

Honors Thesis in Law

University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law

An Honors College student may complete an Honors Thesis in Law with a College of Law faculty advisor, provided that the student plans early and obtains law faculty approval. The project is normally six units over two semesters and culminates in a substantial, polished piece of legal scholarship (most often a law review style Note or Comment).

Students who would prefer to complete their thesis in another SGPP major, such as Political Science, Criminal Justice, or Public Affairs should visit [this page](#) instead.

AT A GLANCE

WHEN	CREDITS	FACULTY	FINAL PRODUCT
Usually the final two semesters	6 total 3 units of LAW 498H each semester	College of Law professor serves as thesis advisor	Polished legal scholarship + letter grade

How the Process Works

Start before your senior year if possible.

1	BUILD A FOUNDATION Take Law courses and note the subjects, cases, policies, or legal questions that most interest you. Create a short list of potential topics.
2	DISCUSS THE TOPIC WITH PROFESSOR SWISHER Meet with Professor Keith Swisher to discuss the topic, likely scope, timing, and preparation, and to identify potential faculty advisors.
3	SECURE A FACULTY ADVISOR Review the College of Law Faculty Directory and then discuss possible matches with Professor Swisher in advance. After you have honed the topic or topics of interest, contact the professor whose expertise best fits the project. The professor must agree to supervise the thesis.
4	COMPLETE THE FRANKE HONORS STEPS Complete the required Honors Thesis Prospectus and other applicable Franke Honors requirements. The prospectus is due by the last day of class in the semester before the thesis begins (typically the start of the fall semester).
5	CREATE THE LAW 498H SECTION After faculty-advisor consent and completion of the applicable Honors steps, the student or academic advisor should contact Associate Director Mark Blair at mlmb@arizona.edu so the College of Law can create the appropriate LAW 498H Honors section.

What Can an Honors Thesis in Law Look Like?

The final project typically resembles a law review Note or Comment: a focused legal problem, enough background for a non-specialist reader, and a clear analytical solution or other contribution. The form can vary with the topic and faculty advisor.

ILLUSTRATIVE APPROACHES

Jurisdictional conflict Analyze a split or disagreement among courts or jurisdictions and argue how it should be resolved.	Policy or law reform Identify a legal problem and develop a judicial, legislative, regulatory, or institutional solution.	Impact / application Apply existing law to new facts or technology—or examine how new law affects an existing setting.
Case comment Closely analyze one significant case, its reasoning and implications, and possible alternative approaches.	Interdisciplinary or empirical Use methods or insights from another field, or data where appropriate, to illuminate a legal issue.	Historical or theoretical Use legal history or jurisprudential analysis to shed light on an unresolved or current legal question.

These examples are not exhaustive.

A Typical Two-Semester Work Plan

FIRST SEMESTER

Research → Refine → Outline

- Set a meeting schedule and project milestones with the faculty advisor.
- Narrow the research question and develop a tentative thesis or central claim.
- Research relevant primary law and appropriate secondary or interdisciplinary sources.
- Identify key arguments, counterarguments, policy considerations, and practical implications.
- Produce a detailed outline showing the structure, principal authorities, open questions, and planned analysis.

SECOND SEMESTER

Draft → Feedback → Revise → Final Draft

- Write and submit a complete first draft for substantive faculty feedback, making sure to finish the draft with enough time in advance for your faculty advisor to review and provide detailed feedback
- Revise in response to feedback and submit at least one additional full draft.
- Meet with the faculty advisor as needed on research, organization, analysis, and writing.
- Polish citations, text, and structure and submit the final thesis for a letter grade.

What Strong Thesis Work Usually Demonstrates

Specific expectations are set by the faculty advisor, but strong legal scholarship generally includes:

- **Focused thesis**

A clear, manageable claim and an explanation of why the question matters.

- **Analysis**

Synthesis of authorities and reasoning that advances the thesis rather than merely summarizing the law.

- **Clear organization, writing, and citation**

A logical structure, useful headings and transitions, concise professional text, and complete, accurate citations.

- **Strong legal research**

Appropriate use of primary authority, relevant secondary sources, and the hierarchy of legal authority.

- **Counterarguments and implications**

Serious engagement with competing views, tradeoffs, policy concerns, and practical consequences.

- **Meaningful revision**

Thoughtful incorporation of faculty feedback across successive drafts, not simply isolated edits.

Project-specific flexibility. The faculty advisor determines the appropriate scope, length, methodology, citation format, meeting schedule, intermediate deadlines, and additional requirements for the particular thesis.

Contacts

TOPIC + FACULTY-ADVISOR PLANNING

Professor Keith Swisher

Director, BA in Law and Master of Legal Studies Programs

keithswisher@arizona.edu

520-626-8373

[Profile](#)

LAW 498H SECTION CREATION

Mark L.M. Blair

Associate Director, Master of Legal Studies Program;

Undergraduate Law Program

mlmb@arizona.edu

520-626-8575

[Profile](#)

Franke Honors requirements still apply. The College of Law process supplements, rather than replaces, Franke Honors College policies, deadlines, prospectus requirements, enrollment rules, and final thesis-submission requirements. Students should review current Honors materials before beginning the thesis and during the thesis year.

USEFUL LINKS

[College of Law Faculty Directory](#)

[Honors Thesis Prospectus](#)

[BA in Law Curriculum and Advising](#)

[Franke Honors College: Honors Thesis](#)

[Franke Honors Thesis Policies](#)