Guidelines for Honors Program in French

The Department of French and Italian encourages qualified majors to consider doing an Honors Project in French during their senior year. The Honors Program represents the most advanced work a student can do in our department and provides a unique opportunity to do a sustained independent project. Honors projects may address topics within French or Francophone literature, cinema, or culture.

The project should be grounded in prior coursework which has prepared the student to complete the specific project successfully. Projects may be written in French or in English. A wide range of projects is possible, including but not limited to the following types of projects:

- research thesis/analysis of a clearly defined aspect of French or Francophone literature, cinema, culture, or language/linguistics
- a substantive translation project including commentary on the approach to the translation
- technology-based projects
- a creative performance- or production-oriented project accompanied by commentary on the preparation and realization of the performance (film, video, drama)

Honors projects in French count for 6 credit hours (FREN 505, by consent of the French faculty and sponsor), generally with 3 hours being taken in the fall semester and 3 hours in the spring semester of their senior year. 3 credits of the Honors work may be substituted for one of the 400-level courses required for the major. Honors students typically meet weekly throughout both semesters with their faculty sponsors.

Qualifications

To qualify for Honors work, students need to have completed by the end of their junior year (or third or fourth year for double degree students with a French major in the College) most of the courses required for the major (i.e., 21-24 credits), including a 400 level course taken in residency. Students studying abroad their junior year who would like to pursue honors and who have not yet completed a 400 level course in residency should make every attempt to take their 400 level course in residency during the fall semester of their senior year.

To pursue Honors work, students must have an overall GPA of at least 3.25 (B+) and a major GPA of at least 3.5 (B+/A-) in courses taken at Oberlin (i.e., apart from transferred credit). Generally, the French faculty will invite qualified students to submit a proposal, but interested qualified students may also discuss with the French faculty the possibility of doing Honors.
Process of application for Honors work in French

Qualified majors interested in pursuing Honors in French should submit a proposal to the French faculty by April 1 of their junior year. Proposals of five to seven pages in length should be submitted in electronic format to Blanche Villar (blanche.villar@oberlin.edu) and should include the following:

Name
Declared major(s) and minor (s)
Current GPA overall and in French
Tentative project title
3-5 page project narrative
1-2 page preliminary bibliography

The Project Narrative

The Department will be looking for proposals that articulate a clear central question, problem, or idea and that explain how the author plans to address that question or develop that idea. The scope and ambition of the project should be appropriate for a research paper of 40 pages minimum. The one to two page bibliography that accompanies the project proposal should include separate sections for primary and secondary sources.

Project narratives should address the following questions:

What do you propose to study and why? What question do you hope to answer by conducting this research? Does the question relate to an author, a genre, a time period, a theory, an approach, a methodology?

What is your background, in terms of language preparation, coursework, or reading, in the area you propose to study?

How will you answer the question you propose? What theories, methodologies, or frameworks do you intend to use? What core texts do you plan to analyze?

How do you plan to structure and manage your research time? Your writing time? How many contact hours per semester do you hope to establish with a faculty mentor?

Students are encouraged to seek the advice of faculty in French in preparing the Honors proposal. The French department will evaluate honors proposals and discuss the student’s previous work in the department. Acceptance into the program will be based on the strength and feasibility of the research project and on the availability of appropriate staffing.
Calendar for Completion of the Honors Project¹

April 1 (junior year):
Submission of Honors project proposal by student and subsequent approval by French faculty; students accepted into the program will enroll in FREN 505 (3 credits) during fall registration.

Mid-November (senior year):
Sponsor, in consultation with the chair of the French department, determines whether or not the student has made “substantive progress” on the honors project and whether the remaining proposed work is feasible.

If yes, the student will enroll for 3 hours of Honors credit (FREN 505) for the spring semester to complete the project.

If no, the student will have two options:
1) Revise the project as a private reading and submit by the end of the semester a 15-20 page essay based on his or her research
2) Revise and resubmit the project proposal. If the revised proposal is accepted by the sponsor, in consultation with the chair of the department, the student will complete the project during spring semester. If the revised proposal is not approved, the student will complete by the end of the semester a 15-20 page essay based on his or her research and replace FREN 505 with an appropriate course during drop/add at the beginning of spring semester.

Late January-early February:
Completion or near-completion of a first draft (or equivalent for production-type projects)

Late March-early April (the week following spring break):
Submission of the final draft of the project to the faculty sponsor

April 15 (approximately):
Submission of the final version of the project to the sponsor and reading committee

Late April-early May:
Oral defense, attended by candidate (and invited guests, if the candidate so chooses), sponsor, and reading committee. The oral defense consists of a 15-20 minute project presentation, made in French and prepared ahead of time in consultation with the project sponsor, followed by a question and answer period. After the defense, the committee will deliberate and prepare its recommendation for the College Committee on Honors at Graduation (typically due during the first week in May).

¹ Calendar adjustments are possible for students graduating in December and who wish to begin an Honors project in the spring semester prior to the December graduation.