

SOCIOLOGY AT BATES

Senior Thesis Guidelines

The final requirement for sociology majors is the completion of a one-semester senior thesis, in which you have the opportunity to explore a topic of particular interest to you in greater depth. In consultation with a thesis advisor from the Department, you will use the tools you developed in the core methods and theory courses, as well as in junior/senior seminars, to conduct original research. The thesis allows you to work as an independent sociologist, focusing on the substantive area(s) of greatest interest to you, and using the methods and theoretical approaches you find most useful. A list of recent thesis titles is available on the Department's website. This list offers a feel for the range of topics, methods, and approaches recent majors have pursued. Please note that one junior/senior research seminar (Soc. 395) is a pre-requisite for enrolling in thesis (Soc. 457 or 458).

Schedule and Deadlines for Senior Theses

- ◆ **1. Thesis Topic Plan:** The thesis process begins with the "Thesis Topic Plan", to be completed toward the end of the semester preceding thesis work. This step is designed to get you thinking about a topic and to get you started identifying some relevant literature. You do not need to have your thesis plans fully developed or finalized by the time you submit this topic plan. The topic plan includes the following:
 - a general topic and preliminary research question for your thesis
 - your preferences for thesis advisor
 - an annotated bibliography covering four readings relevant to your topic/preliminary question

The Topic Plan should follow the format indicated on the attached coversheet (included as the last page of this document), and should be submitted to the Department Chair by the following dates:

- For Fall semester theses: May 15 of the junior year (if you will be away during short term, you are welcome to submit it by mail or to submit it in April before leaving campus)
 - For Winter semester theses: December 1 of the senior year
- ◆ **2. Thesis Advisor Assignment:** On the basis of the Thesis Topic Plans submitted to the Department, you will be assigned a thesis advisor before the end of the semester in which the topic plan is submitted. The criteria for assignment are: 1) faculty expertise as related to student's topic; 2) equity of distribution across faculty members; and 3) student preferences. We will try to assign you to the advisor of your choice, but given the importance of the other two criteria you should not assume that will be possible. Once an advisor is assigned, you should meet with your advisor to talk briefly about your topic plan, so that you can begin to work on additional reading during the break before the semester in which your official thesis work actually begins. Whether or not you are assigned your preferred advisor, other faculty members in the department will always be glad to talk with you about your thesis ideas.

- ◆ **3. Thesis Proposal:** By the end of the second week of classes during the semester in which you are actually enrolled for thesis, you will be expected to submit a brief proposal to your thesis advisor, specifying more fully your research question, methods, and schedule for completion of thesis work. Advisors may vary in terms of their particular expectations for the thesis proposal, but generally you will be expected to specify a research question, offer a preliminary review of scholarly literature related to that question, detail how you plan to gather evidence to answer the research question, and indicate how you plan to distribute this work across the semester.

General Expectations for a Senior Thesis in Sociology

Your assigned advisor, as well as any other faculty members you wish to approach in the Department, will help you ensure that whatever project you plan for your thesis will meet our expectations for a senior thesis in sociology. As you know, the discipline is diverse in the methods and theories it uses, and thus the possibilities for topics and approaches in a sociology thesis are rich and numerous. But as guidelines to consider as you begin to think about your thesis ideas, the general expectations for theses in sociology are as follows:

- theses should incorporate a sociological perspective in investigating the chosen topic;
- theses should be focused around a research question or questions, should integrate ideas from sociology (and other relevant disciplines) in framing the question(s), and should offer an argument with systematically-analyzed evidence to support it.

The specific contents of a sociology thesis will vary depending on the topic and research question, the kinds of methods used, and the preferences of both student and advisor. But as a general guideline, a sociology thesis typically includes about 4-5 chapters, and covers the following:

- An introduction to the topic, question(s), argument and methods used in the thesis, as well as a literature review, providing a critical synthesis of the existing literature related to the topic/question(s) (as a single chapter or a separate introduction chapter followed by a literature review chapter)
- A detailed description of the methods used to gather evidence and to systematically analyze that evidence, and a presentation of the results of that analysis of evidence, including its relation to the question(s) and ideas presented in the first chapter(s) (as a single chapter or multiple chapters, depending on the content)
- A conclusion, usually summarizing the argument and evidence, and offering suggestions for future research and/or social action based on the results of the thesis
- After the conclusion, a bibliography (typically prepared according to American Sociological Association Style) and an appendix if necessary (e.g., a sample questionnaire or interview schedule, supplementary materials regarding an organization studied, or other materials considered important to include but which would not be appropriate to include fully in the text).

Honors Theses

All students are required to write a one-semester thesis as part of the requirements for the major in sociology. If you are interested in earning Departmental Honors by completing an Honors Thesis, you should begin by planning for a fall semester thesis, and should indicate to your assigned thesis advisor that you would like to be considered for Departmental Honors. At the end of each fall semester, the Department will meet to review theses submitted in the fall by students interested in honors consideration. On the basis of the quality of work in those theses, as well as each student's overall performance in coursework within the major, a few students will be invited to continue their thesis work during the winter semester as honors thesis work. The following are expected for consideration for Departmental Honors in sociology:

- a minimum GPA of 3.67 within the major and a minimum GPA of 3.67 overall as well
- completion of a fall semester senior thesis deemed by the Department's faculty to be of sufficient scope and quality to be considered for honors (based on the submission of a brief synopsis to the Department in the middle of November)
- continued excellence of second semester thesis work as judged by the Department's faculty (based on the submission of another brief synopsis in early February)

Students hoping to participate in the Honors Program should plan their winter semester courses as if they will not be enrolling for a second semester of thesis, and make adjustments as appropriate once honors invitations have been extended by the Department.

Students continuing their thesis work in the second semester for the Departmental Honors Program may collect additional data/evidence, further develop their analysis of evidence they collected in the fall, deepen their review of the existing scholarly literature on their topic, and revise the written work in their fall semester thesis. The College requires that students being considered for Departmental Honors submit their final thesis by early March. Later in March, honors candidates are required to defend their thesis orally, before a panel of sociology faculty, other Bates faculty from outside the Department, and an outside expert in the student's field of interest. It is on the basis of the final thesis, as well as this oral defense, that the panel makes a final determination of whether a student will receive Departmental Honors.

Questions?

All of this information may leave you with questions, and any member of the department will be glad to talk with you about the senior thesis process, the department's expectations, and/or your particular thesis ideas. As for all students who complete a senior thesis at Bates, this is a substantial and potentially intimidating process. But it is also an experience that most Bates alumni report was of lasting significance for them. We hope all sociology majors will feel free to ask for help, and for answers to any questions that may arise, as they embark on this experience.

Thesis Topic Plan: Department of Sociology

Circle One: **Fall Thesis (Due 5/15, Junior Year)** **Winter Thesis (Due 12/1, Senior Year)**

1. Name: _____

2. Pre-requisite information: Please list the junior/senior research seminar(s) (Soc. 395) that you have completed or in which you are currently enrolled (at least one Soc. 395 must be completed before you can begin your senior thesis):

3. General topic: please offer a very brief statement of your proposed topic (you will expand on this in the attachments described under #5 below):

4. Previous coursework/background: please describe briefly any previous coursework you have completed, within sociology and elsewhere in the curriculum, that you feel has provided you with background for addressing this topic.

5. Please attach the following to this form: 1) a brief typed paragraph explaining the topic noted under #3 and offering a preliminary research question for your thesis; 2) a brief typed annotated bibliography, providing citations for and short descriptions of the content/relevance of at least 4 sources related to your proposed topic.

6. Advisor preference (please list one faculty member in the Department you would particularly like to work with if possible; keep in mind the criteria noted under “Thesis Advisor Assignment” and realize that we may not be able to assign you to the advisor you prefer):

→IF FALL: check here if you think you may wish to be considered for the Departmental Honors Program and you meet the criteria noted on p. 3 of this packet (note that it is particularly important for advisor assignments to be distributed equitably across faculty for this program) _____

Please submit one copy of this form and the attachments described under #5 to the Department Chair by the due date shown at the top of this coversheet.