Honors in Art History
Regulations and Procedures

Rationale and purpose: The Honors Program in art history is designed to meet the needs of students who wish to pursue a long-term scholarly research project in an area of particular interest. The research project, a year-long senior thesis, demands a substantial investment of both time and intellectual resources. For those students who are well prepared and self-motivated, the project can be a uniquely rewarding experience. It provides an opportunity to pursue original art historical research, of a scale and at a level of sophistication that is not normally possible even within a semester-long seminar.

Procedures for initiating an honors project: Students wishing to consider an honors project must discuss their research interests with a member of the art history faculty, and secure the professor’s agreement to serve as tutor for the project by the last day of classes of the student’s junior year. After consulting with the tutor, the student is expected to carry out preliminary research during the course of the summer, with the goal of further defining the scope of the project, identifying the problems to be investigated, and developing a strategy and a schedule for research. By the first day of classes in the fall semester of the senior year, the student presents a formal proposal for the project to the faculty tutor, who approves it with his or her signature, and then submits it to the art history program director, who must authorize all honors projects within the program. Students must be registered and on campus at Wesleyan in order to pursue an honors project in art history.

Requirements for the award of honors: The award of honors is meant to provide recognition to those students whose work in the major field of study has been of exceptional quality. Accordingly, honor candidates are required to: Complete their research project successfully. Earn a minimum GPA of B+ for their major coursework. Be compliant with the University’s General Education expectations (through Stage II). High honors are awarded to those students who have achieved the highest level of distinction in their work; therefore, this grade will be awarded sparingly.

Senior Talks in Art History: Each year’s honors candidates will present 20-minute public talks based on their theses or essays. All honors candidates present talks.

Procedures for double majors: Double majors who want to write a single thesis for honors consideration in both their majors register for the tutorial in one department or program, but must obtain approval from both departments/programs. The thesis or project will be evaluated by members of both departments/programs, whose recommendations are independent of one another. Nomination for University Honors must be endorsed by both departments/programs. Double majors may also choose to write a separate thesis for each department/program. Two or three students choose this route each year.

Criteria for a successful honors project: It is difficult to generalize meaningfully about what makes honors projects successful, but most successful projects share the following qualities:
they present an original thesis. The successful honors project should not simply present information, but it should make an argument about a clearly defined topic, and the reader should become persuaded of the truth and reasonableness of that argument by the time s/he reaches the end of the work. As for the criterion of originality, the thesis can be original for many different reasons (often a combination of such reasons): the thesis is based on the discovery of new evidence; the thesis is based on a reassessment of long-familiar evidence; the thesis arises from asking new questions about well-known phenomena; the thesis is suggested by the application to familiar problems of new methods or theoretical frameworks for investigation, and so on.

they present an explicit review of earlier literature on the subject. No matter how original or compelling your thesis is, most readers will not be able to fully appreciate your originality unless you clearly situate your contribution within the existing scholarship on the problem you are addressing. By reviewing and assessing previous work on the subject, you enable the reader to see more clearly what is so original and distinctive about your own contribution.

they are theoretically situated and methodologically sound. The essay or thesis should include an explicit discussion of the theoretical positions upon which the research is founded. The methodological approach should also be discussed explicitly, and this discussion should leave the reader persuaded that the research has been conceived and carried out in a manner that is methodologically appropriate.

they demonstrate a mastery of the relevant material. The written work should leave the reader with the impression that the author has truly mastered the subject matter and materials relevant to the project. This mastery should extend not only to works of art, but to relevant historical documents as well. The work should also demonstrate that the author has a good understanding of the historical context(s) surrounding the works, issues, or processes being investigated.

they are clearly argued and thoroughly documented. The importance of presentation cannot be overstated. A rather pedestrian thesis can still strike the reader as impressive and significant, provided that it is presented clearly and argued persuasively. The opposite is rarely true. The most brilliant thesis will remain the author’s well-guarded secret if it is not presented clearly, accessibly, and persuasively. Thorough bibliographic documentation is also essential. Providing systematic and consistent citations and references not only helps support your argument, but also permits the reader to learn from your work and to investigate further those points or matters s/he finds to be of interest. A consistent format for citations should be employed throughout.

they are effectively illustrated. Illustrations, whether in the form of simple black and white photocopies, color copies, or hand-executed maps and line drawings, are an inevitable necessity in most art history theses or essays. Not only should the illustrations be reproduced clearly enough to be readable, but they should also be consistently numbered and captioned, and referred to explicitly by figure number in the text wherever appropriate.
If you still have doubts as to what makes for a successful honors project, discuss the matter with your faculty tutor. You may also find it helpful to consult some past thesis projects that were awarded honors. Archival copies of all earlier honors projects are kept in Special Collections at Olin Library, and although they do not circulate, they may be consulted there. The following titles may be recommended as particularly good examples:

Benjamin Goldsmith, *The Yamai no soshi: The Scroll of Illness and Deformity in Hetian Japan*, 2004
Celia Lowe, *Art of incorporation: transition in the arts of Africa and Oceania*, 1990
Anna Seastrand, *Fabric of the State: Dress and the Language of Politics at the Imperial Mughal Court*, 2003
Tamara Sears, *The Liturgical Use of Space at the Early Buddhist Chaitya Hall*, 1996.
Tressa Williams, *Quilt as Object/Quilt as Metaphor: The Unique Great American Female Feminine Craft Art*, 2000
Carla Yanni, *The Buffalo State Hospital for the Insane: Credit to the State and Ornament to the City*, 1987
Daniel Zolli, *Re-Reading Poliphilo: The Hypnerotomachia Poliphili (1499) and Aldus Manutius’ Humanist Literary Enterprise*, 2007
Theses can be accessed electronically via: http://wesscholar.wesleyan.edu/

Timetable for Art History honors projects:

before last day of classes of your junior year: secure professor’s agreement to serve as tutor for the project and develop a schedule for researching, writing, and revising the thesis/essay with her/him.

during summer between junior and senior year: carry out preliminary research.

Fall semester:

by first Monday after classes begin: submit proposal and bibliography to faculty tutor. Complete “Application for Admission to Candidacy for Honors” form and secure tutor’s signature; submit to Esther Moran in the Program office. Receipt of returned copy with program director’s signature constitutes formal approval of your project.

by end of Drop/Add Period: register for ARHA 409 (thesis) by submitting a tutorial enrollment request through the Drop/Add system

during third week of classes: check with the Honors Coordinator in the Registrar’s Office to make sure your name is on the list of Honors Candidates

during week after fall break: Honors colloquium. All honors candidates make a preliminary presentation to fellow candidates and faculty, discussing their projects and findings to date approximately 10 minutes long. This is an important occasion on which you can get constructive feedback and suggestions from a friendly audience. You will be expected to distribute a single-page synopsis of your thesis/essay in advance of the colloquium so that participants may come prepared with questions.

Spring semester:

by end of Drop/Add period: register for ARHA 410 and submit a Work in Progress Form by submitting a tutorial enrollment request through the Drop/Add
system. Candidates are asked to submit a brief description of their project; the tutor then writes a brief assessment of whether the work thus far seems likely to result in an Honors thesis/project. The Program Director then approves the student for continued honors candidacy at the same time that the thesis tutorial is approved in the drop/add system.

**throughout the semester:** Stick to your schedule for writing and revising

**Third week in February:** Honors colloquium. All honors candidates present a more detailed interim report on their project, indicating progress, methodological and thematic, since October. This is a final opportunity for direct feedback from other faculty member than your thesis advisor.

**by mid March:** With your tutor, discuss images you will need to use for your senior talk, and determine what we have in the Visual Resources collection. Check with Susan Passman in the Visual Resources Center for assistance.

**beginning of April** [check with Honors Coordinator in Registrar’s office for exact dates]: register your reader copies with Honors Coordinator; distribute copies to readers; begin preparing for your senior honors talk.

**(usually day before actual talks):** dry-run practice session, with images, for talks

[FACULTY NOTE: readers comments due in Department office for copying and distribution for meeting following day]

**Usually around April 20th:** senior honors talks; program faculty meet to award honors and prizes

**Usually by April 30th:** all candidates informed as to status of their project (no honors, honors, or high honors); you will receive copies of the written evaluations of all your readers.

For general information on Honors at Wesleyan, and University-wide regulations, see “The Jelly Bean Papers” online at, [http://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/honors/jelly_bean_papers/index.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/honors/jelly_bean_papers/index.html)