

## Honors Thesis Guidelines for Environmental Science and Policy

Scope and Intent: An honors thesis in ES&P will conduct an in-depth analysis of an environmental topic that must move beyond exploring the topic with a descriptive approach. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the major, the thesis may draw on a variety of analytical methods and should involve the generation of original work that will advance understanding of and/or solutions to environmental challenges. Different disciplines have different ways of thinking about evidence and analysis. **Your proposal should clearly identify the evidence and analytical framework you will use in your project** and should demonstrate that you have the appropriate background and training to successfully complete your proposed honors project. Where appropriate, the thesis should also contextualize the interdisciplinary elements of the topic, especially when the project is strongly focused in a discipline. Communication of the primary results of the analysis to an audience with varied backgrounds is an integral part of an ES&P thesis.

Normally, the thesis adviser will be a member of the ES&P program committee. It is expected that all projects will have at least one co-advisor who is a current or recent member of the ES&P Program Committee. In the case of co-advisors, the advisers will serve as the readers for the honors thesis; in the case of a single adviser, a second reader (normally from the ES&P Program Committee) will be appointed. You, your adviser(s), and reader(s) should consult early in the process to make sure the expectations for the final product are clear to all.

Specific details:

1. A minimum overall GPA of 3.2 is expected.
2. Primary responsibility for identifying an adviser rests with the students.
3. Many successful honors theses require data collection over the summer, which in turn requires identification of a project during the junior year. **We strongly encourage students interested in pursuing a thesis to submit a short (1-2 page) pre-proposal during their junior year, in consultation with an adviser.** The pre-proposal should be submitted to the ES&P Program Committee by March 31 (for May graduates) or Oct 31 (for J-term graduates). The Committee will review the pre-proposal and suggest revisions during its April or November meeting. We recognize that students may develop a thesis based on a summer internship or research project. Such students are encouraged to contact potential advisers as soon as possible.
4. **A full project proposal for full year theses must be submitted to the ES&P Program Committee by August 15 (for May graduates) or January 15 (for J-term graduates).** It is your responsibility to identify a primary adviser before submitting a proposal. Students submitting a proposal after this date will normally be asked to begin their work as a special studies and convert this to a thesis at a later date if appropriate. Proposals are normally no more than 3-4 pages single-spaced, excluding

references, and should concisely explain your research question and methods. While developing your proposal, you should work closely with your adviser and consult the Rubric for ES&P Honors Proposals.

5. The program committee will also entertain applications to transform a 4-credit special studies completed in the first semester of your senior year into an honors thesis in the second semester of the senior year. A project proposal to extend your special studies into an honors thesis must be submitted to the ES&P Program Committee by December 1 (for May graduates) or May 1 (for J-term graduates). It should follow the usual proposal format, but should also describe what work you have completed so far and the additional work you will do in the second semester.
6. If human subjects are involved in your research, you must seek Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before data collection begins (<http://www.smith.edu/irb/>). If you are doing research involving vertebrate animals, you must seek approval from the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. If you are working with hazardous chemicals, you must contact Margaret Rakas, Manager of Inventory and Regulatory Affairs, Clark Science Center.
7. You should meet jointly with your adviser(s) and reader(s) at least once early in the first semester of the project (before October 15 for a May graduate or March 1 for a January graduate) to make sure that the project goals and methods and the roles of each adviser/reader are clear to everyone. The adviser will summarize the meeting and share this summary with you, all advisers and readers, and the Honors Director.
8. ES&P honors students are required to give a 15-minute presentation of their honors project work to date at the end of the first semester of their senior year. The presentation should provide an update on your research question, describe your findings to date, and describe the remaining work. Early in the first semester, contact Joanne Benkley ([jbenkley@smith.edu](mailto:jbenkley@smith.edu)) to set up a date and location.
9. The final oral presentation of the honors thesis in ES&P will be judged in part on your ability to communicate your methods and findings and their relevance to an interdisciplinary audience (e.g. the ES&P Program Committee). Students should work with Joanne Benkley to schedule their presentation.
10. Be aware of college-wide honors requirements and due dates, listed on the Class Deans website: [http://www.smith.edu/classdeans/honors\\_program.php](http://www.smith.edu/classdeans/honors_program.php).