

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND GEOGRAPHY

Departmental Honors

The Department of Political Science and Geography recognizes and rewards outstanding student performance by awarding departmental honors. This allows you to explore your major(s) in greater depth by completing either an honors thesis or an honors portfolio. Departmental honors not only exposes you to a close working relationship with faculty mentors and receive recognition for your work. It also allows you to engage in research and develop expertise in a particular area to be featured in your transcripts and diplomas.

What are Departmental Honors & How do I qualify?

The Honors Program of the Department of Political Science and Geography is an opportunity for students who have demonstrated commendable academic performance. The Departmental Honors program is independent from the Honors College and other organizations and is solely administered and granted by the department. In addition to majoring in one of the degrees offered at the Department, you have to meet the following prerequisites in order to qualify for departmental honors:

- overall UTSA grade point average of 3.0
- major-specific grade point average of 3.25
- senior status (minimum of 90 credit hours), and
- recommendation by a faculty member.

How can I receive Departmental Honors?

There is a thesis and a portfolio track available for students pursuing departmental honors. While they differ in their workflow and assignments, both tracks require full and dedicated commitment and have to feature rigorous and high-quality research efforts.

Honors Thesis:

The Honors Thesis is an original research project that will contribute to existing research in the field of inquiry it addresses. The thesis represents a clearly and coherently organized inquiry that frames a question and advances both existing research as well as new insights on the problem or issue it sets out to address as you present credible arguments and evidence to bolster your reasoning and conclusion. Most theses will combine an analysis of theoretical literature with empirical research, although some thesis may focus exclusively on theoretical issues. In formal terms, the thesis is expected to be approximately 30-40 pages in length and of format and quality typical for publishable research. Students applying for Departmental Honors through the thesis

track have to enroll in the appropriate honors thesis course (POL/GLA/GRG 4993) during one of their final two semesters of study. A three-member Honors Committee chaired by the supervising faculty adviser will administer your project. The faculty adviser will work with you to develop the thesis and prepare it for its defense. To earn honors, the thesis must be approved by the committee and receive a grade of B or higher.

Honors Portfolio:

The portfolio track provides an opportunity to obtain departmental honors by combining research assignments completed in different classes finished with a grade of A- or better. Assignments from any upper-division class may be designated and included in the portfolio as long as they represent a significant research effort involving independent work and have been revised significantly after class completion. In addition to three compiled research assignments (totaling a minimum of 30 pages), you have to submit an additional summary and reflection statement (8 to 10 pages) which assess the individual contributions in light of your goals and experiences as a major seeking Departmental Honors as well as summarizes how they connect to current discussions in the respective field(s). The committee supervising the process is constituted by the faculty involved in the individual assignments and has to consist of at least two different faculty members. One committee member will serve as chair to supervise and administer the project. The faculty adviser will work with you to develop the portfolio and prepare it for its defense. The portfolio is submitted as a PDF document with the critical statement appearing first, followed by the three papers in the order of the student's choice. To earn honors, the portfolio must be approved by the committee and receive a grade of B or higher.

Timeline, Scheduling & Administration

The overall process of receiving departmental honors is administered by Andrea Aleman (andrea.aleman@utsa.edu), the department's Undergraduate Advisor of Record (UGAR). She will be your first point of contact. As to your scheduling, you should consider departmental honors by the time you complete your junior year. In order to get the process started, please complete an Honors Petition Form by the end of the semester preceding the intended enrollment in a thesis writing course or submitting your portfolio. This form should include a proposal of a minimum length of 7 pages for the thesis track or a statement of intent outlining the different assignments included in the portfolio. At the same time, you need to identify a faculty adviser as well as other members of the committee. Once completed, you submit your thesis or portfolio before the first Friday in April (Spring graduation) or November (Fall graduation). The committee chair will then schedule a defense prior to the last regular week of class before the end of the month. Based on the submitted work and the defense, the committee chair prepares a report and the committee collectively decides whether departmental honors shall be granted or not.