

Department of Government and Law Honors Thesis Guidelines

Effective Starting with the Class of 2027

Government and Law majors demonstrating excellence and superior academic performance may be eligible to undertake an honors thesis. Students considering a thesis should read these guidelines and be aware that although the bulk of thesis research occurs during their senior year, preparation for honors begins no later than the fall of junior year. Key junctures for proposing and pursuing Government and Law thesis research take place in fall and spring of junior year.

Overview

A Government and Law honors thesis is a substantial, independent research paper produced as a result of focused and sustained scholarly inquiry. Students conduct honors research and writing over two semesters. The thesis must pose a specific researchable question that (a) permits the formulation of hypotheses that can be confirmed or disconfirmed by empirical research or (b) allows for rigorous argument to confirm or disconfirm a proposition based on logical analysis and the interpretation of texts and/or historical evidence. When completed, the typical Government and Law thesis is 80 to 100 double-spaced pages in length, including references.

A student's independent thesis research in Government and Law will be supervised by a faculty member in the department. The thesis produced at the end of the year will be judged by a committee composed of the faculty supervisor, at least one other Government and Law faculty member, and one faculty member from outside the department. Only thesis work judged to be outstanding will be awarded honors.

Students pursuing a double major may propose conducting a joint honors thesis that combines Government and Law with their other major. A joint thesis is possible only when the research at the center of the thesis incorporates both majors. Students approved to undertake a joint thesis have two thesis supervisors: one from each major. The third member of the thesis committee can be from any department or program. Students interested in a joint thesis should consult with potential faculty supervisors from each of their majors to determine whether a joint thesis is appropriate and how to satisfy the expectations and requirements for joint honors.

Pursuing honors is an important and rewarding enterprise, requiring initiative, independence, perseverance, and a significant time commitment. Honors work is challenging and should only be undertaken by those who have enough time and a genuine interest to carry out a year-long research project. When deciding whether to pursue honors, students should consider the alternative opportunities for conducting in-depth research, such as independent study projects and EXCEL Scholarships.

Students conducting honors research are encouraged to participate in NCUR, the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. This annual event provides students an opportunity to present their academic research in a conference setting. Information on NCUR is available at

<https://academics.lafayette.edu/undergraduate-research/national-conference-on-undergraduate-research/>.

Prerequisites for Pursuit of Honors

Candidates for honors must normally have and maintain cumulative (grade point) averages of at least 3.00 overall and at least 3.20 in their major or majors. Students who pursue honors in Government and Law must register for a two-course sequence, GOVT 495-496, typically during their senior year. Students approved to undertake a joint thesis enroll in 495 in the fall semester with one department/program and in 496 the spring semester with the other department/program (e.g., GOVT 495 in fall and IA 496 in spring, or IA 495 in fall and GOVT 496 in spring).

Unless waived by the thesis supervisor¹, students must take one of the following courses as a prerequisite for pursuing honors:

GOVT 275: Political Analysis
A&S 200: Research Methods and Design
ECON 253: Fundamentals of Econometrics
HIST 206: The Politics and Practice of History
IA 280: Research Methods in International Affairs
MATH 110: Statistical Concepts
MATH 186: Applied Statistics
PSYC 120: Quantitative Methods in Psychology
WGS 285: Feminist Research Design

Students conducting thesis research must take one 400-level GOVT seminar and are encouraged to take that seminar during their junior year.

Timetable for Pursuit of Honors (a summary of this timetable appears at the end of the document)

Students typically register for and complete the two-course honors sequence in their senior year. The guidance provided below is geared toward that timetable. Students may explore the possibility of pursuing the two-course sequence in the spring of their junior year and fall of senior year. Students interested in undertaking honors on an earlier timetable should consult the department head, their academic advisor, and their prospective thesis advisor no later than the beginning of their junior year.

Junior Year

Fall Semester

The Department's Honors Thesis Guidelines will be distributed to all Government and Law majors and coordinate majors at the beginning of the fall semester.

The department head will organize an **Honors Thesis Information Session** early in the fall semester to provide juniors and sophomores with an overview of honors thesis requirements and processes. Government and Law majors and coordinate majors will be invited to attend the session. All juniors planning to pursue a thesis should make every effort to attend the session. The session will be conducted in a hybrid format so that students studying abroad have the opportunity to attend.

¹ Though the remainder of these guidelines reference "supervisor," students pursuing joint honor should consult both faculty supervisors wherever the term "supervisor" appears.

Students contact faculty with whom they wish to work to discuss possible research topics suitable for honors. Students should begin this outreach early in their junior year. Potential faculty supervisors determine whether they have the expertise to serve as thesis supervisor. Students are strongly encouraged to identify their prospective thesis supervisor by the end of the fall semester.

During final exam week, usually on the reading day, senior thesis students present their research at the Honors Thesis Proposal Presentations (see below). Juniors considering pursuit of honors are strongly encouraged to attend one of these sessions.

Spring Semester

The department head will organize an Honors Thesis Information Session early in the spring semester to provide juniors and sophomores with an overview of honors thesis requirements and processes. Government and Law majors and coordinate majors will be invited to attend the session. All juniors planning to pursue a thesis who did not attend the fall session should make every effort to attend this session. The session will be conducted in a hybrid format so that students studying abroad can attend.

No later than March 31, students wishing to pursue honors must submit to their potential faculty supervisor a **preliminary prospectus** that describes the topic they plan to study. The prospectus should be 2-4 pages long and include: a) the research question to be studied, b) why the question is important, c) the preliminary hypothesis/answer to the question, d) the proposed approach/methods for examining and answering the question, and e) a preliminary bibliography. A prize to the student who has, in the judgment of the faculty of the Government and Law Department, submitted the best preliminary prospectus will be announced by the end of the spring semester.

Students may not register for a thesis without identifying and gaining the endorsement of a thesis supervisor. Faculty may decline to supervise an honors thesis.

During the course registration period, faculty agreeing to supervise a thesis will send an email to the Registrar identifying the student who will be supervised and requesting that the student be enrolled in GOVT 495 in the following fall semester.

After registering for honors thesis work, each student will consult with their supervisor to plan summer readings and research. Students should also meet with a research librarian, who will be able to provide additional expertise and guidance on the project.

Students proposing projects that may incur research expenses, such as travel to archives, should consider whether to apply for funding support:

- Students can apply to Lafayette's Academic Research Committee (ARC) for grants to cover costs for student-initiated research. Grant applications are reviewed on a rolling basis during the academic year. The maximum award amount is normally \$500. See <https://researchsupport.lafayette.edu/arc-forms/>.

- Students pursuing research with a global focus can apply for Assante Carrasco funding. Full consideration for Assante Carrasco funds will be given to proposals submitted by May 1. The second-round deadline is September 1. Proposals submitted later (for instance, in the fall for January travel) will be considered depending on funding availability but should be submitted no later than November 1. See <https://studyabroad.lafayette.edu/home/fund-for-honors-research-travel/>.
- If funding support is not available through the above avenues, students should contact the department head to find out if department funds may be used to support student research.

Summer Following Junior Year

Although students do not register for honors work over the summer months, successful completion of a thesis often depends on groundwork conducted during the summer months. Students should begin reading and researching, and should draft a revised and expanded thesis prospectus.

Senior Year

August

By August 26, students will submit an expanded prospectus to their thesis supervisor, which the supervisor will use to determine whether the student may continue with the thesis as planned. If approved, the supervisor and student discuss goals to be accomplished in the fall and set a schedule for meeting those goals. Students should plan to meet regularly during the semester with their thesis supervisor.

Research projects that include human subjects may need to receive the approval of the Lafayette College Institutional Review Board (IRB). Thesis students and their supervisors must consider whether submission of an IRB proposal is required. Details are available at <https://irb.lafayette.edu/>. Students who use human subjects as part of their research but do not go through IRB review may not submit the completed thesis to the Library Digital Repository, publish their research, or otherwise publicly disseminate their work.

September

The department head will invite a small group of Government and Law faculty members to lead an **Honors Thesis Cohort Meeting** for all seniors pursuing honors or joint honors in Government and Law. All thesis students are expected to attend the meeting. The session is designed to provide guidance to honors students and to facilitate peer-to-peer support and interchange. The department will seek additional means to encourage peer-to-peer exchange and engagement throughout the year and may organize additional gatherings for the thesis cohort.

October/November

With the approval of the supervisor, the student recruits additional faculty members to serve on the thesis committee. The student should share the expanded prospectus with additional thesis committee members and meet with them to discuss the research.

The department head, in consultation with faculty and thesis students, arranges times for the **Honors Thesis Proposal Presentations**. Depending on the number of students pursuing honors, between one to three separate sessions may be scheduled. Students and faculty should reserve the reading day of final exam week for these sessions.

During the spring course registration period, faculty supervisors will email the Registrar identifying the student who will be supervised and requesting that the student be enrolled in GOVT 496 in the following spring semester.

December

The fall semester sessions of **Honors Thesis Proposal Presentations** are designed to give students constructive feedback that will help them clarify and flesh out their ongoing research. At these sessions, candidates for honors and joint honors will give a presentation to Government and Law faculty, outside members of the thesis committees, other interested faculty, and students. In particular, thesis students will summarize their thesis proposal, research design, completed research, and expected contribution to knowledge. After students present their proposals, faculty and guests in attendance ask questions and offer suggestions.

By the end of the fall semester, students must demonstrate to their supervisor that sufficient progress has been made to warrant continued pursuit of honors in the spring semester. The supervisor of GOVT 495, after determining the likelihood of successful completion of the thesis and evaluating the quality of the work to date, will submit a grade. The grade submitted must be an "A" for a student to continue with the honors thesis in the spring semester. Students who do not earn an "A" will have GOVT 495 converted to GOVT 390, independent study research.

Note: In cases where GOVT 495 is converted to GOVT 390, students who only have one 400-level seminar need not take a second 400-level seminar to complete the major requirements.

January

The supervisor and student discuss goals to be accomplished in the spring semester and set a schedule for meeting those goals, including establishing a clear timetable for completing drafts of thesis chapters.

January-March

Students submit working drafts of thesis chapters to the supervisor and other members of the thesis committee for review and comment. Students should aim to submit an entire rough draft by the end of March.

The faculty supervisor and the department head will submit a **Preliminary Honors Thesis Status Form** to the Office of Advising & Co-Curricular Programs. The form is available at <https://my.lafayette.edu/>.

April-May

A date for submission of the final draft of the thesis and the oral defense is set by the supervisor. To merit an oral defense and be considered for honors, students must submit a final draft of the thesis to all members of the thesis committee no later than April 30.

Unless expanded by permission of the thesis supervisor, attendance at the oral defense is limited to the honors student, the thesis committee, and members of the faculty. At the oral defense, the thesis committee evaluates the quality of the work. To award honors, a majority of committee members (including the thesis supervisor) must agree that the thesis is deserving of honors and an "A" grade. If the thesis is awarded honors, the committee may still ask for some revisions to be made before the final copy of the thesis is presented to the department and the College.

If the thesis is judged to merit honors, the supervisor submits an "A" grade for GOVT 496 to the Registrar. Students who do not earn honors will have GOVT 495 and GOVT 496 converted, respectively, to GOVT 390 and GOVT 391, independent study, and receive a grade for GOVT 391. The grade for GOVT 391 will be determined and submitted by the thesis supervisor.

The supervisor will prepare a **Final Honors Thesis Status** form for submission to the Office of Advising & Co-Curricular Programs. The form is due no later than the senior grade deadline and requires the signature of all members of the thesis committee and the department head, and is available at <https://my.lafayette.edu/>.

The student will submit a PDF version of the final thesis to the secretary of the Government and Law Department, who will arrange for making bound copies of the honors thesis, typically providing two-to-three copies for the student, one for the faculty supervisor and one to retain in the department. If other committee members wish to have a bound copy of the thesis, the department will provide those as well.

Students may submit their theses to the **Lafayette College Digital Repository** at <https://ldr.lafayette.edu/>. Because the level of access to an honors thesis retained in the Repository is determined by the student and their faculty supervisor, students should consult with their supervisor to decide the level of access. To submit theses to the Repository, students should review the instructions and guidelines available at the following link: <https://library.lafayette.edu/services-help/services/honors-students/student-honors-theses-ldr/>.

Summary of Timetable for Pursuit of the Government and Law Honors Thesis Project

Junior Year:

- Take one of the prerequisite courses needed for honors (in or by junior year)
- Attend fall semester Honors Thesis Information Session
- Consider attending December Honors Thesis Proposal Presentations (during finals week)
- By the end of the fall semester, discuss with potential faculty supervisor ideas for thesis research
- Decide on a research topic
- Attend spring semester Honors Thesis Information Session (if unable to attend fall semester session)
- By March 31, submit preliminary prospectus to potential faculty supervisor
- During course registration period, get approval of a faculty thesis supervisor to register for GOVT 495 for fall semester
- Consult with thesis supervisor and research librarian about plans for summer research
- Explore potential funding options for projects that will incur research expenses

Summer before Senior Year:

- Begin research and reading
- Revise and expand thesis prospectus

Senior Year:

Fall semester: Continue research throughout the fall and begin writing the thesis

- By August 26, submit a revised and expanded prospectus to thesis supervisor
- Consider whether review by Lafayette College IRB is needed
- Set schedule to meet regularly with thesis supervisor
- Establish a clear timetable for carrying out research
- Attend Honors Thesis Cohort Meeting
- Recruit two other faculty to serve on the thesis committee, sharing with them the expanded prospectus
- Prepare for Honors Thesis Proposal Presentations
- During course registration period, get approval of a faculty thesis supervisor to register for GOVT 496 for spring semester
- Present preliminary research on thesis at Honors Thesis Proposal Presentations (usually held on the reading day of final exam week)
- By the end of the fall semester, demonstrate to the thesis supervisor that sufficient progress has been made to warrant continued pursuit of honors in the spring semester.

Spring semester: Continue researching and writing the thesis

- Set schedule to meet regularly with thesis supervisor
- Establish a clear timetable for the completing drafts of thesis chapters
- Submit working drafts of thesis chapters to the supervisor and other committee members
- By the end of March, finish writing the rough draft of your thesis
- By early- to mid-April, set date for final draft and oral defense
- By April 30, submit final draft of thesis to all thesis committee members
- Participate in the thesis defense
- Complete any final revisions required or requested by the faculty committee
- Submit your final thesis as a PDF to Government and Law Department secretary, who will make bound copies for you to submit to your faculty advisor and to the Government and Law Department
- Decide, in consultation with the thesis supervisor, whether to submit the thesis to the Lafayette College Digital Repository

(Last Revised - Spring 2025)