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Book Review *How to Write a BA Thesis: A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper* (Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing) By Charles Lipson

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HALLIE E. SAVAGE

Book Review
How to Write a BA Thesis:
A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to
Your Finished Paper

(Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing)

By Charles Lipson. The University of Chicago Press, 2005. 402 pp.

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A hallmark of honors education is high-quality undergraduate research. For honors faculty and administrators, curricular planning that results in excellent thesis research can be a special challenge because honors students represent a wide range of disciplines and vary in competency and preparation for research. *How to Write a BA Thesis* meets this challenge. It is a well-developed, practical guidebook for accomplishment of honors and/or undergraduate research. The contents are built on a developmental continuum or time table beginning with the conceptual basis for a thesis. As such, it is applicable to one-semester projects as well as theses or other in-depth projects.

The early chapters of the book (1-4) define the process of thesis conceptualization. They describe:

- collecting ideas for a thesis;
- selecting a faculty advisor;
- generating guidelines for a proposal;
- starting a literature review for the selected topic;
- taking notes;
- refining broad ideas to generate a precise thesis topic.

Important topics discussed within this section are plagiarism, paraphrasing, and citations that avoid plagiarism.

The middle chapters (5-11) are organized according to the developmental progression of research. Specifically, once the project is conceptualized, the steps include:

- devising a research strategy;
- conducting focused research;
- planning the thesis in more detail;

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- dividing the overall topic into major sections of the paper;
- sorting research into sections;
- prewriting preparation;
- creating the first draft—everything except introduction and conclusion;
- drafting the introduction and conclusion.

Lipson encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research in the treatment of results. In Chapter 6, for example, he presents a rationale and methodology for case studies. He also describes visual treatments of data such as charts.

A unique feature of this book is the description of practical approaches to accomplishing research. Lipson describes typical barriers to undergraduate research in Chapter 13, and then, given these barriers, he outlines strategies for successfully overcoming them in Chapter 14.

The last chapters provide general suggestions for:

- a thesis time table;
- tips and reminders;
- frequently asked questions;
- what to do when you are done.

The final two chapters have special applicability to thesis defenses and, if necessary, finding a second reader. The appendices provide a wealth of information for students and new faculty advisors.

Lipson's book is an excellent, well-developed text for students in all academic disciplines. It will be useful to some graduate as well as undergraduate students and also to new faculty advisors. Another significant benefit is that it will facilitate faculty/student communication. The book accomplishes these goals in a highly readable format that includes summary text boxes highlighting important information and how to apply it. As such, it is an invaluable text for honors education.

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