Honors in a Special Field Program Home

Deadlines

**Statement of Intent:** September 30, 2020 of your 4th year

**Honors Thesis Submission:** February 10, 2021 *This is a rolling deadline so you may submit at any time up to this date. Earlier submission is encouraged.*

**Honors exams:** Spring 2021

Overview

The Honors in a Special Field Program affords 4th year students the opportunity to earn the MD Degree with Honors in a Special Field (*cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, or *summa cum laude*) and requires submission of a thesis and its defense at an examination. Students may pursue Honors in a Special Field in any research discipline. Students apply to the program in the fall through a Statement of Intent. In February, students submit their honors theses. Typically between February and April, students sit for their honors oral examination. Students are notified of their honors status just prior to graduation.

- The Honors thesis *must* be distinct from any prior or concurrent graduate-level thesis. Work that students have submitted to fulfill program requirements for another graduate degree (e.g., masters or doctorate) at Harvard or any other university is not eligible for Honors in a Special Field. An Honors thesis, however, may build on work that students have conducted in the course of earning another degree as long as the Honors thesis *only* includes work that was not described in the other thesis or dissertation.
- Pathways/New Pathway students may write an Honors thesis based on their scholarly project or other research. Pathways/New Pathway students may not apply to honors if they have not submitted a scholarly project proposal by the required submission deadline (July 15, 2020).
- HST students may write an Honors thesis based on their HST thesis research or other research.
- Thesis preparation will require a significant commitment of your time and effort, as well as considerable input from your faculty mentor and other faculty members. *Do not submit a Statement of Intent unless you expect to have sufficient time to complete and submit a thesis.*
- Prior to submitting the Statement of Intent, the student should consult with their SIM Fellow or Advisor to learn more about the scope of what is required for the Honors thesis. The student should only submit the Statement of Intent if the SIM Fellow concurs that moving forward is appropriate.
- Faculty mentor approval is required as part of your honors Statement of Intent and your thesis submission. Be sure to discuss your honors submission with your research mentor before applying.

Statement of Intent

Complete the Honors **Statement of Intent** application.

The following documents must be submitted as part of the application:

- Your project proposal/manuscript
  - HST students submit their HST MD Thesis Proposal Form
  - New Pathway and Pathways students submit their Scholarly Project Proposal
  - In lieu of the HST MD thesis or Scholarly Project proposals, you may submit an abstract, or a manuscript representing your Honors research that is published, in press, undergoing peer review, or that will be submitted for peer review
- The abstract of any prior graduate thesis on a related topic or discipline
- A resume or CV
- Faculty mentor approval: The faculty mentor who has supervised the research must review the proposal before you submit your Statement of Intent and:
  - Write to honors@hms.harvard.edu to indicate approval of the student's plan to submit and defend a thesis
  - Provide a list of four HMS faculty who may be invited to serve as an examiner for your thesis exam. The suggested examiners should not be members of the student’s research group, department, or collaborators.

Your Statement of Intent paperwork will go to a SIM Fellow to review. The SIM Fellow will provide comments about your proposal's strengths and weaknesses. This review is intended to help prepare a cogent, defensible thesis.

Honors Thesis Submission

1. Please review the [honors thesis guidelines](#) to prepare your thesis.
2. Final theses should be emailed as a PDF to honors@hms.harvard.edu no later than February 10, 2021.
3. Send your mentor the evaluation of your work on the theses.
4. Your thesis examination will be attended by three to four faculty members:
   - Two experts in the student's research field who are assistant professors or above
   - A member of the HMS Honors Committee
   - A representative of your academic society may also be present

**Honors Exam**

Honors exams last approximately 90 minutes and take place in Spring of 2021. The Honors Committee chair will go over your exam evaluation with all reviewers. A copy of the exam evaluation is here.

- **Introductions:** You will meet the exam committee members. An honors exam chair will be present to explain the process to other examiners.
- **Opening presentation:** You will begin the exam by presenting a ten-minute overview of your research. You should limit your presentation to the essential information that you can explain in 10 minutes. There will be plenty of time to discuss the details of your work.
- **Questions and discussion** (45-60 minutes): The examiners will ask questions that may cover thesis content, the general thesis research field, or methods, including statistical analysis, instrumentation, and materials. You should be able think on your feet, acknowledge the limitations of your work, and relate it to the larger research field. It is understood that an Honors thesis is not a PhD dissertation.
- **Exam committee deliberations:** You leave at the end of the exam and the examiners discuss your thesis and examination. The exam chair writes a summary evaluation that is provided to the full Honors Committee. Decisions regarding Honors are made after all the Honors exams have been conducted, which is generally during the third week of April.

Successful candidates will be notified in May prior to graduation and will receive the MD Degree with Honors in a Special Field.

Contact honors@hms.harvard.edu if you have questions.

**Examples of Honors Theses**

**Can you give me examples of successful Honors theses?**

Yes. The following theses are part of the HMS student works collection in Harvard's online, open access repository DASH (Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard). Click on the Show Statistical Information tab at the bottom of the page to see page views and downloads for each work.

### Basic Science

Matthew C. Canver, 2018: *The Effect of Human Genetic Variation on CRISPR Targeting Specificity*

Belinda Wang, 2018: *Synthetic Lethal Interactions With Oncogenic KRAS*

Aaron J. Deutsch, 2017: *Widespread Non-Additive and Interaction Effects Within Human Leukocyte Antigen Loci Modulate the Risk of Autoimmune Diseases*

Sarah J. Hill, 2016: *Familial ALS Proteins Function in Prevention/repair of Transcription-Associated DNA Damage*

### Medical Education

Yannis Valtis, 2018: *Better Evidence: Assessing the Utility of an Evidence-Based Clinical Resource in Two African Medical Schools*

Sophia Kim McKinley, 2014: *The Emotional Intelligence of Resident Physicians*

Aleksandra Olszewski, 2016: *Virtual Simulation and Serious Games for Medical Education: A Review of the Literature and Development of a Virtual Reality Peritoneal Dialysis Simulator*

### Social Science

Michal McDowell, 2018: *Cervical Cancer Screening Preferences Among Trans-Masculine Individuals: Patient-Collected Human Papillomavirus Vaginal Swabs Versus Provider-Administered Pap Tests*

Sarrah Shahawy, 2016: *Perspectives on Elective Abortion Among Palestinian Women: Religion, Culture and Access in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*

David Kim, 2016: *The Social Geography of American Medicine*

### Outcomes Research
Brandon Mahal, 2015: The Impact of African American Race on Patterns of Care and Outcome in Prostate Cancer
George Baison, 2015: Outcomes of Laparotomy at a Large Referral Center in Rwanda
Sarah Messmer, 2014: A Pilot Study on Women's Health Education in Rural Guatemala: Impact on Beliefs and Behaviors

**Epidemiology**

Rachel Wallwork, 2016: Ambient Fine Particulate Matter, Outdoor Temperature and Risk of Metabolic Syndrome
Wenxin Xu, 2014: Optimal Systolic Blood Pressure Target, Time-to-Intensification and Time-to-Follow-up in the Treatment of Hypertension
Kathryn T. Dinh, 2016: An Exploration of Risk Stratification for Active Surveillance and Androgen Deprivation Therapy Side Effects for Prostate Cancer Utilizing Data From the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Database

**Medical Informatics**

Nathaniel Roysden, 2016: Predicting Health Care Utilization After the First Behavioral Health Visit Using Natural Language Processing and Machine Learning
Vishesh Agrawal, 2016: Quantitative Imaging Analysis of Non-small cell Lung Cancer

**Health Care Policy**

Anna Jo Bodurtha Smith: Adult-Oriented Health Insurance Reform and Children's Health Insurance: the Massachusetts Experience and Implications for the Affordable Care Act
Ifedayo Kuye, 2016: Cognition and Take-Up of Subsidized Drug Benefits by Medicare Beneficiaries
Zirui Song, 2014: Payment Reform in Massachusetts: Health Care Spending and Quality in Accountable Care Organizations Four Years into Global Payment

**Global Health**

Alex Harsha, 2016: Developing an Implementation Research Program for Quality and Equity: Exploring the Context, Adaptation, and Measurement Challenges of Maternal and Child Health Implementation Research in Rural Nepal
Henrietta Afari, 2015: Improving Emergency Obstetric Referrals: A Mixed Methods Study of Barriers and Solutions in Assin North, Ghana
Michael Hadley, 2015: Modeling Strategic Interventions in a Population With a Total Fertility Rate of 8.3: A Cross-Sectional Study of Idjwi Island, DRC
David Duong, 2015: Understanding the Service Availability for Non-Communicable Disease Prevention and Control at Primary Public Care Centers in Northern Vietnam

**Neuroscience**

Tova Gardin, 2017: Hippocampal Subfield Alterations Across the Psychotic Disease Spectrum
Jay Reidler, 2014: Modulation of Pain with Transcranial Direct Stimulation and Diffuse Noxious Inhibitory controls
Jasmine Thum, 2016: Characterizing EEG Brain States During General Anesthesia in Children: Insights for Improved Brain Monitoring
Xenos Mason, 2015: Neural Circuit Mechanisms Underlying the Exacerbation of Alzheimer’s Disease by Chronic Stress