

Senior Honors Thesis and Senior Thesis Guidelines
Department of Economics
University of Notre Dame
Spring 2021

1. Definition

The range of acceptable topics for a senior thesis is as wide as the discipline, but most senior theses will fall into one of three categories.

The first is the theory paper which presents some aspect of the world through the lens of a model. The goal of the theory paper is to improve the conceptual underpinnings of the analytical tools that economists use to understand the world and make predictions about it. It can introduce an entirely new model, or critique and extend an existing model.

The second is the empirical paper which enables us to test theories and measure actual relationships in the data. The goal is to use statistical methods to uncover and explain causal links and evaluate policies. It applies existing econometric tools and approaches to new or updated datasets and topical policy questions, or improves upon existing methods.

The third possibility is a combination of the two. In this case, an empirical fact might motivate turning to a theoretical model to rationalize it, or a theoretical model is used to derive hypotheses that are then empirically tested.

2. Deadlines

a. The thesis must be submitted to the Economics Department in Nanovic Hall by 4:30 pm on the **first Friday of April**. Extension may be granted by the Director of Undergraduate Studies only in cases of dire emergency, such as a disabling illness. The burden of proof of emergency is on the student.

b. Late theses will be penalized a grade per day, and will receive no departmental honors.

3. Length

a. The typical length of a paper in economics is between 25 and 40 pages (double-spaced) including graphs, tables and references. However, quality is more important than quantity. There is no penalty for shorter papers.

4. Format

a. There should be a cover page indicating the title of the thesis, the students' name, the advisers' name and an abstract that summarizes the content of the thesis.

b. The text should be typed and double-spaced, using 1 inch margins.

5. Citation and Bibliography

a. When citing a theory, fact, or idea from a source, it is best to cite the source in the text of the paper. The in-text citation will contain the name of the author(s) and the year of publication. Additional references can be provided in a footnote. In general, footnotes are reserved for an elaboration of a point and suggestions for further reading.

- b. A bibliography of all sources used by the author must be placed at the end of the thesis in alphabetical order and should conform to the style of the reference section of a major academic journal in economics (e.g. *American Economic Review*).

6. Requirements and Grading

- a. In the fall semester honors students must enroll in ECON 43962: Senior Honors Workshop. The goal of this course is to give structure to the thesis process and provide guidance to honors thesis students. This course will not replace regular meetings with the faculty adviser but rather serve as a platform to acquire general research skills as well as a discussion forum. Students will receive a letter grade for the fall semester which is a composite of the grades received for various assignments throughout the semester and the grade for a detailed outline of the thesis together with a draft of the literature review.
- b. In the spring semester the students will continue to work on their thesis independently in consultation with their advisers. The grade will be determined by the final paper and the presentation of a poster to faculty.

7. General Advice

- a. Work as much as you can on your thesis in the fall semester, avoiding a panicked rush to the finish line in the spring. Pace yourself and set regular milestones with your adviser.
- b. Back-up your work. A computer crash can be a major problem, and you are responsible for not losing your work due to technological failure. Also, be sure to print out a preliminary draft of your thesis well before the due date, to check for typos, fonts, margins etc.