Guidelines & Schedule of Key Dates for the Department of History
Honors Thesis
[For Students and Advisers—revised on April 2012; text modifications in July 2012, Jan. 2013, August 2013]

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 http://www.shc.psu.edu/thesis).

ADVISERS: A useful resource may be Advising the Senior Thesis, by Ken Kirpatrick, Sheila Reindl, Christine Cozzens; for a synopsis see Linda Simon’s adaptation at: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/sr.html.

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 Penn State Library system.

The History Department expects honors theses to be based on thorough research and to offer an original interpretation. Students are expected to undertake some degree of primary research using original sources.

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.
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.

You are free to choose the form of the footnotes or endnotes, but you must be consistent. 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. Go over the final draft and correct awkward phrasing; be sure to eliminate all errors in typing, spelling, and grammar.

Schedule of Key Dates for the Department of History Honors Thesis

Three Semesters before Graduation (SPRING SEMESTER OF STUDENT’S JUNIOR YEAR)
A Thesis Proposal Report (TPR) is due to the Schreyers Honors College in the spring semester of the junior year --- APRIL 15, for those planning to graduate in Spring 2014 (Ex: If the student is planning to graduate in Spring 2013, then the proposal is filed in Spring 2013). The Thesis Proposal Report 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. This proposal will be approved by the Honors Adviser, the thesis adviser and by the Schreyer’s Honors College. This means the student must have a fairly well defined topic, a thesis adviser, and a second reader a year before the thesis is due.

It is incumbent upon the student—at the time of submission of Thesis Proposal Report—to identify and approach a faculty member of the History Department as a potential adviser, someone whose field is directly relevant. Ideally, this is someone whom the student already knows. The student should explain their research interests and ask the faculty member to serve as adviser. In consultation with the adviser, the student should think about and contact faculty members who might serve as a secondary adviser and thesis reader. All theses should be read and reviewed by a primary thesis adviser, a secondary reader, and the History Department honors adviser.

There are many opportunities to apply for scholarships to study abroad and to conduct thesis research in the summer of the junior year (History Department Study Abroad Scholarships, Discovery Grants 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 semesters of independent study with the adviser and must arrange a specific schedule of regular meetings directly with the thesis adviser. Register for HISTORY 494 (first (usually fall) semester of thesis research/writing) and HISTORY 494H (second (usually spring) semester 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 (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 adviser’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 SEMESTER 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. In mid-September of the senior year, the student must submit an expanded thesis proposal, which will also include an outline, an in-progress bibliography (including substantial primary and secondary sources), and a firm, specific schedule for completion (in which the thesis adviser 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 Thesis Proposal provided for SHC the previous spring.

Only those students whose proposals are successfully reviewed will be allowed to continue in the thesis writing process.

No later than the a week prior to the last week of classes in the first semester (so typically no later than the first week of December), the student MUST have completed … 1) a polished draft of one chapter (of approx. 15-20 pages, or more); 2) a detailed outline of the entire thesis with a paragraph for each chapter articulating its argument and listing the supporting evidence; and 3) a substantial working bibliography. It is strongly recommended that a second chapter be completed in December. The adviser may require this of a student.

The student will receive a grade from the adviser for 494 based on the quality of the student’s chapter, remaining chapters’ outline, and bibliography as well as the student’s participation in regular meetings and diligence in research and writing.

Only those students who are 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 adviser, in close consultation with the honors adviser.

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

Schreyers Honors College annual deadlines are here: http://www.shc.psu.edu/students/dates.cfm.
The following schedule offers a guide for the spring semester: the first third of the thesis should be finished one to two (1-2) weeks into the semester; the second third should be finished three to five (3-5) weeks into the semester; the final third should be finished six to seven (6-7) weeks into the semester, which is to say, before spring break; thus reserving weeks seven to ten (7-10) of the semester to revise the introduction and conclusion and to make revisions to the chapters read and commented on by the adviser (and second reader).

[REGARDING THE SECOND READER: Schreyer’s and History Department rules require that—as a minimal condition for thesis approval—that the student’s thesis adviser 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 adviser / 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 adviser for 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.

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 adviser (and second reader) for critical feedback.

Students should also electronically submit a copy of their complete first draft to the History Honors adviser. The History Department Undergraduate Studies Committee, together with the History Honors adviser, will review all theses. The thesis must meet the approval of the adviser, the Honors adviser, (and second reader, if relevant), and the Undergraduate Studies Committee of the History Department 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 by the Undergraduate Studies Committee of the History Department 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 adviser and Honors advisers (and the second reader, if relevant) must be filed with the Schreyer’s Honors College.