



**Carleton
University**

School of Journalism
and Communication

School of Journalism and Communication

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COMS 4908: Honours Research Essay

Guidelines for Supervisors 2025-26

HRE Coordinator

Dr. Susana Vargas Cervantes

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Office Location

Richcraft Hall 4110

Overview

Students with a GPA of 10.0 or higher have the option to register in COMS 4908 Honours Research Essay in their final year. This course constitutes 1.0 credit.

This outline is intended for faculty members who have been asked to supervise the Honours Research Essay. It describes the responsibilities of the supervisor, and provides some supplementary information about COMS 4908. The responsibilities are not numerous or burdensome. The students understand that the essay is an exercise in independent research; supervisors are not to police their work habits or to cajole them into meeting deadlines. If you have any questions about the supervision of the Honours Research Essay, please contact the HRE coordinator Susana Vargas Cervantes.

On behalf of the students, thank you for agreeing to serve as HRE coordinator. The HRE is a tremendous learning opportunity for which your expertise and counsel will be crucial. The essay itself is a chance for students to hone and demonstrate their skills in research and argumentation, and may well be a stepping-stone toward a career or graduate study.

Key Dates

September 17, 2025	HRE students will meet as a group with HRE coordinator
September 29, 2025	Student must have the supervisor consent form returned to the HRE coordinator
November 24, 2025	Deadline for student to submit their proposal to their supervisor
December 5, 2025	Deadline for the supervisor to submit the proposal grade report to the HRE coordinator (see form below)
February 9, 2026	Deadline for student to submit their progress report to their supervisor
February 23, 2026	Deadline for the supervisor to submit the progress report grade to the HRE coordinator (see form below)
April 6, 2026	Deadline for student to submit their thesis to their supervisor
April 13, 2026	Deadline for supervisor to submit HRE grade report to HRE coordinator (see form)

Starting

After enrolling in COMS 4908 students will meet with the HRE coordinator. The HRE coordinator will talk to students about their research interests and will direct them to one or two potential faculty supervisors. You will receive an email from the HRE coordinator indicating the student(s) who have been directed to talk to you.

From the outset, the student should have a preliminary topic area and working thesis - the latter being the central proposition that he or she plans to explore, test, or defend in the essay. It is hoped that the topic area corresponds to the supervisor's own research or teaching interests, but this may not always be the case as efforts are made to ensure there is a distribution of HRE students across faculty.

The student would benefit from the following information:

- whether or not the preliminary thesis – as written – is a potentially-refutable proposition that could support a 40-page essay;
- whether or not the preliminary thesis has been fully and satisfactorily addressed in the literature;
- what revisions to the preliminary thesis could overcome these or other shortcomings; and;
- references either to recent work that relates to the preliminary topic and thesis, or to databases, journals or authors where such work could be located.

If, after your initial discussion with the student, you agree to supervise the essay, then please complete the attached COMS 4908 Supervision Consent Form, sign it, and return it to the HRE coordinator, by **September 29, 2025**.

Research proposal

To underline the importance of planning their research project and starting early, students are required to submit a formal research proposal before the last day of classes in the fall term. The mark assigned by the supervisor to the proposal accounts for 10 per cent of the course grade (a winter term progress report accounts for 10 per cent, the final essay accounts for 75 per cent and a final presentation is worth 5 percent of the mark). It is intended that the proposal be graded as a proposal, not a finished thesis. In other words: the proposal mark should reflect the degree to which the student has conducted serious and systematic preparatory work for the eventual thesis.

The research proposal is the single most important form of communication between the student and the supervisor. It enables the supervisor to locate the strong and weak elements of the student's approach and thinking, and to do so at a relatively early stage. It also serves as an informal contract, by requiring the supervisor to identify any major changes that he or she believes to be necessary, and by confirming the mutually-agreed upon dates by which the student will complete the various components of his or her work.

The proposal should be from 8 to 10 double-spaced typewritten pages and should have the following format:

1. Introduction

... brief description of the topic area of the essay, and an explanation as to why research in this area is needed (e.g. the gaps in existing research, the importance of the policy

implications, the groups that could benefit, etc.)

2. Thesis

... state the central proposition or conclusion to be made in the essay, clarify key words used to state the thesis, and identify subsidiary questions or points to be considered.

3. Theoretical Framework

... specify the set of assumptions and concepts to be used in supporting the thesis, and the reasons for adopting them.

4. Sources of Evidence

... indicate the types of evidence to be consulted in defending the thesis (e.g. historical or current case studies, polls, interviews, speeches).

5. Literature Review

... review 3 to 5 examples of research in the topic area - their theses, theoretical frameworks, evidence - indicate the limitations or gaps within this literature, and how the essay will attempt to overcome these.

6. Bibliography

... cite the primary and secondary sources that have been consulted (including those mentioned under headings 4 and 5 above), as well as those that are expected to be consulted.

7. Work Schedule (to be drafted in consultation with the supervisor)

... confirm the agreed-upon frequency of future meetings, and the dates by which various stages of your work are to be completed (e.g. finish literature survey, collect data, conduct interviews, write preliminary portions of the essay, submit these, have them returned with the supervisor's comments, revise and resubmit).

The student should submit the proposal to you by **November 24, 2025**. Please record the mark (out of 10) for the research proposal on the attached "Proposal Grade Report", attach to this report a copy of your comments, and return it to the HRE coordinator, by **December 5, 2025**.

Progress Report

While the HRE is largely an independent project, it is important that the student maintain good communication with the supervisor. Students are expected to provide you with a brief (approx. 2 page) progress report by **February 9, 2026**. The report should provide a clear description of what the student has done up to that date, what remains to be done and a revised schedule for completion, if necessary. Students are also required to submit a draft introduction with the progress report. Together the report and the draft will constitute 10 per cent of their final grade. Please fill out the attached progress report grading form and send it to the HRE coordinator, along with a copy of your comments by **February 23, 2026**.

Content and Format

The Honours Research Essay is to be analytical rather than descriptive. It does not simply describe a topic area, but rather states and then systematically derives and defends a particular thesis. It does this with reference to a theoretical framework - a set of concepts and assumptions. These concepts and assumptions may be used to interpret or explain evidence drawn from historical or current case studies or primary field research or other sources approved by the faculty supervisor. The students are expected to demonstrate original thought in coordinating and synthesizing ideas and information, and in constructing their arguments. They are expected not to pad their essays - including tables or

diagrams or descriptions of events, institutions, practices or laws only if such things support their thesis.

While the length of the essay will depend upon the chosen topic area, thesis and framework, it is normally in the range of 40 to 50 double-spaced pages, and should not exceed 60 pages.

Confirm with the student the format for footnotes and bibliographical structure that you prefer. They understand that the final draft of the essay must be carefully proof-read, that the style and clarity of writing will be taken into account in the determination of a grade, and that errors in fact, spelling or grammar may result in the essay not being accepted as written. You might suggest that they consult writing manuals such as: *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White; *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian; or *The Broadview Guide to Writing* by Doug Babington and Don LePan.

The essay is to be typewritten and double-spaced using 12-character-per-inch font. It is to be printed on good quality 8 ½ x 11 inch unlined bond paper. It is to have standard 1-inch (2.54cm) margins at the top, bottom and sides of the page. All pages, with the exception of the first page, must be numbered. There must be a Table of Contents page. In addition, the essay is to have a title page, which is set up in the following format:

TITLE

By

AUTHOR

A research essay submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for COMS 4908 as credit towards the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Communication Studies [Honours]

School of Journalism and Communication
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

April 2026

The students are to submit to their supervisor two copies of the final essay, informally bound. After being graded, one copy will remain with the supervisor and one will be retained by The School of Journalism and Communication. It is at the discretion of the supervisor and second reader as to whether to accept a digital copy of the essay in lieu of hard copies.

Students who have applied to graduate immediately after the term in which they are registered are to submit their essay by no later than **April 6, 2026**. Students in their initial registration or their first optional re-registration, and who have not applied to graduate, must submit their Honours Research Essay by the last day of the examination period for their session of registration, as described under The Academic Year in the Undergraduate Calendar.

Evaluation

The final essay determines 80 per cent of the course grade for COMS 4908. The research proposal determines 10 per cent and the progress report determines another 10 per cent. Whereas the research proposal is marked by the supervisor alone, the final essay is marked by the supervisor in consultation with a second faculty reader chosen by the supervisor. If for some reason the supervisor and the second reader cannot agree upon a mark for the essay, please contact Susana Vargas Cervantes, the HRE coordinator, who will assign a third reader. Otherwise, the agreed essay mark, the course letter grade for COMS 4908, and the signatures of the supervisor and second faculty reader are to be recorded on the attached “Honours Research Essay Grade Report”. For students who have applied to graduate, please return the completed report to the HRE coordinator, by **April 13, 2026**.

Carleton University
School of Journalism and Communication
COMS 4908 Honours Research Essay

Honours Research Essay Final Grade Report
Student Name: Student Number:
Supervisor Name: Signature: Date: Email Address:
Second Faculty Reader Name: Signature: Date: Email Address:
Title of Essay
<p>This essay, presented in fulfillment of the requirements of COMS 4908, has been graded as follows (please check one).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Essay did not satisfy readers. Revisions requested. “In progress” grade to be submitted.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Essay passed and awarded letter grade of . This letter grade (weighted 80 per cent), the mark for the progress report (weighted 10 per cent) and the mark for the research proposal submitted in (weighted 10 per cent), have been combined to reach an overall letter grade for the course of .</p>

Please complete this form and submit to
Susana Vargas Cervantes by **April 13, 2026**.

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Proposal Grade Report
Student Name: Student Number:
Supervisor Name: Signature: Date: Email Address:
Research Proposal Grade (determining 10 per cent of course grade) Mark out of 10:

Please complete this form and submit to
Susana Vargas Cervantes by **December 5, 2025**

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Progress Report Grade
Student Name: Student Number:
Supervisor Name: Signature: Date: Email Address:
Progress Report Grade (determining 10 per cent of course grade) Mark out of 10:

Please complete this form and return to
Susana Vargas Cervantes by **February 23, 2026.**

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School of Journalism and Communication
COMS 4908 Honours Research Essay

Supervision Consent Form
Student Name: Student Number: Email Address:
Supervisor Name: Signature: Date: Email Address: Academic Position:
Proposed Topic Area
Draft Thesis Statement

Please complete and return this form to:
Susana Vargas Cervantes (cc: Kemi Obando) by **September 29, 2025**.