Honours Research Projects
FAQs

Is 4th year an “Honours year”?
No. Your four year degree (Bachelor of Design, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Media Arts, and double degrees), considered as a whole, is a degree “with honours”. However, the 4th year includes a substantial independent project component, split across Honours Research Project A (ADAD4010) (12cp) and Honours Research Project B (ADAD4011) (18cp).

Why should I do an Honours Research Project, and what should I expect to achieve?
Honours research projects are an opportunity for you to refine and consolidate the knowledge and practice you have learnt through the previous three years of study through the completion of one or two substantial research projects. Just as the 1st year supports the transition from school to higher education, the 4th year supports the transition from higher education to professional practice, focusing on independence and analytical thinking. Honours projects will help you develop your practice as an art or design professional and provide essential experience in undertaking projects and research that you will be able to use in your professional career. It will also qualify you for applying to undertake postgraduate study. Independent research projects give you the opportunity to make a substantial contribution to your portfolio / body of work and develop and consolidate your skills and practices.

What is the difference between Honours A and Honours B?
Both take the same format, but Honours B involves a 50% greater workload, reflecting the difference in credit points (12 and 18 respectively). You must take Honours A first, which allows you to develop confidence in your capacity to undertake a major studio research project, before completing Honours Research Project B.
Due to mid-year enrolments, students taking Honours Project A and Honours Project B will often be placed together, undertaking the same activities, except where this would be repetitive for Honours B students. After completing your degree you will find yourself working alongside people with wildly varying levels of experience and expertise, so this should not be considered unusual. Regardless of whether you are doing Honours A and Honours B you will follow the same format with the same supervisory and peer-group relations with your cluster leader/s and cohort.

What is the research component of the honours projects?
An important component of honours projects is the integration of research skills into your practice. As well as knowing your practice, you will develop a strong intellectual toolkit for thinking about that practice. This is important to achieving the outcomes required of a UNSW honours degree, and is a highly valued skill whether you are looking for graduate employment, postgraduate research or are setting out on your own. As a professional artist, designer or media artist, communicating and justifying your projects and ideas is essential, and staying abreast of fast changing environments and sectors is just as important as the studio projects you do. You will be well supported in developing your own research approaches, which will be relevant and practical to your studio interests. Research involves understanding the history of ideas, the application of knowledge, and analysing this knowledge in the context of your work. Discussions, seminars and writing activities will assist in exploring and realising quality projects with a solid basis in contemporary practice.

What is the research paper?
Part of the assessment for both Honours Project A and B is a research report/paper. For Honours Project A the research paper is expected to be approximately 2,500 words in length, and 3,000-5,000 words for Honours Project B.
In the research paper you will draw on theoretical knowledge to develop an argument around the choices you have made in your practice. This begins with a literature review, in which you identify the theoretical material and other practitioners most relevant to your work. Your paper should also involve
your findings, and reflections on your practice, drawing on the concepts in your literature review. It may involve the application of a research methodology, such as the use of user experience studies in design. The research paper is assessed, amongst other things, on the clarity of the explanation of ideas, your ability to contextualise your work within these ideas, and the quality of your reflective analysis. Assessment criteria may be interpreted slightly differently according to your discipline.

What are Clusters?
In both Honours A and B you will join a cluster. Clusters are typically groups of around 25 students, led by one or two members of staff (the cluster leaders), but clusters can be any size depending on the number of enrolments (staffing will vary accordingly). Clusters develop upon the studio teaching format in 2nd and 3rd year, with staff taking an increasingly supervisory role as the year progresses, giving you more independence to pursue your areas of interest. The cluster establishes a small community of peers, within which you develop your ideas and practice. Although you are working independently on individual projects, you will be constantly engaged in the discussion and debate within your cluster. Be prepared to be challenged by different ways of thinking, and be open to this group dynamic shaping your practice. As in your future workplace or work context, clusters give you the opportunity to think through your ideas with colleagues and in doing so develop communication and critical thinking.

Cluster leaders also bring their own research interests into the cluster, which is important to bear in mind when choosing clusters. They will give structure to the studio format through prepared readings, discussion sessions and other activities. However, clusters should not be thought of as based around particular skills or materials. Design clusters involve a more detailed brief with clear design objectives, as Design students will be used to from previous studio classes.

How and when do I choose clusters?
Towards the end of the previous semester (before starting Honours A or Honours B), cluster information will be made available. You can make further enquiries about clusters by speaking to cluster leaders, program directors and the honours project convenor. You then enrol online in the normal way. Cluster staffing may vary. Staff will be allocated based on uptake to specific clusters.

What happens if there are too many / too few people in a cluster?
Clusters staffing will be adjusted according to the final size of the cluster. Clusters that have fewer than 12 students may, however, be cancelled, and if so those enrolled will redirected to another cluster.

Can I choose a cluster that is not from my discipline (Fine Arts, Media Arts, Design)?
In principle you can, and indeed we encourage this where appropriate, but this is not a given; seek approval from the cluster leader if you are interested in applying for different clusters. The time to seek this approval is between the cluster information day and enrolment day.

What if I have a project idea and it doesn’t fit into any of the clusters?
Honours projects require you to develop independent project work. The onus is on you to conceptualise and develop a project idea, but in a way that is responsive and relevant to the framework set out by your cluster leaders. Clusters are there to provide structure and to create a framework where you have support and a common intellectual framework amongst your peers and teachers. You should discuss your ideas with potential cluster leaders and see how they would fit into the respective clusters. Remember that cluster leaders are bringing their own research interests to the development of the cluster and that they will be stimulated by your input as well — it is a two way street. Likewise, your ideas should not be too rigid, demonstrating the capacity to adapt, and you should be able to apply your interests in the context provided by the cluster.

Do I need to stick with the same cluster in Semester 1 and Semester 2?
Different disciplines have different expectations. However, in all cases it is critical to remember that Honours A and Honours B are independently assessed, as with any studio class. Honours Research Project A should have clear outputs and Honours Research Project B should clearly involve new work not already submitted in Honours A. You may know people who have done year-long honours projects, in which the bulk of the work was done in the second semester, but you cannot take this
approach. At the same time, you are encouraged to maintain continuity of your own work between A and B. You are always welcome to develop an Honours A project in Honours B, as long as you demonstrate clear development of the project. Please consult the honours project convenor to discuss specific cases.

Can I change cluster mid-semester?
You can always contact the honours project convenor to discuss this, but it is discouraged and will only be considered in exceptional cases.

Is it possible that the clusters or the cluster staffing will change?
Yes it is possible, but this is not expected to happen and every effort will be made to avoid unnecessary changes. Any change of cluster details from those announced will be clearly communicated to all students concerned.

What if my project needs equipment, space, extra support?
Studio cluster leaders will be available to consult with after enrolment. One of the first tasks is planning out a proposal of work. This is where you will be expected to scope the needs of your project. Part of planning is ensuring you have access to adequate resources. Your cluster leaders will discuss such requirements with you early into the first project.

What if my project involves work that might require ethics approval?
Universities have strict research ethics policies in place, with which all staff and students must comply. The need for ethics procedures in medicine, psychology or vet science may be obvious, but even running a survey or observing people using a product falls under research ethics guidelines. For example, if you were interviewing people about their music download habits you might be putting them at risk of revealing an illegal activity. If, in addition, you then stored their responses, linked to their names, on Google Drive, then a US court could conceivably access that information. No matter how unlikely this is to happen, it is important that you have thought about the consequences of your actions on others when conducting research.

You will be inducted on applying for ethics, and you should speak to cluster leaders about specific concerns. Please be aware that applying for ethics approval, when deemed necessary, must be carried out by the student. It takes time to write the application, and importantly, until your proposal has ethics approval, your project cannot commence. These are strict UNSW regulations, which in themselves adhere to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct.

Do I need to turn up to all studios, lectures and workshops?
Yes. As with other courses, there are minimum attendance requirements. If you have specific needs that affect your studies, you should register with the Student Equity And Disability Unit (SEADU, https://student.unsw.edu.au/disability). There are strict guidelines and requirements about getting Educational Adjustments. Please ensure these are in place, prior to Week 1. If there are any other issues affecting your studies, your first point of call will be the relevant cluster leader, then the honours project convenor, and then the Deputy Head of School (there is a Deputy Head of School for Art, covering the BFA and BAHT; and a Deputy Head of School for Design, covering the BDes and BMA).

Can I start mid-year (i.e., start Honours A in Semester 2)?
Yes, Honours Research Projects A and B are offered in both Semesters.

Who marks my work and how is it marked?
Honours projects are examined by two examiners, one of whom is not your cluster leader.

What determines my honours class (first class, second class)?
Your honours class reflects your overall achievement in your program and your work in the two Honours Research Project courses. So we look at a combination of you overall WAM and the average of your Honours Research Project marks (with Project A weighted at 40% and Project B weighted at 60%). Note that WAM does include honours research project grades.
1. Honours Class 1: If WAM of at least 75.0 and Honours Research Project weighted average of at least 85
2. Honours Class 2 Division 1: WAM of at least 70.0 and Project weighted average of at least 75
3. Honours Class 2 Division 2: WAM of at least 65.0 and Project weighted average of at least 65
4. Honours Class 3: WAM of at least 50.0 and Project weighted average of at least 50

Do we have a Moodle site?
Yes. There is a Moodle site for both of Honours Research Project A and B together. Each individual cluster will have its own group within the Moodle site and any common information will also be shared across all clusters.

Will there be a mid-year and/or an end of year show?
All graduating students are encouraged to participate in the Annual exhibition at the end of the year, and can show work related to their honours project in that show. However, the Annual is not an assessment event. Assessment of Honours happens prior to the Annual exhibition. There is no faculty mid-year show. Students enrolling mid-year will exhibit in the Annual following the completion of their Honours B project.

What space do I have access to?
Students will have access to common studio areas with storage. This will be dictated depending on the needs of your practice. Requests for specific space needs will be considered by the honours project convenor.

How can I access specialist studio facilities (i.e., printmaking, darkrooms, audio studios)?
You can request use of specialist studio facilities in the normal way. It is essential you have the prerequisite training for the use of the given space. Speak to the Technical Support Unit if you are not sure what the requirements are for use of a given facility.

How will I be assessed?
There are three assessments throughout semester. The same structure of assessments is repeated from Honours Research Projects A to Honours Research Projects B.

Assessment Task 1
Title: Project Presentation
Due: Week 4
Weighting: 20%
Assessment Type: Presentation
Submission Details: Presentation in class, Week 4, with written components due via Moodle. See assignment instructions for specific deadlines.

Assessment Task 2
Title: Research Report
Due: Week 12
Weighting: 30%
Assessment Type: Essay
Submission Details: Online submission due by beginning of Week 12 through Moodle.

Assessment Task 3
Title: Final Project
Due: Week 16
Weighting: 50%
Assessment Type: Project/presentation
Submission Details: Presentations to be scheduled during Week 16. Submit supporting material to Moodle 24 hours prior to presentation.