

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF HONOURS STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS

### School of Psychology, University of NSW

#### Responsibilities of Students

Honours students have the primary responsibility (a) to conduct all aspects of the research (including literature searches, data collection, and interpretation), (b) for the timely completion of the Honours thesis, and (c) for the form and content of the final product.

#### *Specific responsibilities are:*

- To develop an honours thesis proposal and plan for completing the project within the required timeframe. The student may be involved in topic choice in conjunction with their supervisor. Supervisors may be restrictive in terms of the area in which they are willing to supervise, and students need to compromise in topic choice depending on the supervisor. Once a topic is chosen, the development of the research proposal, including the hypotheses and design, is the responsibility of the student, working in conjunction with the supervisor. The identification of an appropriate sample, and issues of feasibility of using a non-first-year psychology student sample should be addressed by the student, again in conjunction with the supervisor. The same holds for the choice of data analysis. This choice should be clearly dependent on the hypotheses generated, and be specified prior to any data collection. In most cases, the analysis should involve a technique covered in prior research methods and statistics courses.
- To establish with the supervisor the level of support required for successful completion of the thesis.
- To organise the time and place for the panel meeting, and ensure that all panel members receive a hard-copy of the proposal in adequate time, one full day in advance of the meeting at the very least.
- To gain ethical approval for their research project, in conjunction with their supervisor, and to subsequently conduct their research in an ethical manner, treating participants with respect and appreciation.
- To maintain a professional and respectful relationship with their supervisor (e.g., to be punctual for meetings; to be willing to take advice, and constructive criticism, from the supervisor). Students also need to learn how to promptly deal with any interpersonal issues that arise with their supervisor, and if the relationship with the supervisor breaks down, it is the student's responsibility to seek advice from the Honours Co-Ordinator or grievance officer.
- To maintain regular contact with their supervisor. Try to establish how the supervisor prefers to operate, whether from informal discussions, drafts and outlines, question and answer sessions, individually or within the context of lab meetings etc. Students might find it useful to follow up meetings with an email to the supervisor indicating their understanding of agreed decisions, actions, responsibilities, and timelines (thus minimising miscommunication).
- To seek the approval of the supervisor prior to consulting with other academic staff or other researchers in the field about the project.
- To prepare in advance for supervisor meetings, by determining the help required and the areas in which advice would be useful. Present any required written material to the supervisor in sufficient time to allow for comments and discussions before scheduled meetings.
- To undertake additional work towards the thesis identified as necessary by the supervisor.
- To keep organised and confidential records of the data collected, particularly in a manner which can be easily accessed and understood by the student or supervisor at a later date.
- To take responsibility for the quality and originality of all submitted work.

## **Responsibilities of Supervisors**

The overriding responsibility of supervisors is to provide continuing support and guidance to students in researching and producing an Honours thesis to the best of the student's ability. However, the final form and content of the thesis is the responsibility of the student.

### ***Specific responsibilities include:***

- To assist students in selecting and defining the scope of a suitable research topic. That is, research projects should be reasonable in scope (consistent with others completed on time in previous honours years), for which resources are normally available (resources include computer programs, psychological tests, access to research participants, especially where special approval is needed, as with clinical, developmental, and nonhuman animal participants).
- To assist with the ethics application, if the supervisor does not already have approval.
- To guide students in the design, data collection and analysis procedures and advise on the solution of any difficulties that arise. Once the design of the study has been specified, the sample identified, and the research hypotheses clearly stated, the supervisor will discuss a proposed analysis with the student, which should be within the general expertise of the supervisor.
- To ensure that prior to the research proposal meeting, no data has been collected other than pilot data.
- To ensure that the panel meeting takes place, ideally by the designated deadline. Try to avoid having all supervised students presenting their proposal at around the same time.
- To ensure that the panel meeting is run in a constructive manner, with the student taking the lead in presentation and in answering questions, and that constructive commentary from the panel members is seriously considered prior to commencement of data collection.
- To ensure that students have adequate training in the necessary procedures prior to the commencement of the main data collection phase.
- To maintain regular contact with students in order to monitor their progress and ensure that any issues are dealt with in a timely and considerate manner. "Regular contact" varies depending on the stage of the work, but a student might reasonably expect to interact with their supervisor once a week, on average.
- To inform students about any planned absences during the candidature and arrangements for supervision during those absences.
- To advise on matters of thesis content, organisation and writing.
- To provide timely and helpful written and/or verbal feedback (usually within two weeks) to students on any submissions and to assist them to develop solutions as problems are identified. In particular, it is expected that supervisors will heavily annotate the first draft of the thesis, and lightly annotate the second draft — with the exception of the final discussion, which the supervisor must not read at all.
- To advise students of inadequate progress or work below the standard generally required, and to suggest appropriate action.
- To act in accordance with relevant ethical codes with respect to the responsibilities and boundaries of the supervisor-student relationship.
- To attend the School's Examination Meeting for Psychology Honours at which student grades will be determined. If this proves impossible, the Honours Co-ordinator should be informed of this and provided with any relevant input regarding the supervisor's students.
- To make clear their practice regarding possible publication and authorship of the research project, which should be consistent with relevant research and professional codes, and should take into account the possibility of combination with the work of other students or of the supervisor.