

To: History Majors
From: History Department faculty
Date: September, 2010
Subject: Thesis Requirements and Responsibilities

What is the Senior Thesis?

The thesis is more than a traditional term paper; it is an undertaking beyond even an excellent term paper. The topic should be broader, the number of sources greater, the amount of integration and analysis of material more extensive. The final result should be between 35 and 60 pages.

The History Department does not permit the writing of joint theses for double majors. All History majors must write a History thesis.

Research: Both secondary sources and primary sources should be employed, the latter not necessarily in large number. The thesis must show the student's ability to make a successful search for appropriate materials.

Analysis: The work should show evidence of interpretive skills: ability to make generalizations from specific examples, draw conclusions, integrate the topic into a broader historical context.

Mechanics: The thesis must be properly organized and well-written. Prose should be grammatically correct, clear and coherent. Organization of ideas must flow smoothly. Use of quotations, footnotes, and bibliographical form should all be in correct format for historians, as set out in Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing History*, 6th edition.

Advisors: Students are asked to choose the advisor with whom they wish to work. Every effort is made to match students with the advisors they choose. In order to distribute work load evenly throughout the department, however, a student may not always get his/her first choice.

Honors Criteria

Only students with an overall GPA of 3.5 or above by Spring semester of the junior year may attempt an Honors thesis.

1. Substantial use of primary sources. Papers should be original from the student's point of view. The student must find and evaluate a solid body of previously undigested materials, confronting issues of authenticity, completeness of evidence, integration, conflict of sources, etc. Availability of such sources is taken into account.

2. Thoroughness of investigation and analysis. An Honors thesis must go beyond simply collecting and summarizing information. Honors work involves substantial analysis, especially demonstrating the significance of the subject. Generally, for the greater number of sources and more in-depth analysis demanded of an Honors thesis, more space is required. An Honors thesis will usually be about 50 to 70 pages in length.

3. Historiographical review. An honors paper should demonstrate some ability to put the subject into historiographical context. This may be embedded within the paper, or may be contained in an introductory section or first chapter.

4. Honors theses must meet high standards of overall quality: logical argumentation; excellent organizational structure; clean, clear grammar; meticulous in footnote, bibliography and quotation mechanics; and carefully proofread.

5. Honors theses **MUST** meet all deadlines listed in the schedule.

6. In order to receive Honors, a student's thesis must first be submitted to the department by the advisor. The entire department reads the thesis; a majority must recommend it for Honors.

When should a thesis be failed?

1. When the student has committed plagiarism, that is, presented the ideas or words of others as his/her own.

2. When it relies heavily on only a few secondary sources, and thus has not demonstrated the student's ability to think through the sources or solve problems of comprehension or presentation.

3. When the paper is poor in organization, logic or writing, regardless of the quality of the research.

4. When the paper does not represent the quantity (as opposed to quality) of work demanded. In other words, when a student ignores relevant available sources, or addresses only part of the agreed-upon topic.

5. When the paper is incomplete in documentation.

6. When the thesis shows insufficient understanding of the subject, broader context, and/or uses evidence indiscriminately.

7. When a student has not sufficiently participated in the process of working with his/her advisor, regardless of the overall result. All work must go through one revision based on comments from the advisor.

8. Students who have not turned in a full first draft by March 30, 2011.

In order to complete your thesis on time (and have a positive experience):

1. Take responsibility for meeting deadlines.

Faculty members need to know when to expect material so that we may find time in our schedules to read and comment on your work. Professors are advising several theses at once in addition to regular class responsibilities. When students miss deadlines, we simply don't have the time to attend to their writing and return it to them with enough time for them to make use of our suggestions.

To this end, we suggest two things. One is that you consider the departmental deadlines to be absolute, and set your own personal deadlines in advance. Then you don't have to worry about falling behind; even if you fall behind your personal deadlines, you will still meet the departmental dates. Second, think about a final deadline somewhere around mid-semester of the spring, well before the departmental deadline. Everyone gets very busy during the last half of the semester--you will have your course requirements, papers and exams to prepare, job applications, etc. We need to spend the last few weeks of the semester grading papers for our courses while continuing to work with thesis students. The amount of time and assistance we're able to give you drops off at mid-semester and is drastically reduced during the last three weeks of the term.

2. Meet with your advisor continually throughout the year.

What faculty members look for in a thesis is not merely the end result, but also the process itself. The thesis is, to some extent, a collaborative effort. Because of the nature of our educational system, many of you are not used to this--you write a paper on your own, submit it and earn a grade. With the thesis, you will focus not just on the final product, but on the work in progress, making adjustments based on your advisor's suggestions. The more we talk about your work, ideas, sources, and the more you show us in writing early on, the better for you. Think of this as a positive, constructive process. Some of you are only used to coming to a professor's office when there is a problem. But get into the habit of thinking of this whole process positively.

Remember, you chose a college with a Senior Obligation, and you chose a department with a thesis requirement, and you chose your own topic. So enjoy doing it, make this topic your own, and take pride in your efforts. And view us as more experienced writers, researchers, and historians who are giving you the benefit of our knowledge. Our comments are meant constructively, take them in that spirit. Even if you are a good student, you will need to make some revisions. That is the nature of this endeavor. Professional writers re-write things over

and over again, not because they are poor writers, not because they're incompetent, but because they want to improve constantly.

3. Follow our advice.

Problems are caused by students simply avoiding suggestions about which they are unclear, or with which they do not agree. We expect you to either make the changes we suggest OR talk to us about why you can't or don't want to. Simply ignoring our comments is not acceptable. We put a lot of time into reading your work and coming up with solutions to improve the project. Keep in mind also that we have much more experience than you in researching and writing history, as well as in critically analyzing written work. So please take advantage of our skills. That doesn't mean, however, that you must blindly follow every suggestion, even ones that make no sense to you. Talk to us if you are unsure how to do something that we've asked.

History Thesis Schedule-- for Seniors Graduating Spring 2011

Fall Semester 2010

Week 3 - Sep 13

Meet with advisor to discuss your plan of thesis progress. Students who have taken HIS 399: Historical Method in the spring of their junior year should have already chosen a topic, compiled a bibliography, written an outline and prospectus. Students who have not yet taken HIS 399 will need to work out a plan with their advisors to get caught up.

At this meeting, students will go over this schedule with their advisors and sign a copy which the advisor will retain.

Week 10 - Nov 1

Mandatory meeting with advisor, first chapter due.

Spring Semester 2011

Week 3 - Feb 2

Mandatory meeting with advisor, second chapter due.

Week 7 - March 2

Mandatory meeting with advisor, third chapter due.

Week 10 - Mar 30

Full draft due to advisor, complete with introduction, conclusion, footnotes, and bibliography.

Students who miss this deadline or have missed mandatory meetings with their advisor will not be eligible for Spring graduation.

Week 12 - Apr 13

Final versions of theses of any students attempting Honors are due (two copies). Theses submitted after this deadline cannot be considered for Honors.

Week 14 (last day of classes) - Apr 30

Final copy due.

No thesis will be accepted after this date. (College policy)

No student who has not turned in a final copy of the thesis will graduate in May.

Students who turn in theses deemed unacceptable by their advisors will not graduate in May.

NO exceptions to this rule.

NOTE: This schedule is intended as a guide; your advisor may choose to meet with you more frequently, depending on your progress. Your advisor may also impose more frequent deadlines than the ones listed here, and you should abide by them.

Library submission: You will receive an email message from the librarians explaining how to submit your thesis to Miller Library electronically. Save these instructions and follow them once your advisor has approved the final version of your thesis

I have read and understand the policies contained within this document.

Student signature

Date

Faculty advisor:

SAMPLE THESIS TITLE PAGE

The History of Washington College
Senior Thesis
by
Carol Wilson

Submitted May 1, 2008
to Prof. Janet Sorrentino