

Comparative American Studies

Honors Program Handbook

Updated Spring 2025

~CAST HONORS GUIDELINES~

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Senior Comparative American Studies majors may conduct independent, original research or a creative project through the Honors Program. By invitation of a Comparative American Studies faculty or by self-nomination, you will be considered for admission during the second semester of your junior year. Faculty are encouraged to urge qualified students to consider applying for the Honors Program. Honors students must enroll *in* CAST 501/502: Honors Seminar (both semesters) and are exempt from the CAST 500: Capstone Research Seminar

ELIGIBILITY, PREPARATION, AND APPLYING FOR HONORS

~Second Semester, Junior Year~

Eligibility:

To be considered, students must have a 3.00 GPA in the college, and a 3.25 average in the CAST major.

By the start of their senior year, they must have completed the following major requirements:

1. One 100 or 200 level CAST introductory course.
2. CAST 200: Theories and Methods in American Studies

First Steps and Application:

Interested and qualified students should begin to find a CAST faculty member willing to be their prospective honors advisor. Early in the semester, students discuss and work on their 8-10 pg. Honors prospectus with their prospective advisor (see Honors Prospectus Guidelines). Students must submit their prospectus to the CAS department chair by **April 15th of their junior year**.

Students on leave during the spring semester of their junior year are also expected to meet the April 15th deadline, and should make plans to discuss their proposals with a prospective advisor well before they leave campus.

Application Results:

The CAS faculty will review applications for Honors. Students will be notified of the outcome by the end of their junior year, spring semester. Be advised that while students may identify a potential advisor, the CAS faculty will assign advisors based on faculty availability and expertise.

Applicants will either be accepted into honors, declined, or asked to revise and resubmit their proposal. The deadline for a resubmission will be in August, usually a week before Fall classes begin.

FIRST SEMESTER of HONORS

~CAST 501: Honors Seminar~

All honors students will be registered in CAST 501: Honors Seminar, which is led by a faculty member serving as the honors coordinator. In conjunction with the seminar, students will be regularly meeting with their thesis advisor.

Students in their first semester will conduct research that prepares them to write their project. Or, begin the preliminary stages of their creative project. By the end of the semester, the student will have submitted a well-developed writing sample drawn from their research. Typically, students will have completed at least their first chapter. The advisor– in consultation with the department head and core faculty– will determine if the student should continue in the Honors Program based on the quality of their work and progress.

If the student is unable to continue in the Honors Program, their advisor will submit a grade for a first-semester private reading for the student.

Near the end of the semester, the student will form a review committee consisting of their advisor and two faculty readers. Committees consist of faculty with expertise in the student's area who will provide the student feedback throughout the year. The student will consult their advisor and honors coordinator to form the committee. The students will issue invitations to the faculty members they are hoping to have join their committee. The student will share their final writing sample from CAST 501 to their committee.

WINTER TERM

Since final drafts of their project are due before Spring break, students are expected to continue working on their honors project throughout winter term.

SECOND SEMESTER of HONORS

~CAST 502: Honors Seminar~

All students will be registered in CAST 502: Honors Seminar. Students will continue to meet with their peers, advisor, and the honors coordinator regularly. They will additionally, concentrate on writing their thesis or completing their creative project.

First Draft of Honors Project:

By the beginning of spring break, students will submit a complete first draft to the three members of their committee. The committee will provide feedback within a week. The student should consult with their committee about incorporating this feedback into their final revisions.

Final Honors Project:

The final written thesis should be approximately 30-50 pages double-spaced. For creative projects, the student and their project supervisor will determine the final form of their project.

Typically, the final deadline is 3 full weeks before the last day of classes. The student must submit their final project to each member of their committee. The project will be evaluated on the following criteria:

1. How effectively does the student locate this research or creative project in relationship to relevant bodies of scholarship.
2. How original was the research question and analysis. Or, how innovative was the creative project.
3. The quality of the writing or creative work.
4. The persuasiveness of the argument or insights produced in the project.

Honors Defense, Public Presentations, and Recommendation:

By the time the final project is submitted, the project supervisor– in consultation with the student and honors coordinator– should have set up a time and place for the honors defense and public presentation.

In the last two weeks of classes, all honor students will publicly present their projects. Each presentation should be 20-30 minutes in length, and will be followed by a Q&A. Students should consult with their advisor on how to effectively communicate their projects.

Honor defenses are held within 5 to 10 days after a student has submitted their project. Honor defenses are made up of the student's project committee, and last about an hour. The students will present for 5-10 minutes, as well as answer a series of questions in defense of their project.

After their presentation and defense, the student will be evaluated on the following criteria:

1. How well does the student locate their project within current scholarship; lay out the problem; and present data, observations, and analysis.
2. How do they handle questions from the committee, including drawing on secondary and primary sources in their answers.
3. The quality of their project, including the level of professionalism in their presentation (style, the use of illustrations or other media, ect.).

After the student's presentation and defense, the project committee will decide whether honors should be recommended and at what level (Honors, High Honors or Highest Honors). The project committee will then forward a recommendation about both the final project and the honors discussion to the CAS honors coordinator.

The project committee and honors coordinator will determine the student's level of honors on the following weight:

- Thesis/Project: 2/3
- Honors Defense: 1/3

Note that the student's overall GPA at the end of their 7th semester will also factor into determining the recommendation.

Honors students are not exempt from final exams or papers in any of their classes in their major.

Any questions concerning honors in Comparative American Studies should be addressed to the
Chair of Comparative American Studies.

Guidelines for Writing the Honors Prospectus Comparative American Studies

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An honors prospectus in CAS should provide faculty a clear understanding of your topic for investigation, approach for conducting this research, and how you situate your scholarly and creative work within the interdisciplinary field of American studies. The prospectus should be no longer than 10 pages (including bibliography).

As you prepare the prospectus, please consult with the chair of the department or a potential honors advisor. Be advised that while you may identify a faculty member you would like to work with, CAS faculty will make final determinations about advisors based on faculty availability and expertise.

Please address the following areas in your prospectus:

- I. **Topic for investigation:** Explain your topic, the project's scope, and issues to be addressed. You should state a clear research question that you wish to pursue and explain its significance. The prospectus should demonstrate that the scope of inquiry or design of the project is feasible.
- II. **Literature Review:** The prospectus should address the relevant scholarly literature on the topic and how you locate your research within American studies. You should also indicate how you position this research or creative project in relation to specific theories and/or debates and indicate the originality or innovative aspects of your project.
- III. **Methods and Methodology:** The prospectus should discuss your research methods and methodological approach for the project. How will you gather data primary source material you will analyze? Why are the methods and approach(es) you propose appropriate for your research?
- IV. **Sources:** The prospectus should identify the primary sources you will collect and analyze and explain how you will access materials (specific archives at Oberlin or elsewhere; collecting interview data, for example). If it is a creative project, you should provide details about what your creative work would entail. For example if your project requires media technologies or materials not available at Oberlin, explain how you plan to obtain the materials and/or technology you need and how you plan to fund the project.
- V. **Individual preparation:** The prospectus should indicate your previous course work and other relevant information that prepares you for this year-long project. It should also address your facility in foreign languages, methods, media technologies, or other technical skills relevant for the project to be undertaken. If you plan to conduct interviews or use ethnographic methods, you should also note if you have completed CITI training required by Oberlin's Institutional Review Board.
- VI. **Bibliography:** The prospectus should include a bibliography that lists the most relevant materials. If appropriate, differentiate between primary and secondary sources in your bibliography. You do not need to annotate your secondary sources.