

Policy Studies Program
Policy Management -- Law and Policy
Honors Thesis Guidelines

To graduate with honors as a Policy Management (PM) or Law and Policy (LP) major you will need to conduct some original research and produce a thesis that meets the standards set by the Policy Studies faculty. **You must have an overall Grade Point Average of 3.4 or better to proceed with an honors proposal.**¹

PM majors: Your project should relate to an ongoing, real-world policy issue and be directed at an identified real-world client. Your final work product should be in the form and style of a traditional Foundations binder, although other formats will be considered on an individual basis.

LP majors: A central requirement is that the honors project must relate to law and have a clear policy focus. The project's thesis must be a defense or a critique of a policy outcome that is legally related. The format and methodology of the project are open-ended. The first draft of your work (due at the end of the fall semester) should be on the order of 30 pages of double-spaced text. The final draft of the project should be +/-50 pages.

Student initiative is crucial if you are to successfully graduate with honors. Below is a list of steps you need to complete and deadlines you must meet. Consult with your advisor at each step and keep in touch regularly.

Step 1 July 1, prior to Senior Year

- Select a thesis topic that raises issues requiring more original research.
- Seek out a faculty advisor with expertise in this area. Note: If your faculty advisor is not a member of the Policy Studies faculty, you should also ask a Policy Studies faculty member to act as secondary advisor.
- Discuss your ideas with the potential advisor, with an eye toward developing a thesis proposal. You might start by developing 5-6 questions on one topic of interest and then cutting back to 1 or 2 questions that you can expand upon in your thesis.
- Be sure you are registered for a full load of courses in the fall (do not register for an *Independent Research* credit yet).

Step 2 July – August, prior to Senior Year

Do background reading relevant to the research topic, with guidance from your faculty advisor.

Step 3 Day 1, Fall Semester, Senior Year

- Write a proposal (see below). You should make sure your advisor sees a strong draft of your proposal at least two weeks before the start of your senior year.

¹ Exceptions to this rule may be made in extraordinary circumstances.

- Submit your proposal to the Policy Studies faculty by the first day of the fall semester. The Policy Studies faculty will meet to discuss your proposal.
- If your proposal is approved, you should drop one course and add an *Independent Research* credit for your honors thesis (LAWP 550 or PMGT 550).² You may continue to step 4. If your proposal is not approved, you should continue with your regular courses.

Thesis Proposal Outline

- Working Title: Develop a short descriptive title for your thesis. Your title should be self-explanatory and give the reader a clear idea of your topic.
- Introduction: Your introduction will identify the type of research project you have chosen to undertake with some discussion of the methods you intend to employ (e.g., statistical analysis, survey research, elite interviewing, synthesis of literature, etc.). Include the projected focus of your thesis early in the introduction.
- Research question and approach: Your proposal must include a research question that you will examine or a hypothesis to be tested. Your question or hypothesis must be tied to a body of knowledge which currently exists (see below). What methods will you use in your research? If data are involved, how will they be collected and analyzed? What materials will be used? Are there challenges to be overcome? What timeline will you follow in completing your project?
- Annotated bibliography: On a separate piece of paper, include a preliminary annotated bibliography of at least 5 or 6 sources. This is the "body of knowledge" mentioned above. Select books or a combination of books, journal articles or on-line sources which address your topic. Follow APA format in preparing your bibliography.

Step 4 Fall semester of the senior year

- Register for a full load of courses during pre-registration period. (Do not register for your second *Independent Research* credit yet).
- Continue to build up your bibliography and begin to draft the thesis. A clean first draft of your work should be submitted to your advisor(s) on the last day of classes in the fall semester. Note: Students who are unsure of the merits of their work should submit a first draft earlier.
- Your advisor and the Policy Studies faculty will read, discuss, and grade your draft. If the committee decides that your draft merits an A or an A-, you can drop one of the courses for which you are pre-registered and proceed to add your second *Independent Research* credit. Your advisor will return your first draft to you with comments before the beginning of the spring semester.

Note: You will not receive a grade for the fall independent study until you have completed your thesis; your final thesis grade will apply to both fall and spring *Independent Research* credits.

- If the Policy Studies faculty decides that your draft merits a grade below A-, you will receive that grade for your fall independent study. You should continue with your pre-registered courses.

² Students complete the *Special Course Options Form* for the independent work and turn it in to the Registrar's Office.

Step 5 To be completed by April 15 of your senior year

Final draft. Building on the approved and corrected first draft, you write a final thesis. The final draft must be submitted by April 15th. You should submit one hard copy and one electronic copy to your advisor (one to each if you have two advisors). Use the format guidelines found here:

<http://blogs.dickinson.edu/policystudies/files/2011/09/HonorsFormatInstructions.pdf>

Note to PMGT majors: If you are writing a classic “Foundations Binder” do keep in mind that your final thesis will not be presented as a physical binder. Rather, binder sections will need to be collated into one electronic .pdf file.

Step 6 Last week of classes

- Thesis defense. You will be asked to orally defend your thesis before your advisor and the Policy Studies faculty early during finals week. All faculty members present will have read your thesis carefully.
- Honors faculty committee decision. Immediately after your oral defense, the faculty committee will convene privately to decide whether your thesis meets the standards required for honors in Policy Studies. You will be informed of the committee’s decision and any changes you need to make to your final thesis.

Step 7 Before 5 p.m. on Wednesday, prior to Commencement Sunday

- Final revision. If the Policy Studies faculty decides to award you honors, you may be required to make corrections and changes to the final copy. You should make these revisions quickly.
- Submit final, revised versions of the thesis to the following two individuals no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, prior to Commencement Sunday:
 - Your thesis advisor
 - Vickie Kuhn, Senior Departmental Coordinator: kuhn@dickinson.edu