

## The Honors Thesis in Philosophy

[http://shprs.clas.asu.edu/honors\\_philosophy](http://shprs.clas.asu.edu/honors_philosophy)

An honors thesis is a significant and original essay that is often the capstone of one's academic work at ASU. It is an essential element of the honors experience. Given the general and fundamental nature of philosophy, writing an honors thesis in philosophy is often a perfect fit for students in Barrett. Students who have successfully completed their theses here look back on their projects with pride and satisfaction. The Barrett website is extremely helpful in laying out the general rules and deadlines for writing a thesis, and it contains many useful suggestions for making your project successful. You should read those sections of the website thoroughly and address further questions either to the Honors Disciplinary Advisor (the name of whom is given below) or to the faculty and staff of Barrett. They have been through the procedure many times and can help in many ways. The following paragraphs address many important questions as well as the specific requirements for submitting a proposal for and completing an honors thesis in Philosophy. They are not intended to replace the Barrett website.

### **Do I need to be a philosophy major to write an honors thesis in philosophy?**

The short answer is no, but ideally you ought to have had several courses in some philosophic area and found there some issue that you want to pursue further. It is often helpful to take courses with a prospective thesis director before embarking on a thesis project. This is because you will be working closely with this person for several semesters, and you will want your director's way of approaching the issue you address to be one with which you are comfortable.

### **Who can be on my thesis committee?**

The Honors Thesis committee in philosophy consists of two committee members, one director and one second reader, both of whom are regular faculty members (tenure-track or lecturer lines). The thesis director must have a Ph.D. in philosophy. The second reader will be picked with the consent of the director and will be someone whose research and teaching is within standard areas of philosophy (this recognizes that not everyone who works in philosophy has a Ph.D. in philosophy). Committees may include a third member, and that person may be someone whose research and teaching is not in philosophy, including a person outside the university.

## **Who is the Honors Advisor for Philosophy?**

Thad Botham

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## **How do I get a director and committee for my project?**

You should choose the general area and faculty member with whom you think you want to work and do this well before the end of your junior year, i.e., early in the third semester before graduation. Then go to that faculty member to

- Ask whether he or she or she is willing to direct your honors thesis
- Discuss and refine a topic
- Discuss who else should be on the committee. Even if you have a good idea of whom you would like to serve as second and third readers, good sense and good manners both require that this be discussed with your advisor and that names agreeable to both you and your advisor be determined before you ask any other persons to serve in this capacity.

Honors Enrichment Contracts are a great way to interact with faculty members at a deeper level. Moreover, honors enrichment contracts secure honors credit for courses that would otherwise be non-honors courses. Most of the time, philosophy faculty offer honors enrichment contracts in the courses that they teach, but honors students should take the initiative during the first week of classes to find out whether or not their instructors would agree to granting honors credit for the course as well as what such a contract would require were it offered.

## **What will be expected of me?**

An honors thesis is more ambitious in terms of philosophical depth, independent research, and originality than would be turned in for a regular course.

- The thesis work should be equivalent to at least two full courses.
- You will be doing a significant amount of independent reading based on a search of the relevant literature. For this, you will need to learn how to use the electronic data base, [Philosopher's Index](#). For a tutorial, you may want to experience Dr.

Thad Botham's YouTube lecture, [Finding Philosophy: a tour of the Philosopher's Index](#).

- You will set up regularly meeting times with your thesis director where you will present the results of your ongoing research.
- Each chapter or thesis section will go through one or more revisions in light of your director's comments.
- The thesis should be of sufficient quality to be submitted as part of an application to graduate or professional school.

### **How do honors philosophy majors meet Barrett's Thesis/Creative Project Preparation Requirement?**

Prior to enrolling in thesis credit (492 or 493), all students must complete a thesis/creative project information session. The session clearly informs (and provides an opportunity to answer questions from) each student about the process, expectations, and deadlines of the thesis experience. Fairly early in both fall and spring semesters, philosophy (often in conjunction with History and Religious Studies of SHPRS) offers a face-to-face workshop. This workshop's location, date, and time will be announced ahead of time. Prior to attending this face-to-face workshop, philosophy students are encouraged to work through on on-line workshop offered through Barrett via ASU Blackboard. Anyone may self-enroll in the Blackboard course by following the instructions below:

Instructions to self-enroll in the Barrett Thesis/Creative Project Blackboard course

- Step 1: Access ASU Blackboard through your MyASU page.
- Step 2: Once on the Blackboard homepage, click the "Courses" tab at the top of the page.
- Step 3: There you will see a "Course Search" box on the left side of the screen. Type in the course: **Barrett Honors Thesis/Creative Project Online Workshop**.
- Step 4: A list of courses will appear. Locate the Barrett Honors Thesis/Creative Project Online Workshop. Click the double-down arrow in gray under the Course ID and select Enroll.
- Step 5: A confirmation page will appear. Review the information and click Submit.

## Philosophy Thesis Requirements:

- The final product is to be a substantial written thesis, typically 40 pages in length.
- The prospectus, which may be revised during the first semester of thesis work, should include a detailed written calendar of the steps toward completion of the project, to be agreed on by the student and the thesis director. This should include planned due dates for first drafts and well as revisions of chapters or major sections of the thesis.
- The prospectus must include a carefully selected bibliography of works, including journal articles, that you plan to read.
- By the end of classes of your first semester of thesis work (which is usually by the end of a Fall semester), a completed first chapter or significant section must be submitted to the director, on the basis of which approval to enroll in a second semester of honors work will either be granted or withheld.
- The completed draft of the entire thesis project must be submitted to the director and readers at least two weeks before the scheduled defense. You are responsible for making sure that you meet the Barrett Honors College deadline for completion of the thesis defense.

## Useful Tips

The prospectus should be done, or nearly so, by the end of the semester prior to your thesis year.

- Don't overestimate either what is required or what you can reasonably do. A thesis is not a book, much less the "Great American Novel". It is one (albeit significant) step beyond the term papers and essays that you are already writing. Since the best theses are well focused, there is no need to make the project difficult by attempting something too grand.
- It is often easier to begin a philosophy project by carefully considering an issue that is already discussed in the literature. The issue should be intriguing to you to the extent that you have a strong positive or negative reaction to what someone has said. Beginning with existing literature gives a straightforward way to introduce the issue, and this is often the hardest part of writing. It also provides a way of structuring your argument and makes your work part of (relevant to) an ongoing conversation.
- Don't underestimate either the amount of work involved or how long the project will take. Everything takes longer than you expect. Plan to finish a month before

the final deadline. Make a timetable so that you know whether you are on schedule, and stick to it. Build into your schedule plenty of time for rewriting.

**Some Helpful Links to find Philosophy Faculty at ASU (these are not exhaustive)**

[http://shprs.clas.asu.edu/philosophy\\_people](http://shprs.clas.asu.edu/philosophy_people)

<http://sites.google.com/site/philosophyatasu/people-and-research>

**Some Barrett Faculty competent in philosophy (this list is not exhaustive)**

<http://barretthonors.asu.edu/2011/01/dr-ted-humphrey>

<http://barretthonors.asu.edu/2011/01/dr-joel-hunter>

<http://barretthonors.asu.edu/2011/01/dr-john-lynch>

<http://barretthonors.asu.edu/2011/01/dr-thomas-martin>

<http://barretthonors.asu.edu/2011/01/dr-david-pickus>