American Studies Honors Program

Honors Thesis Handbook
~ Overview ~

American Studies majors are encouraged to consider writing senior honors theses. Students who write honors essays consistently report that it was the most important experience of their undergraduate study.

- Completing a serious original research project significantly enhances analytical and writing skills.
- The project provides a wonderful opportunity to bring together strands of study from various disciplines.
- It allows students to work one-on-one with Stanford faculty -- who will then be in a position to write detailed letters of recommendation.
- The experience helps many students decide whether to consider M.A. or Ph.D. programs.
- Students who graduate "with honors" will have tangible accomplishments to show for their undergraduate careers at Stanford.

The basic requirements and guidelines for pursuing and receiving honors are as follows:

- A grade point average of 3.5 or higher in the major is required to apply to the honors program in American Studies.
- Students applying for honors must secure a thesis adviser, a Stanford faculty member who is willing and available to direct the thesis project through the ensuing year. Having a confirmed thesis advisor is required for final approval to pursue an honors project. Students will also need to secure a second reader for the honors thesis no later than the start of Winter Quarter of senior year.
- Along with the application form signed by the thesis advisor, a 3-5 page proposal describing the project, along with a 1-page preliminary bibliography, is due to the Program Office no later than October 1st of senior year. We strongly encourage students so submit at least a preliminary proposal by the end of spring quarter of junior year. The program may approve the application and proposal, or request that the student resubmit with revisions.
- Students pursuing honors must enroll in AMSTUD 199A, B, and C: Honors Workshop during Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters, respectively, of senior year. They must also enroll in AMSTUD 250: Senior Research during senior year for an additional 7-12 units (divided over the quarters). The total units between the AMSTUD 199 workshop series and AMSTUD 250 units must equal between 10 and 15 units. These units are in addition to the units required for the major. AMSTUD 250 must be taken for a letter grade.
- The standard length for an undergraduate honors thesis in American Studies is 50-80 double-spaced pages. In some cases, the thesis may be shorter or longer as determined by the specifics of the particular topic or project, in consultation with the student’s thesis advisor.
The finished thesis is due in mid-May (typically May 15th) of senior year. The final grade for the thesis is assigned based on the evaluations of both the primary thesis advisor and the second reader. Upon satisfactory completion of the project, the student will graduate with a B.A.H., that is a B.A. in American Studies with Honors (n.b., students expecting to receive honors will need to declare B.A.H. on AXESS before applying to graduate).

The American Studies Director and Coordinators are eager to help guide students in the development of their projects, and the Program offers students several specific opportunities for assistance in the development and writing process:

- The program has a designated Honors Coordinator (typically one of the Program Coordinators), who can assist students throughout the process, from decision through completion. All students interested in Honors should meet with the Honors Coordinator during their junior year (prior to submitting their proposal), and must enroll in and complete the 3-quarter Honors Workshop sequence during their senior year.
- American Studies is a long-standing participating program in the September Bing Honors College, which allows seniors to jump-start their research during a fully-funded 2 1/2 week period prior to the start of the academic year.
- The Program encourages students to apply for UAR Grants and also has limited program funds to help with expenses related to thesis research.

**GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AN HONORS THESIS**

**Developing a topic:**

*Start early:* You are encouraged to consider possible topics early in your junior year and prepare yourself by taking appropriate courses. In order to focus your interests, select appropriate courses, and consider prospective thesis advisers, you are strongly encouraged to discuss possible topic(s) with your academic adviser, the Program Coordinators, and/or the Program Director.

*Focus your ideas:* Think about how you can reduce and delimit your proposal. Many undergraduates propose topics that are too large to manage within the scope of a 50-80 page honors thesis. They feel that the scope must be broad in order to provide enough material for such an important project. In reality, the problem students most often face is how to get the subject cut down to manageable dimensions. If the project is not appropriately limited from the outset, students spend a great deal of time and energy on issues that end up getting cut from the thesis, resulting in anything from incredible last-minute pressure to complete the project, to abandoning the thesis entirely.
University resources and possible protocols to consider early on:

➢ Undergraduate Research Grants

The office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies awards grants to help cover expenses of undergraduate research. Major Grants are awarded in the spring for students doing extensive research over the summer; Small Grants are awarded more frequently. For more information and deadlines, go to: https://undergrad.stanford.edu/opportunities/research/get-funded

Please note: Although much of the information for a VPUE grant proposal will be the same as that needed for the American Studies honors thesis proposal, the two proposals are separate. (The bulk of the thesis proposal will likely be the same as your grant proposal, but the thesis proposal should be modified to remove extraneous information for the American Studies reviewers.) Receipt of a grant does not automatically constitute approval of the proposal by the American Studies Program.

➢ Human Subjects – Surveys or Interviews

According to federal regulations and University policy, if you are using human subjects in your research, you must receive approval from the Research Compliance Office. Not many American Studies thesis projects have been required to go through this process, but there are cases where it could apply. For American Studies students, this regulation most often comes into effect if you are intending to interview individuals or conduct surveys of any kind. If your research does require this approval, your project may only commence after you have been notified that the panel has reviewed and approved your research. There are links and resources to help you decide whether your project requires such approval. A good starting place is the Research Compliance Office’s FAQ page, where you can scroll down to “Protocol Management,” and under “Before Submitting a Protocol,” can click on the topic “Do I have to submit a Protocol?”: https://researchcompliance.stanford.edu/panels/hs/forms/forms-templates/faqs

Writing the American Studies Thesis Proposal

Your proposal must be submitted to the Program Office early in autumn quarter of your senior year, typically by October 1st (the exact due date will be stipulated each year). Your proposal should include the following components:

➢ “Application for Approval of Honors Proposal” cover sheet signed by your thesis adviser. (The form is available at https://amstudies.stanford.edu/academics/forms)
A 3-5 page description of the project. This description must specifically address what issue you intend to investigate and how you intend to go about that investigation. If surveys or interviews are planned, check whether approval from the Panel on Human Subjects in Non-medical Research is required (see above).

A one-page bibliography. This should not be all-inclusive. It should reflect your general grasp of the available scholarship. You may include works that you have not yet read.

While working on the proposal you need to be considering who will be your thesis adviser. You must have a confirmed thesis adviser before you can receive final approval for your honors proposal.

Submitting the Proposal

Submit your proposal to the Program Office no later than the stipulated due date (typically October 1st) of your senior year. The “Application for Approval of Honors Proposal” must be the cover sheet. You may submit these materials electronically to the American Studies Academic Services Administrator.

If your application cover sheet is not signed by your adviser, please arrange for your adviser to send an email confirmation to the Academic Services Administrator that he/she has seen your proposal and will be your adviser for the project.

Your thesis proposal will be reviewed by the Program Director and/or the Program Coordinators. The reviewer(s) may take one of three actions: 1) approve the proposal as is; 2) approve the proposal with certain caveats; 3) request revision and resubmission of the proposal.

Writing the Thesis

Honors students are expected to meet regularly with their thesis advisers and with the Honors Coordinator throughout the research and writing process.

Although students may have different methods of research and writing, it is important for them to see their advisers often, handing in drafts of sections as they are completed. This allows for a true mentoring experience and assures that the student does not spend time and energy investigating unprofitable avenues of research.

Students may also wish consult other faculty on a more informal basis, in addition to regular meetings with their thesis advisers, especially if the project draws heavily from more than one discipline. Often one of these faculty advisers will be designated as the second reader.

The standard length for an undergraduate honors thesis in American Studies is 50-80 pages, double-spaced. In some cases, however, the thesis may be
shorter or longer as determined by the specifics of the particular topic, in consultation with the student's thesis adviser.

See the “Timeline” at the end of this document for a more detailed layout of the research and writing process.

**Thesis Units**

You must enroll in AMSTUD 199A, B, & C: Honors Workshop, to be taken in the Autumn, Winter, and Spring quarters of your senior year for a total of 3 units (1 unit per quarter).

You also must register for 7-12 units (in total) of AMSTUD 250, “Senior Research” during the senior year, and take these units for a grade. The normal enrollment pattern for AMSTUD 250 is 3-4 units each quarter (Autumn, Winter, Spring). If your schedule requires a different pattern of enrollment, please check with the office to work out an appropriate plan. This is a year-long project. No matter how the units appear on your record, you are expected to work on the project for three quarters.

Because the final grade for your thesis is determined by the evaluation of both your thesis adviser and your second reader, the Director of the Program is listed as the instructor for AMSTUD 250 and will enter the grade based on the recommendations of your readers.

Be sure you sign up for a letter grade. For AMSTUD 250 you will receive an “N” grade (i.e., “continuing course”) on your record until you have completed the thesis and it has been evaluated. At that time, the units will reflect a grade arrived at from the recommendations of both your thesis adviser and second reader.

If you should fail to submit a finished essay, it is sometimes possible, after consultation with your adviser, to receive partial credit. However, you will not be eligible for honors at the time of degree conferral.

**Applying to Graduate with Honors**

Before applying to graduate, typically in April of their senior year, honors students MUST declare BAH (Bachelor of Arts with Honors) in American Studies in Axess. Please see the Academic Services Administrator if you have any questions about this.

**Second Reader**

By Winter Quarter, you should have found a faculty member to serve as a second reader for your thesis. You must notify the program of who will be your second reader. In the event that you are unable to secure a second reader, please contact the Honors Coordinator.
Completing your Thesis and Submission Due Date

For June graduation, the official deadline for submitting the completed thesis is mid-May (typically May 15th; the exact date will be stipulated each year).

You should strive to submit a readable first draft of the thesis to your thesis advisor by the end of Winter Quarter. If it becomes apparent that your completed thesis will be submitted late (that is after the mid-May due date), it is important for you to speak with your thesis adviser and the second reader to let them know when they can expect to receive the finished thesis for reading and grading.

VPUE Medals

If you wish to be considered for one of the annual medals for excellence in undergraduate research, it is most important that you submit your thesis in a timely manner. We must have evaluations from your readers before the end of May in order to consider your thesis seriously for these awards.

Submitting your Thesis

You must send an electronic version of your completed thesis to the Academic Services Administrator. (If you would like to print copies as well, please contact the Academic Services Administrator.) Copies of your thesis will then be delivered by the Program to your thesis adviser and second reader.

Unless otherwise specified, submission of the electronic version will constitute permission for the Program to post a PDF of your thesis on its website and/or otherwise make it available for reading.

Format guidelines are as follows:

- If you are submitting print copies, use 8 1/2” by 11” paper of good bond quality.
- Please include a thesis introduction and a conclusion.
- In addition to any footnotes or endnotes, your thesis must have a “Works Cited” page.
- For the acceptable form for footnotes, bibliography, etc., refer to one of the standard style manuals, such as the Chicago Manual of Style or the MLA Style Manual. Check with your thesis adviser regarding your choice. Footnotes must be in appropriate form. They may be inserted at the bottom of the relevant pages, at the end of a “chapter,” or as endnotes, depending on what you and your thesis adviser think most appropriate.
Most standard fonts are acceptable. Double-space, and type in regular manuscript style. The left margin should be 1 1/2 inches, and the other three margins at least 1 inch.

**PROOFREAD CAREFULLY.** Theses with many typographical errors or frequent errors in spelling and/or syntax may be returned for correction before being formally accepted. After you have proofread the thesis for content, get another person to proofread primarily for spelling and syntax. Be sure to check that your footnotes are numbered correctly.

**Evaluation of the Thesis**

The final draft of the thesis will be read and evaluated by both your thesis adviser, who will grade your work in producing the thesis as well as the final product, and your second reader, who will recommend a grade based on the final thesis. The thesis will be evaluated for cogency of argument, appropriateness of evidence, and adequacy of conceptualization. The final grade for the project will be based upon these two recommendations, and the comments from the two readers. Comments will be available to the student once both readers have responded and the final grade has been determined.
Honors Thesis Timeline

JUNIOR YEAR

Opportunities for guidance in developing an honors thesis proposal and project:
- Preliminary meetings with the American Studies Honors Coordinator
- Bing Honors College, in September, just prior to Senior Year. You will need to sign up in Spring Quarter of Junior Year. (BHC is free, but conditions apply.)

Winter and Spring Quarters, Junior Year: Meet with appropriate faculty to discuss your ideas for your honors project. Undertake preliminary research to develop a bibliography and formulate your project. Meet with the Honors Coordinator to confirm your topic. Look into UAR resources, and check whether Human Subjects Research Approval is needed.

Spring Quarter, Junior Year: We strongly encourage you to submit at least a preliminary proposal to the Program Office, along with the “Application for Approval of Honors Proposal” signed by your thesis adviser, if possible, at this point. The Director and the Program Coordinators will review and approve, or ask for revisions.

SENIOR YEAR

Autumn Quarter, Senior Year:
- Submit your proposal and “Application for Approval of Honors Proposal”—if you have not already done so—by October 1st
- Enroll for 3-4 units of AMSTUD 250* and for AMSTUD 199A (1 unit).
- Meet regularly with your thesis adviser and the Honors Coordinator to discuss your research. Ideally, you should have an outline and/or a substantial piece of writing submitted to your adviser by the end of the quarter. Please Note: Thesis advisers will be contacted at the end of Autumn Quarter for an informal progress report.

Winter Quarter, Senior Year:
- Enroll for 3-4 units of AMSTUD 250* and for AMSTUD 199B (1 unit).
- Continue meetings with your thesis adviser and the Honors Coordinator to discuss sections of the thesis as drafts are completed. Ideally, by the end of the quarter you should have a draft of the body of the thesis.
- Secure a second reader for the thesis, and let the Program Office know who that will be. If you need advice or assistance in finding a second reader, let the program know.

Spring Quarter, Senior Year:
- Enroll for 3-4 units of AMSTUD 250* and for AMSTUD 199C (1 unit).
- Complete the introduction and conclusion; polish and hone previously written material; check citations and put together your bibliography.
- Log in to Axess and make sure you are declared BAH. Apply to graduate.
- Submit your thesis to the program! The thesis is typically due on May 15th (or the Monday following if May 15th falls on a weekend day). If you need an extension, check first with your thesis adviser to make sure that he or she is willing, and then with the Program Office to request an extension. (An extension of more than a few days will likely make your thesis ineligible for University honors thesis award nominations.)

* The requirement of 7-12 units of AMSTUD 250 is designed to ensure that there is room in your schedule for the research and writing required for an honors thesis. Although 3-4 units per quarter is the usual pattern, the number of units may vary per quarter as long as they total a minimum of 10 units and a maximum of 15 units when added to your 3 units for 199A, B, and C. Exceptions must be approved by the Director.