Senior Thesis Guidelines

Department of Economics
University of Notre Dame

In the senior thesis, students formulate an original research question and use the tools of economics to arrive at an answer. The final product is a research paper, in the style of an academic journal article. Each student will work under the direction of a faculty advisor. Students on the honors track will also take the three-credit Senior Thesis Workshop in the fall.

The range of acceptable topics for a senior thesis is as wide as the discipline, but most senior theses will fall into one of two categories (or a combination). 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. Papers of this type might uncover important relationships in data, identify causal links, or evaluate policies.

Additional information:

1. Deadlines
   a. The common thesis deadline is set by the College of Arts and Letters, and is typically in early April. Students will receive information on submitting their thesis from the Senior Thesis Workshop instructor. 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. Late theses will be penalized a grade per day, and will receive no departmental honors.
   b. Students are also required to participate in the senior thesis poster session, which is usually in late April. The Workshop instructor will provide a poster template and additional details in late February.

2. Format and Length
   a. In general, the thesis should look like a working paper in economics, similar to what you will find on the NBER website. The specifics are up to the student and their advisor.
   b. All theses should include a bibliography. It and the in-text citations should follow a standard citation format (e.g. APA, Chicago style).
   c. The typical length of a paper in economics is between 25 and 40 pages (double-spaced, one-inch margins) including graphs, tables and references. However, quality is more important than quantity. There is no penalty for shorter papers.

3. 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 draft thesis that will be graded by the advisor.

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.
c. More information about the requirements for graduating with honors can be found here. Note that students may write a thesis even if they are not on the honors track, but these students do not ordinarily enroll in the Senior Honors Workshop.

4. Recognitions

a. Students may enter the departmental thesis competition. The prizes are $1000 for first prize (the Sheehan Award), $750 for second, and $500 for honorable mentions. There is also a prize of $500 (the BonAnno Award) for the best international economics thesis.
b. The department also offers prizes for the best posters at the poster session: $250 for first, $100 for second, and $50 for honorable mention.