

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

SENIOR THESIS

Graduating seniors and alumni recount that completing a thesis project is the most meaningful and rewarding academic experience of their four years at Bates College. A thesis allows you to examine a scholarly topic from an original perspective, to support a well-reasoned argument through evidence or research, and to write a cohesive paper that demonstrates your intellectual engagement with this topic. The faculty in Anthropology crafted this document to address rising seniors' questions about their upcoming thesis writing process

Over the next nine to twelve months you will delve into an anthropological topic that intrigues you, develop a focused research question about this topic, and attempt to answer it through independent archaeological or ethnographic research. Distilling this research into a well crafted, lucid and cogent thesis paper provides a sense of accomplishment for any student in Anthropology.

You will complete your theses in your final semester (exceptions are exceedingly rare), but the requisite research and writing process will shape your entire final college year. Be prepared for a significant extra workload during your entire senior year. Initiative is left largely up to the student, though the senior seminar (AN441) does include a thesis-writing component and we do enforce some departmental deadlines, listed below.

Starting early is key, especially when seeking thesis research funding whether from the department, the Dean of Faculty, Off-Campus Study, or the Harvard Center (note that only the anthropology department deadlines are listed below).

The Honors Thesis

In the spring, the Department will invite those rising seniors with strong academic records to pursue honors. They may opt to complete either a (full year) honors or a regular (second semester) thesis. Students interested in honors but not invited may still petition the department for permission. In such circumstances, the advisor's support and a well-crafted proposal about a well-planned project are requisite for departmental approval. Honors rules and deadlines are set each year by a college wide committee; hence they cannot be listed here by specific date. The Honors Committee expects no more than 10% of any department's seniors to pursue honors.

Former Students' Senior Projects

Download a PDF containing honors thesis abstracts from 1996-2008 at:
<http://www.bates.edu/Prebuilt/anthropology-honors-abstracts9-17-08.pdf>

Ethical Research and the Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Any student conducting independent archaeological or ethnographic research is expected to practice ethical research methods, including informed consent, as outlined by the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics at http://www.aaanet.org/_cs_upload/issues/policy-advocacy/27668_1.pdf. Your thesis advisor will assist you to navigate these issues. Anthropology thesis writers must meet the college's Institutional Review Board requirements. These "deadlines" are rolling. See the IRB website at <http://abacus.bates.edu/acad/depts/psychology/irb/>

Thesis Advisors

If you would like to write your thesis with the guidance of a particular faculty member, you should speak to that individual directly – the sooner the better. Though the department will decide who will become your thesis advisor, we take into account your preference.

Please note that the Anthropology department generally will not allow you to choose a thesis advisor outside of the Anthropology faculty. Consult with the department chair before you approach a faculty member outside of Anthropology to advise your thesis.

Access to Student Research Room

Every year, two or three Politics and another two or three Anthropology thesis writers get to use the Student Research Room (Pettengill Hall 153). See the Anthropology department chair for more information. Preference is given to honors thesis candidates.

SCHEDULE OF DEPARTMENTAL EVENTS AND DEADLINES

JUNIOR YEAR

- March 15 **Hamill Family Fund for Fieldwork Application Due (Optional)**
- April **Department faculty will hold an informational meeting for all junior majors**
- May 15 **Written description of likely topic and method.**
Each student should be in ongoing discussions with faculty advisor/s concerning possible thesis topics and methods. These conversations should continue over the summer.

SENIOR YEAR

- September 15 **Honors petition (Optional).**
Honors candidacy is contingent upon Department approval. 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	Department revisits all Honors Candidacies Official honors nominations go to College Honors Committee.
February	Department revisits all Honors Candidacies Honors thesis abstract due to College Honors Committee. December graduates with full year theses submit thesis prospectus by early February with revisions due in early March.
March/April	Honors due dates and panels set by College Honors Committee. December graduates with fall one semester theses need to get their thesis prospectus to the department in early March with final revisions due early April. Regular theses due by the last day of Winter classes

THE SHAPE OF THE PROPOSAL

This proposal is your chance to address a topic you care about personally and/or fascinates you intellectually. For many months you will live and breathe this project, so be sure you are passionate about your topic and that it is feasible. Your fervor will then propel you through the coming months. Demonstrate enthusiasm in your proposal, which should be lively rather than overly mechanical. Your audience for the proposal is the entire faculty of the Anthropology Department.

We have placed in the lounge a (red) notebook with sample thesis proposals, but bear in mind their authors did not have the benefit of the outline we here provide for you in this revised handout. There are old theses in the lounge and each faculty member has particular theses set aside to serve as models as well.

A thesis proposal serves several purposes simultaneously, for you and for us:

- It serves to make your 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.
- It helps you clarify your conceptual framework early in the process.
- It helps you to develop a clear timeline for how you manage your thesis research and writing. How will you proceed? This forces you to plan ahead. What are the likely books you will use? Within what theoretical discourses will you situate yourself? What useful methodological strategies might you identify?
- It will assist us, your professors, when delegating advising responsibilities as evenly and as fairly as possible.
- The quality of your proposal will figure in both ANTH441 grading and the final evaluation of the thesis itself.
- 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 circulating process.

The precise content or contour of your proposal is in your hands, but Anthropology proposals, as of 2009, **MUST** include the following discrete, labeled sub-sections:

1. A descriptive working **TITLE**.
2. A clear, succinct, **SUMMARY STATEMENT OF INQUIRY** covering not only the **topic** but also the **question** to be investigated. This may be presented in the form of a thesis statement.
3. A subsequent more detailed **DISCUSSION** of the issue should set the scene for your investigation by explaining the institution to investigate, the cultural belief structure to explicate. Be sure to let the department know why you find this topic of particular interest.
4. A **LITERATURE REVIEW** section in which you explain to us the nature of the intellectual conversation you will be entering during your thesis year. Here you should review what others have already thought or written about your question, presenting the outlines of a specific theoretical paradigm or philosophical debate. We will look for a demonstrated familiarity with the contours of the relevant ethnographic and theoretical literatures.
5. A **METHODOLOGY** section follows. How, precisely, will you generate your data? This section is extremely important and needs serious attention at the proposal stage. We expect details.
6. A **WORK PLAN** or timeline will outline your process over the coming weeks and months. Again, we expect details. Be specific!
7. A statement of responsibility for addressing research ethics and approaching the Bates' **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**; in addition, this is your opportunity to address any ethical dilemmas you foresee. No proposal will be accepted without a statement of research ethics. See the IRB website at <http://abacus.bates.edu/acad/depts/psychology/irb/>
8. An **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY** for the entire project should be appended. Your comments should indicate the anticipated utility of the various primary and secondary sources you have already found. What other types of sources might you need to complete your task? Indicate what sleuthing may be necessary in the near future.

An annotated bibliography is a list of works in alphabetical order that provides comments about the text. The appended comments may summarize, critique, or provide general information about the text. You may want to specify key concepts or theories and provide pertinent direct quotes in the annotated entry. An annotated bibliography is *extremely helpful* when writing a literature review chapter for a thesis.

Example of an Annotated Bibliographic Entry:

Gregor, Thomas.

1985. *Anxious Pleasures: The Sexual Lives of an Amazonian People*. Chicago, IL:

The University of Chicago Press.

Gregor examines the sexual lives of the Mehinaku, a tribe of Indians living in the Amazonian river basin of northeastern Brazil. Using a psychoanalytic perspective, Gregor analyzes Mehinaku myths and men's dreams in order to suggest that the source of male anxiety and ambivalence, which seems inherent to the male personality, is due to the socialization of a feminine core (see pp. 184 – 199). This feminine core creates ambivalence in male-female relations, especially sexual relationships. I find his book devoid of the female perspective. However, I will still be able to use Gregor in my thesis chapter on gender relations.

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 Japan and Korea." 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 in a class. 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.

As of academic year 2011-12, the Department is open to thesis proposals that have an applied orientation. We expect the majority of thesis projects to carry on the traditional anthropological task, investigating an ethnographic or archeological case and applying a theoretical perspective to it. But we can also imagine some majors being better served by pursuing a project with an applied focus, set in the context of policy issues that bear on that focus.

One example can illustrate what we mean by an applied thesis project. For the past few years Elizabeth Eames and some of our majors have worked with the Androscoggin Bank on providing banking facilities for local Muslims consistent with Sharia (Islamic) law. A thesis project with an applied focus might take this form. There have been other Western and Asian communities and banks that have attempted to provide Muslims with borrowing facilities that do not violate religious scruples. The thesis might begin with a review of these projects and an evaluation of their successes and failures. The balance of the thesis might develop a proposal for how the Androscoggin Bank ought to proceed in light of other communities' experiences. A further task might entail consideration of the theoretical and ethical issues involved in accommodating new Americans. Comparable projects could follow the same logic in looking at community health issues, local education, Habitat for Humanity projects, migration trends in Lewiston and Auburn, or Catholic Charities.

An anthropology thesis can investigate virtually anything. Good theses, however, have a common structure. They begin with a review of the literature on your chosen subject, usually retracing the evolution of recent arguments relative to the issue of theoretical importance. Your literature review

should cover past and current work relevant to your subject, theoretical paradigm, or philosophical debate, and must demonstrate your familiarity with this literature. As you present the literature review, situate your own work within this subject area. How does your work contribute to this larger body of scholarship?

In the following chapters, you should present your methodology and data collected. Your data may include ethnographic material you collected, archival material, secondary sources you have analyzed, or other material you have gathered. This material should be presented in a way that reflects its relationship to your subject and larger study. Finally, you must analyze your data and draw meaning from it through applying an anthropological perspective. It is through this analysis that your research question(s) may be answered, and that your work may be transformed into a significant synthesis of research and theory.

The number of chapters in a thesis is arbitrary, but most have three to six chapters and the entire thesis may run approximately sixty (60) pages. Length for its own sake does not make a thesis; the productive tension between theory and case material does. Think journal article rather than book monograph, and persuasive argument rather than descriptive narrative.

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 a minimum of two human beings with the theoretical and descriptive material. That is, students need to regularly see their advisor, to brainstorm, get feedback, and come to a mutual 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 “Writing at Bates” www.bates.edu/writing.xml. Students shall follow the American Anthropologist's style of “embedded citations” and endnotes, located at http://www.aaanet.org/publications/style_guide.pdf (see especially pp. 4, 7-9).

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.

Writing an Honors Thesis

Honors theses are year-long projects that draw students deeply into their chosen topic. They involve close cooperation with a supportive advisor who helps the student frame the thesis and develop methodological and theoretical tools to address the question. In addition, they often lead to satisfying contacts with experts outside the Bates community. Honors projects usually have their inception prior to the senior year, often with junior-year study abroad or field work during the pre-

senior summer. They formally begin in May of the junior year, with an invitation, and continue in September of the senior year with the submission of a proposal to the anthropology faculty and terminate the following May with a thesis defense before a panel of Bates faculty and an outside expert in the chosen subject. The prospect of writing an honors thesis may at first seem daunting but your advisor will understand this and respond with enthusiastic support. In the end, the intellectual challenges and satisfactions of completion are profound and often have lasting positive impacts upon students' subsequent lives. While some honors theses lead to publishable papers and many form a path to graduate education, all impart a sense of maturity and confidence in having actually made a significant contribution to knowledge.

Invitations to do an honors thesis are issued in the spring of the junior year based upon prior academic achievement. Those wishing to petition the department for the right to pursue an honors thesis should submit their written application in September of their senior year. Normally, Bates departments admit only 10% of their students to the honors program, and the petition is a serious matter.

Resources

Seniors undertaking anthropological research projects may apply to several internal Bates programs for funds to support travel expenses, software, phone interviews, transcription, and interlibrary loan costs. Some funding 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, Kerry O'Brien in Jill Reich's office and Marty Deschaines at the Harvard Center for more information on these opportunities. Consult the Student Research and Service-Learning Support website at www.bates.edu/Research-grants.xml. The department itself has a small budget for student research funding, including, but not limited to, the Hamill Family Fund for Fieldwork in Anthropology.

The Classroom and Technology Event Support Center in Pettigrew Hall 118 maintains a loaner pool of equipment for the Bates community. Students may borrow digital still and video cameras, digital audio recorders, and transcribers. See <http://abacus.bates.edu/ils/offices/media/loanerpoolstudent.html> for additional information.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE THESIS

The Anthropology Department envisions the thesis as an opportunity for you to demonstrate your command of a focused literature on a particular topic within the discipline of anthropology. We expect that through the thesis process you will achieve the following:

Personal Intellectual Growth

- Demonstrate **intellectual curiosity** through the choice of topic and approach
- Acquire a **specialized set of skills** (listening, formulating research questions, using constructive criticism) developed through a **productive relationship with an advisor**
- Create a **completed product**

Content

- Demonstrate a **depth of knowledge about one of the four fields** in the discipline of anthropology
- Evince your **intellectual heritage** by drawing on and citing appropriately the anthropological scholarship and theory relevant to your topic
- Examine a **cultural text or ethnographic case with depth and originality**
 - Describe, interpret, and analyze the text or case
 - Recognize the contradiction, complexity, and embeddedness of this case
- Indicate that you **think anthropologically**
 - Understand insider's/outsider's perspective by demonstrating an awareness of your own positionality
 - Understand a relativistic perspective as compared to an ethnocentric one
 - Understand the limits of relativism
 - Put the case in temporal or spatial context. Explain how the case is historically constituted and situated in a particular place and space.
 - Understand the social construction of reality

Methodology

- Demonstrate **ethical research practices** (which you explain in a methodology section)
- Apply **ethnographic, ethnohistorical or archaeological methods** which you specifically identify and justify (in a methodology section)

Writing and Mechanics

- Compose a **grammatically correct, well-organized, lucid and cogent** document
 - Use precise, concise language
- Clearly articulate your argument in the **introduction**
- Effectively present **evidence** to support your **argument**
- Support your argument in a **compelling conclusion**
- Engage the **reader** in the topic
 - Be aware of and sensitive to audience
- Write in the discipline, using **appropriate style**
- Demonstrate **academic honesty** through appropriate in-text citation for paraphrases and direct quotes and a comprehensive bibliography formatted using the AAA Style Guide

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Deadlines

These project proposals are due **October 1st** for full year and **November 1st** for winter term theses (for December graduates, these dates are February 1st and March 1st respectively). We hope that with our new structural directives, the need for students to revise the proposals at the busiest time of the semester will be reduced, but we reserve the right to ask for revisions if necessary.

Remember, the quality of your prospectus will figure in both ANTH441 grading and the final evaluation of the thesis itself. One of the benefits of being at a small college is the availability of faculty and reference librarians for consultation—please take advantage of these opportunities!

ANTHROPOLOGY THESIS PROPOSAL COVER SHEET

Name: _____

Email: _____

Preferred telephone number: _____

I plan to graduate in (circle one): December June

I will be writing (circle one): One Semester Thesis Yearlong Thesis Honors Thesis

REQUIRED: Advisor's dated signature indicating approval of cover sheet and attached draft:

Advisor 1 _____ Date _____

Advisor 2 _____ Date _____

IRB: Approval date: _____ IRB Review in Progress _____ IRB Review unnecessary _____

TITLE (descriptive)

TOPIC (one phrase)

QUESTION (boil it down to one or two key sentences)

IMPORTANT ETHNOGRAPHIC LITERATURE (provide a brief statement about the literature, not a list of titles)

IMPORTANT THEORETICAL LITERATURE (provide a brief statement about the literature)

MY CONTRIBUTION TO THESE LITERATURES

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY