

**DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, PARK AND TOURISM
MANAGEMENT HONORS THESIS GUIDE**
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Introduction

The Schreyer Honors College provides a description of the honors thesis and offers advice about how to choose a topic, find a thesis supervisor, and budget one's time. Please review this information at <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/project.cfm>.

The Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management Honors Thesis Guide is designed to supplement the Honors College thesis guide with information specific to the expectations of, and requirements for, students completing an honors thesis in Recreation, Park and Tourism Management.

The Thesis

The Honors College describes the thesis as "*a scholarly piece of writing in which the writer is expected to show a command of the relevant scholarship in his (or her) field and contribute to the scholarship. It should confront a question that is unresolved and push towards a resolution.*"

The thesis is likely to be one of the most challenging and rewarding endeavors that you will pursue during your undergraduate career. Through the process of developing and writing your thesis, you will build on what you have learned during your coursework, gain insights into scholarship and methodology, and develop your talent as a writer and thinker.

The final thesis should represent your work, and your work alone. This means that you cannot outsource the writing of any part of the thesis, the development of your research instruments, or the analysis of your data.

Once your thesis is completed, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have produced a work of scholarship that is available electronically to anyone who wishes to access it (go to <https://honors.libraries.psu.edu/search/> to search all of the honors theses currently available electronically). New knowledge has to be shared to have any utility. Thus, you are strongly encouraged, where the subject matter of your thesis lends itself to it, to pursue the goal of translating and communicating your work to a wider audience. This could include presentation at conferences/symposia, and/or submission to an academic or professional journal for publication. Doing so will significantly increase the likelihood that your work will reach the community of scholars and professional practitioners.

If your thesis supervisor recommends that you submit your work to a journal, please make sure that you contact the Schreyer Honors College at least two weeks prior to final submission of your thesis to request restricted access. If restricted access is granted for your thesis, access to the body of the thesis (via PSU) will be denied to everyone for a period of two years. The thesis will be released automatically for access worldwide at the end of the two-year period (see <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/submission.cfm>).

The First Steps: Choosing a Topic and a Thesis Supervisor

There are two key choices you must make when you embark on your thesis: choosing a topic and choosing a supervisor.

Choosing a Topic

A research topic can be very broad - you have not yet developed a specific research question but instead have identified a general area of interest¹. Here are some tips for choosing a successful thesis topic:

- Let your interests guide you. This project will consume a considerable amount of your time during your junior and senior years, so pick a topic that you are genuinely interested in and committed to exploring. Think about interesting topics or readings from your coursework—what caught your attention?
- Pay attention to your social world. Look to the media, news outlets, social media, your friends - what issues are people debating now within the field of recreation, park and tourism management? What questions need answering?
- Think of your thesis as an opportunity to explore and address a research question that is totally new. Is there a course you wish that the Recreation, Park and Tourism Management Department offered about a certain topic? What research questions would follow from that topic?
- Engage with current or past research. See what has been done already within and outside of the field. Look at journals like *Leisure Sciences*, *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, *Tourism Management*, *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, etc. What topics have they covered recently? What can you add to the debate or body-of-knowledge?

Your research topic does not have to be specific yet. Do some brainstorming—write down 5 to 10 topics that interest you. Talk with friends and professors to see which topics are the most interesting (and could provide the starting point for a strong thesis). Once you have decided on a topic, you are ready for the next step.

NOTE: RPTM Honors students are strongly encouraged to enroll in RPTM 530 (Research Methods) during their 4th or 5th semester. This class, which is typically offered in the fall semester, provides students with a basic framework for identifying their thesis topic, posing more specific research questions/hypotheses, and proposing a method to gather and interpret data. Through this class, students are not only exposed to the process and principles of scholarly research, but are also tasked with developing a formal thesis proposal (working in conjunction with their thesis supervisor).

¹ Note that a topic is a broad subject area while a research question is much narrower. A research question is a specific problem or question within a given subject area that can be addressed within the approximate 1.5 year time frame given over to the thesis. A research question can be tested with empirical data or explored through qualitative or interpretive methods.

Choosing a Thesis Supervisor

Once you've identified the broad subject area you are interested in exploring, you should think about who to choose as a thesis supervisor. Any graduate faculty member of the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management may serve as a thesis supervisor and it's a good idea to meet with several faculty members to identify areas of shared interests. A list of the current graduate faculty members is provided in the Appendix.

There are several ways to go about choosing a thesis supervisor. One strategy is to consider professors in whose courses you have been or are enrolled. Is your thesis topic relevant to their research interests? A second strategy is to look on the Department website for a listing of faculty members and their research interests (<https://hhd.psu.edu/rptm/contact/faculty-staff>). You can also think about interesting articles or books you've read in your coursework. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you should meet with the Department's honors adviser to brainstorm about who a suitable thesis supervisor might be.

Once you have identified a potential thesis supervisor, you must ask him or her to supervise your thesis! This should take place during fall or spring semester of your junior year. Before approaching potential supervisors, do some brainstorming on your own. For your own use, write a brief description of your potential topics and 2-3 more specific research questions. When you meet with a potential supervisor, you do not yet need to have a definitive research question. This is something a thesis supervisor can help you with.

You should set up appointments to discuss the thesis with potential supervisors. Send them an email requesting a meeting to discuss the possibility that they advise your thesis. Include the description of your topic. When you have scheduled a meeting, present your potential topic and ask them if they would be interested in advising it. If you are still working on developing your specific research question, ask for their advice or feedback on your potential research questions.

Examples of the questions to ask during your first meeting with a potential supervisor:

1. How promising do you find my research topic? Are there particular directions you think I should explore in developing a research question?
2. How often do you like to meet with advisees?
3. How many drafts are you willing to read? How many days do you require to read a draft?
4. Do you prefer to receive written work or an agenda from you me to meetings?
5. Do you have any books or journal articles that you think I need to read before our next meeting?

Thesis Chapter Outline

Please note that the following chapter outline acts as a general guideline. Based on your topic of study, you will need to agree the specific format with your thesis supervisor. For example, a case study or a qualitative thesis may not follow the typical thesis format. Again, a research methods course such as RPTM 530 can be extremely helpful in developing both your thesis format and methodological approach.

Chapter 1. Introduction: In this chapter you essentially need to outline what your thesis is about (i.e., provide the background to your study, and clearly identify the gap in the literature that your study will address). In this chapter there should be clear hypotheses development and statement of the study's hypotheses.

Chapter 2. Literature Review: This chapter should summarize the literature that is relevant to your research project, bringing out where the gaps in the literature are, and how your research helps to fill in one or more of these gaps.

Note that a literature review is an analytical summary of the past work relevant to your topic and a critique of that work. This is more than just writing a paragraph summarizing the main point of each article. In an analytical summary, you should link together the readings to build a story about what has already been done and what needs to be done.

The literature review is something you will return to throughout the process of writing the thesis. It will change in scope and length as you refine your topic and start to uncover findings. Having a working literature review earlier rather than later will help you stay focused on your specific topic.

Frequently asked questions:

a. What journals should I read?

Speak with your thesis supervisor to find out the top journals for your topic of interest.

b. How should I format citations and references?

Many researchers in the Recreation, Park and Tourism Management field follow the American Psychological Association (APA) format (see <http://www.apastyle.org/>). However, check with your thesis supervisor up front to see what style he or she would like you to follow. For example, if you have decided to target a certain journal with your work, it may be most expedient to format the citations and references in your thesis in the format required by that journal.

- *Chapter 3. Research Methods:* In this chapter, you will outline the method (or methods) employed to test your study's hypotheses. Work with your thesis supervisor to figure out what methods are most suitable to address your research questions.

Data collection instruments should be described in this chapter, and will vary depending on the method you are using. For example, if you are fielding an original survey, your instrument will be your survey questions along with the directions you provide respondents. If you are conducting qualitative interviews, your instrument will be your interview “guide” or list of questions.

In this chapter you should also outline the techniques used to analyze the data that you have collected. Every data analysis process will be different depending on the design of the study and the type of data collected. For example, if you use content analysis to

analyze qualitative data, you will describe how you conducted the content analysis and outline the major categories/coding schemes used.

With quantitative data analysis, it is strongly recommended that you work with your thesis supervisor to develop the skills needed to analyze your data. You are ultimately responsible for your data analysis, so while, for example, your supervisor may demonstrate to you how to use SPSS (a statistics package) to conduct an analysis of variance, you must actually run your data for your thesis yourself. The two most frequently used statistics packages, SPSS and SAS, are available at a number of campus computing labs.

An Important Note about Human Participants Research

If you plan to collect data from human subjects, you need to get the study cleared by the Office for Research Protections. For further information on conducting a Human Participant Research Study visit <http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/humans/conducting-study>.

You will also need to complete training on the protection of human research participants (Institutional Review Board required) prior to conducting data collection. It is strongly advised that you complete this training in the spring semester of your junior year if you think that your research will include human participation.

Visit: <http://www.research.psu.edu/training/irb-basic-training>.

- *Chapter 4. Results:* In this chapter you will describe the findings of your study. Describe your respondents and clearly outline the results of your data analyses. Where appropriate use tables and charts to support your presentation of results.
- *Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusions:* In this chapter you need to discuss the findings of your study. To what extent do they support the research presented in your literature review? To what extent do they add to the findings of previous studies? In other words, what contribution does your study make to the literature? Also, you need to clearly outline the implications of your study's findings for recreation and tourism managers. Finally, identify the limitations of your study and present your recommendations for future research.

Time Management

One of the most difficult parts of conducting original research is scheduling your time. If you leave the writing to the last minute, you will leave inadequate time for revisions, and consequently produce a thesis that falls well below its - and your - potential.

This is YOUR work. Take ownership. Be proactive and lead the project at every stage. This is not like coursework where you are given detailed direction and timelines – you need to “direct” yourself and set your own timelines. Your thesis advisor will offer guidance but you are steering the ship!

Develop deadlines and stick to them. Work backwards from the thesis due date and block out time for each step in the process. On the next page is a recommended timeline for your thesis work. Work with your thesis supervisor to refine this broad timeline into smaller chunks of time (e.g., a monthly timeline).

Recommended Timeline

Fall semester of junior year	<p>Take a research methods class (such as RPTM 530 or RPTM 433W); Conduct exploratory research, brainstorm your topic; talk with faculty</p> <p>Establish who your thesis supervisor is going to be; agree on the scope of your thesis project with your thesis supervisor.</p>
Spring semester of junior year	<p>Continue to refine and finalize the thesis proposal that you started in the fall semester (as part of your research methods course)</p> <p>Thesis Proposal Report (TPR) is due to the Honors College at least one year prior to your graduation</p>
Summer / Fall semester of senior year	Complete the majority of data collection and analyses; refine introduction, literature review, methods chapter.
Spring or Summer semester of senior year* (*dependent upon graduation date)	<p>Write results, and discussion chapters; submit initial draft to your thesis supervisor and complete revisions.</p> <p>Submit revised thesis to your thesis supervisor and receive his/her approval to submit it to the other members of your committee.</p> <p>Submit your draft thesis for Mandatory SHC Format Review – Check dates for the semester in which you expect to graduate.</p> <p>Oral defense of thesis – Present your thesis to your committee (in person for on-campus students; over teleconference/Skype for off-campus students). You should allow at least one week for committee review of your written thesis before the scheduled oral defense (or approximately three weeks prior to the SHC final submission due date).</p> <p>Upon successful oral defense and conditional acceptance of thesis, incorporate committee member edits and submit to honors adviser and/or thesis advisor for final review. A good rule-of-thumb is to allow two weeks to make your final thesis revisions. This is particularly important for SHC students who are away from campus on internship (RPTM 495).</p>

Once your thesis supervisor and/or thesis advisor approves your thesis as the final copy, obtain their signatures and upload an electronic copy of the thesis as listed the SHC thesis submission website.

Presentation of your work at the PSU Undergraduate Research Exhibition, held annually in April, is not required, but strongly encouraged if the timing of your thesis/graduation allows for this. You are also strongly encouraged work with your Honors Advisor and/or Thesis Supervisor to consider appropriate conferences and symposia to present your research.

Important Notes:

1. Work closely with your thesis supervisor to make sure that you are on track at all stages. It is a good idea to set up a weekly meeting with your thesis supervisor at which you'll provide updates on your work.
2. Discuss with your thesis supervisor, early on in the process, how he or she expects to receive drafts of your work. For example, some thesis supervisors like to review each chapter draft as it is completed, while others prefer not to review any work until all chapter drafts are completed.
3. Remember: The SHC Handbook and website (e.g., thesis submission guidelines) are your friends; become familiar with important thesis dates, required paperwork, and submission requirements as outlined in these materials.

Funding Opportunities

The Honors College provides funding opportunities to support thesis work (<https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/research/fund.cfm>):

- a. International Thesis Research Grant: For Scholars proposing long-term research abroad toward the honors thesis. Information about this program is published in January of each year, with a late-February application deadline and the expectation of research abroad during the summer before the final year of study.
- b. Thesis Research Grant: Support documented and receipted thesis-related expenses, including presentation expenses for performance theses. It is a rolling application process with no deadlines.

Additional Honors College Resources

- Thesis formatting guide: <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/formatting.cfm>
- Thesis submission guide: <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/submission.cfm>

Appendix: Graduate Faculty in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management (as of November 2019)

Dr. Jennifer Agans

Dr. Pete Allison

Dr. Birgitta Baker

Dr. John Dattilo

Dr. Alan Graefe

Dr. Carter Hunt

Dr. Andrew Mowen

Dr. Peter Newman

Dr. Bing Pan

Dr. Ashley Schroeder

Dr. Derrick Taff