

The Senior Honors Project
Getting Started: The Rationale, Standards, and the Process of Project Selection
John Carroll University
Honors Program

This document provides an overview of the role that the Senior Honors Project (SHP) plays as a capstone to the Honors Program, and offers some guidance on how to identify a research question to complete it. For the step-by-step process of completing the SHP, please consult the “General Project Overview” online. This and other documents related to the SHP are available at: <http://sites.jcu.edu/honors/pages/forms/> - scroll down to “Senior Honors Project.”

1. **Rationale and Standards.** As a capstone to the Honors Program, the SHP should challenge students to meet or exceed key Honors Program Goals for the Curriculum. These goals include **disciplinary mastery, critical inquiry and analysis, integrative learning, and rhetorical eloquence.** The Senior Honors Project should therefore:
 - challenge students to design, execute, and complete independent academic research ethically, thus addressing learning associated with **disciplinary mastery**, such as possessing strong foundation in the knowledge and methods of the chosen discipline(s), working independently, and modeling academic integrity and ethics;
 - highlight the most relevant knowledge and skills acquired in students’ general education and major field(s), thus addressing the learning outcomes associated with **critical inquiry and analysis**, such as articulating questions clearly, organizing and synthesizing evidence, and drawing informed conclusions;
 - provide the student opportunity to apply this learning to a new context, thus addressing the learning outcomes associated with **integrative learning**, such as undertaking discipline-based and/or cross-disciplinary problem-solving effectively;
 - offer evidence of students’ strongest reasoning and writing, thus addressing learning outcomes associated with **rhetorical eloquence**, such as demonstrating a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose, and communicating meaning with clarity and fluency.

In short, the Senior Honors Project should reflect the key characteristics of **academic excellence** in students’ fields. Essential prerequisites for completing this type of project are adequate foundational content knowledge in the relevant area, a practical understanding of research methods, and an ability to use primary and secondary sources in the discipline.

2. **Linking Academic Excellence to Personal and Professional Discernment.** In identifying and designing a project, fundamental questions that students should explore with their (academic and/or primary SHP) advisors are:

- *What does academic excellence look like in my chosen discipline(s)?*
- *What knowledge and skills do I possess to demonstrate it?*
- *What are some areas that I will have to cultivate while working on the project if I do not currently possess all of the necessary knowledge and skills?*

In fulfillment of the Honors Program Co-Curricular and Community Goals to **support students’ personal and professional discernment**, the Senior Honors Project should optimally build a bridge between students’ studies at John Carroll and an anticipated destination after graduation. Questions that students should explore (individually or with their academic advisor) are:

- *What is one of my personal or professional goals after graduation?*
- *What is the best piece of evidence that I could present to demonstrate my mastery of the Honors Program learning outcomes, and how can I tailor this evidence to meet my goal?*

3. Identifying a Research Question and a Primary Advisor. Using these questions as guides, students – in consultation with their academic advisors – should work together to identify a research question or problem that would **engage students’ academic interest**, and **reflect the appropriate scope** for an undergraduate research project while **meeting the Honors Program Goals for the Curriculum** and **providing a compelling piece of evidence** for students’ first destination.

This research question could be drawn from a shorter assignment completed in their coursework, or from work completed as part of an internship. As an academic capstone, the Senior Honors Project must involve independent and original academic research. Some recent research questions, Senior Honors Projects, and first professional destinations have included:

Student (Discipline)	Research Question	Senior Honors Project	First Professional Destination
Esther (Biology)	What photosynthetic advantages do invasive species have over non-invasive species?	Laboratory research and report on species of invasive and non-invasive roses.	Master’s program in environmental ecology
Jackie (Political Science)	What are the legal precedents for deciding a law on	Legal brief presenting and analyzing relevant	Law school

	same-sex marriage?	precedents.	
Lydia (English – Writing Track)	What are the literary conventions and who are the dominant voices in writing on rural life?	Collection of short stories and poems focusing on a small town, with analytical introduction.	MFA in creative writing
Carly (Accounting)	How well do companies comply with the Global Reporting Initiative’s sustainability framework?	Case study of seven companies with respect to adherence to rules synchronically and diachronically.	Employment in Accounting

Given the tentative research question that they pose, students should consult with their academic advisors to identify a primary advisor for the project. Primary advisors can work with students to refine a research question and provide strategies for beginning the research necessary to write the proposal.

- 4. Beginning Work.** More information is provided online in the documents “General Overview” of the SHP and the “Proposal Guidelines.”

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