

Guidelines for Graduation with Honors in Biology

The College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (CLAS) recognizes students with high achievements in coursework and laboratory research by awarding Departmental Honors. Students earning a B.A. degree in Biology, Biochemistry, Microbiology, or Human Biology or a B.S. degree in Biochemistry, Microbiology, or Biology (Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology; Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology; Cell Biology; Ecology and Evolutionary Biology; Genetics; Neurobiology; or Teaching Biology) are eligible for Departmental Honors. Please note that these guidelines **do not** apply to Honors in Human Biology with concentrations in Anthropology, Applied Behavioral Science, Psychology, and Speech-Language-Hearing. This document describes the procedures, advice, and requirements for attaining **Biology Honors**. First, candidates should submit a completed Departmental Honors Intent form—with approval by the faculty mentor—to Angela Gere (2045 Haworth) *no later* than January 20 of their final (Senior) semester.

Requirements for Graduation with Honors in Biology

1. Complete all **coursework** for the appropriate BA or BS Biology degree with a minimum grade point average (**GPA**) of **3.25 overall** and **3.5 in the major** (based on courses taken at KU *and* transferred from other schools).
2. Complete **BIOL 499** (Introduction to Honors Research, 2 credits) with a grade of “**B**” or better. Completion of BIOL 499 during the sophomore or junior year is strongly recommended. Currently, BIOL 499 is only offered during the Spring semester.
3. Complete **BIOL 699** (Divisional Honors Research Colloquium, 1 credit) with a grade of “**B**” or better. BIOL 699 should be taken just before graduation. Currently, BIOL 699 is only offered during the Spring semester.

Note: Completion of both BIOL 499 & BIOL 699 **exempts** an Honors candidate from the **BIOL 599 requirement** in all Biology degrees.

4. Complete an **independent research project** in collaboration with a KU research mentor in Biology. Projects are individually tailored and may involve laboratory, field, and/or literature studies. Most projects require over a year to complete, so honors candidates are strongly encouraged to begin projects during their freshman, sophomore, or the first semester of their junior year. Honors candidates may or may not enroll in BIOL 424 (Independent Study) while carrying out research. The number of credits and semesters in which to enroll is determined by consultation with the faculty mentor.

The Honors research mentor/advisor must be a KU faculty member who is tenured or tenure-track. The research may be supervised directly by another scientist; however, a KU faculty member must be the **official mentor of record**. Research mentors may be selected by (1) contacting an individual professor whose class stimulated your interest, (2) contacting faculty members whose BIOL 499 presentations interested you, (3) examining research descriptions posted on faculty websites, or (4) consulting the Director of the Biology Honors Committee. Most biology faculty members are in either the Department of Molecular Biosciences (<http://molecularbiosciences.ku.edu/faculty>) or the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (<http://eeb.ku.edu/faculty>).

5. Write an **Honors Thesis** that includes the rationale and objective(s) for the project, results, and interpretation of the results including a synthesis section, placing the new findings in a broader context. The thesis is written in a format suitable for publication in an appropriate scientific journal and is **sole-authored** by the candidate. Typically, the thesis will contain a Title/Authors page, an Abstract, an Introduction, the Materials and Methods used, the Results, a Discussion, and a Literature Cited section. Theses must be submitted to the Honors Committee (pdf or paper) 2–3 weeks before the Honors Symposium, which is typically held on the day following the Spring semester Stop Day. Thesis submissions must be accompanied by a letter from the faculty mentor that evaluates the research and thesis, and confirms that it represents independent work carried out by the candidate.

The precise **format of the Thesis** should reflect (1) the above general information, (2) input from the advisor, and (3) the following specific guidelines: text font size of 11 or 12, one-inch margins on all sides of each page, double-spaced text. Please note that *combined* the main sections of the thesis (Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, and Discussion) will typically comprise at least 15 pages. Thus, when the Literature Cited section, Tables, and Figures are added, a typical Honors Thesis will comprise nearly 20–25 pages. Of course, these estimates/guidelines may vary substantially, depending on the nature of the research. Questions about the format or content of the thesis should be directed to the Biology Honors Committee Chairperson.

6. Candidates present a 12-minute **oral presentation** of their research (an additional 3 minutes will follow for questions) at the **Undergraduate Biology Honors Symposium**, at which faculty, colleagues, and family members are encouraged to attend. Following the Symposium, the Honors Committee determines if the candidate should receive Departmental Honors upon graduation. Students earning Biology Honors receive a certificate and Honors cord at the Undergraduate Biology Graduation Recognition Ceremony. Currently, the Honors Symposium is held at the end of the Spring semester. Honors candidates planning to graduate at the end of a Fall Semester must contact the Honors Committee Chair two semesters before graduation.

Students and mentors will be notified by e-mail of the outcome of the Biology Honors Committee’s decision by the Chair of the Committee within a few days of the Honors Symposium. If appropriate, a follow-up meeting with the Biology Honors Committee Chair will also be offered to provide critical feedback on the Thesis from the Honors Committee members.

If you have any questions about graduation with Departmental Honors, contact the Biology Honors Committee Chairperson: Dr. Kirsten Jensen, 5024 Haworth Hall, (785) 864-5826, jensen@ku.edu.