



Honors Guidelines for the Independent Concentration

Independent Concentrators who (a) have completed at least **two thirds of their independent concentration requirements**, (b) earned mostly **"A" grades** or otherwise demonstrate high performance in the IC, and (c) are in **good academic standing**, are eligible to apply for Honors at the start of their penultimate (usually 7th) semester at Brown.

Honors candidates spend the senior year working intensively on a **self-directed research or creative-practice project** under the guidance of **one faculty advisor (director of the thesis), and two other faculty members who serve as readers**. The pursuit of Honors in the concentration provides an opportunity for intensive engagement. The process of designing a research or creative-practice project and formulating a research question, practicing inter/disciplinary ways of thinking, and presenting one's research to others develops expertise and heightened communication skills, as well as a deepened relationship with faculty mentors.

How to Apply for Honors Candidacy

Applicants must:

- Be in Good Academic Standing
- Have completed at least two-thirds of the IC requirements by the deadline
- Have earned mostly "A" grades (more than 50% of the IC course grades) or otherwise demonstrate high performance in the IC in S/NC graded courses
- Secure a faculty advisor, and discuss plans for the proposed thesis project with the advisor, ideally during the student's 6th semester¹
- Prepare a thesis proposal according to the advisor's specifications and those listed in this document, outlining the major research questions and methods to be used (the *Thesis Proposal Form* is included at the end of this document)
- Submit the proposal, signed by faculty advisor and both readers, to the IC Dean no later than **the third Friday of the 7th semester** (this deadline allows the IC Dean to notify students of their admission to the Honors program with sufficient time to allow the student to add a class by the 4th week of the term)

¹ Students who plan to **study abroad** should think about potential topics and meet with appropriate professors **before leaving**. If away in the 6th semester, they should maintain contact with their advisors while abroad.

Strong thesis proposals will be submitted on time, will be well-written, and will have (1) a clear research or guiding question; (2) sound and appropriate methods (on which the student has received training); and (3) a reasonable timeline for completion by April 15 for spring graduates, or the 1st or 2nd Friday of December for mid-year completers.

Thesis Requirements

Once accepted as honors candidates, students must:

- Enroll in two (2) semesters of [departmental independent study courses](#) with the faculty advisor (student must register **no later than the last day to add a course, four weeks into the semester**)
- Meet regularly with the primary thesis advisor (at least twice per month is recommended)
- Meet ~ twice with first reader each semester, and ~ once with second reader each semester
- Arrange for one group meeting between thesis director and readers by mid-7th semester
- Submit drafts of the thesis by the established deadlines listed in this document to thesis director and readers
 - ***The primary thesis advisor/director should comment on the first chapter soon after submission, and on the first full draft. The first reader should comment on the first full draft. The second reader can comment on the first full draft but need only comment on the final version of the thesis.***
- Give an oral presentation of their research (as all IC students must do)
- ***Quality of the thesis should meet the quality of a high-level of achievement, or the equivalent of "A"-level work.***
- Honors is awarded by the IC Dean based on the assessment of the thesis by the thesis committee members, and on the overall performance in the concentration.

Advisor and Honors Committee

An honors thesis requires **one advisor/thesis director and two readers** to serve as the **Honors Committee** (the advisor and two other readers of the thesis²). While it is not required, the IC faculty sponsor often serves as the thesis advisor. The student identifies two additional readers in consultation with the thesis advisor. The Honors Committee must be established early enough so that they may read, provide feedback for, and sign the Thesis Proposal, due no later than the 3rd Friday of the 7th semester (see the timeline below).

² The advisor and at least one additional reader must be Brown faculty members. A curriculum vitae for any-non Brown thesis readers must accompany the Thesis Proposal.

Although the roles of advisor and reader differ, students must maintain regular communication with all committee members during the research and writing of the thesis.

The advisor works closely with the student to develop the research/creative project and a plan (with short- and long-term deadlines) for its execution. The two should establish a regular meeting schedule at the start of each term. Because the advisor serves as the instructor of record for the required independent study course, this meeting schedule can serve as a syllabus for the work to be done during each of the two semesters. The advisor provides guidance on specific research methods (aligning with the IC student's junior-year methods course), recommending additional coursework or referring the student to faculty with relevant expertise. The advisor also evaluates the progress of the research, providing direction and timely feedback on written drafts.

The two readers play a smaller role, while still providing input and guidance throughout the project. Often, the readers provide feedback in areas where the thesis director/advisor may not have expertise – this is often the case in independent concentrations where the research may span several disciplines. Readers often read fewer drafts than the primary reader, but still offer feedback and comments. Students should establish a few regular meetings with each reader, at least monthly (although this may vary based on the reader's personal style.) It is often beneficial for the readers and the advisor to periodically touch base about the student's progress.

Thesis Components and Format

The honors thesis is an extended essay, usually between 50–100 pages in length. The format and length of the thesis will be determined at the discretion of the thesis advisor and the student. A sample title page is provided at the end of this guide. The structure of the honors thesis varies from across academic disciplines. However, the honors thesis generally consists of:

1. A clear and sustained thesis or argument, and/or creative process
2. A theoretical/conceptual framework, and/or a form of critical analysis of the creative process
3. Primary sources
4. Persuasive, academically honest, and engaging argumentative writing
5. Conformity to proper academic presentation protocol (e.g., table of contents, full and properly formatted notations, subheadings, etc.).³

³ Students should consult a style handbook (such as Modern Language Association Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, The Chicago Manual of Style, the American Psychological Association Manual, etc.) appropriate to the discipline and ensure the style used is acceptable to the advisor. Use of citation management software (such as Zotero, Endnote, or RefWorks) is also recommended. See [Brown's Library website for support](#).

It may be possible to complement a non-written component (such as a multimedia installation, performance, laboratory experiments, etc.) as part of the honors thesis. The form of this component will vary according to the IC. However, the non-written component cannot substitute for an extensively researched and carefully written thesis, supporting the argument of a cogent research question.

Evaluation of the Honors Thesis and Recommendation for Honors

Before recommending Honors, the IC dean will ensure that the student has continued to make progress toward degree requirements and has met the Honors requirements (remaining in Good Academic Standing, etc.) listed in this document.

The Honors Committee and the IC Dean will evaluate the thesis for:

- Original research (may mean a novel approach to an oft-posed set of questions) or creative project
- Intellectual and methodological rigor
- Depth of analysis; evidence is appropriate to the claims being made
- Ability to apply theories and methods of research, analysis, and interpretation or creative techniques as appropriate
- Clarity of the presentation: the thesis should be well written with appropriate citations
- Soundness of the conclusions given the analysis of the evidence
- For creative projects, a “crit” and rigorous reflection on the creative process

Thesis Timeline & Deadlines (*dates are *recommended* and subject to your advisor's approval)

6th Semester

*February–March (October–November for mid-years)

Begin thinking about potential topics; contact potential advisor and readers

*May 15 (December 15 for mid-years)

Submit a working bibliography/references to potential advisor and readers

7th Semester

3rd Friday of the term

Submit signed Thesis Proposal & Form to IC Dean (peggy_chang@brown.edu)

4th week of the term

Accepted honors candidates must confirm registration in an independent study course

December 15 (May 15 for mid-years)

Submit a partial draft (at least 1 chapter) to the honors committee for feedback

8th Semester

4th week of the term

Confirm registration in an independent study course

March 15 (November 15 for mid-years)

Submit the complete draft to the honors committee for feedback

April 15 (December 15 for mid-years)

Submit the final honors thesis, in a single PDF File to IC Dean; consult with each reader to determine their preferred format

April 30

Honors committee's [letters of recommendation](#) are due to IC Dean via email.

Tips and Resources

1. Peruse recently written honors theses in related departments. They are kept on file in department offices and archived at the Brown University Library [Thesis/Dissertation Digital Repository](#). The IC Dean can share IC theses from prior years.

2. Only enroll in 3 courses in addition to your thesis independent study. You will need to treat your thesis work like a course in order to prioritize it and make the steady progress that is required. Create a short- and long-term schedule with goals for each week and each month. The thesis is a marathon, not a sprint!
3. Talk with students in related departments. Find a "thesis buddy" or group to meet with regularly to share ideas, problem-solve, or to simply write together.
4. Create a thesis-advising network that includes a [Writing Center Associate](#) and [Subject Librarian Expert](#) in your field. You are not expected to figure it out alone.
5. Try to schedule at least one group meeting each semester between you and your entire thesis committee, to clarify expectations and roles.

Recent IC Honors Thesis Titles

2025:

- Cole Dorsey, AB in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics: "Property Rights, Economic Growth, and the Political Economy of China's Development"
- Jeremy J. Fleming, ScB in Computational Neuroscience: "The impact of connectivity estimation methods on brain connectivity in young and older adults"
- Jay R. Gopal, ScB in Computational Neuroscience: "ClickMe: Large-Scale Human-in-the-Loop Feature Importance Mapping to Train Brain-Aligned Deep Neural Networks"
- Camryn J. Kimura, ScB in Digital Health: "Designing Digital Health Interventions for Opioid Use Disorder: Attitudes toward iENDURE"
- Tayna Qu, AB in Systems of Power: "BIDness as Usual: Yellowjackets and the Providence Downtown Improvement District"
- Myles Ringel, AB in Empathy in Practice: "QUITTING EMPATHY: Personal Practices of Time in the Attorney–Client Relationship"
- Gabriel Paul Sender, AB in Urban Environmentalism: "Living in the Warming City: An Ethnography of Climate Change Advocates in Providence"
- Cable Stutman-Shaw, AB in Science Communication: "Time and Tide: Changes on the Shores of Moussachuck Beach"
- Clara Elizabeth Tandar, ScB in Bioengineering: "Cell-like Hydrogel Microparticles with Physicochemical Tunable Properties for Drug Delivery Systems"
- Torsten Raimund Ullrich, ScB in Computational Neuroscience: "Neural representation of timing in essential tremor"

2024:

- Pilar McDonald, AB in Caregiving and Care Infrastructure in the US: "The Wages for Housework Movement: How a Group of Feminists Changed the Way We Think About Care"
- Sierra Bornheim, AB in Human Evolution: "Inferring environmental conditions at an important Lower Paleolithic site using avifauna"

- Carter Moyer, ScB in Computational Neuroscience: “A Lifespan Perspective: Predicting Alzheimer’s Disease Biomarker Levels via Machine Learning; Modeling of Cognitive and Social Adversity Variables”
- Hyunjee “Erica” Nam: AB in Food, Media, and Culture: “From ‘The Art of Oriental Cooking’ to Korean American: Understanding Korean Traditional Subjects’ Cultural Identity Development through Cookbooks and Recipes”
- Zoe Fuad, AB in Cyberculture and Digital Communities: “Organizing Against Loneliness”

2023:

- Aaron Castillo, AB in Food and Identity: “Who Has a Seat at the Table? Food and Displacement in Providence, Rhode Island”
- Alex Purdy, AB in Identity, Being and Otherness: “On Toni Morrison’s Relationality and Trans Encounter”
- Gemma Brand-Wolf ’22.5, AB in Studies of Death and Dying: “Elegies”
- Isabel Cox, AB in Human Rights & the Refugee Experience: “‘The System Placed a Glitch on Me:’ Systemic Contributors to Burnout at a Refugee Resettlement Agency in Massachusetts”
- Jason Brown, AB in Black Speculative Arts & Afrofuturism: “Afrofantasia: The Journey of Iyanu (A Play)”
- John Lin, AB in Health Systems and Policy: “Price Transparency for Healthcare in the United States: Promises and Pitfalls”
- Kaitlin Goldin, AB in Storytelling: “Melodrama of the Unknown Woman: a one-woman show (played by several women)”
- Kira Clarke, AB in Imagination: Cognition, Computation & Expression: “A Place for Imagination: A Philosophical Exploration of the Possibility for Imagination’s Mechanistic Role in the Predictive Processing Framework”
- Nicolás Gascón, AB in Critical Theory: “(Re)membering Lost Futures: vaporwave and the Postmodern Condition”
- Reetam Ganguli, ScB in Cancer Engineering in Medicine: “International Multicenter Prospective Evaluation of Machine Learning: Models Prognosing Maternal Transfusion Risk at the Point of Care”
- Sojas Wagle, ScB in Psychiatric Epidemiology: “‘People have very gendered dreams about their children’: A Qualitative Description of Provider Perspectives on Gender-Affirming Care for Youth”

2022:

- Muskaan Garg, AB in Political Psychology and Behavior: “Social-Epistemic Motivation and Perceptions of Algorithmic Fairness in Content Moderation on Social Media”
- Ethan Pan, AB in Food Writing: “East of Feast: What’s Between Uyghur, Chinese, and American Tongues”
- Laila Rodenbeck, AB in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics: “Partial Liberalization: Crony Capitalism in Egypt and India”
- Diego Rodriguez, AB in Philosophical Inquiry Through Creative Forms: “Language, Madness and Politics: A Theory of Plurality and Subversive Illegibility Through the Writing of Rita Indiana, Francisco Matos Paoli and his Psychiatrists”

- Thomas Summe, ScB in Computational Cognitive Neuroscience: “Modeling The Cognitive Process of Evidence-Accumulation for Hierarchical Decision-making in a 4-choice Task Paradigm”
- Ivy Scott '21.5, AB in International Journalism: “In Our Hands: Reflections on Health and Equity from the Summer of 2020, as told by Rhode Island’s African-American community”

2021:

- Jasmine Bacchus, AB in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics: “Fashionably Fake: how online brand communities mitigate asymmetric information in the luxury fashion industry”
- Bella Cavicchi, AB in Literacy and the Performing Arts: “The Essentiality of Playing Pretend: Imagination, Creativity, and Theatre-Based Teaching Artistry in the Early Childhood Virtual Classroom”
- Alex Hanesworth '20.5, AB in Radio Documentary: “¿De dónde sos, Pajarito?”
- Florín Nájera-Uresti, AB in Migration and Human Security: “Language as a Tool of Scapegoatism: Politically Engendered Characterizations of Migrant Women in an Era of Diversionist Racism”
- Alexander Philips, ScB in Health Economics: “Identifying Trends and Drivers of RI Professional Health Care Spending from 2016-18 Using the RI All-Payer Claims Database”
- Emilia Ruzicka, ScB in Data Journalism: “Postmarks: The Life and Legacy of the United States Postal Service”
- Benjamin Spiegel '21.5, AB in Computers and Minds: “Grounding Adverbs to Skill Performance”
- Raffee Wright, ScB in Behavioral Genetics: ““Exploring the Locomotive Effects of Stat92E knockdown in Drosophila”

2020

- Aliosha Bielenberg, AB in Critical Thought and Global Social Inquiry: “How Do We Make A World? Hannah Arendt, the Khoi-San, and the Problems of Alterity and Humanism”
- Talia Curhan, AB in Nutrition, Philosophy, and Human Development: “Project REACH: Redefining Eating Availability and Choices in Hospitals”
- Mattis Dalton, ScB in Cognitive Neuroscience of Music: “Aberrations in time: The effects of music-elicited emotions on time perception in film”
- Ann Garth, AB in Systems Change and Environmental Policy: “The Framing of State-Level Climate Policy”
- Shannon Kingsley, AB in Ethnobotany: “How Do Immigrant Farmers and Gardeners Impact Plant Diversity in Providence County, Rhode Island?”
- Lori Kohen, AB in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics: “Power, Precarity and Violence in Turkey: A Comprehensive Investigation of the Rise in Violence Against Women under the AKP”
- Noa Machover '19.5, AB in Urban Design: “Toxic City: Design Praxis for Just Waste Futures in Bayview-Hunters Point”

- Audrey McDermott, AB in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics: “The American Woman’s Double Shift: Household Labor’s Philosophical Origins, Economic Consequences and Policy Solutions”
- Julia Ostrowski, ScB in Computational Neuroscience: “Rhythmic Modulation of Beta Events in Somatosensory Cortical Processing and Tactile Detection”
- William Patterson, ScB in Computational Neuroscience: “Prediction of bacterial STIs among MSM in Rhode Island: A machine learning approach”
- Chahat Rana, ScB in Computational Neuroscience: “Computation beyond Neurons: A mechanistic proposal for the integration of vascular to neural signaling in dopaminergic axons”
- Sara Runkel, ScB in Environmental Physics: “Atmospheric Boundary Layer Dynamics and Pollutant Transport in La Paz, Bolivia”
- Nivedita Sriram, ScB in Philosophy and the Scientific Method: “Metabolic Syndrome, Certainty and Doubt: Re-envisioning the Scientific Method through Philosophy of Science”
- Daniel Tompkins, AB in Human Centered Design: “Interaction Design and the Art of Free Play”

Sample Title Page

[Title]

Honors Thesis Submitted by

[Student Name]

in partial fulfillment of the

[A.B./Sc.B.] in [Title of Independent Concentration]

Brown University

[Date]

Prepared under the Direction of

[Advisor's Name], Advisor

[Reader's Name], Reader

[Reader's Name], Reader

IC Senior Thesis Proposal Form

This form (signed by the student and honors committee members) should accompany a 1–2 page proposal addressing the questions listed below.

NAME:

GRAD MONTH/YEAR:

CONCENTRATION TITLE:

WORKING THESIS TITLE:

THESIS ADVISOR'S NAME:

DEPARTMENT:

THESIS ADVISOR'S SIGNATURE: _____

1ST READER'S NAME:

DEPARTMENT:

1ST READER'S SIGNATURE: _____

2ND READER'S NAME:

DEPARTMENT:

2ND READER'S SIGNATURE: _____

STUDENT'S SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

Write a 1–2 page thesis proposal addressing the questions listed below.

1. Describe your thesis topic and state your research question(s).

2. Briefly describe your research design, or the type of methodology you will use to answer your question(s). Discuss any training you have received in these methods via your IC methods course taken during your junior year.

3. Provide a projected work schedule of the two semesters of thesis work, noting deadlines listed in the IC Honors Guidelines.

*Submit signed form & thesis proposal to
Peggy Chang, IC Director of Undergraduate Studies, Curricular Resource Center/The College.*