

# ENGLISH HONORS FAQ

## GENERAL INFORMATION

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### What is the English Honors Program (EHP)?

The English Honors Program (EHP) is a selective program for undergraduates majoring in English. More than a “thesis” program, the EHP helps students to develop advanced skills in writing, textual analysis, and research. Students normally apply to the EHP prior to the end of the sophomore year and spend four or more semesters in the program.

### What are the advantages of EHP?

The EHP is a unique learning experience and excellent preparation for the future, whether one’s plans include a job, graduate school, law school, or other post-baccalaureate study. Since the program’s seminars and internships allow students to work closely with some of the department’s most distinguished faculty, Honors students receive more mentoring and individual attention than is possible in the general undergraduate program. The EHP also creates a small community of students with shared interests and goals; Honors students often get better acquainted with each other than do students in larger classes. Additionally, transcripts of graduates of the program reflect conferral of “Special Honors in English.”

### Will EHP help me to decide if graduate school is right for me?

Yes. Though not a prerequisite for admission to graduate programs in English, the EHP does provide students with a taste of the intellectual rigor, independent research, and faculty mentorship that are hallmarks of graduate study. As such, the EHP helps students to determine if pursuit of graduate school is appropriate while also enhancing credentials for admission to those programs.

### Whom should I contact if I want to discuss EHP?

Procedural questions (the application, course applicability, etc.) should be directed to an Advisor in the Advising Office (Parlin 114). Advisors can also answer basic questions about whether the EHP is appropriate for your goals, though you are also encouraged to meet with the EHP Director, Dr. Janine Barchas. Upon admission to the program, you will work with the honors faculty mentors and, eventually, a thesis supervisor.

## ADMISSIONS

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### Am I eligible to apply?

To be eligible for admission, students must have completed RHE 306 and E 316K, or their equivalents, and three additional semester hours of lower-division coursework in either English or Rhetoric and Writing; (s)he must also have a University grade point average of at least 3.00 and a grade point average in English and Rhetoric and Writing of at least 3.50. Meeting these requirements does not guarantee admission to EHP. Our ideal candidate is a highly motivated student who combines strong writing, planning, and interpretive skills— such a student is likely to write a thoughtful, well-researched, original Honors thesis.

**How are students selected for the EHP?**

Applications are evaluated by a committee of Honors faculty who select students on the basis of writing and “close reading” skills, instructor recommendations, grades, and intellectual potential.

**When are applications due, and can I take EHP courses if I miss the deadline?**

Applications are due in March and October for fall and spring enrollment, respectively. While students may submit late applications, priority for enrolling in honors seminars is given to students who submitted an application by the posted deadline.

**What materials are required to apply?**

The application includes an information form and a program planner. Candidates also submit a 4-6 page critical paper, a personal statement, and two faculty recommendations. At least one recommendation form must be from a University of Texas English professor. Applications are available at [www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/english/undergraduate/honors/](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/english/undergraduate/honors/).

**How do I choose a writing sample?**

A good writing sample need not be long, but it must show excellent skill in close textual analysis. Perfect grammar, spelling, punctuation and format are a plus. Many students submit a paper from an English course.

**How should I prepare for EHP?**

If available, take a “pre-honors” or Plan I Honors section of E 314L. An excellent performance in such a course strengthens an EHP application. Seek English instructors who have high expectations of students. Strive to excel in your courses and to impress your professors, as enthusiastic faculty letters of recommendation are vital to a successful application. The English Advising Office also assists students in course selection and other EHP planning items.

**What courses are required for the EHP?**

Fifteen credit hours of coursework are required for EHP: 9 hours of English Honors Seminar work and English 679H. 679H is a thesis course and is divided into two parts (679HA and 679HB). The “A” and “B” indicate that each semester is half, or three hours, of the main 679H course. These honors courses are applicable toward requirements on the English Degree Plan. Specifically, 679HA satisfies the Area IV requirement and 679HB is completed in lieu of the Area VI Senior Seminar. English Honors Seminars may be applied toward the other upper-division English requirements when content is appropriate (e.g., an E 321 Shakespeare Honors section counts toward Area I, etc.). EHP students are also required to fulfill the program’s “historical requirements,” described below.

At first glance, these requirements are often a bit confusing. Rest assured that the confusion dissipates fairly quickly. The Program Planner portion of the EHP application often helps candidates to visualize the compatibility of honors coursework and English major requirements.

**The application indicates that students spend no fewer than four semesters in EHP. What if need to graduate in three?**

Applicants planning to graduate in fewer than four semesters are *rarely* admitted to EHP. High demand for honors seminars, coupled with a mandated lower enrollment in them, makes accommodating students attempting to take multiple seminars in a single semester difficult. Producing a quality thesis in this timeframe has also proven to be problematic. If you are seeking to complete EHP in three semesters, meet with the Honors Director prior to beginning the application process.

## REQUIREMENTS

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### Could you tell me more about the Honors Seminars?

Every semester we offer at least three Honors seminars for undergraduate students, and each year we cover all areas of the English major requirements. These are specialized sections of regularly taught courses or special topics courses for Honors students. Honors courses are smaller, more intimate, and more advanced investigations of literature than regular English classes. The Honors seminars are writing intensive and contain a research component designed to introduce its students to literary research generally and topic/period-specific research methods that relate to the subject area of the class. These seminars train students in the skills and methods they need to write an Honors thesis in the senior year. The discussion-based seminars offer an intense and highly rewarding intellectual experience for our students that cannot be duplicated outside of the EHP. Therefore, students are strongly encouraged to take additional Honors seminars beyond the program's minimum of three.

### Could you tell me more about the thesis course?

The first half of the course, 679HA, is taught as an organized course in the fall semester. With guidance from a thesis supervisor, students continue with independent research and writing in the second half of the course, 679HB. We have more to say about the thesis course below.

### What is this "historical requirement" business?

The EHP also requires each student to complete two courses that focus on literature or language prior to 1800, and another that emphasizes literature or language prior to 1900. To be considered an historical course, at least half of the material on the course syllabus must predate the cutoff. Though students often enroll in Honors seminars in order to meet the historical requirement, it also can be completed in conjunction with any upper-division English course other than 679H. Most students do not have difficulty in fulfilling this requirement. If you have any questions about applicability of particular courses, please see the English Advising Office.

### Can I take these courses in any order?

No. At least two of the Honors seminars must be completed as a prerequisite to E 679HA. Similarly, two "historical" courses must be completed prior to the beginning of 679HA. The final Honors Seminar and final historical course may be taken concurrently with 679HA, but *all honors seminars must be completed and historical requirements met prior to the 679HB semester.*

### Is anything else required in order to graduate with Honors in English?

Indeed. In addition to completing EHP coursework in the prescribed order, honors graduates must also complete the following:

- all requirements for a major in English
- three or more English Honors seminars with a grade of A or B
- the historical requirement, as described above
- 679H, Honors Tutorial Course, with a grade of A in each half
- a defense of the thesis judged as acceptable (see below)
- a University grade point average of at least 3.00 and a grade point average of at least 3.50 in the coursework required for the major

### How does E 679H work?

*E 679HA, Undergraduate Reading and Research* (a.k.a. Research Methods), is an organized *fall* course taught by a member of the Honors faculty. In this course students will have general writing and research assignments tailored to the particular thesis project. Questions of a disciplinary, methodological, archival, and theoretical nature will be under discussion throughout the semester. 679HA students produce and submit a 3-5 page formal thesis proposal and full bibliography prior to beginning the second thesis semester. That course, *E 679HB, Thesis*, is taught through individual instruction by the student's thesis supervisor. This course must be taught by a full-time English faculty member: no visiting or non-English faculty may supervise a thesis. The student and thesis supervisor meet regularly in order to ensure the timely completion of the thesis project.

### How do I choose a topic and/or a thesis supervisor?

The most successful theses are written when a student returns to something they have studied earlier. There are a variety of ways to do this. One may return to a much beloved book or author. Or, one may wish to investigate a text mentioned in a course or related to materials studied but not read in that course. Recall experiences in classes and find something interesting and worth knowing more about. Speak with a former instructor in office hours about this matter, as well. Instructors who are familiar with a student's work are more likely to agree to supervise a thesis. That said, students often need to approach an unfamiliar faculty member whose expertise more closely aligns with the topic. In either case, seek out a thesis advisor *early*. Go to the professor's office hours *in person* to discuss a proposed topic.

### Where can I find more information about writing a thesis?

The Department of English provides an informal thesis tip sheet for EHP students ([www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/english/undergraduate/honors/](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/english/undergraduate/honors/)). Additionally, the College of Liberal Arts publishes a thesis manual with numerous tips and procedures, including formatting guidelines ([www.utexas.edu/cola/progs/humanities/content/resources/](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/progs/humanities/content/resources/)).

### What is the English Honors Colloquium?

The "dead" Monday after classes in the spring semester hosts the English Honors Colloquium, which allows students to share their research with a broader community of students, faculty, staff, friends, and family. The Colloquium thus also serves a celebratory and valedictory function. Faculty thesis supervisors and readers are encouraged to attend the Honors Colloquium; English Honors juniors are required to attend. All presenters are welcome to invite family and friends.

### Is my colloquium presentation an official thesis defense?

The Colloquium follows the thesis defense. During the month of April, each graduating student will take part in an honors thesis defense. This formal academic exercise offers students the opportunity to defend orally their argument and methodology. It also provides students with feedback on the penultimate draft of their thesis, thus allowing them to revise long *before* it has been bound and submitted to the department in May. Defenses will be conducted by the student's thesis supervisor, second reader, and a member of the EHP Committee; a defense will last approximately thirty minutes.

**May I take 679HA in the spring and graduate in a fall semester?**

No. The EHP and thesis course are geared toward a May graduation. Students should plan to enroll in 679HA in the fall and 679HB in the spring. Any exceptions to this requirement must be approved by the Honors Director.

**May I substitute a creative work for the thesis?**

It is unlikely that a creative thesis would be approved. The EHP is centered on completion of a critical Honors thesis, and your application is evaluated as such. Students who wish to complete a substantial creative writing project should consider enrolling in English 367K (Conference Course in Creative Writing). For details, please consult with the English Advising Office.

**How do I obtain funding for my research (travel, conferences, etc.)?**

All EHP students are strongly encouraged to apply for the Rapoport-King Thesis Scholarships, Undergraduate Research Fellowships, and other funding opportunities ([www.utexas.edu/cola/scholarships](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/scholarships)). Though these awards are highly competitive, EHP students have fared well in securing these honors. Additionally, participation in EHP is viewed favorably in Department of English scholarship competitions.

**How is the best thesis recognized?**

Great question. Each spring, the Department of English awards a prize for best undergraduate thesis, presented at commencement. The Thesis Prize winner and honorable mentions are also recognized with a monetary award. To be considered for the award, a student's supervising professor writes a letter of nomination to the Honors Director, with the winner determined by a committee of Honors faculty.