

**GUIDELINES**  
**for a**  
**THESIS OR CAPSTONE PROJECT**  
**to meet the graduation requirement for a**  
**Commonwealth Scholar**  
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

Each thesis or capstone project will be formally directed by a full-time member of the Mass College faculty in an appropriate discipline and presented in public before an evaluation committee of faculty. Co-advisors are permitted if necessary. A student with a history major, for instance, might wish to do a thesis that deals with the literary trends of a particular historical period (e.g., the Restoration, the French Revolution). In such a case, the student could have a primary advisor from History and a co-advisor from English. In another case, a student might have a double major -- e.g., Psychology and Political Science -- and might wish to do the thesis on a topic that uses methods drawn from both areas.

As a general matter, however, a student will have a single advisor in his/her major discipline and, with the help of that advisor (and the Honors Advisory Board, if necessary), judiciously will choose faculty members who will serve as official judges of the oral defense (or public presentation). The advisor should be not only a person knowledgeable about the area the student wishes to explore but also one with whom the student has a reasonably good working relationship. In some cases, a student may know the general topic he or she wishes to explore and will search for an advisor who is an expert on that topic; in other cases, the student may wish to work with a particular advisor, whatever the topic, and will ask that person for guidance in selecting a specific topic. Many faculty members, understandably, will not take on the direction of a thesis/project for a student whom they have not had in class or have not directed in previous independent study. Some advisors will allow the student wide choice of topic; others may prefer that the student join an ongoing research project already undertaken by the faculty member.

**THE PROSPECTUS FOR A THESIS OR CAPSTONE PROJECT**

The thesis prospectus is a formal document which sets forth the parameters of the intended work. Some care, therefore, should be given both to its content and its appearance. The prospectus should be literate, should have substance, and it should be neatly prepared in accordance with standard academic conventions (typed, double-spaced, one-inch margins, citation of sources). It should reflect a carefully thought-out approach to the subject with sufficient elaboration to enable the advisor, the Honors Advisory Board, and the Honors Director to know what the student intends to do. Prospecti that do not meet these minimal criteria will not be approved.

The process of drafting the prospectus could take a number of paths. In general terms, the first articulation of the prospectus will probably develop out of close consultations with the advisor. The advisor may choose to ask the advice of member of the Honors Advisory Board or seek guidance from the Honors Director. After the prospectus reaches an adequate level of definition, it should be submitted by the middle of the Spring term [April 1<sup>st</sup> at the latest] to the Honors Advisory Board for comment. Following that review (and possible revisions), Honors Director will then approve or disapprove the prospectus. (See more detailed prospectus guidelines below.)

## PUBLIC PRESENTATION

A public presentation is required of all students as a condition of completing the project and graduating as a Commonwealth Scholar. The public presentation should include some statement or demonstration by the student of the main ideas in the thesis, and it should make provision for feedback and questions from the faculty judges.

The public presentation will be limited in length to one hour. The first fifteen minutes will feature the student's statement (some flexibility will be reserved for artistic projects such as a musical composition or dance). The balance of the time will involve discussion of the thesis, including questions from the faculty panel and questions from members of the audience.

The panel of four faculty judges will be selected by the student and the faculty advisor, with the assistance -- if needed -- of the Honors Director. Names of the panel members must be submitted to the Honors Director at least a month in advance of the date for the public presentation. Important: the thesis advisor will serve as chairperson of the faculty panel, and he/she will moderate the event. The panel might include a faculty members from the student's major department, a faculty representative from outside the discipline but in a related area, and a faculty member from the Honors Advisory Board.

Ideally, the public presentation will occur at least thirty days prior to the student's graduation date. Allowances should be made for potential scheduling conflicts and for ample time for revisions to the thesis after the public presentation. In the case of a thesis, the faculty panel should receive copies at least two weeks prior to the public presentation to allow them adequate time to read the document.

## Commonwealth Scholar Prospectus Guidelines

- **An introduction** that frames a preliminary thesis (claim to be defended) and contextualizes it in a subject-appropriate interdisciplinary manner (All CS theses are interdisciplinary in the spirit of the liberal arts [link to LA paper]. The prospectus should suggest the ways in which the thesis will address this expectation.)
- **A summary** of the methods to be employed in the scholarship, data collection, and analysis of material constituting the body of reasoning. It is understood that this may look quite different depending on the disciplinary bases of the investigation.
- **An extensive bibliography** representing the breadth of authors and approaches of the investigation.
- **A prospective timeline** for completion of various phases of the project, and a proposed schedule for consultation with the faculty sponsors and honors director.

### CS schedule

Prospectus due April 1 of junior year (should be developed in close collaboration with sponsoring faculty member and in communication with honors directors)

Prospecti approved by HAB by Mid-May (or sent back for revision over summer)

Fall semester: Independent study with faculty sponsor

Spring semester: Honors independent study for thesis preparation with faculty sponsor

Drafts of thesis to be shared with honors director and suitable members of HAB as early as possible in spring semester (specific deadlines arranged among relevant parties)

Late April/Early May public presentation and thesis defense with outside reader (faculty sponsor chairs committee; committee may recommend pass/no pass/pass with revisions).