

Obtaining Honors in Mathematics

a rough time line

Eligibility and other more basic information about obtaining honors in mathematics is available on the **Student Opportunities**¹ link on the department's website. The timetable below is intended as a guide to faculty and students as they prepare to complete an honors project in mathematics. Further questions should be directed to the department chair.

It should be noted that this is only a guide and that adjustments may be necessary in special situations. In particular, some students will seek a joint honors project with another department. The mathematics department encourages such projects and is willing to adjust our time line if necessary to align with the needs of other departments.

1. Students interested in graduating with honors should seek out a faculty member about a potential project. Typically, this is done during the spring semester of the student's junior year, if the student plans on graduating in May.
2. Once the student has found a faculty member willing to supervise a project (hereafter referred to as the advisor), the student, in consultation with the advisor, will write a short proposal (typically just one page) in the form of a memo to the entire department. The advisor will route the memo through the department to obtain each faculty member's signature. This memo gives preliminary approval from the department that the project is of the appropriate level to warrant honors in mathematics. Students may be asked to rewrite their proposal if a faculty member raises concern about the proposed project. Proposals should be completed during the semester *prior* to graduation and a copy of the signed proposal should be forwarded to the department chair. A sample proposal can be found on the department's website.
3. The student will complete a project over the course of the next several months and write the results in the form of an honors thesis. Honors projects in mathematics fall into one of two broad categories: an expository of mathematics research *or* original research. Especially for an expository type of project, the student will typically sign up for a directed study (Math 491) with the advisor for the semester during which the work will be completed. Longer projects may require the student to complete a directed study the previous semester as well. Original research projects often involve directed studies, but this is not required. Faculty may set their own policy about whether or not a given project requires enrollment in Math 491.
4. At least one month prior to graduation, the student will seek two additional faculty members to serve on his or her committee along with the advisor. Each of these faculty members will eventually read the honor thesis, make comments for improvement, and sign off on the finished product.
5. The student, under the guidance of his or her advisor, will write up the results of the project in the form of a thesis. The style of the thesis is left at the discretion of the advisor. However, the final thesis must include a standardized title page and signature page. L^AT_EX templates for these pages are available on the department's website.
6. By March 1 of the year of graduation (October 15 if graduating in December), the student will notify the department chair of his or her intent to graduate with honors. At this time, the student should also give an indication about when he or she plans to defend the honors project.

¹<http://www.umw.edu/cas/math/students/>

7. In consultation with the department chair, the student and advisor will schedule a time to present the results of his or her thesis. Before proposing a time to the chair, the research team should be certain that each committee member is able to attend. In the event that there are multiple students graduating with honors, the presentations will likely be scheduled on a common day close to the UMW Research and Creativity Day. Students are encouraged to participate in R&C Day as well since it serves to promote the department and also adds something substantive to their resume.
8. At least one week before the honors presentation, the student should present a final version of his or her thesis to each of the committee members. Committee members are requested to have the thesis read and commented by the time of the presentation.
9. Towards the end of the semester, the student will give a 15 - 20 minute presentation about his or her project. All faculty and students will be invited to attend. After the talk, the committee members will present the student with any comments on the honors thesis.
10. After making any changes suggested by the committee, the student should obtain the committee members' signatures on the official signature page of his or her thesis. Note that this revision process could take a few weeks. Therefore, students should plan their presentation early enough in the semester so that they will have ample time to revise and obtain signatures before submitting the final paper.
11. By the last day of classes, the student should present the department chair with **three** hard copies of the final thesis, each with signatures of the committee members. One copy goes to Simpson Library, one goes to the department library, and the final one goes to the advisor. If the student wishes to have more copies made, he or she should present as many additional copies as desired to the chair at this time. The department will pay for up to three additional copies of the honors thesis to be bound for the student. Bound copies of the thesis often take several months to be completed. Students should leave the department chair with contact information so that the bound copies can be mailed upon receipt.
12. Student graduates with honors distinction on the diploma!