**Commonwealth Scholar Thesis Timetable**

During the fall semester, I expect students and their faculty sponsors to be meeting regularly and establishing their own deadlines, goals, etc. As Honors Director I am happy to consult as needed, but will intrude only minimally or as requested. However, it is important to treat the fall semester as a stand-alone course, the product of which will determine whether the project moves forward into the spring semester and eventual defense. I will thus expect to see, by the end of fall semester, substantive evidence of progress (such as an initial, full-scale draft of the thesis, or at least a complete outline, overview of the research, and several fully drafted sections of the thesis).

In the spring semester, the process becomes much more open and collaborative. By the first week in February, a complete draft of the project should be in the hands of the director who may make detailed or general suggestions. At this point, I will identify a third faculty reader, who will also be invited to weigh in. Students and faculty sponsors should understand that this collegial exchange, and a robust response to it (which is not to say agreement with every aspect of it) is an important part of the process. The aim is not to critique completed work, but to challenge and strengthen work in progress. If we believe major revisions are warranted at this stage, we may need to see them take place quite rapidly in order to decide whether to go ahead with a defense.

By the first week in March, a completed and meticulously edited thesis should be in hand, so that we have time to identify an outside reader and give that person time to read and think about the project. The defense should take place early to mid April.

**FROM THE PROSPECTUS/THESIS GUIDELINES** (to reiterate):

**Commonwealth Scholar Project Schedule:**

* **April 1st:** Prospecti are due the first of April of the student’s junior year, and should by that time have been developed and refined (see Stage One below) in close collaboration with sponsoring faculty member, and in communication with honors directors
* **Mid-May:** Honors direcctors approve or reject prospecti in consultation with the Honors Advisory Board, after discussion with faculty sponsors. At their discression, the directors may send the prospectus back to the student with requests for a revision, normally due at the end of June.
* **Fall semester**: Approved projects register for CS Thesis Research course (HONR 550) with faculty sponsors. (You must register; this does not automatically happen!) Normally, this will involve at least weekly consultations, depending on the nature of the project. The directors will consult with the faculty sponsor at mid-term to assess progress, and after the end of the semester will make a determination, based on the quality of the work produced so far, whether to allow the project to go forward into the second semester
* **Spring semester:** If the directors allow the project to go forward, the student will again register for HONR 550, CS Thesis Research, with the original faculty sponsor. By the beginning of February, however, a substantially completed draft will circulate to the directors, as well as other members of the faculty with relevant expertise, initiating a collaborative process of critique and revision. By the first week of March, the thesis will be in its finished form, ready to go to an outside reader.

The public presentation and defense will be scheduled during April. The evaluating committee will consist of one honors director, the faculty sponsor, another member of the faculty (chosen in consultation with the candidate), and an outside reader. The committee members will ask the candidate questions, after which the audience will have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the thesis. The committee will retire to deliberate and vote on the project. The committee may recomment either ***pass***, ***no pass***, or (in rare cases) ***pass with specific revisions***.

Commonwealth Scholars are expected also to give a presentation at the Statewide Undergraduate Research Conference at U Mass Amherst, normally held in late April, with a submission deadline in early February.

**As an aid to developing and refining your prospectus, we recommend that you undertake the following exercises in collaboration with your faculty sponsor:**

**Stage One** (an early exercise for developing the prospectus. To ensure clarity and simplicity this should fill no more than half a page):

**1)** Give a brief, descriptive **title**.

**2)** Attempt a coherent, one-sentence **description** of what you hope to accomplish.

**3)** Briefly **contextualize** the project, including a clear exposition of your methods of research and analysis, what theories or perspectives you will employ, and why they are suitable for your project.

**Stage Two** (an exercise for keeping the project focused and moving it forward, best undertaken perhaps a month into the first semester of the project):

**1)** **Introduction**: Set the stage for the study; present a statement of its intent in relation to both scholarly and wider social contexts.

**2)** **Purpose**: What are your reasons and purposes for undertaking the study? What is its significance or rationale?

**3)** **Limitations**: How might you still need to narrow the scope of the project to keep it manageable, while still significant? Identify potential weaknesses and limitations of the methods you are using. What will your study *not* do?

**4)** **Literature Review:** Survey what others have published on the topic, explaining why your work fills a gap.

**5)** **Methods:** develop, now more fully, an account of your methods of research and analysis, and evaluate them in light of your developing understanding of the project.