

# COLLEGE of CHARLESTON

DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATION

## BACHELOR'S ESSAY GUIDELINES

*Adopted by vote of the department faculty: March 28, 2006*



### *Introduction*

The following guidelines have been adopted by the Department of Communication to provide guidance to students majoring in communication and completing the bachelor's essay requirements to become Honors College graduates. The timely and successful completion of the bachelor's essay requires careful attention to the policies of the Honors College and the department, along with regular consultation with the faculty advisor and the tutor who agrees to work with the student.

### *Honors College Guidelines*

Communication is one of the most common majors for students in the Honors College at the College of Charleston. As part of its commitment to intellectual challenge and stimulation, the Honors College requires the completion of a six-credit bachelor's essay as a condition of graduation from the Honors College. The Honors College provides specific policies governing the completion of the bachelor's essay, and these policies may be altered

over time. Should these departmental guidelines ever conflict with the policies established by the Honors College, the policies of the Honors College shall prevail. Allegations of conflicts between Honors College and departmental policies shall be considered and resolved as appropriate by the department chair, who will consult when necessary with the departmental faculty and the dean of the Honors College.

### *General Departmental Expectations*

In the Department of Communication, the bachelor's essay is typically the lengthy written report of a substantial, carefully designed, and original research project completed under the close supervision of a faculty member who serves as the tutor for this project. The bachelor's essay answers an original research question, rather than merely summarizing the research of others. As such, the research on which the essay is based will take weeks or, more commonly, months to complete. While often less methodologically sophisticated than a master's thesis, the work involved in completing a bachelor's essay is comparable to that completed in writing a master's thesis.

The department expects the student completing the essay to take initiative in seeking out a suitable tutor for the project, in defining the research project, in conducting the original research project, in writing the bachelor's essay, in providing an appropriate oral defense of the research design and findings, in making appropriate revisions to the essay following the oral defense, and in managing time wisely. The tutor will assist the student in completing these tasks, but the student alone is responsible for completing this work.

Should the bachelor's essay involve the completion of a photojournalism or documentary photography project, some of the advice contained in this guidelines document will not be relevant to such a project. Please see the department chair or the appropriate faculty member for more information about expectations for a bachelor's essay centered on creative activities.

### *Timeline*

The timeline for completion of the bachelor's essay is described on the Honors College Web site. The preferred approach to completing the bachelor's essay is to find an agreeable faculty member to serve as the tutor for the essay in the second semester of the junior year. The research project is then selected and the prospectus is completed early in the first semester of the senior year. Following prospectus approval by the tutor, the additional reader(s), and the departmental honors committee, the student completes the research project and writes the bachelor's essay in close consultation with the tutor during the first and second semesters of the senior year. (The second semester of the senior year is assumed to be the final semester prior to graduation.)

The bachelor's essay must be scheduled for an oral defense no later than the last regularly scheduled day of classes in the final semester prior to graduation. The final, revised copies of the bachelor's essay must be completed and submitted to the tutor, the department, and

the Honors College by the last regularly scheduled day of final examinations for that semester on the main campus of the College of Charleston.

### *Tutor Selection*

While not required to do so, communication majors in the Honors College typically plan to enroll in COMM 499 and to earn COMM credit for the completion of the bachelor's essay. To enroll in COMM 499, the student must find a full-time College of Charleston faculty tutor who is qualified to direct the bachelor's essay project and who is willing to serve in this role. The tutor must be a roster faculty member appointed in the Department of Communication.

Service as a tutor is a major commitment, and no faculty member is obligated to take on this role. Faculty members are most willing to serve as tutors for students who clearly are motivated and organized.

Students are strongly encouraged to approach faculty about service as tutors several months prior to the senior year. Waiting until the senior year begins to make these arrangements could lead to problems with COMM 499 registration and increases the likelihood that the faculty member will not perform this service.

Frequently the assigned faculty advisor is a good choice for service as the tutor. Students typically should begin the search for a tutor by discussing the matter with the advisor. If a student does not have a faculty advisor, a staff advisor or the department chair typically will assist the student in seeking out a suitable tutor.

Faculty members are strongly discouraged from service as tutors until they have worked at the College of Charleston for at least two full years. Adjunct faculty members are not paid to complete tutorial work and are strongly discouraged from taking on this significant obligation.

### *Additional Reader or Readers*

The Department of Communication requires that a second reader review the contents of the bachelor's essay and participate actively in the oral defense. The tutor and the student will work together to identify a suitable reader and seek out the faculty member's consent to serve as reader. The second reader ordinarily should be a full-time faculty member in the Department of Communication. Because adjunct faculty members are not paid to complete tutorial work, they are strongly discouraged from taking on this significant obligation.

In consultation with the student, the tutor may conclude that a third reader is necessary for the review and completion of the bachelor's essay. The third reader ordinarily should be a full-time faculty member at the College of Charleston, whether in the Department of Communication or some other academic unit. The third reader's duties are identical to those of the second reader.

A reader may be replaced or removed at any time with the permission of the department chair.

### *Proposal Requirements*

Once a tutor and reader or readers are identified, the student should prepare a short (usually 8-15 double-spaced and typed pages) proposal outlining the research project. The proposal should be written in accordance with the instructions of the tutor. The tutor may require multiple revisions of the proposal and/or set deadlines that must be met by the student, subject to review and determination by the department chair. In a case where Human Subjects institutional review and approval will be required, the proposal should reflect awareness of this review process.

The typical proposal includes the following elements:

- review of the research problem,
- a summary of a few research studies relevant to the problem,
- the statement of the research question(s) to be answered or hypotheses to be tested (if applicable), and
- a description of the research method to be applied in the study.

The proposal must be approved by the tutor, the reader(s), and the departmental honors committee no fewer than eight full weeks prior to the last day of regularly scheduled classes for the graduation semester. Successful bachelor's essay projects typically are approved well before the eight-week deadline. (Deadline accommodations will be made by the department chair on a case-by-case basis for summer enrollments.) Ordinarily, students who fail to meet this deadline will be assigned a course letter grade of F and will not be permitted to complete COMM 499 in any future semester.

Exceptions to the proposal-deadline policy are possible with the permission of the tutor, the reader(s), and the departmental honors committee. Exceptions to this policy are unlikely.

Once the proposal has been approved by the tutor, the reader(s), and the departmental honors committee, the student may proceed with the research study.

### *Departmental Honors Committee*

The departmental honors committee is made up of the Department of Communication Executive Committee, unless the department chair shall appoint an ad hoc committee to serve as the departmental honors committee. A majority vote of the departmental honors committee is required to approve a bachelor's essay proposal. The departmental honors committee may use electronic voting in the approval process.

### *Course Registration*

The student typically should register for three hours of bachelor's essay credit (COMM 499) in each of the last two semesters of undergraduate coursework, for a total of six credit hours of COMM 499 over two semesters. Students ordinarily will not be permitted to register for six credit hours of COMM 499 in a single semester.

### *Bachelor's Essay Expectations*

When complete, the bachelor's essay should meet the highest professional standards for composition and preparation. The essay reports the findings of the student's original research project and typically should include the following elements:

- an introduction orienting the reader to the problem being addressed,
- a substantial and thorough review of the research literature relevant to the topic,
- a statement of the research question(s) that were answered or hypotheses that were tested (if applicable),
- a discussion of the research design and method used in the study,
- a summary of the research results,
- a bibliography of the sources cited in the bachelor's essay, and
- appendices containing any other relevant material.

The typical bachelor's essay, when complete, will be 50 or more double-spaced and typed pages in length. Manuscripts exceeding 100 pages are not unusual for historical, critical, and/or interpretive research projects. Sections or chapters in the essay should be clearly marked, and a table of contents is recommended.

### *Style Sheet and Guidelines*

Students completing the bachelor's essay should adhere to the directions provided in the style sheet specified by the tutor. Ordinarily APA or MLA style is used in completing bachelor's essays in the Department of Communication.

Whenever possible, the guidelines provided by the Graduate School of the College of Charleston for preparing graduate theses should be used in preparing bachelor's essays in the Department of Communication. More information about the Graduate School guidelines is available at the Graduate School Web site.

### *Oral Defense Description and Expectations*

The oral defense allows the student to demonstrate what she or he has learned in completing the bachelor's essay. The oral defense should be scheduled at a time when the student, the tutor, and the reader(s) are available to attend the defense. The department chair may approve the use of teleconferencing or videoconferencing in extraordinary cases to allow for

the timely completion of the oral defense. If the absence of a reader from an oral defense can be anticipated, the reader should be replaced if at all possible.

The oral defense shall be scheduled only after a complete manuscript draft of the bachelor's essay has been delivered to the tutor and reader(s). This draft must be delivered to the tutor and reader(s) at least one full week prior to the scheduled date of the oral defense. If the manuscript draft is not acceptable to the tutor, the oral defense shall be cancelled and rescheduled following consultation between the student and the tutor. Exceptions to the one-week requirement require the approval of the tutor and the reader(s).

The oral defense shall be scheduled and held no later than the last day of classes in the graduation semester. An earlier oral defense date is strongly encouraged.

The oral defense includes a formal, 10-15 minute presentation of the research project, followed by a period of no fewer than 30 minutes during which the student will answer questions about the bachelor's essay. Questions about the literature review, the research design, the research process, and the writing process are expected.

The oral defense ordinarily is scheduled in a College of Charleston classroom or conference room. If not serving as the tutor or a reader, the department chair should be invited to attend the oral defense as a guest. Other guests may be allowed to attend with the consent of the student and the tutor. Guests are not permitted to speak or to ask questions at the oral defense.

#### *Required Revisions after the Oral Defense*

Following the completion of the oral defense, the tutor and reader(s) shall confer about what revisions, if any, shall be required in order to make the final copy of the bachelor's essay acceptable. Approving these changes ultimately is the responsibility of the tutor, who assigns the final course grade for COMM 499. Any required changes shall be spelled out to the student within one day of the completion of the oral defense.

The final copies of the bachelor's essay must be received and approved by the tutor no later than the last scheduled day of final examinations in order to avoid a final course grade of "Incomplete" (I) in COMM 499.

#### *Grade Assignment*

The satisfactory and timely completion of a competent research project reported in a well-written bachelor's essay will allow the student to earn a grade of C- or better. The bachelor's essay should be consistent with the work completed to earn six credit hours of 400-level COMM credit. With the advice of the additional reader(s), the grade for the bachelor's essay is assigned by the tutor in light of the announced institutional grading system. Grades in the superior range (A, A-) require a high level of achievement and reflect the commitment of the Department of Communication, the Honors College, and the College of Charleston to intellectual rigor.

Completion of the required revisions following the oral defense does not guarantee any particular grade outcome. Unsatisfactory completion of those revisions may result in a failing course grade. See the previous section for discussion of the Incomplete (I) grade.

#### *Copies of the Bachelor's Essay*

As a condition of course completion, bound copies of the final version of the approved bachelor's essay shall be delivered to the tutor, the main departmental office, and the Honors College no later than the last scheduled day of final examinations for the graduation semester. Expensive bindings usually are not necessary or expected, though the student should comply with the directions of the tutor in this matter. The tutor may require that bound essay copies be supplied to the reader or readers. Tutors and readers may choose to accept electronic copies of the bachelor's essay but are not required to do so.

Failure to provide all the required final copies of the approved bachelor's essay may result in an Incomplete (I) grade.

The student should confirm with the tutor that the essay is approved before making the final bound copies. All photocopying, printing, and binding expenses are the responsibility of the student. For planning purposes, students should expect to spend \$100 or more in supplying appropriate final copies.

#### *Waiver Requests*

The department guidelines listed here may be waived on an individual basis by the department chair, in consultation as needed with the tutor and other departmental faculty.

#### *Amending the Bachelor's Essay Guidelines*

The Department of Communication may revise or amend the *Bachelor's Essay Guidelines* at any time and without prior notice.

Should these guidelines conflict with the department by-laws of the Department of Communication, the department by-laws shall prevail.