Honors Pre-proposal and Research Methods Course

**Overview and Purpose:** This course is designed to provide you with the opportunity to develop a strong research topic, question, and thesis statement before beginning your Honors Proposal (HO 498). You will be given a checklist that must be completed by the end of the semester. The checklist consists of a number of academic tasks that will provide you with greater organization and focus as you develop your Honors Proposal. The meetings times will be based on availability and will be designed to answer questions that you may have regarding appropriate methods in your field of study. For example, several meeting times will be devoted to the development of an annotated bibliography or a review of relevant literature. Other sessions might delve into particular research methods within a given field. The purpose of this course is to prepare you for HO 498. Think of it as an academic “head start.” Once you complete the checklist and therefore the course requirements, you will be well on your way to the development of a comprehensive Honors Proposal.

**Meeting Times:** Meeting times for this course will be determined on the availability of both the professor and the student. Since this is only a one credit course, there will be a minimum of three meetings. Additional meetings can be scheduled to assist you in the development of your honors thesis topic. If you are unable to meet as part of the group, you can have one-on-one meetings with Dean Dooley.

**Basis for Grade:** This course relies on the development of your research plan. The more that you put into its development, the better your eventual proposal. Remember, this course is intended to help you get a jump start on your proposal. Try to get as much done as possible this semester. This can and will help to alleviate the stress and workload of next semester when you must hand in a rough draft of your honors proposal by the seventh week of the semester.

**Checklist:** The checklist is the most important part of this course. It is a list of tasks that need to be completed by the end of the semester. Try and not think of the checklist as a series of boxes that need to be checked. In other words, aim for the highest and not the lowest common denominator. If there is one thing that is necessary, it is to find an appropriate faculty advisor. If this is accomplished early on, you can both explore potential topics. For advice on the selection of an advisor, please see Dean Dooley.
Checklist:

1. Identify an academic topic.

2. Develop a research question.

3. Develop a clear, well focused thesis statement and supporting paragraph that explains your study.

4. Find an appropriate faculty advisor who can assist you with your thesis. (Remember, this can be accomplished before you begin any other item on the checklist.)

5. Complete an annotated bibliography of 10-15 sources.

6. Create a strong methodology. If you will require IRB approval, complete the survey and send it off for review.

7. Meet with the Dean and a member of the Honors Council to discuss the topic and research question. (This is just another layer of support to ensure that the topic is one that can be endorsed by the Honors School).

Checklist Explained:

1. What is an academic topic? An academic topic is a topic that can be examined in an intellectual/scientific/artistic way. For example, there are numerous ways to examine poverty or crime or unemployment. These are academic topics. You of course have to narrow the topic down to make it operational. To make a topic operational, you will have to be able to clearly express it in such a way that it can be turned into an actual research project. Therefore you will also need a research question.

2. What is a research question? A research question is a focused inquiry into something within your academic topic. For example, one cannot look at poverty; it’s too general. One can however, look at poverty in a given area. One can then ask an appropriate question as to why poverty is occurring in a particular place. Remember, just because you “like” a particular type of literature or sociology or mathematics, you still need to develop a research question that can be answered in a systematic way.

3. What is a thesis statement and supporting paragraph? The thesis statement is the way you describe the purpose of your project.

For example:

The purpose of the following study is to determine the correlation between unemployment and high crime in a given area. For many years, it has been argued that high unemployment creates a climate that is more conducive to criminal activity. What has rarely been examined however are
the types of crime and the demographics of those within the community. I will be employing a methodology that examines pre-existing data…

4. Who is an appropriate faculty supervisor? The best faculty supervisor is someone who is relatively well-versed in the area in which you hope to explore. He/she should be someone who is somewhat knowledgeable in the literature within the area as.

5. What is an annotated bibliography? The annotated bibliography is a list of all the relevant sources you have used to develop your Honors Proposal. You will need to be able to write several paragraphs about each entry. Each entry should include the source information as well as 1.) Why is this (article, book, book chapter, etc.) important to your study, 2.) Why it is important to the field of study at large. Remember that bibliographic entries should be of an academic nature.

6. What is a methodology? If you refer to number three above you will note that you will need to develop a way of answering the question you pose. This is what the methodology is. Some of you may need to develop a survey, some of you may use existing data, some of you may be conducting your own experimentation in a lab, while others may rely on qualitative measures. Methodologies are designed to allow you to conduct high level research. Since methodologies vary from discipline to discipline it is important to work with a faculty member who is best suited to help carry out your research.

   a. What is the IRB? The IRB is an acronym for the Institutional Review Board. The IRB needs to approve surveys before they are given to human subjects. If you are developing a survey, you need to gain IRB certification.

7. Why meet with the Dean and another member of the Honors Council? Because the Dean and the Honors Council needs to be convinced throughout the entire process that what you are working on is worthy of Honors designation. It is just another set of eyes in the process that can possibly add some other level of objectivity to the study.