

Departmental Honors in Psychology

Johns Hopkins University

Psychological & Brain Sciences

Benefits of Honors in the Major

Honors in the department requires a rigorous engagement for at least one year of doing the science of Psychology under the guidance of a mentor. Each of the Stages below must be completed. Even if a student does not complete every stage necessary to receive honors, many of the benefits of these stages can be gained through extended experience working as a Research Assistant in a Psychology Laboratory or through internships and we encourage all students to seek out such experiences as part of their required "Small Group Experience" for the major (see "Major Requirements"). These benefits include: detailed letters of recommendation from mentors who know you well; extended guidance on career paths in Psychology; a richer undergraduate experience to draw on in discussions with potential graduate school advisors and employers; the possibility of shared authorship on conference posters or papers (likely only to occur when students spend more than one year working on a single project with a mentor).

Stage 1. Preparing the Letter of Intent

Students intending to do honors in the program must submit a letter of intent prior to the Spring Break of their junior year. This letter should describe the general outline of the project, the lab and mentor who will supervise the project and detail the student's previous experience working with this mentor. This letter should be written by the student, signed and submitted to the mentor. The mentor should then turn this letter into the Director of Undergraduate Studies' mailbox in a signed envelope. The mentor should include in this envelope a separate letter, written by the mentor, detailing the degree of enthusiasm they feel for the project, their relationship and knowledge of the student, and the likelihood that the student will be able to complete the project on time. These materials will be discussed in a faculty meeting, typically with the mentor present, and a decision will be made by the entire faculty whether or not the student can progress to writing a full proposal. Acceptance to this second stage does not indicate acceptance of the project. This will be decided upon the completion of Stage 2.

Stage 2. Preparing the Project Proposal

For this second stage the student must complete the following materials in consultation with their mentor and turn these materials in to the DUS before the end of March:

- 1) A three page proposal that includes an introduction detailing your knowledge of the relevant literature with citations, a research plan for what you will do for your project, your past experience that qualifies you for the research you will be doing, and a description of your advisor (e.g., who will be your immediate advisor working on the project with you, who will be the faculty sponsor, what role will each person play in the project).
- 2) A detailed timeline, specifying goal dates for the following types of items:
 - Date of submission and expected clearance of IRB materials for your study
 - Completion of Methods, creating materials, programming, etc
 - Beginning of pilot testing of subjects
 - Dates from beginning to end of testing and number of subjects anticipated to be tested
 - Dates for doing Analyses and Graphing Results
 - Date for completion of the literature review portion of the thesis (i.e., the Introduction)
 - Date for completion of writing the Methods section for the thesis
 - Date for completion of writing the Results section for the thesis
 - Date for completion of writing the General Discussion portion of the thesis
 - Date for turning in the final draft of your thesis (before the last day of classes in the Spring Semester of the year you wish to graduate)
- 3) Your certificates of completion of compliance training for both human subjects and animal subjects
- 4) An unofficial transcript

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5) A letter of recommendation from the head of the lab you will be working in noting that they have agreed to be the advisor on your honors thesis and they have discussed your honors project with you and agreed on the proposed timeline.

Please give a paper copy of these materials to the Director of Undergraduate Studies before the end of March of your Junior year.

The faculty will review the Project Proposal. Typically your mentor and a second reader will read the full proposal. The proposal will be discussed at a faculty meeting and the faculty as a whole will decide whether or not the project will be invited to be completed for honors. The Director of Undergraduate Studies will notify the student and mentor of the faculty's decision. If the faculty decides that the project is not invited to be completed for honors in the department, the project can still be completed if the mentor and student wish and many of the benefits of doing honors (e.g., letters of recommendation etc) can still be gained. Projects that focus on an area within the demonstrated expertise of the mentor are the most likely to be accepted by the faculty and the faculty anticipates that most such proposals will be accepted. For this reason, students hoping to do honors are encouraged to create relationships with potential mentors during their Sophomore and Junior years prior to submission, especially by working as a Research Assistant in the Laboratory of a potential mentor.

Stage 3. Carrying out the Research Project

If the Project Proposal is accepted by the faculty, the student should carry out the proposed project according to the proposed timeline. Successfully completing honors may require the student to carry out research during the summer between the Junior and Senior year. We encourage students to plan to have the data collection portion of the thesis work completed before the end of the fall semester of the year they wish to graduate. Deviations from the proposed timeline are allowed, as running experiments and observing clinical settings often lead to unexpected outcomes. Students should persevere and, under the guidance of the mentor, stay focused on developing a convincing and thorough thesis document to be turned in before the last day of classes in the Spring Semester of the year you wish to graduate.

Stage 4. Preparing the Written Thesis

Students should prepare the written thesis according to the formatting guidelines supplied. Download the example thesis given on the department webpage. The student can use this existing document to serve as the formatting guide for their own thesis. Delete all content and fill in your own content so that your final document contains all of the sections included in this example document (e.g., title page, table of contents etc.). Multiple drafts of the written thesis should be written with the final draft, approved by the mentor, presented to the mentor and the second reader (a faculty member invited by the mentor and student) by April 1st of the Senior year. The Mentor and the Reader will have 1 week to read the thesis.

The student will then sit in an oral defense where in the Mentor and Reader will ask the student questions about the research in the thesis, probing for further details. At the end of this defense, the student will leave the room for a few minutes and the Mentor and Reader will decide what if any improvements need to be made to the thesis. Most theses will require some small improvements such as including more references from a particular literature or further discussion of data. The student is then invited back into the room and the Mentor and Reader ask for the requested changes (or for no changes). The student is given 1 week to complete these changes.

After making the requested changes, the student prints out two copies of the final thesis. The student should have one of these bound (e.g., at FedEx/Kinkos with a clear plastic cover and back). Examples of suggested binding are available from the DUS. The student then has the Reader and the Mentor sign the cover sheets of these two copies. The student turns the final signed and bound version of the thesis into the DUS and retains the other copy for themselves (e.g., for providing copies for graduate school applications etc). The final bound copy will be kept on file by the DUS. The signed copy serves as the official document demonstrating successful completion of an approved written thesis for honors within the major. Congratulations!