The Honors Thesis and the Education Major (Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle Grades and Special Education)

The Process of Matching Students with Mentors

We recognize that the quality of the mentoring relationship between the honor student and the faculty mentor is critical to the successful completion of the honors thesis. The scholarly interests of the student and the faculty mentor should be sufficiently similar to promote a productive, engaging relationship throughout the year to year and a half required for completion of the honors thesis. While we realize that working with a capable, highly motivated student will be rewarding, there are times in a faculty career when the expenditure of this amount of time and effort cannot be made without compromising other professional commitments. Faculty members who agree to mentor honor students should feel that they have time in their teaching and research schedule to meet the demands of the mentoring relationship.

Although we are not recommending a formal procedure for matching honor students and faculty members in mentoring relationships, the following guidelines are suggested.

- The honor student’s advisor will assist him or her in identifying a faculty member whose scholarship interests match those of the student, and the Chair of the Education Department will approve the choice of the faculty mentor.
- After a meeting between the honor student and the prospective mentor, the two will decide whether to enter a mentoring relationship. Should either one feel that the partnership would not be productive, the faculty member may suggest another member of the department. In any case, the student’s advisor should oversee the process of finding a mentor for the student.
- Sophomore Honors Fellows should find a mentor and prepare for the thesis topic and proposal prior to the beginning of their junior year.

What Constitutes Acceptable Thesis Work in Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle Grades, and Special Education

The honors thesis constitutes a significant body of work in which the honor student demonstrates his or her growth and development as a researcher. The honors thesis is driven by a spirit of inquiry, in which the student asks a question of educational significance. After an extensive literature search, the honor student will refine his or her question and devise a methodology to collect and analyze data. The result of the inquiry will be a better understanding of the research question, some answers to the research question, and further questions. Data collection and analytical methods may be either qualitative or quantitative, depending upon the nature of the research question. In any case, the faculty mentor will guide the honor student through this process, assisting the student in refining the research question, evaluating the quality of the literature review, and offering advice on data collection methods and data analysis. Finally, the faculty mentor will carefully review the final thesis to ensure that it represents the highest level of scholarship of which this honor student is capable.

It is possible that a student may want to implement a program or conduct a service learning project to answer his or her research question. In this case, the faculty mentor will assist
the student in determining a likely site for the project and enlisting the support of agencies, schools, institutions or neighborhoods located in the local community, other regions of the state of nation, or in international settings. The faculty member will provide guidance on the project design and implementation, as well as data collection and analysis.

A public presentation of the honors thesis and a defense are required by the Honors Program. For honor students in the early childhood, elementary, middle grades or special education programs, it is recommended that the honor student and his or her mentor present the student’s research during one of the regularly scheduled meetings of the Education Department.

**Time Line for Completion of the Honors Thesis**

The proposal for the honors thesis should be submitted during fall semester of the student’s junior year. Honor students are encouraged to complete their theses prior to student teaching.