

Senior Honors Thesis in Economics

The senior honors thesis in economics is one of the requirements for a degree with Honors in Economics. It can be a richly rewarding experience. But going into it you must be aware that you will need to show a great deal of initiative and independence. You will need to find a topic and carefully monitor your own progress. We in the faculty will be more than happy to help you in this exciting venture. But it is a much different experience from enrolling in a class, where the professor tells you on a weekly basis what to do next.

This document contains both recommendations as to how to write a thesis and formal requirements, including registrations and so on. It is not designed to scare you off, but rather to help you avoid the pitfalls of thesis-writing. If you are thinking of writing an honors thesis, please read this document carefully and then discuss it with your advisor, with the Senior Thesis coordinator, or the Director of Undergraduate Studies in Economics.

Names to Know:

Senior Honors Thesis Coordinator: Prof. Mark Gersovitz
Director of Undergraduate Studies: Prof. Bruce Hamilton

General Advice

1. The senior honors thesis is worth 5 credits. Two credits are earned by enrolling in 180.521 Research in Economics (fall); the other three by enrolling in 180.522 Senior Thesis (spring). These two courses constitute a one-year sequence; 180.521 is a prerequisite for 180.522. All students should expect to complete both courses.
2. 180.521 and 180.522 DO NOT count toward the requirements for the major.
3. Your first job when embarking on a senior thesis is to find an area that you want to work in; this will then be narrowed down to a specific topic. (If you're lucky you may have an idea for a topic straight off.) You will then want to discuss your ideas with the thesis coordinator, who will supervise your work. These steps should be completed by the end of your JUNIOR YEAR. That way you can do a bit of background work over the summer and hit the ground running in September.

You may need help in the early stages of topic-hunting. In this process, you should feel free to meet with your academic advisor, with the coordinator of the Senior Essay or the Department's Director of Undergraduate Studies. Ultimately, you need to get your topic approved by the thesis coordinator.

4. You must complete a serious progress report during fall semester of your senior year. This will be graded and will be the basis for your two credits in Research in Economics.

5. You should set aside an amount of time roughly equivalent to an upper-level class during spring semester to complete the thesis. You should also arrange regular meetings with the thesis coordinator during spring term. Finally, you should come to an agreement with the thesis coordinator about due dates, including the due date for the final draft.

6. We are often asked “how many pages.” And here we can just give the classic professor’s answer: “As long as it needs to be.” The best guidance we can give you is that the thesis should reflect at least the amount of work in a major 300-level economics course.

How to Register

1. Sign up for 180.521 Research in Economics for the fall term. This class is for two credits. It does not have a meeting time; you are to meet with your thesis advisor and work independently. The details of grading will be determined by the thesis advisor, but generally speaking you will be graded on a major progress report due at the end of the term.

The designated course instructor for Research in Economics is Prof. Caroline Fohlin, and you should check in with her during spring of your junior year.

2. After consulting with the thesis coordinator during fall term, sign up for 180.522 Senior Thesis for the spring term. NOTE THAT 180.521 IS A PREREQUISITE for 180.522; you will not be permitted to write a senior thesis if you have not taken 180.521. Also remember that neither 180.521 nor 180.522 counts as one of the five electives required for an economics major.

3. Note that both Research in Economics and Senior Thesis are permission-required courses. For each of these courses you need the permission of the Senior Honors Thesis Coordinator.