

ANTHROPOLOGY SENIOR THESIS—SCHEDULE

While anthropology theses are completed in the final semester of the senior year (exceptions are exceedingly rare), the requisite research and writing process will shape the entire year—be prepared to bear a significant extra workload. In truth, initiative is left largely up to the student, although our senior seminar does include a thesis-writing component. Start early when seeking thesis funding from the department, the Dean of Faculty, Off-Campus Study, or the Harvard Center. In the spring, those rising seniors with the strongest academic records will receive an invitation to pursue honors, and may opt to complete either a (full year) honors or a regular (second semester) thesis. Anyone interested in honors but not invited may still petition the department for permission. Honors rules and deadlines are set by a college-wide committee. Anthropology thesis writers must meet Institutional Review Board requirements. As a rule, all thesis advisors will be members of the anthropology department. The following deadlines are not negotiable:

- May 15** **Written description of likely topic and method.** Department faculty will hold an informational meeting for all junior majors in April. Meanwhile, each student should be in ongoing discussions with faculty advisor/s concerning possible thesis topics and methods. These conversations should continue over the summer.
- September 15** **Honors petition.** For petitioners, honors candidacy is contingent upon receiving approval from the entire department. By this time, we also need to know which spring invitees wish to pursue honors.
- October 1** **Year long (including honors) thesis prospectus (plus IRB).** Circulated to all anthropology faculty for comments and approval. May require resubmission by Nov. 1st. IRB issues to be addressed.
- November 1** **Regular (winter semester) thesis prospectus (plus IRB).**
Circulated to all anthropology faculty for comments and approval. May require resubmission by Dec. 1st. IRB issues to be addressed.
Revised prospectus for year long/honors theses (if required).
- December 1** **Revised prospectus for regular (winter term) theses (if required).** Every effort is made to assign students the department advisor of their choice, but we must distribute advising responsibilities evenly. Advisors set parameters for process and progress, including deadlines, with the following exceptions:
- January** **Official honors nominations go to College Honors Committee**
- February** **Honors thesis abstract due to College Honors Committee**
- March/April** **Honors due dates and panels set by College Honors Committee**

REGULAR THESES DUE BY LAST DAY OF WINTER CLASSES

ANTHROPOLOGY SENIOR THESIS—PROPOSAL/PROSPECTUS

A thesis proposal serves several purposes simultaneously:

- For you, the prospectus serves to make the thesis real. It firms up your commitment to a particular anthropological problem, gets you into the library and/or into the field, and forces you to demarcate a sufficiently specific topic. This intellectual work PRECEDES the writing of the proposal.
- You will have to come up with a clear idea of how you will proceed (likely books to use, theoretical discourses in which to situate yourself, proposed methods, a timeline) and this forces you to plan ahead.
- It will assist us, your professors, when delegating advising responsibilities.
- It will put all of us on notice of your interests so that we can send relevant material your way as it comes to our attention. This can be a very useful by product of the proposal writing process.

Your proposal is your chance to choose a topic which you care about personally and/or fascinates you intellectually. You will live and breathe whatever topic you choose for many months, so be sure you are passionate about it and that it is also feasible. This fervor will then help propel you through the coming months of hard work. Try to demonstrate your enthusiasm in your proposal, which should be lively rather than overly mechanical. We have placed in the lounge a (red) notebook with sample thesis proposals and many theses of varying quality for you to peruse for inspiration. Each faculty member has particular theses set aside to serve as inspiration as well. While the content and contours of the proposal are largely in your hands, you **MUST** include the following:

- A descriptive working **TITLE** (you may wish to hold flashy titles for later). A clear **SUMMARY STATEMENT** covering both the **topic** and the **question** to be investigated.
- Your subsequent **DISCUSSION** of the issue should take several pages, including **setting the scene** for the investigation of the problem (e.g., institution to investigate; cultural belief structure to explicate) and reviewing what others may have already thought or written about it (e.g., presentation of a specific theoretical paradigm or philosophical debate; demonstrated familiarity with the contours of the **relevant literatures**).
- Your **WORK PLAN** should address both **methodology** (how you will generate your data), as well as a **timeline** (your procedure over the coming months).
- Include your strategy concerning Bates' **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**.
- A **WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY** for the entire project should be appended. You don't [yet] have to have read everything in detail, but you do have to indicate to us that you have been digging for sources.

The project proposal is due October 1st for full year and November 1st for winter term theses. We may ask you to revise before allowing you to move on. Remember, the quality of your prospectus will figure in both AN441 grading and the final evaluation of the thesis itself. One of the benefits of being at a small school is the availability of faculty and reference librarians for consultation—take advantage of this opportunity!

ANTHROPOLOGY SENIOR THESIS—THE WRITING PROCESS

By their nature, theses are exercises in creating new knowledge. In a natural science, a thesis project might entail a laboratory experiment; in philosophy, it might require a close analysis of a particular philosophical position. Most theses for this department depend upon fieldwork, in combination with library research.

Theses do more than gather information on a particular topic. Theses are not reports, nor are they entirely descriptive. They can be genuine research only to the extent that they look at a topic generated out of a particular location from a theoretical perspective. Without a perspective on the topic, students have no criterion by which to include or exclude material, except, perhaps, the limits of their own energy, the extent of our library resources, and the strictures of time. With a perspective, though, carrying out fieldwork or doing library research acquires a point, a premise, a reason: “I want to show that Sahlins’ understanding of ‘stereotypic reproduction’ is wrong in the case of the colonial encounter between Greeks and Macedonians.” Or: “In this thesis I want to take a cognitive anthropological approach and investigate *The Bates Student*.” Or: “Anthropological thought has been dominated in recent years by two approaches to the peasantry and agricultural development, one associated with Geertz, the other, with Bloch. This thesis is an attempt to evaluate the strengths and shortcomings of both approaches.”

A good thesis can begin with a student’s interest in either a topic or a theory. Sometimes it begins with a student rummaging through anthropology journals. Sometimes it grows out of the ideas or experiences first encountered on a junior year abroad program or during a summer job or internship. Topics are motivated sometimes by moral interest, sometimes by more obviously academic concerns. There is no reason in principle why a student could not take an anthropological theory and apply it to a not obviously anthropological case, let’s say, something that struck a student’s interest while taking a course on Roman Britain, or on the Old Testament, or on the contemporary media, etc.

An anthropology thesis can come from virtually anywhere and investigate virtually anything. Good theses, however, have a common structure. They begin with a review of the literature, usually retracing the evolution of recent arguments relative to an issue of theoretical importance. This literature review sets the scene for the presentation of the new material that follows. That material can be ethnographic material collected by the writer, it could be library material uncovered and re-analyzed by the writer, or an examination from another perspective of the theoretical literature presented previously. The number of chapters is arbitrary, but most theses have three or four chapters and run from fifty to eighty pages. Length for its own sake does not make a thesis; the productive tension between theory and case material does.

This handout can only provide a summary view of conceptualizing and organizing a thesis--each thesis is a project that takes its particular shape from the interaction of *two* human beings with the theoretical and descriptive material. Students need to see their advisor regularly, to brainstorm, get feedback, and come to an understanding of what will work and what will not. Guidance on the mechanical details necessary for writing a long research paper can be found in Kate Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Further information is available on such webpages as Bates’ Writing Workshop (use the link on the “hot list”) and C.B.B. (<http://leeds.bates.edu/cbb/>). Students shall follow the *American Anthropologist*’s style of “embedded citations” and endnotes (see www.aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.pdf, esp. pp.5,7-8,10-14). Bates’ IRB website is <http://abacus.bates.edu/acad/depts/psychology/irb/>

WRITING A THESIS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology theses may differ somewhat from those on other anthropological topics because they tend to be interdisciplinary, often relating to one or more of the natural sciences, and because archaeological data tend to be concrete, often requiring quantitative descriptive analysis. The facilities, collections, and research activities of the Maine State Museum provide many interesting opportunities for such thesis projects. However, an added bit of planning and coordination may be required to assure their success.

If you are interested in writing an archaeology thesis based upon original archaeological research, be sure to contact Professor Bourque early so that you can develop a workable project design. You may have to arrange for substantial advice from a faculty member in another department, schedule travel to visit Museum collections, or conduct fieldwork or other activities which complicate matters slightly.

STUDENT RESEARCH FUNDS

Seniors undertaking anthropological research projects may apply to several internal Bates programs for funds to support travel expenses, cassette or film purchase, software, phone interviews, transcription, and interlibrary loan costs. Some programs are administered by the Dean of the Faculty's Office, others by the Dean of Students' Office. The Harvard Center is another source of funding for anthropology students. See Doris Vincent in the Off-Campus Study Office or Kerry O'Brien in Jill Reich's office for more information on these opportunities. It is Marty Deschaines at the Harvard Center. Consult the Student Research and Service-Learning Support website www.bates.edu/Research-grants.xml. The department itself has a reasonable budget for student research funding, including, but not limited to, the **Hamill Family Fund for Fieldwork in Anthropology**.

[revised 3-08]