

## General Course Description

The purpose of the honours thesis course is to provide senior undergraduate students with a comprehensive research experience that consolidates their undergraduate training at the University of Lethbridge.

It is an intensive course that places considerable emphasis on students' ability to think critically and independently, organize their time and activities efficiently, and produce a substantial piece of scholarly work.

It is intended to provide students with a variety of practical, technical, and intellectual skills that are central to scientific research generally. It is, therefore, intended primarily for students who are committed to pursuing graduate studies.

Students will work directly with a faculty advisor or co-advisors on an independent research project. Student should identify an appropriate research question, develop a systematic research plan to address it, and then execute this plan themselves, collecting, analyzing and interpreting the resulting data, and writing them up in standard scholarly format (the thesis). That is, the students are ultimately responsible for all steps in the research process.

The role of the faculty advisor(s) is to provide guidance in these various steps where appropriate, such as helping to identify the research question and providing feedback on the research design and execution, data analysis, and writing of the thesis. Students should also give a public oral presentation summarizing the thesis.

The following material provides additional information on the objectives of the honours thesis course and on the various steps involved.

## Registration for an Honours Thesis

Prospective Honours Thesis candidates must meet the following prerequisites as laid out in the Undergraduate Calendar:

- (i) Fourth year standing (a minimum of 90 credit hours)
- (ii) A minimum GPA of 3.30 calculated on all completed University of Lethbridge and transferable courses taken within the terms containing the last 20 courses (60 credit hours).
- (iii) The faculty advisor(s) will have worked closely with the student in the past. For example, having done independent and/or applied studies under their supervision.

The Departmental Curriculum Committee assesses honours thesis proposals for their suitability, taking on board comments and suggestions from faculty and instructors in the Department of Psychology as a whole. An acceptable proposal is one that (i) addresses a clear psychological topic, (ii) provides a well justified rationale for the study, and (iii) offers a clear outline of the study design with well-defined methods.

Proposals are assessed on a continuous, rolling basis, and can be submitted at any point in the academic year. However, proposals must be submitted **no less than three weeks** prior to the

beginning of the semester in which the study is to commence. This is to enable the Departmental Curriculum Committee to seek feedback from faculty with respect to the proposal's suitability, and to offer suggestions for improvement, if needed. Proposals should be submitted to the Departmental Administrative Assistant, Erin Cooke ([erin.cooke@uleth.ca](mailto:erin.cooke@uleth.ca)).

Once approval has been given, the student is then responsible for submitting all relevant paperwork to the registrar. The deadline for official registration with the registrar is the standard add/drop date in September, January or May (consult the current calendar for the exact date).

### **Specific Course Objectives**

The course is designed to develop scholarly skills in a variety of areas that are central to the research process, including:

#### **(1) Critical thinking**

Conducting effective scientific research involves thinking critically about significant issues in a particular field, evaluating past research in the area, and identifying important outstanding questions that warrant further study. Central to this process are a comprehensive literature review, a carefully planned research design, and a thoroughly justified rationale for the work.

#### **(2) Acquiring Evidence**

Collecting appropriate evidence that directly address a specific research question is absolutely central to effective science. Such evidence can derive from systematic reviews of previously published work, from secondary analysis of existing datasets (e.g., Stats Canada, the Demographic and Health Surveys, eHRAF) or one's own empirical data. The reliability and validity of the data collected hinge on using appropriate data collection methods and techniques.

#### **(3) Statistical analysis**

In the case of empirical studies and meta-analyses, the statistical analysis of data is a key component of the study. It is critical, therefore, to use and understand the statistical analyses that are most appropriate to the particular data collected and the research they were designed to address. In cases where the thesis comprises a review of the existing literature (whether quantitative or qualitative) it will often be necessary to interpret and assess the statistical results of published analyses, so, again, it is critical that one recognises whether acceptable procedures have been followed and that appropriate inferences have been drawn.

#### **(4) Oral and written communication**

A key part of the research process is communicating the results and their significance to the wider scientific community. This includes presenting the research both orally and in written form.

Projects suitable for the honours thesis in psychology can therefore be classified as follows:

- (1) A quantitative empirical study that involves the systematic collection of observational or experimental data by the student to address a question of psychological interest.

- (2) A qualitative study that uses empirical data collected by the student to address a question of psychological interest.
- (3) A quantitative analysis of either published data (including, but not limited to, meta-analyses) or an existing dataset that addresses a question of psychological interest.
- (4) A systematic or scoping literature review that either (i) presents an overview of the current state-of-the-art in a particular sub-discipline of psychology or particular research area or (ii) answers a specific question of psychological interest.

### **Course Format**

Much of the work for the Honours Thesis will be conducted independently by students and will occur outside the context of structured class meetings. Students are also encouraged to meet with other students working on an honour's thesis (if other students are present in a given academic year) to allow for discussion and feedback from student peers. Faculty members also include honours students in their regular meetings and other collective lab-based activities.

If a student is unable to complete the course due to medical or compassionate reasons, Academic Advising must be contacted and a Withdrawal, a Withdrawal with Cause, or an Incomplete will be assigned after the appropriate documentation is reviewed.

### **Timeline and Grading Scheme**

The student and advisor(s) will develop (1) a timeline that the student will follow to ensure successful progression through the various steps involved in the thesis research and (2) a formal grading scheme for the thesis. These will be submitted as part of the "Thesis Agreement Form". The complete thesis will be read by the faculty advisor and a second evaluator, the thesis reader (another faculty member) and final grades assessed according to the agreed formal grading scheme.

NOTE: As specified in the University Course Calendar, only students earning a final grade of B+ or higher will receive the "Honours thesis" designation. Students who earn a B or lower will receive credit for the "Undergraduate thesis" course but will not receive the honours designation.

### **Thesis Dissemination**

All students will submit an electronic pdf version of their thesis to their advisor(s) and to the Departmental Administrator. The final format of the thesis will be decided upon by the student in consultation with the primary advisor.