



**McGill University
Department of Geography**

GEOG 491: Honours Research or GEOG 492: Joint Honours Research

2025-2026 Academic Year

Honours Coordinator: Prof. Sarah Turner

Office hours: Tuesdays 2-3pm (starting 16th Sept) on Zoom
(link on MyCourses Announcements)
Winter will be updated on MyCourses.

Email: sarah.turner@mcgill.ca

Honours cohort meetings: TBD via email /doodle poll.

Overview: GEOG 491 and 492 are two-semester courses that provide a framework for the undergraduate thesis in one of four Honours programs in Geography (see below). The **Coordinator** of GEOG 491 and 492 is responsible for administrative matters related to the course(s), organizing progress meetings and presentations and submitting grades in consultation with the Supervisor and Reader of each student. If at any stage you have questions or concerns about the supervisory relationship, you should make an appointment to chat with the co-ordinator.

The **Supervisor** is responsible for the academic matters related to the courses. The supervisor guides the student through the thesis research by giving advice and holding meetings with the student. The **Reader** plays a secondary role in thesis advising process. Both the Supervisor and Reader evaluate the thesis and submit a grade to the Coordinator.

NOTE: the Honours thesis you will produce must be a thesis by thesis (also called monograph model), not a manuscript/article-based thesis.

Honours Programs in Geography

To enrol in an Honours program, students must fulfil all university and departmental requirements (see general catalogue and the departmental website), and must maintain a CGPA of 3.0 and a program GPA of 3.3.

- **B.A. Honours in Geography**
- **B.A. Honours in Urban Systems**
- **B.Sc. Honours in Geography**
- **B.A. Joint Honours in Geography** and in another subject if the honours thesis (6 credits) is written in the Department of Geography

GEOG 491 (fall/winter or winter/fall): **Honours Research** (reading course, 6 credits)

The course consists of supervised reading, research and preparation of an undergraduate thesis under the direction of a faculty member. **Prerequisite: GEOG 381.** Restriction: only for U3 B.A., B.Sc. Honours and B.A. Joint Honours Geography students. Students must register in GEOG 491D1 or N1 and GEOG 491D2 or N2. No credit will be given for this course unless both GEOG 491D1 or N2 and GEOG 491D2 or N2 are successfully completed in consecutive terms.

GEOG 492 (fall/winter or winter/fall): **Joint Honours Research** (reading course, 3 credits)

Students should register for GEOG 492 only if they seek a **B.A. Joint Honours in Geography** and in another subject *and if the honours thesis is written for credit in both departments* (3 credits in each department)

The course consists of supervised reading, research and preparation of an undergraduate thesis under the direction of a member of staff. **Prerequisite: GEOG 381.**

Restriction: only for those U3 Joint Honours students in Geography, who opt to enrol in a parallel course in another department. Students must register in GEOG 492D1 or N1 and GEOG 492D2 or N2. No credit will be given for this course unless both GEOG 492D1 or N1 and GEOG 492D2 or N2 are successfully completed in consecutive terms.

Organization and Administrative Issues

The Coordinator will announce the exact dates of the various deadlines and practical details related to the thesis at the beginning of the course. The class will meet on specific dates determined by the Coordinator (in discussion with the class v.v. other course scheduling). Attendance at these meetings is **mandatory**.

Supervision:

Two faculty members oversee your thesis research, a **Supervisor** (Evaluator 1) and a **Reader** (Evaluator 2). A **Supervisor** must be a tenure-track faculty member *within the Department of Geography*, while a **Reader** (Evaluator 2) can be any tenure-track faculty member from within the Department or McGill University (or sometimes from another university, but only with the Coordinator's permission). Typically, the Supervisor is responsible for most oversight and guidance, with the Reader playing a secondary role. Students should discuss the role of each faculty member at the start of the thesis research with their supervisor.

Requirements:

To enrol in GEOG 491 or 492, students 1) must be registered in the Honours program, 2) have successfully completed GEOG 381 (or an approved equivalent), and 3) must submit a signed *Supervision/reader Acceptance Form* to the Coordinator. The submission of the Acceptance Form (thesis title and abstract), signed by the Supervisor (or Supervisors for Joint thesis in two departments), the Reader, and the student, is required by April 15 when 491 or 492 starts the September following, or by December 15 when 491 or 492 starts in January (if this date falls on a weekend, then it is due the following Monday). For further information consult the program descriptions in the calendar or on the Departmental website.

Supervision/reader Acceptance Form. This form (with a 150 word summary of the project) must be submitted on the appropriate form (see Honours web page), signed by the Supervisor, the Reader and the student by the appropriate deadline (see above). For Joint Honours students, the Supervisors in both

departments sign the form if the thesis is submitted to both departments. A student will receive permission to register in GEOG 491 or 492 once the Coordinator has received the signed form.

Presentations. Students are required to present the results of their honours research. These poster/oral presentations are typically held in April during the second term of 491 or 492 *or* in December (for students who started in January) near the end of classes or the early part of the final exam period.

Submission of the first draft sections, final draft, and examinable thesis; and archival library copy. You should plan to submit a minimum of three drafts/thesis versions to your Evaluators. If they agree, you can send them electronic copies; if they want paper copies, printing is your responsibility.

First draft sections: Monday December 8, 5pm.

(July 31 if you started in January)

The *first draft sections* are to include – at a minimum:

- 1) your table of contents (chapter outline) for the entire thesis, annotated with detailed notes of what will go in each chapter
- 2) the good drafts of TWO (2) other sections/chapters (for example, your complete literature review and methodology).*

*Supervisors can generally give better feedback on more complete pieces of work. Your Supervisor may ask you to submit your first draft sections to your Reader as well, while others will have you wait.

It is very important to give your Supervisor a good indication of the shape of your thesis at this time.

Final draft: Monday March 16, 5pm

(November 6 if you started in January)

The *final thesis draft* should be a complete version of your thesis, with a table of contents, all chapters, results, and analyses. It should be free of typographical errors, and should be in the correct thesis format. Generally, the only “rough” or incomplete elements might be diagrams, maps, or figures.

Your Supervisor and usually also your Reader read the thesis at this stage, and recommend corrections and revisions, and are expected to return these to the students within about two weeks. *Please note that this is a norm, not a rule*, and that some Supervisors/Readers may need additional time. It is your responsibility to ensure that they have sufficient time to review and comment on this draft. In some cases, they may ask you to submit it before the deadlines above.

Students typically receive the most complete and extensive feedback from their Supervisor/Reader on this final draft. You then have a final opportunity to revise the text based on these comments before you submit your thesis for grading.

Examinable thesis: Monday April 20, 5pm

(December 4 if you started in January)

Your grade is based (largely) on the *Examinable thesis copy* and it should incorporate the comments and revisions required by your Supervisor/Reader based on the final draft.

Evaluator(s) roles: The Supervisor should read all the written submissions listed above. Some Readers will read all these too, some will read the final draft and examinable copy, and some will read only the

examinable copy. Please confer with your Supervisor and Reader in advance to see how involved your Reader will be in the development of your thesis.

Some Supervisors may ask to review individual chapters or versions of the thesis in between the first, final, and examinable copies. Be sure to discuss your Supervisor's preference with them.

Archival library copy and Dept. website abstract: Monday May 11, 5pm to Prof Turner
(January 8 if you started in January)

Finally, you must submit an archival copy of your thesis and a one-page abstract as .pdf files. The archival copy will be stored and catalogued electronically by the McGill Library system, and should reflect any corrections necessary as identified by your Supervisor and Reader such as typographic errors or formatting issues. Please keep in mind that this copy is the permanent record of your work, available to the public, and you should take care to present a professional document.

The abstract will be available on the Department's website in the Honours Thesis Archive. The abstract will likely be the most visible record of your research, and it is very important you take care in its preparation. It can be no more than one page, and should have up to one figure, diagram, map, or illustration.

Evaluation and grading. The Honours thesis and the work that has gone into it counts for 100% of the grade, and the Coordinator assigns the grade for the thesis (and hence for GEOG 491 or 492) in consultation with the two evaluators (Supervisor/Reader). In the case of grade differences the Coordinator will confer with the two evaluators to establish the final grade. No supplemental examination is available.

While the minimum passing grade for the Honours thesis is technically the same as any other required class (C), students must maintain a B+ (3.3) program average to graduate with an Honours degree. If the grade on the thesis drops a student below a 3.3 average, they will not earn Honours.

Students who do not submit the thesis on time will receive an automatic J.

K Grade Policy. No K (incomplete) will be granted in this course unless (1) a written request from the student to receive a K, submitted through and with the written support of the student's Supervisor, and giving justification for the request, is received by the Coordinator *before* the deadline of submission; and (2) the request for a K is approved after consideration at a meeting between the Supervisor and Coordinator.

Your grade is based on your work up to and including the examinable copy.

Timeline for Honours Program and Thesis

Students should discuss timetable, procedures, and arrangements for the thesis with the Coordinator and Supervisor during the last semester of their U2 year. Such discussions are necessary if a satisfactory thesis is to be completed on time. These discussions will indicate the research required, fieldwork to be done, data to be obtained and other matters such as what would need to be undertaken during the period between the end of the U2 year and the start of the U3 year.

The timeline below (and see Fig. 1) assumes a "normal" schedule, with a student starting McGill in fall semester, and having a graduation date at the end of winter semester. Students entering in winter semester and/or graduating after fall semester should adjust the schedule accordingly.

Fall semester, U2 Year. Discuss the Honours program with the Undergraduate Advisor for Geography and enrol in the program.

Winter semester, U2 Year. Take GEOG 381 (or equivalent approved by the Department). Contact potential Supervisors and Readers, and develop a thesis proposal in conjunction with a Supervisor once this faculty member has agreed to work with you.

April 15. Submit a signed Honours Thesis Proposal form to the Coordinator. Students cannot enrol in GEOG 491 or 492 without this form.

Summer between U2 and U3 Years. In conjunction with your Supervisor:
Complete the development of the research question and design, and review relevant literature;
Data acquisition: Conduct fieldwork or lab work, compile data, visit archives, administer surveys, conduct interviews, etc. Obtain an Ethics Certificate before you begin any research involving human subjects.

Fall semester, U3 year. Enrol in GEOG 491 or 492. Finish research and tasks listed above; begin analysis and writing of thesis.

December 8. Submit first draft sections: a complete detailed chapter outline and at least TWO (2) chapter drafts to Supervisor.

Winter semester, U3 year. Enrol in GEOG 491 or 492. Complete analysis and writing of thesis.

March 16. Submit a complete, final draft to the Honours Coordinator, the Supervisor, and the Reader.

Early-April. Presentation of research as poster presentation (the exact date varies from year to year) *or virtual presentation (TBD)*.

April 20. Submit the examinable copy of the thesis to the Coordinator, the Supervisor, and the Reader with revisions reflecting the comments of the Supervisor and Reader on the final draft.

Late April. The Supervisor and Reader submit grades for the thesis to the Coordinator, who then enters that as your grade for GEOG 491 or 492 on Minerva.

May 11. Students should submit a complete, archival copy of their thesis and a one page abstract with up to one photo, diagram, etc., to the Coordinator for inclusion in the Honours Thesis Archive. Both should be .pdf files. If this is not submitted, then you are likely to have your grade changed on Minerva until it is submitted.

	<i>Fall Semester, U2</i>	<i>Winter Semester, U2</i>	<i>Summer</i>	<i>Fall Semester, U3</i>	<i>Winter Semester, U3</i>
<i>Courses and Program</i>	Enrol in Honours Program	Enrol in GEOG 381		Enrol in GEOG 491 or 492	
<i>Research and Writing</i>		Contact Supervisor and develop proposal April 15: Submit signed proposal to Coordinator	Conduct Research 		March 16: Final draft due Early April: Poster session April 20: Examinable thesis copy due May 11: Archival copy and abstract
				Write thesis	

Figure 1. Guideline to Honours timetable.

Academic Integrity / *l'honnêteté académique*

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/academicrights/integrity> for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples enseignements, veuillez consulter le site <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/academicrights/integrity>).

Using artificial intelligence (AI) in Honours thesis writing.

Using generative AI to generate content and *presenting it as one's own work* constitutes plagiarism, in violation of the Code of Student Conduct. <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/policies-procedures/code>

Work submitted by students for evaluation is expected to be their *original work unless clearly indicated otherwise*. Content generated by AI does not constitute original work. If you have any questions or concerns regarding AI talk with your supervisor.

Role and Purpose of the Honours Thesis

The Honours thesis is an academic exercise carried out by Honours students in Geography in their final undergraduate year. Its purpose is to determine the extent to which students are capable of organizing and carrying out independent research and applying the methods they have been taught and the knowledge they have acquired during their study program over the previous years.

Normally, students should engage in the analysis of primary materials, such as field or survey data they have collected themselves or as part of a research team; census, survey, climate, remote sensing, or similar data collected by governments or institutions; archival material or historical documents; or interviews.

The thesis can be written in either English or French. The thesis counts as 6 credits or two courses (note special requirements in the Joint Honours program). Thus the academic work is the equivalent of approximately 230 working hours.

Subject Matter

The Honours thesis is a truly independent work of research. Students, in consultation with their thesis Supervisor and Reader, choose a suitable subject and find an appropriate approach within a geographical framework before starting GEOG 491 or 492. *The Honours thesis is clearly distinct from a routine term paper and requires considerable preparation before the actual thesis course begins.*

The more successful theses tend to be those that address a specific topic and/or a restricted area. Studies of the economic geography of entire countries, or of global climate variations over a long period of time, for example, are almost inevitably superficial. Thus “Immigrant Settlement in Canada” would be too broad a subject; but “A Comparative Study of Haitian Communities in Montreal and Toronto” might prove feasible. Scholarly analysis, rather than simple description, should be the principal component of a thesis.

Thesis Length and Format

The thesis should exceed neither 15,000 words nor 50 pages 1.5 line spacing (exclusive of the reference list and appendices). It should be prepared in a professional style according to the *Honours Thesis Handbook* (available on the Honours Program web page and MyCourses), and must be free of typographical or spelling errors.

Honours Program web page: <http://www.mcgill.ca/geography/undergraduate/honours>

Ethical Conduct of Research and the Use of Human Subjects

Any research involving human subjects – including research projects that are carried out by undergraduate students -- must receive a *Certificate of Ethical Acceptability* before the research can begin. This applies when research includes interviews, questionnaires, or the collection of data from human participants for analysis and presentation. This process is required by McGill and the Canadian Government and is described by the Tri-Council Policy Statement *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.¹

You can find more information on Human Subjects review from the Research Ethics Board (REB) Office. You should first review the *Student Guide*, and then discuss the matter with your Supervisor and/or the Coordinator. <https://www.mcgill.ca/research/research/human/reb> More details in Geog 381 or ask Prof Turner.

¹Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 (2022)*. https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2022.html