Psychology Honors Major & Honors Project Information

Criteria for Graduating with an Honors Major in Psychology

✓ Graduate with an overall GPA of 3.25 AND a Psychology GPA of 3.5*
✓ Complete all requirements of the Psychology major as well as the Arts and Sciences degree
✓ Complete an Honors Project: PSY 1973 Honors Directed Research AND 1975 Honors Thesis under the supervision of a primary or secondary psychology faculty member
✓ Successfully defend the Honors Thesis before a three-member faculty committee (see committee guidelines below)

*Note: These GPAs are not required to begin an Honors Project; however, they must be realistically attainable by the time one is to graduate in order to be permitted to begin an Honors Project. Please see the Director of the Psychology Advising Office for more information.

Honors Project: Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Honors Project? An Honors Project is a two-course sequence (i.e., a two consecutive semester minimum commitment), including registration in three credits of PSY 1973 Honors Directed Research and three credits of PSY 1975 Honors Thesis. The Honors Project is an intensive research experience that allows undergraduates to construct and carry out their own research project, as either an original study or a replication of a previously reported study, under the guidance of a Psychology faculty member. The final product should be an APA-style research paper (a.k.a. thesis) that demonstrates a superior grasp on the process and outcomes of performing a research study.

Honors Thesis committee. Together with their faculty mentor, students form a three person committee to oversee the project. The committee will be comprised of the faculty mentor (who serves as the chair of the committee), at least one other faculty member (who may be from Pitt or from another institution), and third member who has a master’s degree or equivalent and is qualified to evaluate the Honors thesis. This member might be an advanced graduate student, postdoctoral fellow, or staff member involved in the research.

Honors Thesis Proposal. During the PSY 1973 semester, students work with their faculty mentor to develop a proposal, written in journal article format (following APA style) and typically consisting of Introduction, Methods, and Data Analysis sections. Proposals should be no longer than 25 pages (excluding tables, figures, and references, using 1” margins and 12 point font). Once the proposal has been finalized and approved by the faculty mentor, it should be circulated to committee members at least one week prior to the proposal meeting. Proposal meetings should be scheduled for at least one hour. It is customary for the student to present a brief overview (approximately 15 minutes) of their proposal prior to responding to questions. The Honors Thesis Proposal Form should be signed by the committee at the proposal meeting (or after revisions are approved) and turned in to the Psychology Advising Office before the end of the PSY 1973 term. While it is anticipated that students will begin preliminary work on their projects during the PSY 1973 semester as part of proposal preparation, it is expected that substantive work on data analyses and interpretation will commence following approval of the proposal by the committee. The proposal and proposal defense must be completed and the proposal approved by the end of the PSY 1973 semester.

Honors Thesis Defense. When the research project is completed and the thesis written, the student presents it to the committee at an oral defense meeting. Again, after being approved by the advisor, the thesis should be circulated to committee members at least one week in advance of the defense meeting (again, however, this timeline may be altered at the committee’s discretion). The honors thesis should be no longer than 35 pages (excluding tables, figures, and references, using 1” margins and 12 point font). The defense should be
scheduled for at least one hour. It is customary for the student to provide a brief overview (15 minutes) of the completed research project; this is followed by questioning by the committee. Following a successful defense or after successful completion of required revisions, the Honors Thesis Defense form should be completed by the committee and submitted to the Psychology Advising Office. Following any needed revisions, an electronic copy of the final thesis should be provided to the Psychology Advising Office for archiving. These documents need to be submitted to the Psychology Advising Office on or before the last day of classes for the term.

What do I need to do BEFORE registration? There are SIX STEPS to complete before registration:

1) Meet with your psychology advisor to discuss the Honors Project in the Psychology Major.
2) Complete a minimum of 1 credit of PSY 1903 (Directed Research) with proposed faculty mentor prior to submitting Honors application. Choosing the subject and research question can be discussed during the PSY 1903 (Directed Research) time. You should begin taking these steps at least one semester in advance of starting work on your Honors Project.
3) Student and faculty mentor must form a three-person Committee to oversee the project.
4) Student and faculty mentor must set a date for the Proposal Meeting before the end of the enrolled semester in order to complete the Honors application.
5) With your honors project faculty research supervisor, complete the Psychology Honors Project Application, including a brief description of the project and projected timeline.
6) Schedule an appointment with the Director of the Psychology Advising Office (412.624.4540) to process your application, and if approved, obtain a permission number to enroll in PSY 1973.

What does each Honors Project course entail?

PSY 1973 Honors Directed Research is characterized by, but not limited to, the following:

a) Review your proposal, which describes your project, and set your goals and tentative deadlines with your thesis advisor.
b) Propose your project to your thesis committee. You must complete the Honors Thesis Proposal form and have your committee sign this form during the proposal meeting. Once approved and completed, submit this form to the Advising Office. This completed form is due before the end of the term you are enrolled in PSY 1973.
c) Draft the Introduction & Methods sections of your thesis.
d) Obtain IRB approval (if applicable) & begin data collection.

PSY 1975 Honors Thesis is characterized by, but not limited to, the following:

a) Finish analyzing your data and draft your Results and Tables/Figures.
b) Draft your Discussion, Reference, Title Page and Abstract, and turn in your final APA-style paper to your committee.
c) Defend/give a brief presentation of the thesis to your faculty committee. During your thesis presentation, you must complete the Honors Thesis Defense Form. Submit this completed form to the Advising Office before the last day of classes.
d) Address any requested modifications and submit the final version of your thesis to your faculty mentor, Advising Office, and committee (if requested) before the last day of classes for the term.

The Honors Thesis can, with an appropriate course of study and modifications to the thesis committee, be utilized as the thesis for the Bachelor of Philosophy (BPhil) degree offered through the University Honors College. Students wishing to pursue the BPhil should consult the Honors College website (http://www.honorscollege.pitt.edu/bphil-degree) and discuss this interest with their faculty mentor as early as possible to facilitate appropriate planning for the thesis and thesis committee.