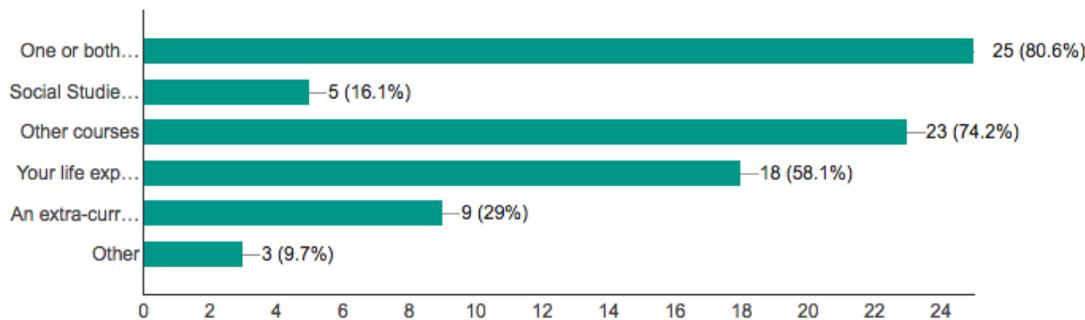


1. What courses or experiences were the most helpful to you in choosing your senior thesis topic? Please check all that apply and describe how you chose your topic.



My thesis topic was most generally informed by my life experiences (i.e., interest in democratic legitimacy), and then narrowed by courses (i.e., researching early American democratic legitimacy).

I learned about my topic at a lecture.

I was going to write about something totally different until I went home during J-term of junior year, and realized that there would be no topic more meaningful than the (oft-neglected) lives of the people of my home community. Of course, the theoretical interest behind all of this (ex. civic engagement! social capital!) had been bubbling up the entire time, through social studies tutorials, Gov seminars, and other classes. Keep your eyes and ears peeled because your thesis topic could be born out of anything!

I chose my topic based on my own extra-curricular experiences, after applying what I learned in Social Studies and WGS to my participation in that extra-curricular anyway.

The final paper for my first junior tutorial felt most aligned with my vision for my thesis, so I pursued a similar project moving forward.

I selected my topic gradually. First, I selected my regional focus from my coursework in foreign language classes. As time progressed, I worked with my academic advisor and my junior tutorial leaders to hone my theory focus. Over the summer before senior year, I explored my potential topics and gave myself time to explore. Then I re-grouped with my thesis advisor in August and began the thesis writing process.

My topic melded many of my theoretical and practical interests. I was interested in public health at an applied level, but found many overlaps between public health and the theoretical concepts discussed in Social Studies 10 (especially Foucault's biopower) and a health inequality course (medicalization). These overlapping interests, as well as my experiences working at a hospital for Health Leads, gave me my idea for my thesis topic.

Place and space came up in my junior tutorial on Heidegger and in a film philosophy course, but I wanted to see if it could come together with contemporary ontology (in which I became interested after reading Heidegger and Deleuze)

I think the most influential course was a junior seminar, "Poor People's Movements in Latin America." It really inspired me to think more critically about my previous experiences in Latin America and start developing my own questions.

Many evolving conversations with my thesis supervisor. My topic was an offshoot of an interest of mine that developed in a junior tutorial.

My fall term junior tutorial and a class I took freshman year

I initially picked a topic I was interested in learning more about. My topic changed very substantially as I began reading/researching, though.

The two courses that helped me choose a thesis topic were a seminar in the Government Department called "Democracy, Alienation, and Muslims in the West" and a history course called "Empire, Nation, and Immigration in France since 1870." The Social Studies junior seminar "Migration in Theory and Practice" helped me craft an answerable research question and develop a methodology. While studying abroad in Paris my junior spring, I did an independent study, which allowed me to familiarize myself with the French literature on the topic.

The junior tutorials in Social Studies were very helpful in thinking about which aspects of income inequality I wanted to tackle. While the topic was informed by my own life experience and a Gov seminar in which I enrolled, Social Studies allowed me to bring a variety of methods and perspectives to the question of how social capital and civic engagement are shaped by a lack of socioeconomic opportunity.

Most significant to me was a sociology course I took during my first year.

I was really interested in media and how it portrays people of color. I wanted to think about those issues in a more academic sense.

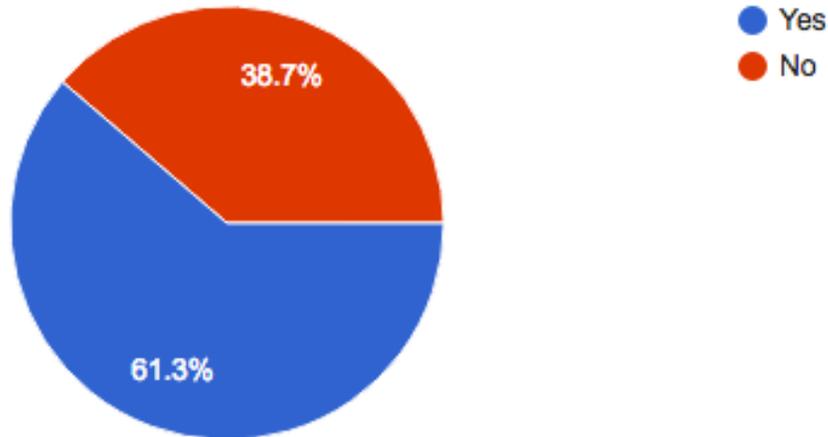
The combination of my junior tutorials and the courses within my focus field helped me to pick my senior thesis topic. My fall junior tutorial facilitated my introduction to my chosen methodology for my thesis by requiring that I engage in qualitative, ethnographic research throughout the semester. My second junior tutorial helped me to further refine my topic. The course was more theoretical, but it also aided me by making me engage in a preliminary literature review on public defenders. My courses in my focus field were excellent in guiding regarding how to consider matters of justice across several disciplines. Finally, my extra-curricular involvement informed my grounded understanding of the issues related to my thesis and furthered my interest.

Over winter break junior year, I started thinking about potential thesis topics. I was interested in a lot of different things that straddled global health, African studies, and U.S. foreign policy. At the time, the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa was receiving a lot of attention in the media, and in particular, the recent characterization of the virus by President Obama as a U.S. national security priority and the military response that it mobilized, what became known as Operation United Assistance. In other words, this significant current event served as the initial spark for my research, but my academic interests had really been solidified through the courses I took in the fall of junior year.

I chose my topic based on my personal life experiences (questions I had consistently asked and wondered about growing up, relating to the place I grew up), and solidified the specifics based on conversations with an HKS professor and a summer internship doing research for a philanthropic intermediary organization.

I wrote a theory thesis, but one that began by asking a question about practical politics (corruption), in which I first became interested during a summer internship, in the language of political theory. In figuring out how to answer this question, I came to think that I needed to find a satisfactory account of another, ostensibly smaller and prior concept (administration). No satisfactory account being forthcoming, it seemed the thing to do to write that story myself.

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.



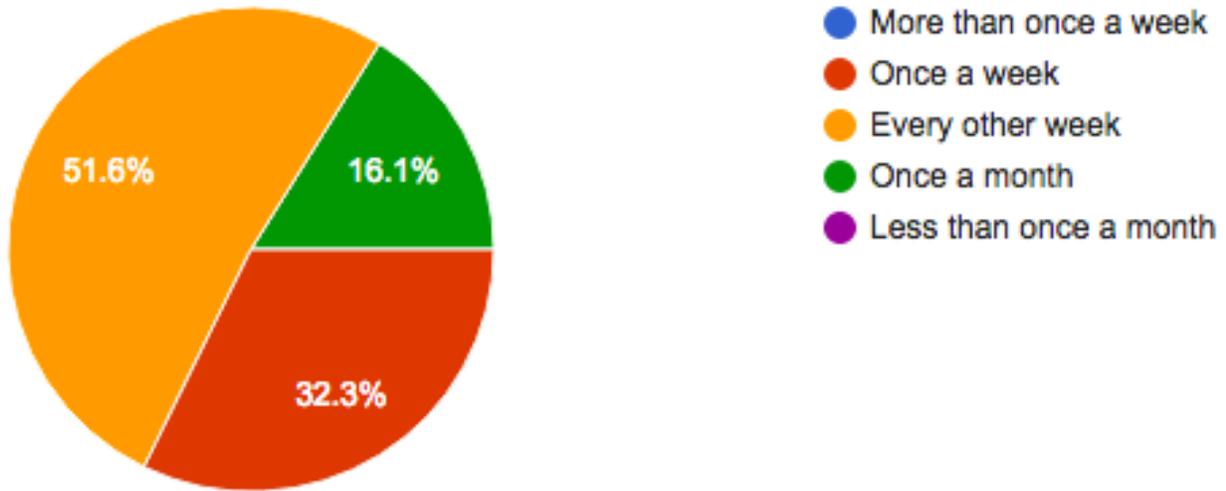
She taught my spring junior tutorial.
A lecturer in Social Studies referred me to someone else who referred me to my supervisor.
The person I wanted to be my supervisor left Harvard, and I asked her to connect me with someone else who might be able to supervise me.
Junior Tutorial Instructor
I was recommended by my academic advisor to speak to them about my thesis because they did research in that area
I first approached my thesis advisor upon the recommendation of my academic adviser. I had a brief meeting with her about my topic (she also spoke about her expectations for me as her thesis advisee). She first encouraged me to go out and talk to a few other people just to make sure that I wanted to work with her, and then when I came back, we agreed to be a pair!
I researched professors and graduate students with experience in the topics or methods I wanted to pursue and emailed them for a meeting.
I chose my academic advisor as my thesis advisor because he is well-versed in my topic and we work well together.
I had met my advisor once before, but it had been in a pretty different context and I didn't really know her at the time. However, I knew I was looking for someone who had a regional focus on Latin America--preferably with a lot of knowledge about Brazil--and would be a very hands-on advisor for my thesis. I spoke to other people who had worked with her before, and their reviews were stellar. And as I spoke more with her (before we agreed to have her be my supervisor), it became clearer to me that she was the perfect mentor to have for this thesis.
I took a course with my thesis supervisor.
Caroline Light from WGS introduced us based on my methodology and topic interest.
My concentration adviser recommended him, I knew he taught courses in areas of interest similar to mine, and the first meeting I had with him went very well.

Social Studies Thesis Advice From the Class of 2016

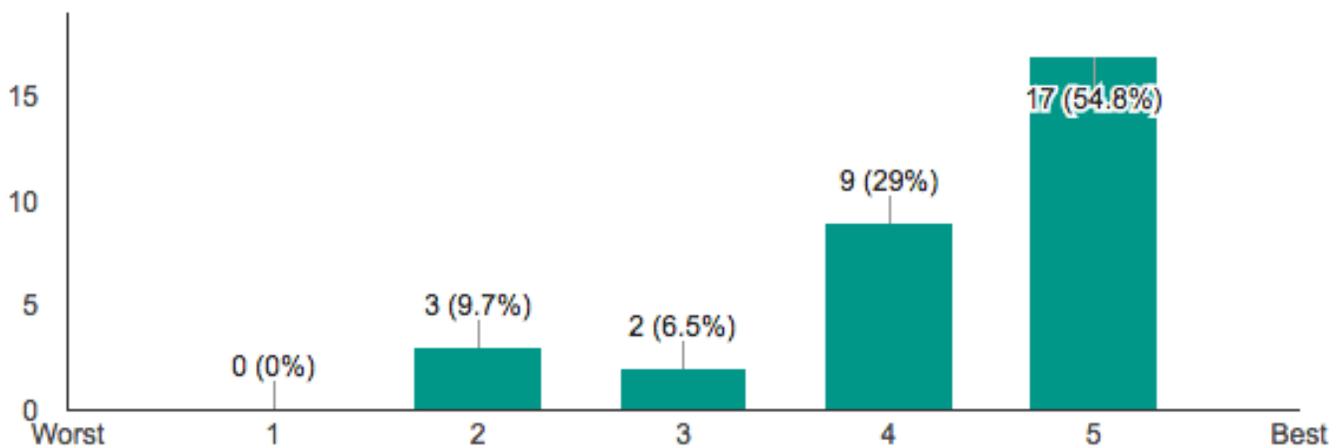
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<p>My thesis supervisor was my MAPS mentor, a program in which I participated since my junior year in order to assist with the research and writing process for my junior papers.</p>
<p>My thesis supervisor was a graduate student who lived in my house, and someone whom I thought would be able to push back on my ideas and give me productive criticism.</p>
<p>My Social Studies 40 TF</p>
<p>She was my professor for another class that ended up being part of my focus field.</p>
<p>My thesis supervisor taught my fall junior tutorial and one of my focus field courses. I asked if he would advise my thesis because I loved his junior tutorial and was incredibly excited and motivated to pursue an ethnographic project for my senior thesis.</p>
<p>My thesis supervisor was my TF in a History course I was taking my junior spring.</p>
<p>I knew my advisor from academic advising, and Social Studies 10. I chose him because he has always been supportive of my open-ended intellectual exploration, and good at giving feedback and holding high standards for my work.</p>
<p>Used the thesis supervisor database; was given several names as recommendations and emailed them to arrange a meeting, selected the person who seemed the best fit for my working style.</p>
<p>I knew her from two classes I had taken. Admittedly I changed supervisors twice in the writing process, once at the behest of the supervisor and once of my own volition. My first was my junior tutorial leader, and my second was someone I hadn't previously known.</p>
<p>I took a lecture course with my advisor in my sophomore year and met with them fairly regularly in office hours that semester. We got back in touch in my junior year to talk about some research questions that I was interested in, and their advice and suggestions (and frankly, investment in the initial stages of what would become the thesis) were so intellectually productive that, when it came time to identify a supervisor, they were very much the natural choice.</p>
<p>I knew the general direction I wanted to go in terms of a thesis topic but I didn't know what specific area I was interested in that general topic. Thus, I took very specific classes my junior fall trying to figure out what I wanted to focus on. I picked one of those classes strategically to get to know the professor and whether I would like to ask them for advising. I loved how she teaches and the course, and thankfully she agreed to be my advisor!</p>
<p>I was connected to my thesis supervisor by my former agreed-upon supervisor, who could no longer advise me.</p>
<p>I wanted someone with a background or interest in 'place and space' philosophically or not, and found him after emailing lots of people for suggestions and then those suggestions for more suggestions.</p>
<p>I had taken one of her courses and realized that she would be an excellent adviser throughout the course. I also looked at a few other advisers but ultimately decided that she would be the best fit.</p>

3. On average, how often did you meet with your supervisor during your senior year?



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?



5. What advice do you have for juniors about what to look for in a supervisor?

<p>An advisor who "fits" with you is key, otherwise you'll spend the next year bitching in the d-hall when you have an absolutely great advisor who just does things differently than you do. Get one that fits your topic and your working style, and then make it work. If you're lazy, find a lazy advisor (or, perhaps, one that wants to meet every week). If you're type A, find a type A advisor. There is no platonic advisor for all people, and further, there isn't one for you! They won't be perfect. Make it work. Be an adult.</p>
<p>It is really important that you find a supervisor who complements your style. If you tend to procrastinate, you might want someone who will keep you accountable. If you're self-motivated, make sure your supervisor can keep up with meeting as often as you'd like, reading what you've written, etc. Ultimately, your supervisor should be someone with whom you are very comfortable talking and working.</p>
<p>Look for someone who actually has the time to meet with you. It doesn't really matter how experienced they are in your specific field. To me, it was much more important that they were willing to meet with me on a regular basis and spend time giving me feedback. Similarly, having someone who knows your methodology (interviews, ethnography, etc) is really helpful.</p>
<p>Expertise in your topic area is useful, but probably not as important as personal connection.</p>
<p>A relationship that is friendly, personal, not just cordial. Someone that you can trust will dedicate themselves to helping you.</p>
<p>Think about what you need most. Do you need someone who's going to know all the literature you need to know because you're a newbie at the topic? Do you need a "thesis mom" who will be on your back about producing writing? Do you need someone who'll just chill in the background because you're the kind that works best alone and undisturbed? You need to reflect about yourself before you think about what you might want in a thesis advisor. Then, look for a person who matches that criteria AND is a reliable communicator.</p>
<p>It's more important that your advisor has time to read your writing and thoughtfully advise you than it is that s/he has name-recognition.</p>
<p>You want someone who will be critical and honest, but also encouraging.</p>
<p>I think it's super important to make sure that your supervisor is someone who will dedicate a lot of time--and, equally important, a lot of thought--to your thesis. They should be someone who has a decent knowledge of the literature or area of research that you're engaged in, but more importantly they should have a sense of what questions need to be asked to push you into improving your ideas and your thesis structure. Also, they should be a nice person. That's pretty important.</p>
<p>Find someone who can help you with questions of methodology. Most important are your framing and your conclusions.</p>
<p>Find an adviser that has time for you and who will answer your emails quickly and be a generally empathetic human. I had the best thesis advising experience out of anyone I know and all of my thesis friends were jealous at how great our relationship was because he always made time for me and truly cared about my work and personal mental health.</p>
<p>It's important to get a sense of how much time they can commit to meeting and giving substantive feedback.</p>
<p>Prioritize your needs and what you are looking for in an advisor based on those needs. Then have meetings with potential advisors and ask them questions based on that list to see how well that person would fulfill the role you need him/her to fill.</p>
<p>I was happy that I picked a grad student; she was much more willing to walk me through things in a way that many professors might not have time for or might be more intimidating about (i.e. Here's the world expert and I'm asking him/her the most basic, initial questions about how to do research?).</p>

<p>Ask them how many theses they are planning to supervise. I think that my supervisor took a few too many she always gave me feedback in a very timely manner, but I could feel that she was overwhelmed, especially towards the end of the process. Also, don't be afraid to ask them very specific questions like how often they would be meeting with you, how many drafts they would read, how much feedback they would give you, and so on.</p>
<p>I would advise juniors to select a supervisor who is present and genuinely invested in the student's success and the success of the thesis. While this may mean selecting a prominent professor, often the best advisers are those who have a true investment in undergraduate work, such as social studies faculty and graduate students. Either way, the most important thing is that the adviser be willing and able to talk about research design and process, as well as the writing process, both during the summer and especially during the month before the thesis is due. Finally, students should make sure to select an adviser based upon their own strengths and weaknesses. While the ideal is to have someone who aligns with one's topic area and methodology, this is usually not possible. In that case, I would advise students to select an adviser who is stronger in the area in which they feel weaker, and fill in the gaps by informally utilizing other faculty and graduate students who are interested in their project.</p>
<p>Look for someone you know well. Some people stress out a lot about finding "the perfect supervisor," but honestly someone whom you respect and work well with will almost always work out, regardless whether they are an expert in your topic area. Remember, you can always assemble a "thesis team:" your advisor doesn't have to be a know-it-all genie. You can always reach out to other professors or TFs if your supervisor is not an expert in your field. For that reason, I was very comfortable picking someone who was not an expert in my field but whom I got along great with.</p>
<p>Choose someone who will be able to make time for you and who you feel comfortable going to for help, as opposed to just someone who has a big name and an impressive reputation</p>
<p>Don't get obsessed with finding a "big name" to advise you at the expense of finding an advisor who will really be invested in you.</p>
<p>Find a supervisor that you have a strong relationship with. It was really helpful that my advisor was familiar with my working style.</p>
<p>Look for someone who aligns with you methodologically and who you will feel comfortable working with over the course of the year. Make sure that you have shared expectations and working styles. If your supervisor prefers emailing more frequently over meeting frequently, ask yourself if you're comfortable with that. In addition, if you need more structure than others, you should take this into account. My thesis supervisor wasn't hounding me for drafts or imposing deadlines; I did this myself. For me, that's an ideal situation because I'm an independent worker, but it's not always the case for others.</p>
<p>Someone who will provide consistent support and commit significant time to you and your project throughout the thesis process.</p>
<p>It is important to find someone who has good experience with the thesis process. However that is not enough. It is even more helpful if they are already an expert in your topic.</p>
<p>Be aware of your working style and the amount of feedback you'll be looking for: be honest with potential supervisors about what you expect out of the relationship (e.g. do you prefer a more hands-off style of advising? do you want to be meeting every week and reviewing material?)</p>
<p>Don't hesitate in asking a potential supervisor very direct questions in order to determine the extent to which they are hands-on/off, because this is an important thing to find out before you pick them. From the outset, if a potential supervisor seems to have strong opinions/thoughts on how you should do your thesis and you don't agree them, then avoid them because you may otherwise realize in the fall that the arrangement is untenable.</p>
<p>I think it's important that they challenge you and are not easily pleased. It would also help if they have a sense of how Social Studies works and teaches.</p>
<p>Look for someone who is fundamentally interested in your project and who is willing to sacrifice time for you. My thesis supervisor's commitment to meeting with me every week was amazing.</p>

6. What advice was most helpful to you before you started your research? What, if anything, do you wish someone had told you before you started your thesis?

No one else in academia knows what they're doing either, so give it your best shot.
The most helpful advice I received was a reminder that I didn't need to have my question figured out exactly before collecting data.
I think it is really important to just realize how much time it will take to do the research for your thesis. The writing is actually the easy part if you've done your research in advance. Start early and analyze your data as you go along... not just after you've collected all of it.
It won't go exactly as planned, but, as with the writing, better to just get started and not worry about it.
It'll all be fine!
The most helpful advice I received (I wrote a qualitative, ethnographic thesis) was not to read too much literature before analyzing my data. I think that really opened up the maximum potential for innovation and original ideas while I was looking back through the data and trying to come up with an argument. Secondly, approach the research itself with an open mind! You will likely enter with an incomplete direction of research or enter the field with the false assumption that you have a perfect direction of research. Whatever you think at that time, you will find out that you are wrong later on.
Read more than you think you need to (for an qualitative, empirical study) in methods and theory.
I was told to explore my interests. If I could go back in time, I think it would have been nice to know that winter break is thesis writing crunch time.
I'm not sure about any particular bit of advice, but I do think it helped to have a sense that I needed to hit the ground running relatively quickly when I got to my research location. I'm not sure I have any really great pointed advice for new thesis writers, except that it's really important to have some sort of game plan for your research before you head out, but that you still need to be open to having things go in totally unexpected (but helpful) ways.
It is quite unlikely that you will stick fully to your original research question. Don't be scared by that! Also, start your lit review early on. I worked backwards and did my lit review after my fieldwork. I think I would have had a more focused thesis and a stronger concluding chapter (which I think was the weakest chapter of my thesis) had I done that.
Budget.Your.Time. seriously.
I would have liked more advice about how to structure a thesis and how to manage one's time on such projects.
Not to feel like I had to come back from the summer having done all of my research. I didn't do my research until mostly November and had plenty of time to analyze it and write.
I wish I knew how important it is to have a solid back-up plan. I didn't have one, so when I was in the field and things were not turning out as I expected them to I started to freak out. Fortunately, my supervisor happened to be in the same city around that time, so we met and had a productive conversation about ways to move forward.
The advice that was most helpful to me was that the research could change over time. Since I was using a survey method, this meant asking a lot of questions, in case my hypotheses were not borne out. I wish someone had told me how limited the time is after J-term (even though I knew this internally), so that I would moved a little bit faster during the summer and fall semester.
While you don't have to start with the lit review, it would have been helpful to have much of it done before the school year started. Even if you don't get around to doing all or much of your primary research over the summer, getting some literature "reviewed" is a low-key, low pressure, pretty low stress way to make some good headway before the school year starts. I would do that if I could go back.
Not sure
Plan to finish well ahead of the deadline and then shoot to finish well before then.
I wish I had known to do more background reading over the summer before senior year.

To seek others' help. I made use of a variety of resources to get through the thesis process far beyond my thesis supervisor. Within Social Studies, I talked to my academic adviser, to the writing fellows, and to my seminar. Outside of social studies, I met with the research librarian, relied on social studies alums' advice, and gained helpful feedback from peers/friends. That said, I was reluctant to do this at first. I am so glad to have had a "village" of supporters helping through the process.

I was told very early on to create a thesis "team." Identify people (faculty, family, friends) who can help you in different aspects of the thesis process. I also followed the advice to get as much writing done as humanly possible over winter break and that proved enormously helpful given that the spring semester flies by.

Make sure your advisor specializes in the subject you want to research. This will help you be able to go more in depth in your research, building off of their knowledge rather than reinventing the wheel.

Reach out to supervisors early - the good ones go fast. Don't underestimate how time-consuming interview research is and how many issues you may run in on the ground. Be ready to be a little flexible about the methodology and even the topic of your thesis as your actual fieldwork takes shape.

By far the most helpful advice: You either write a thesis for the research process or for a very high final grade, but it is extremely hard to do both. If you want the former, choose a topic that'll allow you to travel somewhere new, or have new kinds of interactions with new kinds of people. If you want the latter, choose a very clearly focused and somewhat 'safe' topic, in which you'll know exactly how you'll get your information and have a relatively clear sense early on of what it'll look like. Doing both is hard because the two goals often work at cross-purposes.

Things I wish I had been told: 1) If you're doing interview-based work, factor in a lot of time for transcription. 2) Especially if you're doing interview-based work, don't be intimidated by people talking about methods and methods-training. A lot of people using somewhat obscure words to talk about methods can make one feel like there's some deep and inaccessible secret to research methods

Don't have lofty summer goals for research that isn't your main priority. If you have small goals it will be easier to see progress.

I was told early on to follow the problems/questions that I found most interesting, and not to worry overmuch that the thesis was evolving from what I had initially envisioned. To thesis writers just beginning the process - 1) it's okay to answer a question that feels smaller or more rudimentary than the one with which you started (it usually isn't a less worthwhile endeavor), and 2) write. Write early, write often, and write both to understand and to make yourself understood. You will rarely know (and will sometimes be surprised by) what you really think until (when) you've seen it fixed on a page.

Start thinking about thesis early and put some good thought into your topic, don't rush it! It has to be something you're genuinely interested in.

Know your own approach to writing and give yourself signposts/warnings based on that - if you hate writing everyday don't try to, likewise if you hate outlines don't do them - basically, just ensure you can get the work done regardless of what may be the 'traditional' way to go about writing.

Really do your background reading, It makes the actual writing much easier and I didn't do enough of it before I started writing. Also just have fun with it. If you go in trying to write a Hoopes prize-winning thesis, you won't enjoy the experience. Allow yourself to view your thesis as a personal project that is about your work, not anything else. Your thesis will be better for it.

Don't stress too much over finding the absolute perfect topic since your project will inevitably evolve as you work on it anyway

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?

No
I did travel to conduct research. I highly recommend learning at least a little of the local language before you travel. If you can make even a small effort to speak to people in their native language, it often surprises and pleases them, which is helpful for building rapport with potential interview respondents and other sources of support.
Nope. I was in Boston.
Yes. Very good experience. Not sure on advice, don't be scared.
Yes. Don't overestimate your foreign language expertise - better to bite off a smaller chunk with a less ambitious project and do it thoroughly and well, as opposed to writing a bad thesis with a more ambitious research design.
I did not travel for thesis research.
I traveled domestically. I would advise thesis writers to immerse themselves in their travel destination and community as much as possible. That way you can prevent loneliness and be able to speak with more authority based in personal experience about the location of your study.
I stayed at Harvard over the summer to do research. If you plan to travel, create a schedule and goals to stay on track. It's easy to get distracted.
I did travel, and it was amazing--I would definitely recommend it!!! I think for students who are traveling for their research, it's also good to recognize that the first few days they're probably going to be getting oriented to the new location rather than doing actual "research," so they'll need to take that into account for their scheduling.
Be flexible about location, timeline, and research topic. Have a back-up plan. Always prioritize safety. Structure your time (but be open to making adjustments). Do something fun (and unrelated to your thesis) every day. Talk to friends and family about your successes and struggles. I had an EXTREMELY miserable time while conducting thesis research, but I sought help and survived and came back to campus with a decent amount of data to work with. The rest of the thesis process was a breeze in comparison :)
I traveled to a site about 40 minutes from my home, so I don't know if that counts as actual travel. However, I would say that it is good to have some familiarity with the field site before going in - either through previous experiences there or by conducting thorough background research and speaking with people who have been to that location.
Even a whole summer in a place you've never been before isn't all that much time. If you can, travel to a place you have been before. This may seem less applicable to those students who can't afford to travel all willy nilly, but Harvard offers great travel grants leading up to Junior summer and I got funding to travel my home state for thesis research.
Yes. My travel experience was one of the most rewarding I had during my time at Harvard. In terms of advice, I would recommend planning and solidifying your schedule as much as possible before you leave. I would, however, keep a few days free (i.e. book your return flight a couple of days or even a week after your last interviews are scheduled). I ended up scheduling additional interviews while I was in the field (primarily through informants) and they ended up being some of my most important interviews.
N/a
I would highly recommend traveling for thesis research - it is a very immersive experience and a unique chance to have fascinating conversations (if you're doing interview research). I would recommend you either a) pick a place where you have a solid network on the ground or b) attempt to get a related, low-key internship, etc. in your research field to get you started. It can be challenging and frustrating to build a

network of respondents from the ground-up, not to mention a little lonely. Make sure to spend at least 8 weeks on your research site - you don't have to be doing only thesis research that the whole time, but it takes several weeks to build a network of respondents and it can be frustrating to have to leave right when things are heating up.

I did travel to conduct research, and greatly enjoyed it. My advice would be to apply for travel grants early. People think they need to figure out their topic in painstaking detail before applying for a grant, but most grants give you immense flexibility in changing topics over the spring. Having funding secured allows you to plan the research travel process with a greater sense of certainty, not the other way around.

Not applicable

I loved being elsewhere for thesis research! Fewer friends around, and hence fewer distractions. I'd recommend setting yourself a daily routine (thesis research is a job, after all), and giving yourself weekends to explore and not work. For example - I would free-write on methodology from 9-10, do secondary source work from 10-12:30, have lunch, then spend time with my primary sources until my brain gave up (typically around 5 or 6), taking a break for caffeine in mid-afternoon. I'd frequently read in the evenings too, but never on topics directly relevant to my thesis (although they ended up making their way into the finished project in unexpected ways).

8. What were the most helpful tips/strategies that you developed, used, or wished you had used during the writing process?

Setting realistic goals for each day can make writing much more manageable. Writing a 20-25 page chapter is daunting, but it isn't so bad if you take it 3 or 4 pages at a time. Additionally, it's okay if you fall short of your goal some days as long as you adjust and keep plowing along the next day.
Set a certain number of pages to write per day and stick to that.
Just start writing, it won't get any easier.
"Parking on the downhill slope" - only finish writing for one day when you start a new idea that you can easily pick up the next day to get straight back into the writing process.
People will tell you to write a page per day (or something along those lines). Let's be honest: that will not work. The biggest advice I can give is: don't be afraid of writing. When you're stuck, take free writes or lower the standard so that you're not afraid to produce. The single biggest mistake I made through the thesis process was letting the hope for perfection delay my writing, and I ended up handing in a draft that I could have taken several additional looks at.
Pretending my writing voice was my speaking voice to make the process go quicker.
I set reasonable goals for myself and figured out when I work best. I found that working 3-5 hours a day was more productive than working for really long stretches of time. It's easy to burn out.
Don't stress! It will get done! It will get done a little quicker if you do a thorough job planning and outlining everything in advance, but it will get done nonetheless! Outlining was actually hugely helpful for me for my thesis--also, it was good to kind of subdivide tasks so that I had a goal for every week and worked toward that goal.
I wish I had started writing much earlier, and that I had begun the writing process over the summer when I was doing my fieldwork. I also wish I had done more of my lit review earlier on.
The ten-minute free write exercise; don't edit, just write! So helpful for actually getting out thoughts.
I wish I had developed and stuck to effective writing/time management strategies!
To make deadlines for myself months ahead of time with my thesis advisor. They kept me on track and I was therefore on target the whole time in terms of where I was supposed to be.
Plan little rewards/celebrations (i.e. watching an episode of your favorite TV show) ahead so that you have something to look forward to while writing. Give yourself mindless tasks to do when you are tired (i.e. formatting, working on appendices, compiling your bibliography). Set reasonable goals (i.e. if the number of pages you plan to write in a given day repeatedly ends up being higher than the number of pages you manage to write, then adjust your expectations). Take days off: you don't have to be thinking about your thesis the whole time.
I developed the strategy of setting deadlines with my adviser to turn in full drafts of chapters, and treated them as real deadlines. This really helped to keep me on track, as did the thesis seminar.
You don't need to write linearly. You can also write your introduction and literature review last, if you want. There's no set way you have to attack the writing process. Plan to block out almost all of February to write, unless you have miraculously made huge progress before that point. Think of it as writing a two-page response paper a day. If you write two pages per day in January and February, excluding weekends, you'd have like 100 pages. So the biggest thing is not to freak out, and to view each two page chunk as its own mini project. If you look at the whole project, you'll be demoralized. Break it up into paragraph chunks.
Exercised every day, wrote
Rather than getting overwhelmed by the prospect of writing a 100 page paper, approach more like writing 5 20 page papers instead (20 page papers are nothing to a social studies veteran). This framing made a huge difference writing the longest paper of my life.
1) blocking out times on my gcal 2) accountability meetings with my advisor 3) finding people to be chapter readers--helped me have more products finished for people to read and I got a jump start on editing

<p>I made lists often and kept track of what I'd done and what I had left to do. I broke down tasks that could be just one thing into smaller, readily achievable items (e.g. rather than read Book X, read Chapters 1-2 of Book X). That way I could accomplish one of these things in between a class or before another extra-curricular event. I kept my Thursdays and Fridays as free as possible both semesters to write in the library. Toward the end of the process, rather than finding one specific thesis spot to write, I needed to move around a bit and discover new places (Tozzer and Cambridge Public Library were great!).</p>
<p>I did a lot of secondary research over the summer in addition to my fieldwork. Although I obviously had to do additional research in the fall and that was valuable, it was helpful to have identified sources and completed a mini lit review before returning to campus.</p>
<p>I wish I had participated in a writer's seminar because I struggled more with the writing process (articulating my thoughts, categorizing and explaining my findings) than I had anticipated that I would. I was for the most part good with time management, creating and sticking to an ambitious schedule. However I did not revise the final product as much as I wish I would have. Last, if I could redo the whole thesis process I would have done far more than 17 in depth interviews, starting this research process earlier, so that I could more deeply investigate certain findings by finding additional interview subjects based on preliminary findings.</p>
<p>I enjoyed having a carrel at Widener and setting apart full days to do writing and research instead of trying to do a little every day - it was difficult to be fully immersed in the work otherwise.</p>
<p>Wished I had used: starting transcription earlier, start writing earlier. Used: 1) blocking off large periods of time to work on the thesis rather than doing it in smaller bits allowed me to work faster than if I had to frequently re-immense myself in my thesis for short bursts. 2) Allowing myself to write very slowly at first, because getting it closer to right the first time is easier than having to do substantial re-drafts.</p>
<p>Come back to campus for J-term. No matter how much or little you got done before then, it is crucial to have that time to make sure the majority of your thesis is written before spring semester starts.</p>
<p>Free-writing was an enormously helpful exercise for me - not because any of the prose was any good, but because it was a way to exorcise a lot of demons (I had a lot of hangups about methodology and my ability to write) without the judgment of the external world. For people who think spatially - I used markers, index cards, sticky tack, and one wall of my bedroom to keep track of thoughts and facts, and eventually to plan out the organization of my chapters and the thesis as a whole. And yes, it does make you look completely nuts.</p>
<p>Always checking back in with your argument and developing it as you go. Looking back, I should have thought much more about my research question to begin with.</p>
<p>Just start writing as much as you can, and edit later instead of worrying about making it perfect from the beginning. You should end up having many drafts.</p>
<p>Stay organized with ideas however you can (outlining, notebooks, pictures); writing in a big block of time worked better for me than in shorter frequent sessions; remember transitions and signposts</p>
<p>Set aside a certain amount of time each day, starting in the fall, for thesis stuff. If you treat it like any other class and build it into a routine, it will make it easier. Also, find a group of thesis buddies to work on things together. This allows you to commiserate and have some fun while working. It sometimes comes at the cost of minor productivity, but when you're already working in your thesis at midnight on a Friday with like a month out, you can afford to make it more fun and to discuss ideas with others instead of just being a writing machine.</p>
<p>Set shorter deadlines along the way!</p>

9. What would you do differently, if you were going to write a senior thesis again, knowing what you know now?

When in doubt, make your thesis interesting! Why would you spend your thesis doing a ton of data collection on [fill in boring topic here]? Have some fun with it.
I would definitely take more time to take care of myself mentally.
I would have started earlier and used my summer more wisely.
Start developing data chapters before finishing background
Done more reading before the summer to give myself a decent theoretical hypothesis to work off in my analysis, as opposed to having to do all of that retrospectively after having my data
If I could write a senior thesis again, I would 1) drill better into my head the fact that no matter what you write, it will change significantly. I think this understand would have made me less afraid of producing writing. 2) take the optional thesis writer's seminar to keep me on track in terms of producing writing. 3) go away to somewhere without internet access to think over the overall logical structure of the thesis (this is something that I did do and worked very well). 4) accept (and if needed, ask for) help and support and love from other people when you need it (thesis fairies, friends, family members).
I would have stayed in the field for at least a month more.
I would begin writing sooner.
I think I would be more diligent in typing up my interview notes/transcripts right after doing my interviews, rather than waiting to get back on campus to start transcribing. That was probably the most painful part of the thesis (especially since I was transcribing in a non-native language), and I would do everything I could to minimize the pain.
I'd start with the lit review, and choose my question from that. In actuality, I worked backwards, fitting my question to what I believed I could say after conducting my fieldwork.
I would have tried to get a draft done earlier so I could actually fix the theoretical holes that I knew I had but did not have time to address.
I would have tried to force/motivate myself to write earlier.
I would stay at home during J-term. I can get a lot of work done at home and was really efficient while working on my thesis for the time that I was home. I think even coming back to campus a week and a half before the semester started was too early -- I think people should emphasize that it is more about feeling comfortable than feeling like you need to be on campus. Wherever is your most efficient place is where you should be.
I would choose a different methodology (and therefore a different research questions). I realized that what caused me a disproportionate amount of stress during the research process was having to interact with human beings. If I were to write a senior thesis again, I would do archive-based research and choose a research question accordingly.
I would have spent more time on my data analysis in the fall semester.
I would not panic at not having started my primary research over the summer. It is possible to do much if not all of your primary research during the school year. Also, when you hear people talking about how they have two chapters done by November 1st, don't be nervous. Most people write most of their thesis over winter break and during January and February. If you are way ahead of the game, good for you! If you've left a lot for January and February, also don't stress. If you write a page or two a day, it will be very manageable. Know that you will have to spend many hours on it during Jan/Feb, but that it won't be overly stressful as long as you make progress every day. Look at the thesis process as a really cool opportunity that most people never have - to spend many months creating your own piece of research. While it won't be the next hit social science book, look at it as an amazing experience, and take it with a grain of salt/put it in perspective. It should be enriching and good, not high-stakes and panic-inducing.
I would a lot more time for editing and reorganization.

<p>My biggest difference would be that I did not know how to do data work but it's unfair to think about what I would have done differently with regards to that because I had to develop my data skills by stumbling through the thesis process for a long while.</p>
<p>There's not much I would do differently. I would potentially read other literature sooner or find my theoretical background sooner. Overall, I had a very gratifying experience. Writing a thesis is a grueling process, but writing it was well worth my time. It has instrumentally informed what I want to do in the future, made me think harder and write better, and given me a sense of pride as I prepare to leave Harvard.</p>
<p>I would start writing earlier and worry less about the organization of the thesis early on in the process. I felt a kind of pressure to know where my thesis was going before I started actually writing. But in many respects I think that I could have had a stronger thesis if I had been less concerned about the big picture in the beginning.</p>
<p>I would have sought a thesis advisor with expert knowledge and experience about my topic. Specifically I would have chosen an advisor that already works on my topic (sociological methods) rather than the advisor I did choose (who specializes in theory).</p>
<p>I would try to do a better job of interweaving my literature review with my thesis writing - I think I got stuck in a rabbit hole of trying to read all the available literature on various aspects of my thesis, only to move my writing in a different direction and to realize I lacked the theoretical foundation there.</p>
<p>Try and write most of it in the summer/early fall, because it's very possible. Many people, myself included, end up writing most of it in 3 weeks in February/March, and there is usually no great reason why those 3 weeks can't be in August-October instead. In my case, there was a reason - delays in transcription by both me and someone helping me - so I would also have thought through that process more.</p>
<p>I would choose a different supervisor.</p>
<p>I would wish to have had drafts of all of my chapters by the beginning of February - to give myself more time away from them before going back and doing major revisions. (More generally, I would have tried to be more open to major structural revisions in the internal chapter structure and overall chapter organization earlier on in the writing process.)</p>
<p>I would focus on an even more specific aspect and I would not necessarily compare two countries.</p>
<p>I would have spoken to more professors who know about my topic, instead of mainly only discussing with my supervisor.</p>
<p>Think about how ideas are being presented (and in what order) earlier on; start reading in the summer (for a theory thesis, I got to the crux of useful reading way later than I had wanted)</p>
<p>I would have been more strict with myself about doing background reading first and continuing to read once my topic narrowed. My big mistake was doing a lot of reading in the beginning before my topic was specific, and then stopping as I got into writing. It would have been better to continue to read up as I wrote on more specific areas, especially as people had made contributions that I missed in my final thesis. Separately, I also took on a bit more than I could chew with my topic, so maybe narrowing my scope further would have been a good idea.</p>