Senior Survey: Class of 2013
1. What courses or experiences were the most helpful to you in choosing your senior thesis topic? Please check all that apply and describe how you chose your topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>An extracurricular experience</td>
<td>29.60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your life experience</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other courses</td>
<td>57.80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Studies 10</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>One or both of your junior tutorials</td>
<td>65.60%</td>
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### Sample Comments:

My global health and medical anthropology courses in my focus field helped me most in picking the general area of my thesis (healthcare in India), and I ended up choosing my exact topic based on what I found available in my city of interest.

I began thinking about and researching my thesis topic before I went abroad for my junior spring semester, and I then narrowed in on my topic while studying abroad in Santiago, Chile. My social studies coursework had supported my interest in inequality, culture, and human rights, and I combined this with my personal interest in art to craft my topic and my guiding question.

My thesis topic was mostly inspired by my experiences in Kuumba and by conversations with my Harvard peers. I ended up not explicitly using any social theory in my thesis, although many of my ideas were shaped by social theorists who were prominent in my intellectual autobiography.

Social Studies 40

Semester abroad in Cuba.

My spring junior tutorial was instrumental in helping me choose a thesis topic. I found a topic I was really interested in through the midterm paper for the class, which I expanded upon in my final tutorial paper, and eventually turned into a thesis topic.
This was a perfect complement to my own experience working at a district attorney's office during my sophomore summer. In addition, some of my other classes piqued my general interest in law. Overall, I would say the junior tutorial was the most important factor.

My study abroad at King's college, a history junior tutorial, and a graduate course were my main useful courses. Social Studies 10 was also critical because my thesis was a theory thesis. My social studies junior tutorial was essentially irrelevant but I chose it knowing that.

Summer work experience was by-far the most influential

Summer Study Abroad in Prague, Czech Republic

I tried to pick the least possible evil when it came to thesis topics: what will annoy me least? What will I not give up on halfway through? I chose to write about Marxist philosophy because I have been interested in complaining about capitalism since I read the Communist Manifesto at age 11.

I was interested in themes from Social Studies 10, refined through specific topics gained from focus field courses, with help from my advisor.

My junior tutorials were the most helpful, but a research seminar on human rights that I took during my sophomore year was also very helpful, as was my experience living and interning abroad during the summer following my sophomore year.

My senior thesis was informed by my Latin American development classes, including my junior tutorial, a Gen Ed course on global health, and experience working in the region. I tend to find the most interesting paper topics (for senior thesis and regular coursework) at the intersection of disciplines or literatures. Taking related classes (i.e. similar topic but different perspectives or methodologies) really helps zero in on what you're ultimately interested in exploring.

I found my focus field courses to be more directly relevant to my thesis than my tutorials - my tutorials were very helpful on the methods side, but not as much on the substantive portion.

My thesis adviser really helped shaped my thesis. He never forced me to fit into a topic I didn't want, but he definitely led me to consider approaches that I hadn't been exposed to before.
2. Did you know your thesis supervisor before you worked with him or her on your thesis? In the text box, please describe how you chose your supervisor.

Sample Comments:

He was a professor of mine for a previous class.

My thesis advisor was my spring junior tutorial leader

I took a course with my supervisor junior fall. This course also inspired my topic, so asking her to advise my thesis was an obvious choice.

I spoke with about three potential thesis advisors, none of whom I had previously worked with. I ended up choosing someone very knowledgeable about Latin America and who was also in the Social Studies department. My advisor was very supportive of my interdisciplinary interests and topic. It was also important to me to know that my advisor would be very engaged throughout the process, and we spoke at length about how if this person were my advisor, we would stay in touch while I was abroad and meet weekly during senior year (which we did!).

My thesis supervisor led my Fall Junior Tutorial, and I wanted to write on topics related to that tutorial, so asked for advice and ultimately decided to work with them.
I took two seminars with him and asked him to supervise my thesis based on a) my experience with his teaching style and willingness to offer time to students b) his experience as an international historian.

My thesis supervisor had already been my academic adviser and the leader of my fall junior tutorial. We worked well together and had a strong relationship, so this person seemed like the perfect choice.

I met with four different potential supervisors and decided that mine would be the best fit.

He was a TF (but not mine) for a course I took (related to my topic) who had done his own research on similar issues (which I discovered on a list of the TFs + their research interests on the course website).

Yes, my thesis supervisor was my fall junior tutorial leader. I really enjoyed her class and thought she would make a great advisor, so I reached out to her, as well as several other members of the SS dept.

My academic advisor found her for me, we went on "dates" after she advised some reading and writing for me, and then I asked her.

I found my adviser through the Social Studies database, emailed him to set up a meeting, and felt great upon chatting in person.

My supervisor was my academic advisor and former tutor. I knew that we could work well together, and felt like through a year-long process, a stress-free yet supportive work experience outweighed subject-specific knowledge.

My thesis advisor had been the thesis advisor of a good friend in the Class of 2011. She gave me great feedback about her advisor, and I ended up choosing him as well.

I found my supervisor in the Social Studies database. Her interests, based on the paragraph on the website, seemed to line up with mine. When I met her, I discovered that she, too, was a short-haired, parliament-smoking radical who shaved her head at age 13. So I knew it would all work out.

He was the leader of my spring junior tutorial on a topic related to my thesis interests; he liked my writing and we worked well together so I asked him to be my advisor.

I knew my thesis advisor from freshman year and I had a great relationship with him before starting my thesis.
3. On average, how often did you meet with your supervisor during your senior year?

![Pie chart showing meeting frequency]

- Every other week: 46%
- Once a week: 36%
- Less than once a month: 5%
- Once a month: 13%
- Less than once a month: 17%

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 as the best and 1 as the worst, how would you rate your experience with your supervisor?

![Pie chart showing rating distribution]

- 5: 33%
- 4: 27%
- 3: 20%
- 2: 13%
- 1: 7%
Selected Comments:
My adviser was always very responsive to emails, encouraging, and helpful in terms of providing feedback. I was very happy to have had him. The only reason I do not give the experience a "5" was because he was unfamiliar with advising Social Studies theses and thus was a bit unsure of how to approach that type of specific advising. He eventually became better as time went on, but there were certain parts of my thesis (things that I had to write) that I wish I had known earlier. I think this is simply a matter of needing more experience, though, which he now has!

Positive: My thesis advisor met regularly with me, and many of our conversations were quite informative and productive. Negative: My thesis advisor never made any comments directly within word documents of my drafts using track changes. I never had any proof that my thesis advisor had closely read my drafts, and usually our conversations focused on the "big picture" rather than specific details in my drafts. My advisor did not communicate well via email, which discouraged me from asking her questions. I would have appreciated more precise feedback, and more written feedback, as opposed to oral feedback.

Throughout the thesis process, I felt supported. My supervisor was clear about expectations and came through on her promises. She consistently made time to meet with me, and she was responsive to email. From the CUHS process through the final draft, she provided crucial guidance into the expectations of a senior thesis, how to use qualitative methodology, and where I could improve my work. She was adaptive to the needs of this thesis in particular. I do think there could have been more support in the process of recruiting participants -- and that since she had more experience she might have been better able to discern what would work and brainstorm various means.

Struggled because supervisor was not specialist in content area

Most positive - sometimes so committed to the project, very engaged and excited. Least positive - sometimes would completely disappear when I needed guidance.

Overall, I thought my advisor was very helpful. She was good about keeping me on my toes and setting guidelines for when things needed to get done. She was also not afraid to tell me what I needed to improve, which turned out to be extremely important in the revising process. She was pretty good about getting my chapters back to me in a timely manner. The only thing I felt was missing was that she was not super familiar with the literature around my topic.

I loved working with my advisor. I can see why she won so many advising awards. She helped me keep track of the picture, she knew just what writing to advise, she was incredibly responsive, and she was very approachable and supportive.

I loved working with my adviser -- he has a really rare ability to be both very encouraging and very demanding at the same time. I loved meeting with him to
discuss my project and to go over my research, ideas, and writing. I really can't think of a negative (or "least positive") element of my experience working with him. He was truly outstanding.

I had a connection with my thesis advisor and I believe my thesis advisor is devoted to my well-being and success as an academic. I did have difficulty in terms of contact because my thesis advisor is located off-campus.

Most positive: My supervisor was very familiar with the SS thesis process, and was able to keep me on track with strict deadlines. She was also a great resource for me while navigating the defense/oral exam process. Least positive: Not much!

My adviser dedicated countless hours to reading and re-reading my drafts, giving me very constructive feedback on the argumentative and stylistic levels. However, what I valued the most was her ability to support me in the early stages of the project, when my argument was still unclear, and to provide me with very practical exercises that could help me define it better.

Great moral and mental support, great advice on the thesis timeline and process. Challenge was having advisor who was not an expert in my topic.

Most positive: My supervisor was brilliant and interesting and I did really enjoy and appreciate conversations with him when they happened. Least positive: He was super flaky and difficult to track down. He'd frequently stand me up for meetings and we never had a regular schedule. I could have used more intentional support.

Most positive: Very specific feedback about content and was useful in supporting quantitative work, which few other advisors are able to provide (SS is very qualitative-heavy). Least positive: Response time was slow, and very hands off unless asked specific questions = little day-to-day support

He was fantastically helpful at the conceptual/theoretical level but not necessary at the individual text level. What was most positive was quite simply the ability to learn how to conceptualize and execute an intellectual project from a very accomplished scholar who has spent decades doing precisely that, and to understand how he does it from the inside out. He is the most inspiring intellectual I know and was MY advisor. Having him take me and my ideas seriously was a social theory nerd's dream. Of course, this tends to come at the expense of the "line by line" editing that some other advisors seem to have provided. But that was never my expectation.

My advisor was always responsive and helpful, and I always left our meetings feeling reinvigorated and excited for my work. The only less than positive aspect was that I feel like we didn't particularly bond, but that's okay!

My supervisor was amazingly dedicated, supportive, understanding, and knowledgeable. I really couldn't have chosen a better advisor, in terms of how she
supported me through the process. I needed someone who was personally invested and got the way I work and could push me when I needed it, which she did. We really had such a great personal relationship. The only thing that could have been better was if she had set stricter chapter/work deadlines.

My advisor was very involved. We met weekly, he read all of my chapter drafts, and we discussed my argument at length. I felt like he was very knowledgeable about my topic, and this helped me feel like I was reading the right background material and staying on track. He was also flexible and very happy to help me incorporate art into my topic, even though that was not his area of expertise. The least positive part of the experience (which is very minor) was near the end, when all of my advisor's thesis advisees were sending him full drafts (four advisees including me). I don't think my advisor read a full final draft of my thesis before I submitted it, but this is a minor negative point. He read multiple drafts of all of my chapters (just not all together at the very end).

Great supervisor and very helpful, especially with editing as I got closer and closer to the deadline. I'm very much a self-starter, so I pretty much drove the process, but I don't think that's a reflection on my supervisor as much as a reflection of the way I like to work. (As an example, I prepared a schedule at the start, which we then opted to follow for most of the process.)

My advisor was really great about reading drafts and returning them to me with edits in a short time frame. However, I wish she could have pushed me further on the theoretical ideas in my thesis.

My thesis adviser (a grad student) was really involved and very very helpful. I couldn't have asked for more.
5. What advice do you have for juniors about what to look for in a supervisor?

I think it is important for juniors to figure out what their own individual weaknesses are (do they have problems with time management? do they need someone willing to give them harsh criticism? do they need someone who has a lot of knowledge background specific to their interests?) and to know this before starting the thesis adviser search.

I would advise juniors to have graduate students as advisors because they will likely have more time to dedicate to your project. I often did not feel like a priority for my advisor.

Work with a full professor if possible.

In choosing a supervisor, I recommend that you be very careful. A supervisor should be somebody that you trust to be responsive if a problem arises. They should consider supervising a thesis to be an important role of theirs, and they must understand that this commitment takes quite a bit of time, especially once they should be reading drafts. It seems far more important to find someone who cares--a graduate student rather than a big-name professor, for example--but you also benefit if they have advised theses before, particularly in Social Studies. Most of all, be extremely careful to set up expectations!

Choose a supervisor who has topical knowledge of your thesis area. Mine had none, and I chose him for his organizational skills and past experience in advising social studies theses. I should have gone with someone who knew more about my specific area.

Look for someone who will be honest and upfront with you - that was the deciding factor for me in choosing an advisor and I think it was really important in making my thesis the best it could be. Also, I think it's more important to find someone who will have time to read and work with you than a "big-name" professor, unless you are able to work independently well.

Find someone who will be involved and knows your topic, rather than someone famous. So many of my friends that had senior professors had bad experiences if those people weren't supportive or weren't involved.

Pick someone in the SS department for sure. Make sure they will really have time for you.

Make sure you and your supervisor agree from the beginning about what kind of support you want/need, how often you will meet, what level of edits you will receive, and other questions about the thesis process. Deep knowledge about your topic is less important than similar philosophies on advising.
Look for someone that you know you will work well with. A big name is only so helpful, and -- after all -- you will be the biggest expert on your subject matter.

Find someone who can be patient with your personal working style. And DON'T get stressed out if you think you didn't pick the 'perfect' advisor. Advising is about having a team of professors, TFs, tutorial leaders, and peer reviewers to provide feedback about your work!

Decide what type of person you need to keep you motivated (warm, strict, scary, etc.) and find someone who fits the description.

Find someone who fits your needs, if you lack knowledge/resources for methodology; find someone who could really help with that. If you really want someone who will help you with literature, find someone who has worked significantly on your topic.

Someone who has experience advising before!

Don't worry too much about finding someone in your field -- focus on finding someone with whom you will work well and who can give you good methodological and writing support. The most important thing is to find someone who is generally excited about your project and who wants to advise you and to be a part of your experience.

If you need emotional support or writing support, find someone who can give them to you. Find someone who will have time for you. That's a thousand times more important than someone who's an expert in your particular sub-field. Find someone who's not an expert in your particular sub-field. Someone who isn't will have an interesting outside perspective, and prepare you to write for a general audience.

Ask around about their soul.

Know yourself, and know what you need in an advisor. Be honest about it. Some people need a "hands on" advisor who will prod them to finish chapters by certain dates and to give them more constant reinforcement. Others need a less hands on supervisor and can afford to take a big named professor who will put the onus on you. There are few "good" and "bad" advisors, and many good and bad "fits" between advisors and advisees.

First and foremost personality compatibility and matching types of work ethic. Secondly, shared methodological and regional interests.

Look for someone you will feel comfortable disagreeing with. Consider little details like how good he/she is at responding to emails. The most important thing though is that your advisor will have time for you.
6. What advice was most helpful to you before you started your research? What strategies worked well for you, and is there anything you wish you had done differently? Please explain.

Develop a fairly detailed research proposal, but be prepared to modify it radically. Ask people on the ground what they think is interesting once you get there. I wish I had been more disciplined and set up a regular structure to order my time during my field research.

The most helpful advice I received was to record everything because you never know what you will end up needing, which I found to be so true. I also think that it was important to be very aware of my experience while researching because my thesis ended up relying largely on my own experiences for the narrative flow. I wish that I had known to visit more places and been able to schedule more interviews beforehand - I should have looked for more contacts before doing field work.

I wish I had started the IRB process earlier (either junior spring or over the summer). I was not expecting this process to take 2+ months, as it did, and I believe the quality of my research suffered as a result.

I wish I had spent more time immersing myself in the secondary literature before embarking upon my research.

Setting a fast-paced timeline was the best thing I did. Having a full draft finished a few weeks beforehand was perfect. Still, I wish I had made more serious revisions to my argument with more time in advance.

I think I should have started earlier with my research. Taking notes and summarizing with an annotated bibliography probably would have been helpful. I think definitely could have been organized in my reading because I ended up with one big folder on my computer with hundreds of PDFs.

I did a lot of reading, which helped me narrow my topic so I could do more systematic research and also so I could figure out what really interested me. I wish I had learned German earlier, though, and I wish I'd been more prepared for archive research.

Organization is key.

Just start writing. Don't care how perfect it is. Just do it! And perfect it along the way. Also, get the IRB out of way real SOON!

Having an open mind about where your research will take you is very important!

Anya's excellent advice about assembling a thesis team was something that I really focused on early during the thesis process.
The most useful advice I received was not to be afraid to let my thesis topic change and evolve over time. It allowed me to go beyond my original question in a much better direction.

Start as early as possible. Don't feel like you have to be perfectly prepared before you dive in to the heart of your thesis. Things will change so it doesn't matter how much time you've spent thinking about one question if you eventually decide to change it.

The best advice was, honestly, not to stress too much about it and to expect the unexpected, especially hidden snares. Spending a lot of time in Widener worked well for me. If I could go back, I would have applied for grant money to fund translation help earlier, as my later request was denied more or less solely because it was a later request.

I went to every panel and thesis info session possible to get the best info I could. I would definitely tell everyone to apply for grants and spend a ton of time working on them--that truly laid the foundation for the entire process for me, and allowed me to have the financial flexibility to take risks and go on adventures related to my thesis.

I wish I had started writing sooner. There were some periods when writing became very difficult, and I should have had a better strategy for how to stay productive.

Be flexible and think about contingency plans in case your ideal research scenario becomes unrealistic or you run into obstacles. Always have multiple things you can be working on while you wait for other things to pan out or people to respond to your requests.

Read everything. Read things that you don't think you'll end up using, because you might use them. Read things that you don't want to read, because you'll be asked about why you didn't read them. It's easier to read during the summer when you have nothing to do than to go back and do it on top of your work all semester. Take two classes + thesis in the fall.

One thing that I wished I had done differently in the planning stages of my research was to create contingencies for the possibility of my research plan not going completely according to plan. Additionally, I wish that my advisor had played a more active role in the pre-planning stage and advising me more on my research design.

My thesis was fairly ambitious, and I don't think I fully appreciated how difficult the execution of a project with that level of ambition actually is.

People told me to be flexible with my topic- which was definitely the most helpful thing- as you likely won't figure out what your thesis is really about until you are wrapping it up- and maybe not even then! That's sort of the point.
7. Did you travel to conduct research? If so, how was that experience, and what advice would you give to a student planning to travel for thesis research?

Selected Comments:
It was surprisingly tough! I was in India in a city with a fair amount of family, but I still felt socially and culturally isolated. I would have benefited a ton from having a peer in the city or region with whom I could commiserate, share notes and tips, etc.

Get money early. Realize that your plans will likely change in the weeks before you go, or even when you get there, so be ready for surprises. Safety is your first priority always. Be willing to put yourself out there but also be realistic as to what you can actually do. Do not travel alone. Do as much research as possible before you leave. Have fun!

I recommend it highly! Make sure to plan in your junior fall for funding applications.

Your thesis argument/structure/topic is bound to change over the course of your research, and you may well emerge from the summer before the start of senior year realizing that you’re going to be writing about something very different from what you outlined in your original grant proposals - don't let this intimidate you or stress you out, as it happens to MOST people! As for prepping for thesis-related travel, come up with a clear schedule for yourself while you're still on campus, so that you don't waste time once you're in your research location. If you're interviewing, have your appointments scheduled and your questions prepared well in advance. If you'll be visiting archives, make sure to check when these archives open and close, so that you can maximize research time.
I loved it. I traveled to four places, and the research process was the absolute highlight of my thesis. Apply for grants, do it early, and let your thesis take you places!!

Have an idea of what you are going to do before you get there if you can. Be sure to get out and meet people, travel, and do things not thesis-related, because the thesis research experience can be VERY isolating. You are only going to be there for a short amount of time, and usually can't go back, so any time spent procrastinating is less material to work with afterwards. Oh, and one more important thing: transcribe, record, and log your activities as much as you possibly can! Transcribing interviews and trying to figure out what you did over the summer and when is the WORST when you are back at school and have a million things to do besides that. Really, really try to transcribe as you go and keep a detailed record of everything you did and everyone you talked to.

I think spending a lot of time on the grant application in fact helps formalize your plans for the thesis itself.

Think about travel logistics, not just how you'll get to the country, but how you will get around over the course of your research. It takes time to get around town, and it may take a while before you get a sense of the geography. Schedule in down time for yourself while remaining receptive and sensitive to valuable opportunities to glean information you otherwise would not have if you just followed a rigid 9am-5pm timetable.

My experience was okay, not as useful as I had expected. A big part of it was not communicating enough with my thesis adviser throughout the time I was abroad. E-mail might work for short exchanges, but nothing replaces a real conversation. I wish I had spoken with her on Skype; it certainly would have helped me bounce off ideas much more efficiently. In any case, something that really helped while abroad was to get in touch with Professors at local universities who have experience in your thesis subject. More often than not, they're extremely willing to meet up with you and help you out!

Yes. My advice in for international travel is to establish contacts on the ground before you arrive at your research location. Having just one friend or colleague who can give you insights on wherever you are can be extremely valuable.

My experience doing research in Chile was great. I did research after I had studied abroad for a semester, and so I used that time to acclimate, get to know the culture, improve my Spanish, expand my network and make connections, and to just orient myself. I needed this time, and I recommend taking some time for cultural immersion if traveling for research.

I wish there was retroactive funding because I didn't travel until November of senior year and had to pay out of pocket.
8. What were the most helpful tips/strategies that you developed, used, or wished you had used during the writing process?

Free-writing for 5-10 minutes was a great way to take notes on and process secondary sources. I obviously wish I had transcribed all my interviews during the summer or at the very beginning of the fall to make my life easier. One really important piece of advice I got was to treat each draft like it only had to be "good enough" for a particular reading by someone else. This helped me steel myself against the criticism I got on drafts that I had worked hard (but ineffectually) on.

I believe that always having goals for yourself with the writing process is the most important. Setting a timeline and then keeping track of how you do with the deadlines early can tell you realistically your writing speed, style, and timeline for the future, allowing you to restructure it accordingly in the crucial last few weeks if necessary.

Hi Rise espressos.

Get an entire draft written of each chapter/the entire thesis, than go back and revise. I found that often after drafting one or multiple chapters, I would rewrite the entire chapter, or condense multiple chapters into one. It helps to write complete drafts as quickly as possible, so you can think to write, and go back and revise/develop your thoughts. (As opposed to being a perfectionist and belaboring chapter drafts.)

Do a little bit every day, at least. Getting into the routine of sitting down and thinking about your thesis daily makes it so much easier. Spreading the work out also allows for reflection and refinement as you return to ideas and have time to think them through.

I found it helpful to create strong deadlines with my thesis supervisor to motivate my work and ensure it was finished in a timely manner. I found spaces that were effective for me and made sure to write there. I relied on support from roommates and friends during the toughest writing moments. I was careful to sleep well and eat enough food, which made it possible to keep at the writing over the last month.

When I got into writing crunch time, I set myself a daily minimum of 1000 words. Even if I had to go back and edit sections later, forcing myself to get words on the page and get into a habit of writing large chunks at once was very important.

Start writing early (wished I had done this)

Carry around a pen and a pad of paper with you at all times - you never know when a series of ideas will suddenly come to you. When they do, make sure to write them down immediately as opposed to trying to recall 5 days later what those interesting thoughts were.

For the first draft, just write. Don't worry too much about how polished the writing is, but get something on paper. Once you have something on paper, then you can polish
all that you want, but getting something down is the first and most crucial step.

I put "Thesis" on my calendar for an average of 2 hours per day. When I couldn't get into writing, I did more administrative things. But you have to work on it all the time. Plugging away little by little really helped keep me at ease, and it made the entire process enjoyable and manageable. Don't let the work slip away from you!

I worked in 4 hour chunks. I would spend roughly half the time reading/taking notes and the other half writing. I tried to write 800 words a day, and tried not to care how good or bad the writing was. If I felt good, I would go to 1000, but I would always try to get at least 800.

I scheduled classes so that I had days when I could work on my thesis uninterrupted. I wrote multiple drafts of every chapter, sometimes almost rewriting them. Don't be afraid to write too much, and don't feel like you need to have everything planned out in your head before writing it down.

The most useful exercise I did early in January (before I began to write) was to outline my entire thesis. In the fall, my argument and cases were not as clearly defined as to be able to write an outline. But after doing additional research (and thinking) in December, I was able to even estimate how many pages each of my sections would take. Even though I did not necessarily follow my outline word by word, it made me feel that I could divide the work and write it.

Plan backwards from your deadline date (or from a week before the deadline), freewrite on a regular basis (these scattered notes served as a constant reminder of why I was interested in what I was doing and formed the basis of my analysis), every night I wrote what I had accomplished for the day and what were the most important things to tackle tomorrow so I could wake up wiht a concrete idea of what I set out to do, have people read bits and pieces of chapters/freewrites throughout the whole process!

I had someone keep me accountable throughout the process (my adviser, thesis writing seminar), which was hugely helpful and often was the only way to get me to write.

Stay open to new arguments along the way -- you will have divine moments of inspiration that will challenge what you have so far -- don't cling to your old arguments! Also, when you feel overwhelmed, remember that this thesis is one step in a life of learning. There will be many directions and arguments you want to make but are not yet ready. Don't worry about leaving some behind, knowing that you will continue to reflect and work on those in future years.
9. What would you do differently, if you were going to write a senior thesis again, knowing what you know now?

I would either 1. adjust my expectations for how well I wanted to do to reflect that fact that I couldn't spend a ton of time on the project or 2. cut out a lot of extracurricular responsibility so that I would actually have enough time to do an excellent job.

I would do everything earlier - get a thesis adviser earlier, start researching earlier, start writing earlier.

I would have gotten IRB approval in the spring of my junior year, began research during the summer, and drafted my introduction and conclusion earlier.

Start earlier. Pick a topic that is specific and well-defined, and is something you care deeply about- if you don't have passion for your subject, the thesis process will be so much harder, because you basically are living with your thesis constantly in mind, at least a bit, for several months.

I would recruit participants as heavily as humanly possible from the beginning, exploring all potential avenues for recruitment from the start rather than adding new ones as the first ones were insufficient. I would focus almost all of my attention and energy here during the early fall to ensure the later success of my thesis.

Start trying to find a topic earlier, thinking about it from the end of sophomore year in choosing junior year classes. seek more methods help.

Recognize the inherently competitive nature of how Social Studies sets up the thesis process, sit with that for awhile and let it fester, then try to forget about it as best you can.

Get started much earlier. Don't be so scared about choosing a topic - that was honestly the hardest part for me.

START WRITING EARLIER. If you're a prospective thesis writer reading this, I know what you're thinking: of course I'm going to start writing early - that's intuitive given an undertaking as long and intensive as a senior thesis. However, it is so incredibly easy to fall behind on the writing process when there's so much reading and research that can always be done. It's never too early to start writing!

Not much-- I would obviously change a lot of what I did now that I have feedback on the thesis itself, but that's more a part of an ongoing process rather than something I'd like to change. Enjoy it!
I would try to choose something that I could get really excited about, but I tried to do that this time and just failed :) I would also probably choose something easier to work with and that I could more knowledgeably relate to (ie not everything in a foreign language), but it was a good learning experience for me to push myself.

I would make it clearer, from the very beginning of the introduction to my final thesis, what my goals were for the project and how I was going to achieve them. I would have people who weren't as intimately familiar with my thesis as my adviser and I were read sections or chapters.

Take an easier course-load in the fall, and make sure I could do what I did in the winter break earlier. Or at least attempted to do that. My chapter in December came about under a lot of pressure, and it could have been easier if I had had (or made) enough time earlier in the semester to continue advancing my thesis.

Start working on my thesis earlier, find a more active thesis advisor

Complement non-SS advising with a contact in the SS department, because there are differences across departments that "outsiders" don't know about.

I would NOT have stressed so much about the time spent not writing, not reading, time spent living my life. I would have trusted myself to be able to get it done.

Start writing/reading earlier. I ended up having to scramble towards the end because I put off writing for too long.

I think I would have tried to talk to more faculty members at Harvard and at other schools before starting research.

Different advisor, start earlier, work harder, deal with mental health issues at the start, enlist more help from friends, turn it in on time, and many more.
10. What, if anything, do you wish someone had told you before you started your thesis (something you did not know then that you know now)?

It doesn't and shouldn't define who you are as a person or even a scholar. It is one piece of work in a much broader scope, and it is not worth staking your personal identity on it.

Make sure that you love your topic now, and that you are doing the thesis because you care about it, not because you have to. Otherwise, the process will be miserable, and you'll not enjoy what should be one of the happiest years!

It's not that scary, nothing more than writing a few tutorial papers and tying it all together. Would emphasize that tying it all together is really important and to leave time for that at the end.

It feels great to have completed such a labor of love!

It's the most rewarding academic experience you will go through here. Throw yourself into it fully!

Writing a good thesis involves making the thesis an emotional priority - make sure you recognize this and are willing to accept it. Writing a 120-page long document invites a host of frustrations that aren't anything like those associated with term papers. Find a great thesis support system around you that will encourage you when you're feeling down about the research or writing process.

Stop freaking out-- you're not doing yourself any favors. Writing a thesis is a totally manageable and incredibly enjoyable venture. Allow yourself the time to get into it, and really make sure you spend time thinking about it each day. 1-2 hours a day for the year will allow you to produce something awesome. So many people talk about how awful thesis spring is, and that's something I wish I'd heard less of. I had an amazing experience writing my thesis and I wish juniors hear more of those sentiments going into it!!

A thesis requires a ton of commitments and sacrifices, and will cost you a LOT of money. Money to travel (even with grants), money lost on time you can't work at your job because you have to thesis, money to spend on food because you can't make normal dining hall hours or don't want to take that much time away during a productive day, money on little rewards to keep yourself sane, money on printing your thesis, money lost on the summer job you couldn't do because you were researching. Not to mention all the sacrifices of time, energy, happiness. I'm not saying not to do it, but there is much more to it than simply the stress of WRITING that long of a paper.

Never underestimate the importance of choosing a good thesis adviser, and the worthwhile sacrifice of coming back in January to really move forward. Both things made a huge difference in how confident I was that I could finish, and be satisfied with my work.
Manage expectations related to grading and comments. I (and many seniors I know) had frustratingly inconsistent experiences with receiving feedback - this is both across readers for the same thesis and across different theses. Some were graded by total strangers with no general insight into their topic and a "bone to pick", while others were graded by professors who had written their recommendations for graduate school (something I heard multiple times). Quality/depth of feedback can feel incongruous with the amount of work you put into writing the thesis in the first place (for ex, blatant spelling and grammatical errors throughout the commentary).

It really is as hard as everyone claims. But it feels so great when you're done!

It IS possible to finish early without panicking. Don't go into the process assuming that everyone struggles through a crazy period right at the end and therefore you shouldn't even try to avoid it. YOU can have a relaxed thesis experience!

The thesis is not going to perfect, and that is sometimes difficult to accept. There will always be a chapter you want to change, an idea to refine, but ultimately, once you're done and have put in the time and the dedication, you should and will feel proud of your end result--even with all of its imperfections. Most people don't even know the crux of their argument until late in the game...sometimes January, or even February. Don't feel like you are alone if you are still working through your argument around then.

No one really understands unless they're thesising too. There were days when I seriously believed I would not graduate because my coursework would not fulfill any other concentration. There were days when I thought my breakthrough was so noteworthy I could publish some of my work some day. This range is just part of the process. Being around others who were writing theses gave me a sense of solidarity that I very much needed - so look for that.

I tell every Social Studies underclassmen to take Social Studies 40. I also tell them not to worry too much -- especially about the oral defense, as it turned into an absolutely validating and wonderful experience. All in all, the process of writing a thesis is a tremendous gift to seniors. You are given the opportunity to dedicate yourself full time to a particular project of your choosing. You'll be surprised how much other professors respect that choice and will help you write it (in guidance, extensions, etc.). Enjoy those writing sessions with your friends -- build a thesis team over J-Term and get writing earlier! You're going to have to be willing to scrap a lot of what you write along the way, but your ultimate product will be so much stronger for it.