

Education Honors Program

Education Studies Thesis

Students wishing to graduate with honors in Education Studies must write an honors thesis during their senior year. The thesis should serve as a capstone experience to the undergraduate major in Education Studies; it is a challenging enterprise that can be among the most significant and rewarding activities in one's undergraduate career.

Writing a thesis involves extensive empirical and/or theoretical/analytical investigation into an educational topic, which requires careful scholarship, good organizational skills, and the ability to work independently. Successful completion of an honors thesis will require a substantial, sustained effort through which students will gain skills and expertise that will serve them well beyond your undergraduate program. It will provide you with the opportunity to: 1) develop expertise in a particular topic related to education, 2) learn how to critically analyze existing research in the field of education, 3) learn how to conduct empirical research, and 4) improve your organizational and written and oral communication skills.

In your junior year, you should begin contemplating the possibility of doing a senior thesis. You should consider the following questions:

- Are you passionate and excited about an educational topic that you want to think deeply about across a full year of study?
- Will you be able to manage your time independently, do a sustained research project, and present your findings and arguments orally and in writing?
- Will you have enough time necessary for such a project? (Although students receive two full course credits for the thesis their senior year--signing up for ED99a and ED 99b in the fall and spring semesters, the time commitment and intellectual effort may be more than two typical courses.)

If you can answer these questions affirmatively, you should speak with an Education Professor during your junior year. Additionally, you must submit a **two-page project proposal** to the Honors Thesis Coordinator preferably during the spring of your junior year and no later than the end of first week of classes in the fall semester of your senior year.

Requirements and Standards

Eligibility to write an Honors Thesis in Education

Student must:

- Have a minimum overall GPA of 3.50 by the end of Junior year,
- Submit a two-page proposal to the Honor Thesis Coordinator in the first week of classes in your senior year, and
- Complete the Honors Thesis Seminar (non-credit, meeting several times in senior year)

** Interested students who do not meet the requirements to write an honor thesis may petition the Honors Thesis Coordinator and the Director of the Education Program. Petitions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.*

Standards for an Honors Thesis

Student must:

- Meet the deadlines for thesis completion,
 - Produce an empirical or theoretical/analytical thesis that meets the form and style requirements set by the Education Program, and
 - Conduct an oral presentation/defense of the project in late spring semester.
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Frequently Asked Questions about Honors Theses in Education

Q. What is an Honors Thesis in Education?

A. An Honors Thesis in Education is an original, inquiry-based project that will contribute to existing research and/or theoretical/analytical literature in the field of education. Education theses can be empirical or theoretical/analytical papers.

Empirical Paper – This is based on an empirical research project on an educational topic. It is guided by a clear, concise and original research question. Based on data collected, it theorizes as to what the answer to that question might be and offers evidence to support a conclusion or argument. This paper is typically formatted in the model of a conventional research journal article.

Theoretical/Analytical Paper – This investigates a new or unique idea in the field of education, conceptually and analytically. This may involve examining a little-studied issue in education or conceptually linking different disciplines or schools of thought to develop a new way of thinking about a long-standing problem. As a work of both scholarship and interpretation, a thesis might undertake extensive research into a given subject and make a critical argument about it. A theoretical/analytical thesis aims to master relevant background and thinking in an area of inquiry, while making a fresh contribution to ongoing scholarship. This requires a considerable amount of reading in the field and analysis, synthesis, and critique of existing research and theory. The format a theoretical/analytical paper (decided upon by the student and Thesis Director) will vary based on the nature of the work.

Q. How do I get ready for a thesis project and come up with a topic?

A. The Education Program will offer informational sessions in the fall and spring semesters to help students think ahead about writing an honors thesis. In these sessions, faculty will help interested students to better understand the thesis requirements and procedures and think through potential topics and projects. In order to do an honors thesis, you will be expected to have identified a topic and potential project and submit a proposal in the first week of classes in your senior year. Thus, if you are interested, ***we strongly encourage you to attend an informational session in your junior year.***

Q. How do I propose an honors thesis project?

A. You must submit a two-page proposal to the Honors Thesis Coordinator, preferably, during the spring of your junior year and no later than the end of first week of classes in the fall semester of your senior year. In the proposal you must outline:

1. the topic of your proposed project,
2. what you anticipate doing for the project and how,
3. the significance of the project (e.g., Why do you think your project is important and how do you think it can contribute to educational research, theory, policy, and/or practice?), and
4. related readings you have done and professional and/or personal experiences that have prepared you for your proposed project.

Q. What are the components of the thesis?

A. *Theoretical/analytical theses* can take different forms based on the project. Which components it will contain will be worked out between the student and the Honors Thesis Director.

Empirical theses typically contain the following components:

1. a concise and clearly stated research question,
2. an overview and critique of the relevant scholarly literature,
3. a justification of the import of the research question and a defense of the approach used to answer the question,
4. a discussion of the data that will be used to answer the question and a description of the methodology employed,
5. coherently written chapters that discuss the findings of the study, and
6. a conclusion that uses the research to answer the research question.

Q. How long is a thesis?

A. The length of theses varies but they are typically 70-100 pages.

Q. How frequently must I meet with my thesis director? How many hours per week must I work on my thesis?

A. There are no fixed standards. However, it is very important to the success of your thesis that you meet regularly with your advisor. Very early on in the advising process you and your advisor should reach an understanding on how often you will meet and on your individual calendar for thesis completion. Completing the thesis requires sustained work. It is NOT something you can put off until the end of the semester. It is expected that you will work on some aspect of your thesis each week, throughout the fall and spring semesters.

Q. Can I complete a thesis in one semester?

A. Given the intensity of the work, we expect students to work for two semesters on their theses. Students studying abroad in the fall semester of their senior year must consult with the Honors Thesis Director and Coordinator *in the spring of their junior year* to agree on a plan of work.

Q. What if I start an honors thesis project and then find that I can't finish it?

A. If a student is not making adequate progress (see timeline) on their honors thesis project, as determined by the Thesis Director and the Honors Thesis Coordinator, he or she may be asked to discontinue the project. A progress evaluation meeting will take place at the end of the fall semester for each student working on an honors thesis, attended by the student, the Thesis Director and Coordinator. At this time, students will receive feedback and guidance on their work and progress. Students discontinuing their honors thesis project before completion will still receive credit for all for-credit courses completed.

Q. What are ED165a and the Honors Thesis Seminar and do I have to take them?

A. Education Studies majors must take the capstone course, *ED165a: Reading (and talking back to) Research on Education*. It is intended to assist students with their first-time effort to do serious social science research and teaches students how to formulate a research question, structure a research design, gather data/evidence, and organize a research paper. ED165a meets weekly in the Fall Semester and is typically taken in one's senior year. Additionally, those completing an honors thesis must attend the *Honors Thesis Seminar*, which will meet several times over the course of the year.

Q. How many copies of my thesis must I submit?

A. You submit three (3) copies of your thesis (one to each of the readers and the honors director) prior to the oral defense. After revisions, you will also submit one to the Library. The Archives & Special Collections Department requires that you submit a completed [Senior Honors Thesis Release Form](#) along with your thesis. In addition, they have specific requirements for the formatting of their copy. The cover sheet should contain the following information in this exact order: 1) Title; 2) Author; 3) Senior Honors Thesis; 4) Education Program; 5) Brandeis University; 6) current year. In addition, they ask that you submit a loose, unbound copy since they will be bound in hard-cover by the library (do NOT hole-punch). Ideally, your thesis should be printed on acid-free paper to ensure its longevity; however, we recognize that not all students are able to do that.

Thesis Committee

Each honors thesis must have one director and two readers who, together, make up the thesis committee.

- *Director* – The thesis director should be a Brandeis faculty member, customarily but not necessarily, in the Education Program.
- *Readers* – At least one reader must be in the Education Program. The other can be out of dept. or even in another university. The Coordinator will identify a potential director and at least one of the readers based on availability and knowledge of topic.

Honors Thesis Coordinator

The role of the Honors Thesis Coordinator is to orient students to the honors program, help them to compose their committee, oversee the honors theses projects and provide support and guidance to seniors completing honors theses. Specifically, the Coordinator will:

- Review initial two-page proposals and consult with any student who wishes to write an Education Studies thesis to help them determine if doing an honors thesis project is feasible.
- Identify a thesis director and at least one reader, in consultation with the student.
- Teach ED165a and facilitate the Honors Thesis Seminar.
- Keep abreast of students' progress and, particularly in ED99a, determine if a student is making adequate progress. If not, the Coordinator will consult with student and Thesis

Director to raise concerns and to make recommendations as to whether or not the student can/should proceed.

Timeline

Below are the timelines by which students are expected to complete components of empirical and theoretical/analytical honors theses. These timelines, which start at the beginning of the students' senior year, will be used to gauge students' progress over the course of the year.

Empirical Research Project

Month	Task(s)
<i>Fall</i>	
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit two-page proposal - Due first week of classes • Consult with Honors Thesis Coordinator to determine if you will proceed with honors thesis project • Identify research site • Develop research questions
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit final research questions - Due first week of Oct. • Develop research methods and design instruments for data collection • Seek IRB approval (if needed) • Prepare to enter research site
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and begin data collection if research protocols approved • Submit annotated bibliography - Due November 15th
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection • Data analysis • Progress evaluation meeting
<i>Spring</i>	
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit literature review draft - Due first day of spring classes • Data collection (if not completed) • Data analysis
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise literature review • Submit methods chapter • Work on data analysis chapter(s)
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit data analysis chapter(s) – Due first week of March
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit complete draft of thesis (due April 1st) • Oral defense in mid-April • Submit final thesis by the end of April

Theoretical/Analytical Research Project

Month	Task(s)
<i>Fall</i>	
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit two-page proposal - Due first week of classes• Consult with Honors Thesis Coordinator to determine if you will proceed with honors thesis project• Identify appropriate literature
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalize abstract, outline and work plan - Due first week of Oct.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete one chapter draft - Due November 15th
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue writing
<i>Spring</i>	
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit second chapter draft - Due first day of spring classes
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit first chapter revised
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit second chapter revised• Submit paper discussion/conclusion
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit complete draft of thesis - Due April 1st• Oral defense in mid-April• Submit final thesis by the end of April

Assessment

The thesis committee will make a recommendation to the Education Program faculty based on the quality of the project and paper after the formal presentation in late spring. It will be possible for a student thesis to earn honors, high honors, or highest honors. The criteria for these designations are on the next page.

Honors

The student has successfully completed and defended an honors thesis with distinction, in writing and in person.

High Honors

The student has successfully completed and defended an honors thesis with unusual distinction, in writing and in person.

Highest Honors

The student has successfully completed and defended an honors thesis with the highest distinction, in writing and in person. Only the most original scholarship and eloquent presentation warrant this evaluation.