

Senior Thesis/Project

All candidates for honors in Special Concentrations must submit a senior thesis. This thesis usually takes the form of an essay of approximately 40 to 70 pages. Given the wide variety of Special Concentrations, however, students have often submitted material in other media. For example, we have had films, a musical comedy, an opera and a musical adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* offered in lieu of a senior essay. Students with a practical, laboratory or performing aspect to their concentration should consult closely with their adviser and the Director of Undergraduate Studies before pursuing such a senior thesis.

Choosing a Topic

Writing a thesis is a task which calls for planning, research and perseverance. Thesis writers must find a topic which combines their serious interests with an issue of concern to the scholarly world. The effort necessary to produce a good thesis cannot arise from an issue foreign to your concerns and imposed on you from without; nor can private field notes or a personal testament serve as scholarship. You should already have made progress after three years of undergraduate studies, including two semesters of junior tutorial work. To help identify your scholarly interest, look over your past work at Harvard and find those themes or threads of interest that run through the choices you have made. Once you discover a field and a general question or set of questions, speak with those who are knowledgeable about that area in order to clarify the topic and limit it to a manageable scope. Read broadly in that area and find out what has been done and what still can be done.

Finding a Thesis Adviser

Special Concentrators usually have less trouble finding an adviser than students in other departments as they already have a good working relationship with their faculty adviser. The faculty adviser may or may not choose to act as thesis adviser, but he or she can usually direct the thesis writer to an expert in the field who will be willing to advise the thesis.

Planning the Work

The foundation of a good thesis is laid in the fall semester or sooner. A good thesis shows breadth of study and depth of insight. A senior cannot expect to read broadly in the relevant field after the fall semester; by then one must focus one's energies on the material that will appear in the final draft - on the writing and argument. One cannot afford to spend a leisurely month reading and thinking about the topic as a whole and the larger implications of one's research; instead, come spring, one will be overcome with the need to produce a finished piece of writing. This breadth can only be supplied in the relative calm of the preceding summer and fall term.

Similarly, the depth of one's argument comes from the repeated experience of making a generalization, stepping back to consider its inadequacies, and refining that position by further argument. This process of bold thesis-making and serious self-criticism necessarily takes time; it cannot be done in the month or two that is available in the spring. The result of a last-minute rush to write a thesis will be an error-ridden superficial work. It is important to begin writing as soon as possible. Thoughts that are written out are usually more coherent. It is also easier to improve on a thought when you can look back at it a week later and show it to your adviser for comment.

Content

The primary aim of the thesis writer, whatever the area of his/her thesis, should be to express his/her ideas clearly and coherently - not in the jargon of a specialty or with unnecessarily long and involved sentences. Since the author is communicating to the reader the originality of the interpretation and the expression of the ideas, the sentence structure and the words chosen should

enhance the ideas, not obscure them. There should be a clear beginning, middle and end, i.e., a clear introduction where the problems are posed or the areas to be investigated are stated; a middle containing the detailed arguments and documentation leading to the final resolution; and an end which logically concludes the two earlier sections with clarification and, if appropriate, resolution of the earlier themes or by suggested solutions to the problems posed in the first section.

For theses in scientific areas: in general, a thesis based on laboratory experiments should contain the following sections: Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, Discussion, and Brief Summary followed by a list of References which were cited in the text.

Deadlines

Three copies of the thesis must be submitted to the Office of Special Concentrations by the Thursday before Winter Holiday Recess for March degrees, or the Thursday before Spring Break for June degrees.

No late theses will be accepted without the approval of the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Extensions must be granted before the deadline date, and then only because of a prolonged illness or other serious emergency. Thesis advisers should help students plan so as to leave time for a computer or printer breakdown, as well as a final adviser's response and a thorough proofreading.

Proofreading

The author is responsible for all typed material, and, therefore, typographical errors, misspellings, and other inconsistencies should be corrected. An excessive number of errors of this type will lower the thesis grade.

Length

There is no absolute minimum or maximum, although in general the thesis should be between 40 and 70 pages. These limits refer to the main text of the thesis, including footnotes, but not bibliographies, glossaries, or appendices.

Style & Format

Paper should be 8½ x 11 inch acid-free bond paper and should say "acid-free," "acid-neutral" (pH 7.0-8.5) or "buffered". Common types are: Xerox XXV Archival Bond and Howard Permalife. Hammermill's acid-free recycled paper is also acceptable; it is the least expensive. Please note: Only the copy for Archives must be on acid-free paper.

Leave 1½" on left edge (binding edge) and 1" on all other sides. Pages should be numbered. Font size should be 12 point. Manuscripts should be double-spaced, except for long quotations, footnotes and references. Notes, bibliography, and other matters of style should consistently follow the guidelines in one of the following style manuals: *MLA Handbook, A Manual of Style* (University of Chicago Press), *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian, or *Form and Style In Thesis Writing* by William Campbell. The choice of which manual to follow should be discussed with one's adviser.

Illustrations

Black and white is preferred since color is not permanent. Dry mounting is acceptable for photographs. Use a good quality, acid neutral paste (Uhu). Do NOT use rubber cement, cellophane or gummed tapes.

Sample title page form

<p>Title</p> <p>A thesis presented by</p> <p>Name</p> <p>to</p> <p>The Committee on Degrees in Special Concentrations in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree with honors of Bachelor of Arts Harvard College</p> <p>Date</p>

Copies

Three copies must be submitted, an acid-free original for Archives and two clear photocopies for readers. Students should also have a fourth copy for their personal use.

Binding

Do NOT use a binder for the Archives' copy. Also, do NOT staple, do NOT punch holes in paper, and do NOT use rubber bands, they can tear the paper. Simply put a large clip in the corner and put into a manila folder. Binders may be used for readers' copies if desired.

Proper Documentation and Plagiarism

To plagiarize is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "to present as one's own an idea or product derived from an existing source." Even when the source is noted, concealed quotations or extended paraphrases that read as though the ideas were the student's own are considered instances of plagiarism. Every student should discuss the subject thoroughly with his or her adviser, and make every effort to avoid even the most unintentional appearance of undocumented

borrowing of ideas. Plagiarism is an extremely serious offense in an academic community and the usual response of the Administrative Board of the College to cases of plagiarism is requirement to withdraw. For more information see *Handbook for Students*.

Evaluation of the Thesis

The faculty adviser is ultimately responsible for finding readers for the thesis. Students are encouraged, however, to pass on any suggestions for readers they may have to the faculty adviser.

Two readers are assigned to each thesis. Grading is based on the system below. If the readings return with widely disparate grades, e.g. a *summa* and a *cum*, the opinion of a third reader is sought.

The final thesis grade is the average of the two readers' grades. *Summa* is given only rarely, because it means that, in the reader's judgment, the thesis is extraordinarily original, powerfully argued, beautifully written, in short --- remarkable.

Theses in the "magna" range have one or more truly outstanding qualities. They take on interesting and challenging subjects and handle them with skill and independence. The prose should be excellent.

A "cum" means that very good work has been done and reasonable expectations for handling the subject have been met. A "cum" should not represent merely the satisfactory completion of a task.

A student does not automatically receive a *cum* minus merely because he or she has written a thesis. A grade of "not worthy of honors" is reserved for those circumstances where the thesis is hastily and carelessly constructed, a mere summary of existing material, or is poorly thought through.

Dropping the Thesis

The Committee may exclude from Special Concentrations 99 any student who is not doing satisfactory work in tutorial. Credit will be given for half of Special Concentrations 99 if the requirements below are met.

If a student decides to drop honors at mid-year with half-course credit for Special Concentrations 99, s/he must submit a 30-page paper to his/her tutor by January 15. The first half of Special Concentrations 99 will then count as fulfilling the Special Concentrations 96r requirement for non-honors concentrators.