

UH Mānoa Honors Program

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/undergrad/honors/honors@hawaii.edu>

Latest version: June 2024



Honors Proposal Guide

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RESOURCES

Mākālei Portal, to track progress in Honors, update checklists, and upload/submit your proposal: <https://honors.coe.hawaii.edu/student>

Sample Honors Proposals:

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/undergrad/honors/senior-honors-project-proposal-samples/>



WHY DO YOU NEED A PROPOSAL?

What does a proposal do?

A proposal explains what you want to do for your senior project, what its contributions will be, and what steps you will take to complete it. The proposal will be reviewed and approved by both your faculty mentor and the Honors director. A well-crafted proposal will build a structure and pathway for your project, and may become a first draft for several sections of your thesis or portfolio.

Plan for success

Sophomore year

- Declare a major; submit Department Approval Form on [Mākālei portal](#)
- Consider ideas for your senior project
- Attend bridge session with the Honors director (Spring of sophomore year)

Junior year

- Select a faculty mentor
- Take a proposal-writing class offered by Honors or major department (optional but highly recommended)
- If you cannot take proposal-writing class, meet with the Honors director and make a plan to complete proposal independently and in time
- Submit proposal to [Mākālei portal](#). **Your proposal must be submitted and approved before your senior project can begin.**

Senior year

- Invite at least one additional faculty member as a “committee member”
- First semester: HON 494: Honors Workshop, 0-credit class to plan the project
- Both semesters: HON 496 or course in major - For example, BIO 499
- Attend graduation info session, give an oral presentation at the Undergraduate Showcase, submit Honors projects to [Mākālei portal](#).

PROJECT TOPIC AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Identify a topic

You may have already identified a topic for your senior project - for example, the vertically-integrated project you are focused on as an Engineering student, or the laboratory where you are doing research.

If you are still considering your options, use these questions to help you identify a topic:

- What have been your favorite classes, projects, or extracurricular endeavors?
- What competencies and skills do you want to develop?
- What areas do you want to strengthen as you prepare for careers and graduate school?

A successful topic has these qualities:

- It excites and motivates you
- You are prepared to do it - you have enough coursework and experience to get started
- It may help you in the future - either professionally or in your continuing / graduate education

Project questions

After you develop a topic, the next step is to figure out what questions you want to answer about the topic. This helps you identify the interventions and contributions you want to make. To identify your project questions, ask yourself:

- What do you need to learn more about in relation to your topic?
- How can you create a new understanding of the topic?
- What questions can we ask about the topic that other people will find interesting or important?

Taking a proposal class, like HON 495 or HON 499 (one or the other depending on the type of project), can help you answer these questions. These courses are highly recommended to write the proposal in a supportive academic environment.

PROPOSAL-WRITING CLASSES

- HON 495
- HON 499
- Specific in-major options: HIST 396, ECE 396, ENGR 396, NURS 481, and others

What makes it Honors work?

An Honors project consists of original research or creative work undertaken by the student. It should be of a scope that is beyond the level of a traditional undergraduate term paper or project. For most students, the two-semester sequence of an Honors project, undertaken with consistent faculty mentoring, provides time and support to create a project that has greater scope and accomplishments than a more typical one-semester major capstone.

The project and proposal must clearly demonstrate the following:

A. Significance of the project

1. The project is significant within its academic field.
2. The project is socially relevant, inherently interesting, or has practical application beyond academia.

B. Literature review

1. The proposal demonstrates familiarity with the current state of research on this topic.
2. All appropriate sources are acknowledged.

C. Clarity of design

1. The project questions or goals are clearly and concisely stated.
2. The research methodology is appropriate for answering the project questions or reaching the project goals.
3. There is a clear explanation of how the project will be carried out. For example, there is a description of how data will be gathered, analyzed, and interpreted; how a creative work will be designed and undertaken; and how portfolio items will be created and compiled.

D. Presentation

1. The overall organization of the proposal is sound.
2. The proposal is free from excessive jargon, misspellings, and errors.

FINDING A MENTOR

Every Honors student needs a faculty mentor to oversee their senior project. **A mentor must agree to serve before your proposal can be approved.** Your mentor may teach your senior project classes, or can guide your work while you take an Honors senior project class.

Eligible mentors

Because each student's project is unique, Honors empowers students to select their mentor according to the criteria below.

- Can be any faculty member from your major department
- Can be faculty from another UHM department, **with approval from major department**

Scripts to contact faculty

Below are email scripts you can customize to communicate with faculty mentors. Make sure to customize the scripts with your own voice / approach and situation, and replace the words in the brackets with your own language.

Request a meeting:	After meeting:
<p>Dear [Prof. or Dr.] [Last Name],</p> <p>My name is [Name], and I am an Honors student majoring in [Department]. I took your course [name of course] and really enjoyed learning about [topic / area of expertise]. [Or explain other ways that you know about them.]</p> <p>As an Honors student, I am developing a senior project idea and am thinking about working on [topic]. Do you have time to discuss my idea in the next few weeks? I would really appreciate your input as I develop this idea. [Suggest days / times to meet]</p> <p>Thank you,</p> <p>[Name]</p>	<p>Dear [Prof. or Dr.] [Last Name],</p> <p>It was great to meet with you today. Thank you for taking the time to talk about what it's like to [pursue a project in your field]. I especially appreciated hearing about [something you discussed]. Thanks again for your time and assistance. I look forward to [working with you on this project, staying in touch, taking your course, etc.].</p> <p>Mahalo,</p> <p>[Name]</p>

TYPES OF PROJECTS AND PROPOSALS

Honors senior projects fall into three formats: **research, creative, and portfolio**. Consult your faculty mentor, your department advisors, and the Honors director to decide which is best for you.

Research thesis

The research thesis represents original, independent, mentored inquiry or creative work that reflects sustained effort, thoughtfulness of design and excellence in execution, and which enhances the student's area of study. It is the culmination of our Honors students' hard work, persistence, and dedication and is the capstone to their Honors education. Students work closely with a Faculty Mentor and an additional committee member over the course of their senior year to conduct research or carry out creative work as appropriate to their major, and produce a written record of their work.

Research thesis proposals are 10-12 pages (minimum), 12-pt. type, double-spaced. Use the citation and formatting styles typical for your discipline. They should include:

1. Project title
2. Clear statement of the purpose or goal of the project and its significance
3. Statement of research questions or hypothesis (especially for science-based projects)
4. A literature review that is relevant to the topic and which describes the field(s) to which the project is contributing (should be substantive and demonstrate the student's exploration of the topic)
5. Methodology / project design
 - a. Define any key terms or concepts used in the project
 - b. Discuss data or evidence to be used, and how you will access or generate it
 - c. Methods or types of analysis. Draft interview script or survey questions if used
 - d. If you are part of a mentor's larger research project, describe your role
6. Explanation of your training in the protocols for the research, as needed (e.g. methods course, safety certifications, animal research training, etc.)
7. Ethics statement or clearance from Institutional Review Board, if applicable
8. Timetable for project (from submission of proposal to graduation)
9. Works cited list

Creative thesis

Creative theses are original, well-conceived, and technically well executed works of visual art, music, performance, or other formats. They typically have two parts: the documented creative work (performance, visual art, film, screenplay, costume catalog, etc.) and an accompanying reflection narrative essay of some depth discussing the process and significance of the creative work, as well as citing scholarly work in the field.

Proposals need to be 10-12 pages (minimum), 12-pt. type, double-spaced. Use the citation and formatting styles typical for your discipline. They should include:

1. Project title
2. Clear statement of the purpose or goals of the project, including description of concepts to be explored, issues to be addressed, and reasons for engaging in the project
3. Significance and potential impact of the project to you and others
4. A literature review that is relevant to the topic and which describes the field(s) to which the project is contributing (should be substantive and demonstrate the student's exploration of the topic)
5. Methodology / project design
 - a. Define any key terms or concepts used in the project
 - b. A discussion of the student's creative plan, media, justification for this process
 - c. Especially if a team-based effort (such as a collaborative performance), a description of your specific contributions to the thesis
6. Explanation of your training in the skills or practices needed for the project (i.e. dance training, video editing classes taken, other media studied)
7. Ethics statement or clearance from Institutional Review Board, if applicable
8. Timetable for project (from submission of proposal to graduation)
9. Works cited list

Portfolio

A portfolio is a collection of coherently linked individual projects or items. Each item is typically shorter in length than a research or creative thesis, but in combination represent an equivalent amount of work. The portfolio is a good format if you want to include work with multiple formats (like design projects, coding, websites, group work, etc.), and also if you are using work created in several classes, like a combination of an HON 496 and a Business school capstone class.

Portfolios typically include 3-4 projects, tied together by a 10-12 page reflection essay (exclusive of front matter, diagrams, tables, illustrations, etc.). The essay clearly explains the connections between components and describes the student's specific work in each element. **(It is especially important in a group project that you clearly identify your individual contributions and work.)**

Examples of portfolio projects:

- A 10-page report or research paper from a UROP-funded project or class
- An experiential learning activity culminating in a formal presentation or paper
- An engineering design project, work of code, website, or creative work
- A business plan or submission to a design competition

Portfolio proposals must be 10-12 pages (minimum), 12-pt. typed, double-spaced and use the citation and formatting styles typical for your discipline. They should include:

1. A title
2. A clear statement of the goals or purpose or work of the portfolio and why the portfolio is the most appropriate form to showcase the student's work in the major
3. The significance and potential impact of the portfolio project
4. A literature review that is relevant to the portfolio's overall theme and which describes the field(s) to which the artifacts of the portfolio are contributing (should be substantive and demonstrate your exploration of the topic)
5. Portfolio design & process:
 - a. Description of each portfolio item
 - b. Any necessary context or information for understanding the artifacts
 - c. Resources and materials available to you to carry out the project
 - d. If a team-based project, description of your specific contribution to each item**
6. Description of your preparation to carry out any part of the project (methods course, draft interview protocol, surveys, certification for biohazard, animal research training, etc.)
7. Ethics statement or clearance from Institutional Review Board, if applicable
8. Detailed timeline (from proposal submission to graduation)
9. Works cited list

HOW TO WRITE THE PROPOSAL

Writing drafts

It can help to imagine the proposal as a set of around 5 components. Write each component separately, combine into a single document, and revise for clarity and consistency.

Topic and questions. Write 2-3 pages on the “what and why” of your topic and your goals. What do you want to know more about? Why is this project important?

Impact. Write 2-3 pages about the 5-10 most important books, articles, and other works on the topic (your literature review). What were important theories, ideas, conclusions, or controversies about your topic? What are some works that you want to emulate, challenge, or complement?

Design and process. Write 2-3 pages describing your path to learning more about your topic. How will you find the materials you need? What methods will you use to analyze and interpret them? Will you be in a library, a lab, a farm? Will you work independently or in a team?

Ethics and safety: Will your project involve other people, for example, interviews and surveys? If so, you may need to get approval from the [Office of Research Compliance](#). Consult with your faculty mentor and the Honors director to get more information on this process.

Other elements: Timetable for your project; resources and materials; and works cited. Don't forget your title at the front!

Combine these elements into a single document, review and revise for style and grammar. That's your proposal. You made it!

THE APPROVAL PROCESS

After you have a complete and well-edited proposal draft, your faculty mentor will give feedback and suggestions. Listen carefully to their input and make any recommended revisions. Once your mentor signals your proposal is complete, you can submit it to the Honors [Mākālei portal](#). Your proposal must be submitted and approved before you can start your senior project.

What happens next

After your proposal is approved, you are ready to begin your project. Your proposal can serve as a valuable jumping-off point for your research and writing. **Take pride in finishing your proposal. It is a lot of work but well worth it as a key step in your Honors journey.**