

How Does it Work & What Should I Do?



**JUDY GENSHAFT
HONORS COLLEGE**
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

What is a Thesis Committee and why do I need one?

Since the thesis process is meant to mirror the kind of mentoring you would get in graduate school, the Honors College requires that you work with a committee of readers. This includes a) your thesis chair and b) at least one other person with expertise in your research area.

Thesis Chair

Your thesis chair is the faculty member who will mentor you through the thesis process. This person will be with you from beginning to end. You will meet with your thesis chair on a regular basis to determine such things like the purpose of your research, methods of inquiry, developing a prospectus, developing a reading list, conducting your research/creating art, etc., writing your thesis paper, obstacles, questions, changes in direction, and more.

The thesis chair has the final approval of your thesis prospectus and the final paper, as well as your grades for both semesters of thesis at the end of each thesis semester.

***Keep in mind that Thesis Chairs are often key people for writing recommendations on your behalf for graduate school, prestigious scholarships and jobs—be sure to maintain a good working relationship by demonstrating strong work ethic and interest in their mentorship.*

Your thesis chair must have significant experience in the area of your thesis research/inquiry, including a terminal degree; PhD, M.D., J.D., MFA, M.Arch., etc.

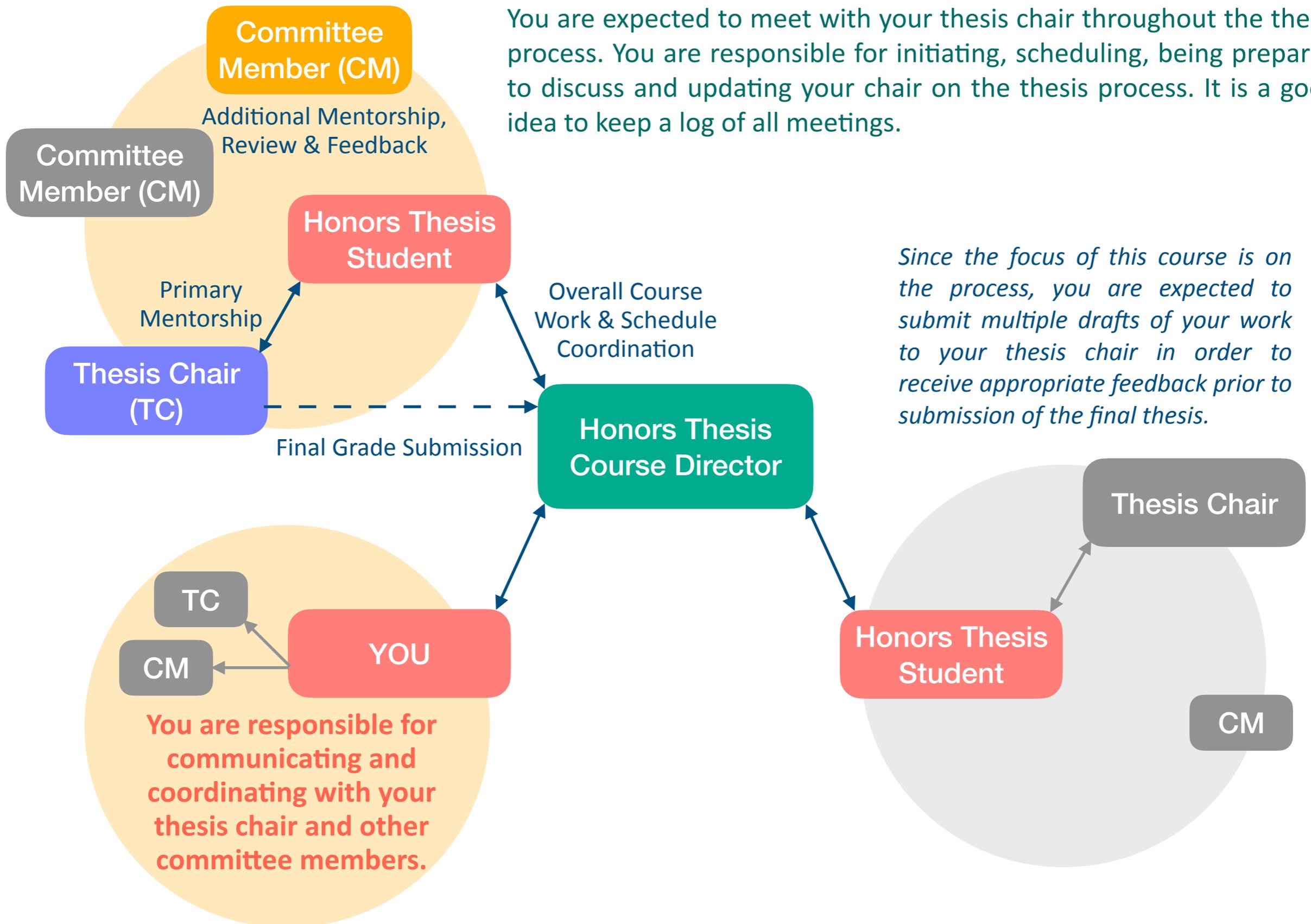
The Chair also needs to be a USF full-time faculty member. Part-time faculty and graduate students are not eligible to serve in the role of thesis chair in general. *(There are some exceptions depending on the situation—please contact the Honors Course Director.)*

You should confirm that your chair will be available to work with you during the terms when you will be taking IDH 4970-001 Thesis II & 002 Thesis II *(Note: 9-month faculty may not be available during the summer).*

Other Members of the Committee

The College prefers that the second person is a faculty member, but we have allowed advanced doctoral candidates to serve on thesis committees. *You do not need to have one right away—talk with your chair, and no need to submit an agreement form for these members (the form is for thesis chair only).*

How Honors Thesis Works - Communication System



Working with your Thesis Chair - Maintaining a “Good” Relationship

Your most important course work will be the development and maintenance of a meaningful working relationship with your thesis chair.

Student’s Responsibilities

Communication:

- Informing & updating the course activities and due dates
- Discussing & understanding what your chair expects

Coordination:

- Creating the overall project schedule and organizing meetings—meet regularly!
- Requesting feedback in a timely manner to meet the deadlines

Submission:

- Submitting assignments on time—*please make sure that your chair receives each submission via a delivery method your chair prefers!*

When confirming your thesis chair (during Thesis I), you will need to submit an agreement form signed by you and the chair.

Thesis Chair’s Responsibilities

Mentoring:

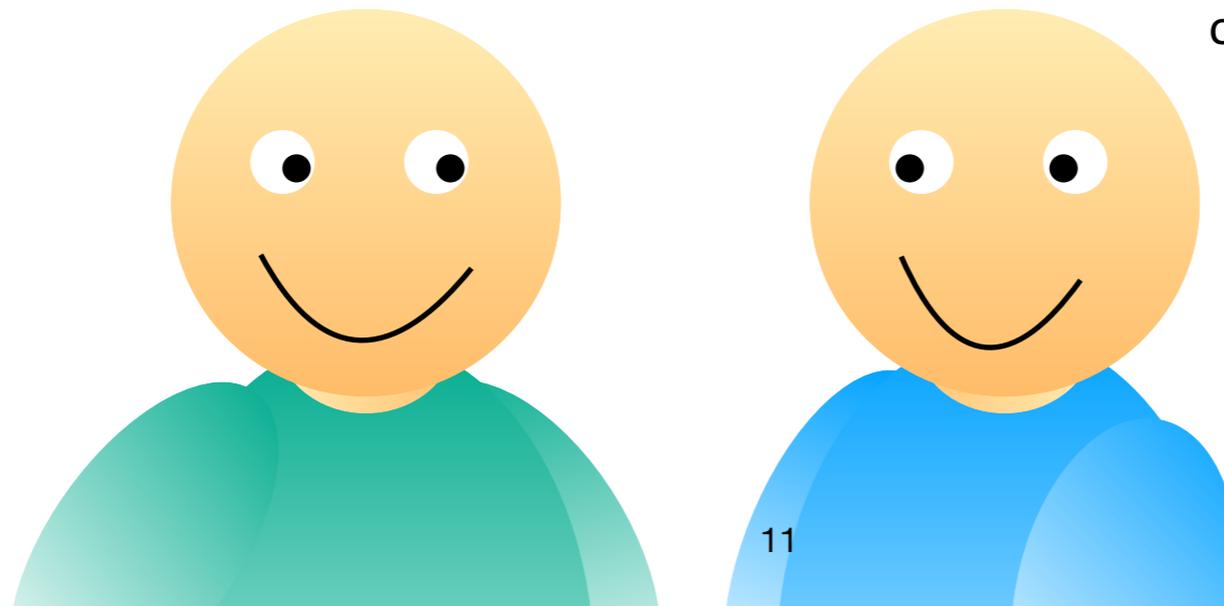
- Guiding the overall thesis process
- Sharing knowledge and resources
- Supporting challenging tasks and encouraging taking creative risks
- Reviewing student’s work
- Providing clear expectations and feedback on each submission

Submit Grades: (to the course director)

- Submitting grades for the draft thesis/prospect
- Submitting final grades (Thesis I & II)

Communication:

- Notifying the Honors course director of any issues or concerns



How Can I Find my Thesis Chair? - Strategies & Steps 1-6

Sometimes, it takes time to find a thesis chair depending on your topic selected, previous experiences, and research skills. Therefore, it is good to start searching for your prospective thesis committee members and contacting them—**BEFORE** registering for the course! Leg-work is critical at this stage and in-person/online meetings are more effective as they allow more interactions!

1. Determine your Interest

Consider what you want to investigate and what you want to produce in the end.

Remember,

TYPE		FOCUS		OUTCOME	
T	I	D	D	T	M
E	E	A	P	R	C

4. Prepare for Interviews

Organize your ideas and questions BEFORE meeting with your prospective thesis chairs. However, you do NOT need to have all of the answers in terms of what you want to do for your thesis. The main goal is to get to know them (e.g., are you comfortable talking with them?) and “how” they actually work because essentially, you will be learning their “research methods” from them.

2. Explore Faculty Research

Check out USF faculty members and their research/course information & academic/professional background. Don't be limited to faculty in your major, but do include some members, esp. ones you know. You may also include Honors faculty if you are interested in creative, interdisciplinary studies or if you have no idea where to start.

5. Interview 3-5 Faculty

Use your meeting opportunities to brainstorm your ideas but be open-minded for new ideas! You can also ask about types of projects they would be interested in assisting. If they cannot assist your thesis, don't despair—ask if they can recommend someone (e.g., their colleagues) and also ask for suggestions for improvements and different approaches to your project.

3. Identify Faculty Members

Select faculty members for you to interview. It is a good idea to include someone you are comfortable talking with—sometimes, a new idea emerges simply by just talking. Keep in mind that some may become a committee member rather than a thesis chair depending on their research interests, background, experiences, tools, or skills.

6. Follow up & Finalize

Reflect on your interviews and determine what works for you. Sometimes, you choose a chair because their research matches with your research interest. On the other hand, you may choose a faculty member because you like working with them and you will explore how to integrate varying interests/ideas, and then come up with a unique interdisciplinary work.

Interview Prep: Example

Your Thesis Project Ideas

My Project Ideas:

My Project Resources:

- Main Concept:
- Historical/Contextual Info:
- Article List/Annotated Bibliography:
- Case Studies/Project Examples:
- Useful Websites:

Do a quick investigation to collect some resources and information—do what you can and use the findings as a tool to brainstorm some of your ideas.



BEFORE contacting: Conduct background research on your prospective chairs by reviewing their C.V. and some of their recent publications and projects.

Faculty Info:

- Professional Experience: Field, Organization, & Role within it
- Academic Background & Research Types/Areas
- Project Examples, Publications, Presentations, etc.

TYPE

Theoretical

Interpretive

Empirical

Experiential

FOCUS

Data Collection

Development

Analysis

Production

OUTCOME

Traditional Paper

Math/Statistics

Report/Proposal

Creative Project

*What kind of **research projects** does my prospective chair typically do?*

*Which **area** does my prospective chair typically **focus** on?*

*What does my prospective chair tend to **produce**?*

Interview Process

The main goal of the interview is to initiate a conversation with your prospective thesis chairs—this is just the beginning. If you missed something, follow up with an e-mail.

Steps for Informational Interviewing

1. Reach out via e-mail or in-person to request a meeting with the following content
 - A request for 5 to 15 minutes of their time to discuss their research and background
 - A specific aspect of their research that genuinely interests you
 - A brief statement about your current area of study and interest
2. In the interview, use active listening techniques (<https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>) to meaningfully connect with the individual
3. Following the interview, send a thank-you note for their time