies: |  |

**Please attach:**

1. A copy of your STARS report
2. A substantial writing sample that shows your research and writing skills to best advantage (for ex., a previous research paper or project)

**APPENDIX 2.**

**Undergraduate Honors Thesis Agreement**

**University of Southern California**

**Department of Art History**

**This form confirms that:**

1. The student has submitted a satisfactory honors thesis proposal.
2. The faculty advisor agrees to continue acting as supervisor for the student’s honors thesis during the AHIS 495b semester.

**Student identification**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Student name: |  | |
| USC ID#: |  | |
| Student email: |  | |
| Degree objective(s): | |  |

**Honors thesis information**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Title of project: |  |
| Faculty advisor: |  |
| Second reader: |  |

**Signature/Date**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Student: |  |
| Faculty advisor: |  |
| Director of Undergraduate Studies: |  |
| Department Chair: |  |

**Please attach:**

1. The honors thesis proposal