

GVPT Honors Thesis Details and Expectations

The honors thesis is a key requirement for graduating with departmental honors. This document provides information to help prepare students for successful completion of the thesis project.

Credit and Completion Time: The thesis is a two-semester project. Students receive six hours of credit for their thesis work, in GVPT 396 and 397.

Thesis Length and Types: The GVPT department offers two tracks for thesis writers:

- **Track 1** is the conventional approach, and the large majority of theses are of this type. A Track 1 thesis should be 70-100 pages (18,000-25,000 words). It includes multiple chapters and gives the honors student the opportunity to consider the research question from a variety of angles or to bring different types of evidence to bear. Track 1 theses may include historical analysis, comparative case studies, regression analysis, process tracing, etc. in addition to an extensive argument built on existing literature.
- **Track 2** is an option for honors students who wish to pursue a project with advanced, rigorous empirical methods using data they collect. It is styled as a publishable paper in Political Science or Economics journals and includes extensive appendices with supplementary analyses. A Track 2 thesis should be 40-60 pages (11,000-14,000 words). A Track 2 thesis might include data scraping, analysis of big data, machine learning, GIS analysis, etc. Students wishing to complete a Track 2 thesis should discuss the option with their advisor and should inform the Honors Program Director prior to the completion of the first semester of thesis work. This option is particularly suited to APAN students who are also doing an honors thesis.

Timeline: Typically, honors students complete the thesis during the spring of their junior year and the fall of their senior year. In the event that a student studies abroad or is otherwise unable to follow this schedule, the thesis can also be completed during the two semesters of one's senior year. See the thesis timeline for specific expectations and goals to meet over the two semesters.

Registration: The honors student develops a **500-1,000 word overview** of their general research interest, which includes three academic citations. The student then identifies a faculty advisor and requests permission to enroll in the thesis courses under that advisor. The request for permission to enroll is made to the GVPT Honors Program Director, at which time the student should provide the written overview of interest and the faculty advisor's name. The advising office will provide a registration code to the student for enrollment under that faculty member.

Credit toward the GVPT Major: GVPT396 and 397 may count for Upper Level Major Requirements upon successful completion of BOTH. If the student completes 396 but does not continue to 397, then neither course will be counted towards graduation requirements. Credit can be converted to GVPT 388 (Independent Study) if a student does not complete the thesis, provided that sufficient work has been completed.

Requirement to Advance to the Second Semester (GVPT 397): In order to register for GVPT 397, Track 1 honors students taking 396 must share with the Honors Program Director 20 pages

of thesis writing. This does not need to be “thesis-ready” writing—it may be literature review, a draft thesis chapter, the development of a case, etc.—but the student should expect to incorporate a good portion of it into the actual thesis. Track 2 students should share 12 pages of writing as well as evidence of data collection and analysis. The first semester is heavy on research, but one should also write as the research evolves.

Selecting an Advisor: It is the honors student’s responsibility to identify a faculty member within GVPT to serve as the faculty advisor. Good options are faculty members whose research falls in the general area of the proposed thesis topic, and it is nice when students have had an opportunity to take a course with that particular instructor.

Developing a Topic: Students will start with a topic and will refine it into a research question that can be answered. This will be done with the help of the faculty advisor, but students will need to have thought about the topic of interest prior to the start of the first semester of thesis writing. Honors students are encouraged to read and explore their intellectual interests and potential topics before they begin GVPT 396.

Meeting times: The thesis is an independent research project, and students are expected to self-motivate. The student and faculty advisor will determine a schedule for one-on-one progress meetings, which might be once per week, twice per month, once per month, etc., based on need and the faculty member’s preference. There is no regular course meeting associated with GVPT 396 or 397.

Thesis Defense: In order to graduate with departmental honors, students must defend their completed thesis before a panel of three faculty members - the advisor and two additional instructors. The defense typically lasts approximately one hour; it begins with a brief presentation by the honors student which is followed by a Q&A period.

Grades: Honors students receive letter grades for successful completion of GVPT 396 and 397. The faculty member has discretion to withhold a grade for 396 and to issue an Incomplete if an evaluation of progress is not yet feasible.

The Decision to Write a Thesis: Students in the GVPT Honors Program must complete the thesis in order to graduate with departmental honors. However, students who elect not to do so may still remain in the program and may continue to take Honors-designated seminars.

Cut-off for Completing the Thesis: Honors students are expected to defend and submit the thesis by the completion of the second semester, just as they are expected to complete the work for their other courses within the designated semester. Students who face extenuating circumstances and need to request an extension must submit the thesis by Week 8 of the post-397 semester in order to be considered for graduation with departmental honors.

Honors Notation: Upon the thesis defense, students may be awarded a notation of No Honors, Honors, or High Honors. High Honors is reserved for theses that show atypical sophistication and which often include original data.