

**INSTITUTE HONORS THESIS PROSPECTUS**  
Virginia Military Institute

The crowning achievement of the Institute Honors candidate at VMI is the completion of a senior honors thesis under the supervision of a faculty adviser, normally in the cadet's major department.

The cadet defends the thesis in a public presentation, open to faculty and other students as well as interested members of the college community, before submitting the final written copy for review by the Institute Honors Committee and the Deputy Superintendent for Academics and Dean of Faculty. A copy of the approved thesis is bound and shelved in Preston Library.

The first step in writing a thesis of the caliber expected for Institute Honors involves the early formulation of a prospectus that defines the project. The prospectus must demonstrate the cadet's understanding of the challenges that the project will present, an awareness of its academic or professional significance, and a plan for completing the work in a timely manner.

Written as a formal memorandum to the Institute Honors Committee, each Institute Honors thesis prospectus must include the following elements:

- I. Working title for the project
- II. Cadet's name
- III. Faculty adviser (see requirements for faculty adviser's letter of support, below)
- IV. Description of the project
  - A. Introduction (including what interests you about the topic in general)
  - B. Specific statement of proposed project, phrased as a research question or a hypothesis
  - C. Methodology
  - D. Significance of proposed research
- V. Working bibliography (sources that you have consulted in preparing section IV)

**Adviser's Letter of Support:** At the time the cadet submits this prospectus for review, the faculty adviser must submit a letter of support for the project. The adviser's letter should provide a frank appraisal of the prospectus, indicating

- support for the project as the cadet has defined it;
- confirmation of the project's significance and appropriateness for Institute Honors-level work;
- potential pitfalls for the project overall or weaknesses in the prospectus; and
- confidence that the cadet will be able to complete the work.

Other Notes:

1. Origins: You may start your thesis from scratch OR you may build on a project begun in a class, extending it in some way that raises its level of difficulty and significance to a project that your adviser and the Institute Honors Committee find appropriate for Institute Honors-level work.
2. Two Theses?: A departmental honors thesis, if sufficiently challenging and original in its research, will normally qualify also for Institute Honors, and vice versa. In other words, you do not necessarily have to write two theses if you are pursuing both departmental and Institute Honors. You must, however, be certain that the thesis project satisfies both sets of requirements.
3. Capstone?: The same is true here as for the departmental honors thesis: normally, these projects, properly conceived, will satisfy both the requirements for the departmental capstone and those for Institute Honors. Caveat: When the capstone is a group project, your contribution must be sufficiently distinct and extraordinary that the Honors Committee is able to appraise it apart from the work of the group overall.
4. A note about HN 400-401: If you are not receiving credit for the thesis work through enrollment in a capstone or departmental honors thesis course, you may—but are not required to—enroll for HN 400-401 to earn up to six credit hours for work on your thesis. To enroll, each semester you must present the Honors Program director with a written description of the work to be completed for the 3 credit hours that particular semester and your adviser's endorsement of that description. HN 400 and 401 are 3-credit graded courses.