

Guidelines & Schedule of Key Dates for the Department of History Honors Thesis

[For Students, Advisers, and Thesis Supervisors---revised on May 2015]

The Schreyer Honors College has a description of the honors thesis and offers advice about how to choose a topic, find an adviser, and budget one's time (located at <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/>).

The Thesis

The Honors College describes the thesis as “***a scholarly piece of writing in which the writer is expected to show a command of the relevant scholarship in his (or her) field and contribute to the scholarship. It should confront a question that is unresolved and push towards a resolution.***”

The thesis is likely to be one of the most challenging and rewarding assignments of a student's undergraduate career. For history students, this is an opportunity to actually write history and personally address what history is and means. In the process of pursuing a topic, conducting independent research, formulating, articulating and crafting a sustained argument, students will build on what they have learned in coursework, gain insights into historical scholarship and methodology, and develop their talents as writers and thinkers. Once the thesis is completed students will have the satisfaction of knowing they have produced a work of scholarship that will be permanently archived in the Schreyer's (electronic) thesis archive and the Penn State Library system.

The History Department expects honors theses to be based on thorough research and to offer an original interpretation. **Students are required to undertake a meaningful degree of primary source research in crafting the thesis.**

The nature and extent of the primary research may vary according to the question pursued and the field of study. Students are also expected to situate their research and analysis within the scholarship of the field and to clearly articulate and support the significance of their project and its contribution. Students whose work involves extensive primary research should be careful not simply to present a narrative or an inventory of their sources, but to center the thesis on the analysis and interpretation of their research in such a way that their thesis makes an argument. Advisers should help determine the appropriate balance between primary research and scholarly contextualization, between presentation of the evidence and interpretation.

Length

A History thesis is expected to be between **60-100 pages of text** (300 words/page), plus the bibliography and notes. The text must be double-spaced with one-inch margins.

Think of your thesis in terms of chapters. Each chapter is a subtopic related to the whole. A chapter should present an argument supported by evidence; it could almost stand alone as a research paper, but as a chapter, it should establish its connection to the larger argument and/or preceding and succeeding chapters at least at the beginning and the end. As a ballpark figure: **you should envision the thesis as being comprised of three, or maybe four, substantive chapters**—with, in addition, a shorter “introduction” and perhaps an “epilogue.”

Footnotes

You must use footnotes or endnotes to identify the source of every quotation and every idea, conclusion, or inference you have drawn from the work of another author or source. Advisers serve as a resource if there are any doubts about whether or not to cite something.

Choose the form of the footnotes or endnotes ONLY after close consultation with, and the approval of, your thesis supervisor. Make sure to be consistent in your footnoting/endnoting formatting. Consult a guide such as the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations; The Chicago Manual of Style; Kate Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations; Richard Marius, A Short Guide to Writing About History.

Bibliography

The thesis must include a complete bibliography citing all the materials used for the thesis. See the above sources for format.

Style and Usage

The thesis is a formal piece of scholarly writing. Do not use colloquial expressions or contractions. Remember that the thesis is important—it is a source of pride and will be archived electronically (for all to read!). Go over the final draft and correct awkward phrasing; be sure to eliminate all errors in typing, spelling, and grammar.

Schedule of Key Dates & “Check-Points” for the History Honors Thesis

Three Terms before Graduation (SPRING TERM OF STUDENT’S JUNIOR YEAR)

A SHC Thesis Proposal is due to the Schreyers Honors College in the spring term of the Junior year --- April 15, 2015, for those planning to graduate in Spring 2016. The SHC Thesis Proposal outlines the scope of the proposed research and any special needs the student might have to pursue this topic, such as the need to travel to archival collections, order microfilm, and so on. **It is a History Department requirement that your SHC April Thesis Proposal include a preliminary bibliography.**

This proposal will be approved by the honors adviser; the thesis supervisor (that is—the Department faculty member who will be your primary adviser on the thesis (the honors adviser CANNOT also serve as the thesis supervisor)); and by the Schreyer’s Honors College.

This means the student must have a fairly well defined topic and a committed thesis supervisor one full year before the thesis is due.

It is incumbent upon the student—in the months preceding the time of submission of Thesis Proposal Report—to identify and approach a faculty member of the History Department as a potential thesis supervisor, someone whose field is directly relevant. Ideally, this is someone whom the student already knows and has already taken a class with. The student should explain their research interests and ask the faculty member to serve as thesis supervisor.

As you think about which faculty member(s) might serve as your thesis supervisor it is wise to consult with your honors adviser. ***Narrowing down your list of potential thesis supervisors should really be done, at the latest, around the mid-point of your Junior year*** (to give you plenty of time to have preliminary conversations).

As required, all theses should be read and reviewed by the thesis supervisor, the History Department's honors adviser, and, if applicable, a secondary reader.

There are many opportunities to apply for scholarships to study abroad and to conduct thesis research in the summer of the junior year (Penn State Erickson Summer Discovery Grants, Schreyer's and Paterno summer research funding, History Department Study Abroad Scholarships, and the like). All Schreyer's Honors College students are strongly encouraged to apply for such funding in order to pursue thesis research full-time over the summer of their junior year.

One Year before Graduation

The student will be enrolled in the equivalent of two terms of independent study (the honors adviser will be your formal instructor for these two courses); however the preeminent thesis advising role will be carried out by the thesis supervisor.

Register for HISTORY 494 (first (usually fall) term of thesis research/writing) and HISTORY 494H (second (usually spring) term of thesis research/writing). The honors adviser will also arrange for regular meetings and workshops with all students enrolled in 494 and 494H. ***By registering for the 494/494H sequence, students will earn 6 credits total (only 3 credits of which are Honors credits) for writing their thesis.***

General Advice: The more time the readers have to read the student's work the better they can comment, and the more the student can benefit from their expertise. Expect the need for significant revisions. Be considerate of your supervisor's busy schedule and recognize the constraints of your own schedule. Try to complete sections of the thesis ahead of the suggested schedule—the sooner you have a complete draft, the better.

HISTORY 494 (FALL TERM OF STUDENT'S SENIOR YEAR)

The student should start with a clear subject of interest and have already begun to read the relevant scholarship and investigate the primary sources (over the summer between his/her Junior year and Senior fall).

In mid-September of the Senior year, the student is required—for the first meaningful “check-point”—to submit an EXPANDED THESIS PROPOSAL, which will also include an outline, an in-progress bibliography (including substantial primary and secondary sources), more specifics on the layout and sequences of the chapters, and a firm, specific schedule of chapter completion dates (in which the thesis supervisor has signed off and agreed to), to the honors adviser. This Expanded Thesis Proposal will be reviewed by the Undergraduate Studies Committee.

The Expanded Thesis Proposal must demonstrate that the student has made *significant substantive progress* in researching/conceptualizing the thesis since the SHC Thesis Proposal provided the previous spring term.

Only those students whose “expanded proposals” are successfully reviewed—as determined by the thesis supervisor and the honors adviser—will be allowed to continue in the thesis writing process.

Regarding the second meaningful “check-point”: no later than the a week prior to the last week of classes in the Senior thesis-writer’s first term (so typically no later than the first week of December), the student must have completed ... 1) A POLISHED, CREDIBLE DRAFT OF ONE CHAPTER (of approx. 20 pages or more); 2) a detailed outline of the next chapter draft slated to be written (and preferably all subsequent chapters); and 3) a substantial working bibliography. It is strongly recommended that a second chapter be completed in December. The thesis supervisor may require this of a student.

Take note that this deadline for a “polished chapter draft” is firm and non-negotiable.

The student will receive a grade from the thesis supervisor (then passed along and recorded by the honors adviser) for **History 494** based on the quality of the student’s chapter draft, the quality of the next-slated chapter’s outline, and bibliography.

Only those students determined to have satisfactorily completed the specified tasks noted in the paragraph just above—at this end-of-History 494 juncture—will be allowed to move along into History 494H and continue in the thesis writing process. This determination will be made by the student’s thesis supervisor, in close consultation with the honors adviser.

HISTORY 494H (SPRING TERM OF STUDENT’S SENIOR YEAR)

To be eligible to take—and pass—History 494H, the thesis writer must be in residence for this term.

Schreyers Honors College annual deadlines are here: <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/resources/dates.cfm> .

The following schedule offers a guide for spring term (the Senior thesis writer’s final undergraduate term): the first third of the thesis should be finished one to two (1-2) weeks into the term; the second third should be finished three to five (3-5) weeks into the term; the final third should be finished six to seven (6-7) weeks into the term (so before Spring Break); thus reserving weeks seven to ten (7-10) of the term to revise the Introduction and Conclusion and to make revisions to the chapters read and commented on by the thesis supervisor (and second reader).

[REGARDING THE SECOND READER: Schreyer’s and History Department rules require that—as a minimal condition for thesis approval—the student’s thesis supervisor and the history honors adviser both provide their respective signatures each attesting to the rigor and scholarly merits of the submitted thesis.

A **second reader** is another PSU faculty member, who has specialized knowledge in the thesis topic, and agrees—by the request of the student and/or the thesis supervisor / honors adviser—to read the thesis draft and offers constructive guidance and advice. The second reader provides a helpful supplementary role, and the History Department encourages thesis writers to seek out, and garner the advice of, an appropriate second reader.

A second reader, then, is not required for thesis approval, but, again, such input is greatly encouraged. It is recommended that the student contact the intended second reader no later than the second month of the final semester.]

The student will receive a grade from the thesis supervisor (then passed along and recorded by the honors adviser) for **History 494H** based on the quality of the student’s thesis as well as the student’s participation in meetings, workshops, and the student’s research presentation at the Undergraduate History Conference.

THESIS WRITERS: be mindful that all students are required to present their thesis research findings at one of the two annual Undergraduate History Department conferences. These conferences are held every year in early December and late March.

A faculty panel, along with members of the audience, will comment and ask questions of the student presenter. This presentation will count as the “defense” of the thesis.

Submitting the Thesis

A complete draft of the History Honors Thesis must be filed with the Schreyers Honors College in mid-March as part of a format review. We will have a coordinated single deadline for both the History Department and Schreyer’s Honors College draft thesis review. When students submit their thesis to the SHC, they should also plan to submit a complete full first draft for review to their thesis supervisor, the honors adviser (and, if applicable, second reader) for critical feedback.

Students should also electronically submit a copy of their complete first draft, firstly, to the thesis supervisor and also the honors adviser. The thesis must meet the approval of the thesis supervisor, the honors adviser, (and second reader, if relevant) before final submission to Schreyer’s Honors College.

The History Department upholds rigorous standards for the Honors Thesis and a thesis may not be approved if it is not deemed up to those standards.

Only those students whose thesis is successfully reviewed in March will be allowed to file a thesis. If the student’s thesis is deemed insufficiently developed, the student may be asked to defer graduation or to forego graduating with honors.

In early April, the final version of the thesis must be filed with the Schreyers Honors College.

The next day a signatory page with the signatures of the thesis supervisor and the honors adviser (and the second reader, if relevant) must be filed with the Schreyer’s Honors College. It is your responsibility to make the appropriate arrangements with your thesis supervisor and honors advisers to carry out the signatures—and to do so in a timely and respectful manner.