

What to expect when you are expecting an Honors Thesis

Thank you for your interest in working with me on your honors thesis! As I receive a number of requests to mentor this important milestone, I have developed a list of my expectations. Please review and consider these so that you can make a well-informed decision before embarking on this cognitive- and labor-intensive journey.

First I have a few “ground rules”:

1. I only supervise students who pursue empirical (data-generative) theses. Students’ research should pose a question that can be answered with data; I do not wish to supervise a thesis that focuses solely on a review of the literature.
2. I must know something about the topic/question that you want to study. I am a clinical psychologist who studies topics such as the connection between social anxiety and risk behaviors (especially alcohol problems), the effects of alcohol (especially on processing potentially threatening information), as well as psychosocial factors (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, anxiety, trauma, demographics) contributing to alcohol use and non-medical prescription drug use. Unfortunately, I cannot supervise a thesis if I do not know about the topic.
3. The research must have potential to be published in a respected, peer-review journal. Said another way, the question being addressed should contribute to the research literature relevant to your topic. Good research takes a lot of time and even more effort, and it involves scarce resources (e.g., the subject pool, funding); if we’re to invest, the endeavor should be worthwhile.
4. Honors students working with me must apply for a SURF award and/or honors college research grant!!! Details, including deadlines, can be found at: <http://honorscollege.uark.edu/98.php>
5. Because of the grant deadlines and the honors college timeline, you must develop your idea well before you plan to defend your thesis and graduate. For example, if you plan to graduate in May 2015, you will need to develop your idea and submit your SURF award or honors college research grant for the deadline in Fall 2013. You are responsible for keeping track of and meeting deadlines!
6. You must work for my lab as a Research Assistant for at least one semester before proposing your thesis. You must sign up for 3 credits of PSYC207V and plan to devote about 9 hours/week to lab activities. This gives us time to talk about ideas and common interests, to see how my lab operates, to complete lab training, and to make sure we work well together.

Other notes/advice:

- Typically, students have not had the time and/or training to come up with a project that meets these expectations. I will let students try to come up with a project on their own, but most often they end up working on a project that I have “given” them (this might be something that I am considering pursuing or something that a graduate student in the lab has considered pursuing). You may receive additional or primary mentorship by a graduate student.
- Thesis work takes (much) longer than expected. Plan ahead, start early, and be prepared to work hard; theses require a lot of initiative and independence. Though it is a lot of hard work, in the end many students find the thesis to be a fun and rewarding experience!

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