Senior Comparative American Studies majors may conduct independent, original research or a creative project through the Honors Program. Consideration for admission to the Honors Program takes place during the second semester of the junior year, by invitation of the Comparative American Studies faculty or by self-nomination. 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 Research Seminar (CAST 500) requirement.

PREPARATION AND APPLYING FOR HONORS

Students accepted for honors must normally have a 3.00 GPA in the college, and a 3.25 average in the major at the beginning of the second semester of the junior year. By the start of their senior year, they must have completed the following: Introductory course requirement (100 or a 200-level CAST course) and CAST 200: Theories and Methods in American Studies.

Interested and qualified students should speak to prospective supervisors from the Comparative American Studies faculty as soon as possible. Early in the second semester of their junior year, students should work with the chair or a faculty member to prepare an approximately 10-page honors prospectus (see Honors Prospectus Guidelines). This prospectus must be submitted to the CAS department chair by April 15 of their junior year.

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

The CAS faculty will review applications for Honors. Students will be informed of the outcome by the end of the spring semester of the junior year. 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 HONORS WORK

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

First semester work focuses on preparatory research for the writing of the honors project, or preliminary development of the creative project. By the end of the semester, the student will...
have submitted a well-developed writing sample drawn from their research. Based on the quality of the work and progress the student has made, the supervisor, in consultation with the CAS core faculty and director, will determine whether or not they should continue in the Honors Program. If the student is unable to continue, the supervisor will submit a grade for a first-semester private reading for the student to the director of the program.

Also by the end of Fall semester, the student, working in consultation with the project supervisor and the honors coordinator, will form a committee consisting of the supervisor and two faculty readers. The honors coordinator will issue invitations to these faculty to join the student’s project committee. The student will share their final writing sample from the previous semester with the two other members of the project committee.

SECOND SEMESTER HONORS WORK
Students will register for CAST 502: Honors Seminar and continue meeting regularly with other honors students and the honors coordinator, and work in the second semester will concentrate on writing the thesis or completing the creative project.

The student will submit a complete first version of the project to the three members of the project committee by the beginning of spring break. The project committee will provide feedback within a week. The student should consult with all three faculty members about incorporating this feedback into the final revisions.

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

Typically, the deadline for submission of the project in its final form is 3 full weeks before the last day of classes. The student must submit the final project to each of their three examiners. The project will be evaluated on the basis of 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; and 4) the persuasiveness of the argument or insights produced in the project.

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

All honors students will participate in a public presentation of their projects to be held sometime in the last two weeks of classes. Each talk should last 20 - 30 minutes and include a period of discussion. Students should consult with their project supervisors about strategies for effective communication of their work.

The honors discussion consists of the student’s project committee and should be held within 5 to 10 days after the submission of the project. The discussion will last about one hour; after the discussion the committee will evaluate the discussion based on the following criteria: 1) how well does the student locate the project within current scholarship, lay out the problem, present
data, observations, and analysis; 2) how do they handle questions from the committee, including drawing on secondary and primary sources in the answers; and 3) the quality of project including the level of professionalism in the style of presentation, the use of illustrations or other media, etc.

At the conclusion of the honors discussion, the project committee will decide whether honors should be recommended and at what level. They will then forward a recommendation about both the final project and the honors discussion to the Comparative American Studies program committee. Normally, the relative weight given to the project and the honors discussion in determining the level of honors recommended will be:

- Project: 2/3
- Honors discussion: 1/3

Overall GPA at the end of the 7th semester will also be a factor in 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.
CAS Guidelines for Writing the Honors Prospectus  
(Updated May 2019)

An honors prospectus in CAS should define a topic for investigation, discuss the significance and viability of conducting this research or completing the creative project, situate the topic within appropriate fields of study, demonstrate the availability of primary source material or materials and technologies to be used, and discuss your relevant intellectual preparation for the work to be done. The prospectus will run about 10 pages long (including bibliography). You should prepare the prospectus in consultation with the chair of the department or a potential project supervisor. Be advised that while you may identify a potential advisor, the CAS faculty will make final determinations about advisors based on faculty availability and expertise.

Normally, an honors prospectus should follow the format below:

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. Identify the broad issues you will engage, but also be sure to explain as precisely and concretely as possible what you propose to research. 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 in order to clarify the significance of this project for the field or fields of study. The prospectus should indicate how you position this research or creative project in relation to that of previous scholarly or creative work, and indicate the originality of the research or innovative aspects of your project.

III. Individual preparation. The prospectus should indicate your previous course work, private readings and other relevant information that prepares you for this year-long project. It should also address your facility in foreign languages, quantitative methodology, ethnography and/or other methodologies, media technologies, or other technical skills relevant for the project to be undertaken.

IV. Sources. The prospectus should identify the primary sources to be collected and analyzed or the main aspects of the creative project. For primary sources, you should also address their availability and how you will gain access to them if they are not available at Oberlin. If your project requires media technologies or materials not available or costly, explain how you plan to obtain the technology or materials or fund the project.

V. Bibliography. The prospectus should include a bibliography that differentiates between primary and secondary sources. Secondary source listings should be limited to the most relevant materials and need not be annotated.