



## **School of Health Sciences Honours Guidelines 2023**



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## **Objectives of the Embedded Honours Programs**

The School of Health Sciences offers four embedded honours programs in the clinical health science disciplines of occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech pathology and podiatric medicine. The embedded programs occur across the final three semesters of these four-year programs. Specific honours subjects are embedded across the last three semesters of these degrees.

Completing Honours provides the student with research training and development of skills and knowledge in a specific area of the clinical health sciences. The honours subjects build on the research knowledge and skills established in the first two and a half years of each undergraduate program, which are further developed as honours students are introduced to a wider field of research knowledge, skills and techniques. The major component of each honours degree is a supervised program of research that results in the completion of an honours thesis.

Upon completion of the embedded honours program, the graduate will have achieved the requirements of Level 8 of the [Australian Qualifications Framework](#) and will have “advanced knowledge and skills for professional or highly skilled work and/or further learning”, being able to “apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, well-developed judgement, adaptability and responsibility as a practitioner or learner”. Honours in the School of Health Sciences is a pathway for the commencement of research training, providing a strong foundation for future research endeavours and higher degree study.

Students enrolled in the embedded honours programs will have attained a high standard of undergraduate achievement and will develop a great depth of understanding of the field in which the research topic is based.

## **Honours Guidelines and Procedures**

These Honours Guidelines contain procedural information specific to the available honours degrees in the School of Health Sciences. These Honours Guidelines should be read in conjunction with the University's [Honours Procedures](#) which apply to all honours programs at Western Sydney University.

### **Honours projects**

The School Associate Dean (Research), working with the representatives from each clinical health science program, and the School HDR Team, will invite all School academic staff members to propose honours projects of relevance to the clinical health science students in early Autumn semester each year. The primary supervisor of each honours project must be an internal staff member of the School of Health Sciences who meets supervisor requirements outlined below, and co-supervisors may include industry partners and other academic staff members. Projects may be suitable to one or more disciplines and will be compiled into an honours project document that will be distributed to prospective honours students at the end of Autumn semester each year in preparation for the Spring intake of the new honours cohort.

### **Admission Process**

Honours places in the clinical health science programs are by invitation only and students do not need to apply. Invitations will occur soon after the results for Autumn Year 3 are released. Enrolment into the clinical health science honours programs occurs in Spring of year 3 for all programs.

Students meeting the criteria for admission as outlined below will be invited by the Director of Academic Program of their respective clinical health science program. Invited students are sent the honours project document and are required to submit preferences pertaining to the projects available. The Associate Dean (Research) will allocate projects following consultation with the Directors of Academic Programs or the honours subject coordinators, and honours supervisors, taking into consideration students' preferences. Students accepting an honours position will be notified of their allocated project, and then be required to lodge an online program variation form to change their program enrolment to the honours program of their respective degree, which will be sent to the relevant Director of Academic Program or nominee for approval.

## Criteria for Admission

In line with *Section 3 - Admission (clause 12)* of the [Honours Procedures](#), admission to the embedded honours programs is based on the following criteria being met as appropriate to each program:

- a. *Achievement of a threshold admission average mark (AAM) equal to or above the required minimum.* The required minimum will be no less than 65. In the School of Health Sciences, the minimum AAM may be higher than this due to the number of projects on offer compared to the number of eligible students..
- b. *Statement of intent or School equivalent.* In the School of Health Sciences this pertains to the invitation and acceptance of a place in the honours program of their degree.
- c. *Appointment of a suitable Principal Supervisor by the Dean of the School or nominee.* In the School of Health Sciences this is overseen by the Associate Dean (Research) and the relevant Director of Academic Program.
- d. *Demonstrated satisfactory academic writing skills appropriate to the discipline.* In the School of Health Sciences this is accounted for by having demonstrated a high level of academic achievement in the initial 2.5 years of their study to date, and an AAM that places them in the top-ranking students in their program cohort, who will receive an invitation into the honours program.
- e. *Completion of a specified number of credit points in the applicant's undergraduate degree.* In each of the programs in the School of Health Sciences, students will have normally completed the first 2.5 years of their program, which would typically equal between 200 credit points, or in some programs 190 credit points when there are placement subjects for which final grades are not yet available at the time of invitation.
- f. *Any other specific School requirements.* In the School of Health Sciences, honours admission is by an invitation-only basis.

## Calculation of the Admission Average Mark (AAM)

As outlined in the [Honours Procedures](#) (*Section 3 – Admission, clause 14*), the AAM must include marks from a minimum of 80 Western Sydney University credit points.

## Supervision

The [Honours Procedures](#) (*Section 4 – Supervision, clauses 18-19*) notes that each student will have a Principal Supervisor, with an example of good practice being one where co-supervisors and/or team supervision from suitably qualified team members may be available.

Supervisors must meet the following requirements:

Clause 19 - *The Principal Supervisor must be listed on the School's register of Honours supervisors, and at least one of the supervisors:*

- a. *must hold a Doctoral degree, or equivalent professional experience that includes:*
  - i. *an AQF Level 9 qualification, and*
  - ii. *current accreditation/registration within a relevant profession (if applicable), and either:*
    - *at least three years recent (within the past five years) professional experience that is relevant to the Honours program or*
    - *current enrolment in an AQF Level 10 program and recent (within the past five years) professional experience relevant to the Honours program, and*
- b. *must be active in research and publishing or otherwise making original contributions to a relevant field or discipline.*

The appointment of supervisors to students occurs once student project preferences are determined and allocation of students to projects takes place. Supervisors and students are informed about the project allocation by the student's Director of Academic Program or their nominee and put in touch with each other to commence their work.

Students who experience issues with their supervision can contact relevant staff for assistance in line with the [Honours Procedures](#) (Section 4 – Supervision, clause 20), which outlines that students may approach their honours subject coordinator or equivalent for assistance. Each clinical health science program has a relevant Director of Academic Program and/or an honours point of contact, available to students to discuss supervision concerns. In cases where the supervisor is one of the nominated people noted here, or if the student feels more comfortable, the student can approach the School's Associate Dean (Research).

## **Program Structure - Embedded Honours Programs**

Each program has an approved Honours program document designed in line with the Bachelor Honours Degree (AQF 8) requirements as detailed in the [Curriculum Structure Procedures](#) (clauses 42-49). These approved program documents detail how each program meets the two compulsory components of honours programs, namely (i) the research training component, and (ii) the research component of each honours program.

Links to handbook entries for each program are contained in the below table.

<a href="#">4709</a>	Bachelor of Podiatric Medicine (Honours)
<a href="#">4712</a>	Bachelor of Occupational Therapy (Honours)
<a href="#">4733</a>	Bachelor of Physiotherapy (Honours)
<a href="#">4788</a>	Bachelor of Speech Pathology (Honours)

Each program includes all requirements for an honours degree as outlined in the [Curriculum Structure Procedures](#):

### **Compulsory Research Training**

*(47) The compulsory research training component must include:*

- a. A formal research proposal. Note, in the School of Health Sciences this is completed by all clinical health science honours students in the common subject PUBH 4001 Evidence in Professional Reasoning (Honours).*
- b. Research seminar attendance. Note, in the School of Health Sciences this occurs for all clinical health science honours students across several of their honours subjects as outlined in the respective handbook structures.*

*(48) The compulsory research training component may include training in the ethical conduct of research, research management and work integrated learning, depending upon the nature of the study. Note, in the School of Health Sciences, all clinical health science honours students undertake this training across their required honours subjects.*

### **Compulsory Research**

*(49) The compulsory research component may be a written thesis, or a non-standard thesis, as follows:*

- a. A written thesis, which may vary in length according to the credit points allocated. As a guide, a 60 credit point thesis may range in length between 15,000 – 20,000 words. A 40 credit point thesis may range in length between 8,000 – 12,000 words. Note, in the School of Health Sciences, clinical health science honours students undertake a written thesis developed across 40 credit points worth of honours subjects.*

### **Ethics and/or other required approvals**

Ethics approval is the formal approval, where required and appropriate, of the proposed research by the relevant Western Sydney University Ethics Committee. Details on when ethics approval should be sought can be found in the [Research Ethics and Integrity](#) site.

The Principal supervisor is responsible for obtaining the appropriate approvals that may be required for the research proposed, both by the University and external agencies/organisations. No data collection, experimental or field work can be undertaken without the appropriate approvals.

## Honours Progression

Progression through the honours program occurs via completion of the dedicated honours subjects for each program as outlined in the respective handbook entries. These subjects provide a scaffolded experience of research training at the honours level. Should students not meet necessary requirements of passing honours subjects, or experience difficulties that preclude their continuation, they have the support of honours subject coordinators, Directors of Academic Programs, and Academic Program Advisors to understand the options available to them. Relevant policies pertaining to student support and disruption to studies apply. Some students may need to, or wish to, return to the pass degree, and individually tailored academic advice will be provided to support their continued progression in the pass program.

## Thesis Component

### Thesis format and Research requirement

For the award of honours, students must carry out an independent research project under the guidance of their supervisor and will write up their results in a format suitable for examination, for example, a research thesis with traditional chapter structure or a combination of a journal manuscript and extended literature and methods reviews. Detailed requirements for the thesis format are outlined in the relevant program learning guides of subjects pertaining to thesis finalisation.

### Thesis submission

The due date for the submission of the honours thesis varies across the four clinical health science programs due to differing course structures and the timing of clinical placements in their final year of study. Due dates for each program are published each year in the Honours subject learning guide for their common first honours subject in year 3, PUBH 4001 Evidence in Professional Reasoning (Honours). Students therefore have a minimum of one-year advanced notice of their required due date.

In their final honours subject, students are advised to submit an electronic version in accordance with detailed instructions contained in the relevant learning guide. The subject coordinator of the final honours subject for each program coordinates submission. Support by the School HDR professional team can be provided to streamline this process.

### Extension for submission of thesis

An extension of time for thesis submission is permitted in line with clauses 23-25 of the [Honours Procedures](#), whereby:

*(23) A student may apply for an extension of time for thesis submission up to three working days before their originally approved submission date. Any variations to this timeline must be approved by the School Honours Coordinator or nominee.*



*Extensions can only be granted in accordance with University policies.*

*(24) An application for extension must be submitted under the subject code for the Honours thesis or project subject.*

*(25) The Subject Coordinator must approve applications for extensions and advise the student of the decision. If a School requires the Subject Coordinator to consult with the School Honours Coordinator or nominee, and/or advise them or the SAC of any extensions granted, this will be specified in the School Honours Guidelines.*

Note – the School of Health Sciences does not require the SAC approval of extensions. In addition, the subject coordinator approving extensions also advises students that an extension of submission may impact on their graduation timeline, and therefore their registration with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and/or the ability to compete for HDR scholarships. In the case of physiotherapy students, registration with AHPRA and the allocation processes for employment with NSW Health may also be impacted.

## **Examination, appointment of examiners and release of marks to students**

All aspects of examination, including the appointment of examiners, examination processes, and release of marks to students occurs in line with *Section 6 – Examination, clauses 26-32* of the [Honours Procedures](#).

Specifically:

*(26) Where an Honours program requires formal examinations, the [Examinations Policy](#) and [Examination Procedures](#) will apply.*

*(27) The significant research component will be examined by two suitably qualified examiners, who may be external to the University or internal to the University. At least one examiner must hold a qualification at or above Honours and have a record of research or scholarly attainment in a relevant field. A professional examiner from a related industry can be the second examiner.*

*(28) Where examiners are only internal to the University, there will be an independent moderation process to assure quality and consistency of internal examination.*

*(29) Each School will determine its process for recommending and approving examiners for the significant research component. This process will be published in the School Honours Guidelines, which are endorsed by the SAC and approved by Education Committee.*

Note – in the School of Health Sciences, Principal supervisors will identify two examiners from internal School or University staff and/or from suitably qualified external examiners. Examiner details will be submitted to the subject coordinator of the final honours subject where the thesis is submitted, and their suitability cross checked against the examiner requirements as noted above.

*(30) Examiners will not be supervisors or co-supervisors; examiners will make independent determinations on the significant research component and will each award a mark out of 100,*

which will be averaged to give a total score. Refer to the [Conflict of Interest Policy](#).

(31) Where there is a marked discrepancy of 10 or more marks between significant research component examiners or a difference in the examiner-recommended Honours level, the School Honours Coordinator or designated position within a School may take one or more of the following actions:

- a. have the Subject Coordinator invite the examiners to confer with each other and/or with the School's Research and Higher Degrees Committee with a view to presenting a consolidated recommendation
- b. appoint an experienced marker of Bachelor (Honours) theses as a third examiner who will act as an arbiter:
  - i. the arbiter will review the thesis and the other examiners' reports (de-identified where possible), including all comments and discussions as required to clarify
  - ii. the arbiter will then determine the mark and level on the basis of the published criteria and standards for the thesis
  - iii. the mark determined by the arbiter is the final examination result for recommendation to the SAC

(32) Final examination results are made available to students through the University's standard processes for releasing results.

## **Honours Levels**

Award levels are determined in line with *Section 7 – Award Levels* of the [Honours Procedures](#).

In the four embedded clinical health science honours programs, the final honours level is determined by the mark of the thesis only. Each approved program document outlines the determination of the honours level based on the thesis mark. The subject coordinator of the subject under which theses are submitted is responsible for ensuring all marks are collected and entered correctly in marking spreadsheets and/or gradebooks. The collation of all reports, marks, and other information is required for the determination of the final honours level as per policy using required SAC documentation pertaining to honours finalisation for graduation. Final honours level results are also completed in conjunction with the Director of Academic Program of each respective program, or nominee.

Honours levels in the School of Health Sciences are as follows:

Honours Class	Honours Thesis Mark
Honours Class I	85% or above
Honours Class II, Division 1	75% to 84%
Honours Class II, Division 2	65% to 74%
Honours Class III	50% to 64%
Fail (Honours not awarded)	0 to 49%

Students eligible for the University Medal are also determined at this final point and submitted to the SAC by each Director of Academic Program or nominee, in line with *Part C – Academic Excellence, University Medal* section in the [Graduation Policy](#).

## Review of grade and appeals

The [Review of Grade Policy](#) applies to all subjects of each honours program and is outlined in *Section 8 - Review of Grade (clauses 40 and 41)* of the University [Honours Procedures](#).

The appeal process against the level of Honours awarded, is outlined in *Section 9 (clause 42)* of the [Honours Procedures](#) and is in accordance with the University [Academic Appeals Procedures](#).

Appeal of the honours level can only be made on the grounds of procedural irregularity.

## Key dates

Call for honours projects across School	By March 31 <sup>st</sup> each year
Student entry into honours	Spring semester of year 3 for each program
Submission of thesis	Date to be determined by each program, factoring in student practice placements required in the final year, and published in the relevant learning guides at the commencement of the final honours year. Benchmarking by the honours subject coordinators to occur across each program to ensure equitable submission dates.
Examination reports submitted and finalised via School Academic Committee	End of year results processing meeting, or subsequent SAC meetings in the case of students with approved extensions.