Honors Thesis Guidelines

ES 460 Individualized Study: Research

Department of Environmental Studies
Gettysburg College

Overview

Student research can be the most gratifying part being an Environmental Studies major. We define the term “research” broadly in our department. Your project may be based in the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, or arts. It may take the form of a research paper, film, performance, exhibition, or other product approved by the department. Regardless of the format, a written honors thesis and an oral presentation are part of every ES 460 project. We consider the ES 460 project to be honors-level work, and students must have a minimum 3.3 GPA within the ES major to conduct an ES 460 project.

A worthy project is a serious undertaking. It is wise to plan carefully and work diligently -- the rewards are definitely worth the effort. The following information will guide the prospective ES 460 student through the process.

1. Consider possible project topics and speak with ES faculty during your junior year.

To get some ideas, take a look at the ES Student Research page, which describes past honors thesis projects, conference presentations, student publications, and faculty publications: http://www.gettysburg.edu/academics/es/research/

Once you have a few ideas, approach one or more of the faculty and discuss the possibilities. Don't be shy. We expect you to come and talk! This selection process is important. It’s a two-way street. The decision to work closely together for three semesters is a major commitment for the faculty member as well as for you. The likelihood of a successful project increases when both of you understand what you are getting into! Some faculty require you to sign an ES 460 project contract that outlines the expectations for both the student and the faculty member. Other faculty do not. Either way, by February, you and the ES faculty member who has agreed to serve as your project advisor must have a clear understanding about what working together will entail.

While all faculty members accept ES 460 students, there are limits to the number of students that each faculty member can advise. Sometimes a faculty member can’t take on students because he or she has other commitments, such as a sabbatical away from campus. If you start your search late, it is possible that the project advisor with whom you want to work will have a full load and won’t be able to accept you. The faculty member may suggest that you do the project with another project advisor. Please don't take a refusal personally!
2. **Develop a project in consultation with your project advisor.**

Work with your project advisor to choose the research questions you want to address and how you will investigate them. Your project advisor will make suggestions about reading material, library resources, and topics for you to discuss with other people. You should dive into the material immediately and consult with your project advisor often. Once you and your project advisor have sufficiently defined the topic, the two of you must choose another faculty member to serve as your second reader. The second reader agrees to read and comment on your project proposal and the completed work at the end of your project and to provide guidance along the way.

3. **Write a project proposal in February and March.**

The proposal must be submitted to your project advisor and second reader for their assessment and feedback **at least two weeks before it is due to the department**. A successful proposal is the result of a lot of hard work on the part of you and the two faculty. We expect your proposal to be carefully thought out and well-crafted before you submit it to the department for our consideration.

The proposal is a double-spaced document at least five pages in length that must contain the following:

*Title page:* A brief and informative project title, along with your name and those of your project advisor and second reader, **both of whom have signed the proposal** to indicate that they read it and made editorial comments to which you responded.

*Introduction:* A description of the main ideas behind your project. It should lay the groundwork for the reader of the proposal and must include a short literature review and a summary of any preliminary research you may have already completed on the topic.

*Objectives:* A clear statement of the objectives of your project, including the questions you will address or hypotheses you will test.

*Research design:* A description of how you plan to meet your objectives. Research designs differ widely. As an ES major, you have a great deal of experience conducting research within and across a wide variety of disciplines. Making a film is different from carrying out a laboratory project. Collecting quantitative field data is different from conducting interviews and surveys. In all cases, however, you must state the methods you will use and present a time-line showing when you expect to finish each part of your project. The proposal must provide a budget with all the expected expenses for the project, including, but not limited to, the costs of any supplies, equipment, and travel. The proposal must indicate the funding sources to pay for these expenses. Such funds may come from a variety of sources such as the project advisor’s research grants, the ES Department budget, or College sources outlined at [http://www.gettysburg.edu/academics/research/facstud-research/](http://www.gettysburg.edu/academics/research/facstud-research/). Seeking financial support is an integral part of the ES 460 process. You are expected to work with your project advisor to learn how to obtain finding.
Literature cited: A list of the references you cited in your proposal text. At least five references that you have read must be cited. Note that the department prefers a larger number, indicating that you have given sufficient thought to your project.

4. Submit your proposal to the department by the first Monday in April.

Submit a copy of your proposal as an e-mail attachment to the departmental Administrative Assistant. The proposals will be circulated through the department to provide all faculty with the opportunity to comment on them. Approval of the department is not guaranteed. It may be conditional if the proposal is incomplete or if the project is judged to be unacceptable as presented. In these cases, you will be given an opportunity to revise and resubmit your proposal.

5. Submit your ES 460 paperwork to the Registrar during spring registration period.

Congratulations! Once your proposal has been approved, the department Chair will sign the form used by the Registrar for ES 460 registration. Please understand that ES 460 projects begin in the junior year and are not finished until May of the senior year. All ES 460 students sign up for one course credit for the spring semester of the senior year, when the project is completed. The project receives a letter grade and counts towards the major.

In consultation with their project advisors, some ES 460 students also choose to enroll in ES 463 for the fall semester of the senior year. ES 463 is graded S/U and does not count towards the major.

Note that not all research projects conducted for academic credit are lengthy ES 460 projects. ES 450 Individualized Study – Tutorial projects are of shorter duration, receive a letter grade, and count towards the major.

6. Conduct the project during the next 14 months.

A successful project requires a great deal of interaction between you and your project advisor. You are responsible for meeting with your project advisor on a regular basis. At minimum, these meetings are held weekly. They are meant to keep you on track. Projects usually require additional meetings, subject to the research style of you and your project advisor. Some project advisors take a “hands-off” approach, while others prefer frequent updates on your part. There is no single style that works best for every project.

Towards the end of the spring semester of your senior year, by a date to which your project advisor and second reader have agreed, you will submit your project to them for their comments and suggestions. Once you have revised your work and completed your final version, you will submit your thesis to your project advisor and second reader for their approval. As with your project proposal, they will sign the cover page, indicating that they have found your work acceptable. You will not receive a grade until you submit the signed copy in electronic format to the departmental Administrative Assistant by Wednesday of final exam week. It will be archived in pdf format on the departmental server.
You will make an oral presentation on your project to the ES Department during the last week of the spring semester. The precise date and location of the departmental symposium will be announced during the spring semester, as will the format for your written abstract. You must submit an abstract of your project results in the appropriate format to the departmental Administrative Assistant one week before the symposium so that a symposium program can be compiled and printed.

The department also requires that you present your project to the College-wide community as part of the campus research conference held at the end of the spring semester. Your project advisor will notify you of deadlines and other the details, as they vary from year to year.

If your project involves work in addition to the written thesis, such as a film, performance, or exhibition, that work must be presented to the department and College-wide community as well.

The grade that you receive for your ES 460 project is determined by the project advisor in consultation with the second reader. In addition to the quality of your honors thesis and other project products, your project advisor will consider the second reader's comments, your oral presentations, the difficulty of the project you attempted, and your effort throughout the project.

7. Some frequently asked questions.

Can my internship, REU, summer job, study abroad project, or other project experience count as an ES 460?
Projects that are not directly advised by an ES faculty member cannot count as an ES 460 unless special arrangements are made. Work done elsewhere may serve as the basis for an ES 460 project if an alternative time-table for additional work is approved by the Chair of the ES department, an ES faculty member who agrees to be the departmental project advisor, and a second reader.

Can my ES 460 project be conducted in another Gettysburg College department?
Faculty members in other departments and programs may serve as project advisors. Note that projects in other departments may have requirements different from those for an ES 460. Although we allow some leeway, a project completed successfully according to the guidelines in another department may not satisfy our departmental requirements. To avoid such a disappointing outcome, the student is required to petition the ES Department to accept a 460 project from another department in lieu of the ES 460. With the approval of the ES Department beforehand, a student may enroll in a 460 project in another department under the direction of a faculty member in that department. In such a case, the second reader must be an ES Department faculty member.

Can my second reader be from another department?
Yes. If the second reader is from another department, the project advisor must be an ES Department faculty member.

Can I conduct more than one project?
The only Individualized Study – Research course number that receives a letter grade and counts towards the ES major is ES 460. The other numbers (ES 461, 462, 463, and 464) are for experiences that meet requirements in other departments, but not ours. Although it might be possible for a student to conduct two ES 460 projects, we do not believe that any student has the time and other resources during the junior and senior years to conduct more than one ES 460 project successfully. Instead, students who would like to work on other projects are encouraged to do so as ES 450 Individualized Study – Tutorial projects. ES 450 projects receive a letter grade and count towards the major, but they neither substitute for the ES 460 nor count as a capstone experience.