

Dr Curtis' Philosophy About the Honors Thesis (v.26)

Every faculty member views undergraduate theses differently; that was acknowledged in starting the program! I provide here my 'take' on the thesis, where I am not trying to recruit you ...

I am trying to give you a perspective in case your philosophy aligns with mine.

BE EXCITED: First and foremost, it should be something that you can get excited about. It should be something you update to your friends, and proud to talk to your parents about ... this excitement will show in the effort, and ultimately serve you well in interviews, job/ graduate school applications

BE COMMITTED: There will be other things in your life that will be displaced. Something worth losing some sleep, skipping some social activities, getting to school a few days before classes and leaving a few after- and hopefully it will occasionally 'distract' you from other classes! Look for that chance to stay full time for the summer, since there is nothing better than having all day to dedicate to thinking and working on a thesis project.

TAKE CONTROL: Work from being trained, to being the expert. There is a lot to be learned in my lab that is 'generic'. We have a very systematic means by which to try to take you from 'having your hand held' to being able to execute work independently. Simple tasks of "how to use equipment" we have videos, standard operating procedures (SOP) etc ... but do not mistake "working in the lab" with working on a thesis. I do my best to direct you to your own independent hypothesis, where YOU do some of the background reading, YOU develop an experimental plan ... and ultimately YOU are directly contributing the interpretation of those results, because in biologically related research, the outcomes are often dependent upon immediate observations (how did they look, how did it behave, etc).

TAKE ADVANTAGE. You might be working with a graduate student, or even another talented undergraduate. This is personal instruction you should appreciate. I take an active role in research - and in some cases, I will have you work alongside me as the primary mentor - particularly on my newest lab ideas. I have been around my lab for 80-hrs a week for my entire career. I respond to YOUR effort. The harder you work, the harder I will work for you and with you. Weekly reports are efficient 'virtual meetings' for individual feedback. There are opportunities to go to meetings, compete in 'paper/presentation' competitions ... a large part of this is dependent on you. Academic research is somewhat like a competitive sport: play to win.

HAVE FUN. An honors thesis provides another 'social circle' that may be full of the people that you wish were in your life - not by chance - but by common philosophy.

OTHER Random thoughts - keeping this discourse to less than a page

- Don't worry about academic distractions that preoccupy faculty: research impact, publication, funding, competing labs ... if you are excited about what you are doing and making the effort you are capable of as an honors student, the rest will fall in place.
- It is ok if your thesis fails! The more interesting hypotheses are often those most risky. Since there is very little 'risk' (and no 'thesis defense' as in graduate school), an undergraduate research project is a great place to take chances with ideas that are more risky (and more fun).
- **Learn more:** check out the [last 50 honors thesis from my lab](#) ... including my own !!