



# A Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Social Studies

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# A Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Social Studies

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# Why Should I Read This Guide?

The goal of this handbook is to support you through the thesis-writing process by offering answers to common questions that you may have as you work on your thesis project. The questions covered in this guide, and the answers I provide to those questions, follow the rough chronology of the thesis process—from choosing a topic, framing a question, and collecting data to writing the final draft. As such, there are different ways to read this guide. We suggest that you read this guide once through before beginning your thesis process, so that you know what's in store for the year ahead. Then, we suggest that you refer back to the guide while working on your project, using the table of contents to identify questions that come up once your work on the project has begun.

Throughout this guide, I have focused on asking and answering key questions that are likely to arise for you at one time or another. For example: Am I prepared to write a thesis? What's the difference between a thesis topic and a thesis question? How can I help establish a good working relationship with my thesis supervisor? I am scared to start writing; what can I do to get over this block? The answers that I provide for these and other questions are not necessarily 100% comprehensive; but, grounded as they are in the experience that I have gained over the past seven years of supervising students writing senior honors theses in Social Studies, they should give you a firm basis through which to begin working through whatever concerns you face during this process.

One last note: while much of the information included in this guide may seem to be oriented more toward students writing empirically based theses, theorists will also find this guide helpful in many important ways. For example, information about developing a good working relationship with your thesis supervisor, writing grant proposals, crafting your research question, compiling an annotated bibliography, and writing as a “process”—just to name a few of the topics covered here—are key issues of concern for ALL thesis writers, no matter what question you plan to investigate.

# Before the Project Begins: Basic Questions

## Why should I write a thesis?

The deceptively easy answer to this question is that—because writing a thesis is required of all Social Studies concentrators—you have to write one.

However, we hope you will not focus on this answer (that is, that the thesis is required) as a reason to avoid thinking about the benefits and challenges of thesis writing. Being clear on what you hope and expect from the process at the outset may make it easier not only for you to begin the project well, but also for you to finish it well. Over the course of the year that you work on your thesis, you will invariably encounter at least a few significant challenges that may render the entire process more difficult than you might have imagined. On the other hand, the rewards of thesis writing can also be substantial!

One of the most frequent comments that we hear from students who have graduated to the working world is that they value having had the opportunity as an undergraduate to pursue in-depth the intellectual examination of an area of personal and academic interest. These students look back on the long-term, in-depth exploration of their thesis project as having provided a valuable opportunity that, depending on their choice of profession, they may never have the chance to repeat. Students remember, for example, the expertise they developed on their topics; the seeming luxury of devoting substantial time to exploring and thinking about an area of personal intellectual interest; and the physical product, which more than any other single item symbolizes that they accomplished “something” at Harvard.

Moreover, there are other, practical benefits that result from the thesis-writing process. Writing 100 pages of coherent narrative text well is a learning process in and of itself, providing valuable experience in conceptualizing, researching, and finishing a long-term project. Not only is there work involved in planning a suitable project (that is, one that is both realistic and interesting), but it also takes significant work to complete the project successfully. In particular, negotiating the various administrative and intellectual tasks involved with conducting primary source research and analyzing the data you collect teaches valuable research skills that are applicable to non-academic work environments as well as to academic ones.

## What’s a good topic for a Social Studies thesis?

Almost any topic in the social sciences or history is a good topic for a Social Studies thesis. Students write on theoretical topics—investigating problems in political theory or intellectual history, and they also write on empirical topics located in the US or abroad. In any given year, students choose a topic on the basis of debates that have engaged their interest in academic coursework, extracurricular experiences they have found meaningful, and intellectual problems that have captured their attention. Many topics focus



broadly on issues of social justice, political engagement, multicultural understanding, and global problems of inequality, since many Social Studies students' coursework focuses on these themes.

To get a better idea of the kinds of topics that students pursue in their thesis work, you can look on the Social Studies website, where we've listed the titles of theses written in Social Studies over the past four years. From that list, you can see both the range of topics, and also the range of disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) approaches, that students have used in recent years. Here are a few selected titles that begin to suggest the range of subjects on which students write:

*Land Beyond Property: Evolving Conceptions of the Landscape in American Jurisprudence*

*The Face of the Enemy: How Textbook Narratives Influence Israeli and Palestinian Children's Abilities to Empathize with the "Other"*

*Leaving Lima Behind? The Victory and Evolution of Regional Movements in Peru*

*Modernization, Economic Development and the Changing Nature of Son Preference in North India*

*The Will to Life: Friedrich Nietzsche on Perspectivism and Metaethics*

*Lazarus at America's Doorstep: Explaining U.S. Federal Appropriations for Global HIV/AIDS Programs*

*"Murder Capital Art": Graffiti as a Coded History of Washington, D.C.*

*Public Responsibility, Solidarity, and Citizenship: Vaclav Havel and Jurgen Habermas on Morality and Democratic Politics*

Keep in mind that the most important aspect of the topic that you choose is that it should be intellectually or personally compelling to you, since you have to be engaged in active thought and investigation about your topic for a year, during which time you'll become an expert on it.

## How long is a Social Studies thesis? How should it be organized?

A Social Studies thesis needs to be between 20,000 and 30,000 words long, which roughly works out to about 80–120 pages in length. While this may sound intimidating, the reality is that most students end up somewhere over the wordcount and end up having to edit their content back down.

The usual format for a thesis is the following: an introduction (which sets out the question you are posing, along with its significance, your methodology for investigating that question, and the argument you'll be making), three or four body chapters, and a conclusion summing everything up. (While this is the format that most theses take, there are always variations.) The first body chapter should be what is called the "background chapter," which provides either the theoretical background or the historical background to set up your discussion in chapters to come. The other body chapters should be oriented around your primary source data collection and organized in a way that supports your main argument.

All theses must incorporate a substantial amount of primary source data, and they should also make an original argument. That is, they should be a "contribution to knowledge."

You may consider reading a sample thesis early on in the process, to gain a better sense of your end goal. Model (Hoopes-winning) theses are posted on the Social Studies 99 website.

### What am I committing to in taking on this project?

Writing a thesis is unlike any other undergraduate assignment that you've undertaken, and, to do it well, you'll need to commit a substantial amount of time toward its completion. While the time commitment will vary over the course of junior spring to senior spring, you should expect to allocate at least part of your summer toward working on your thesis (anywhere from 2–8 weeks, depending on your particular project), and around 10–30 hours/week during the school year, depending on what you were able to accomplish over the summer.

The intensity of your time commitment between junior spring and senior spring will vary by project. If, for example, you are investigating an international topic that requires research abroad, then you will need to dedicate between 6–8 weeks over the summer to conduct interviews and complete your data collection process. If, on the other hand, you plan to focus on a theoretical or empirical topic for which you can do research during the fall semester, you can dedicate less time over the summer to your project, just setting aside a few weeks for background reading and to help hone your question and methodology. If you do plan your data collection during your senior fall, you may want to help balance your workload by taking fewer classes that term or making sure that at least one of your fall classes is directly related to your thesis. (It's also not a good idea to leave your data collection to the fall if you'll be participating in post-graduation employment recruiting, since recruiting is a very time consuming process.) In all cases, you can assume that you'll be very busy with thesis writing and editing for the first six weeks of your senior spring. During these 4–6 weeks right before the thesis is due, many students spend a significant amount of their time—upwards of 20 hours each week—completing their thesis writing.

It's entirely reasonable for you to consider practical concerns, including job experience you want to gain over the summer, extracurricular activities you are already committed to, or other personal issues that concern you—as you plan the topic, question, and research methodology for your thesis project. Just remember that you can't do everything, and at some point—either during the summer or your senior year—you may have to make some difficult decisions about your priorities regarding thesis, other academic work, extracurricular involvement, and planning post-graduation.

### Am I prepared to write a thesis?

Yes, you're prepared. As a Social Studies concentrator, you have benefited from our curriculum, which has been designed with the concentration's thesis-writing requirement in mind. Through the sophomore tutorial, you were taught to think broadly about major theoretical questions that underlie social science investigation, and you were introduced to ways in which past theorists thought about and answered these questions. You've also gained substantial experience reading primary sources (original theoretical texts).

Through the junior tutorial program, you had the opportunity to write at least one major 25-page research paper (about the length of one thesis chapter), integrating the analysis of primary source data to secondary literature through a process that mimics

the thesis process overall (beginning with crafting a question, etc.). Also, as a junior, you participated in the thesis workshop, learned about IRB requirements, and received some relevant methodological training. By working closely with your academic advisor over the course of your sophomore and junior years, you have also crafted a focus field to which your thesis will be tied, thereby making sure that you have been introduced to literature relevant to your project even before you begin honing your broad topic into an answerable question.

Also, you should keep in mind that you aren't completely on your own as you work on your thesis. You'll get regular guidance and feedback from your thesis supervisor. You have other resources available to you, such as your academic advisor, concentration advisors, and Sue Gilroy—the amazing reference librarian at Lamont. As a Social Studies concentrator, you also have access to support options that we offer throughout your senior year, including the yearlong (optional) thesis writers' seminar, and the thesis presentation workshops facilitated by Social Studies faculty members in February.

### What kinds of social and structured support will I have while writing my thesis?

Although completing a project of this length will require a substantial amount of individual work-time, there will be plenty of opportunity for you to engage with peers, faculty, interviewees, and other individuals as part of your thesis research and writing process. In fact, the successful outcome of your thesis may well rest on how well you complement your individual work-time with “social” work-time. This “social” work-time will include engaging friends, roommates, and fellow students in discussions about your topic and research plans, as well as asking them for feedback on the clarity and substance of your writing.

You can seek out these possible forums for discussion and feedback informally, but the university environment also creates important opportunities for structured interaction, including: faculty who work on topics related to your project; institutes and centers where you can find groups of scholars working on similar or related topics; and support centers, such as the house system, the Writing Center, and the Academic Resource Center, where you have access to individual and group opportunities for feedback and advice. You can also factor your desire to interact with others into your choice of research topic and methodology by planning a project that will require interviews or other in-depth involvement with particular groups of people. That said, the most substantial work on this project will take place on your own individual work-time, and so you should definitely plan for a substantial amount of structured “alone” time for planning, analysis, thinking, and writing over the course of the thesis process.

## What's a general thesis timeline from junior spring to senior spring?

### HONORS CALENDAR

Specific dates for this year can be found on the Social Studies website.

February	March	April	May	June
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Choose a thesis topic and start looking for a supervisor</li> <li>- Take Thesis 101</li> <li>- Submit grant proposals for summer research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Submit grant proposals for summer research</li> <li>- Continue to look for a supervisor</li> <li>- Take URTP Human Subjects Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take URTP Undergraduate Training Session if you haven't done so already</li> <li>- <b>Last Week in April:</b> Submit name of thesis supervisor to Social Studies office</li> <li>- Submit URTP Decision Form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Submit URTP Decision Form if you haven't done so already</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Start primary research</li> </ul>

### SENIOR YEAR

September	October	November	December	January
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attend Senior Meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>First Tuesday of October:</b> Submit Thesis Prospectus to Social Studies office</li> <li>- Complete primary research, begin writing first draft</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Begin writing first draft</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Last Day of Classes:</b> Submit first chapter to thesis supervisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>First Day of Classes:</b> Submit working title and descriptive paragraph</li> </ul>
February	March	April	May	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete first draft</li> <li>- Edit and revise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Wednesday before Spring Break:</b> Thesis due!</li> <li>- Receive grades and written comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Submit Intellectual Autobiography</li> <li>- Oral Exams administered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Senior Colloquium and Reception</li> <li>- Honors Determined</li> <li>- Commencement!</li> </ul>	

# Getting Started: Planning the Thesis Research Project

Questions about choosing a topic and formulating a research question

## How do I get started?

A good way to get started on your thesis project is to read this section of the handbook and become familiar with the suggestions offered about choosing a topic, finding a supervisor, and planning your research—all of which you'll be working on throughout your junior spring.

One of the first things you might want to do is to write out your individual junior spring calendar, in which you list key dates for the spring, such as grant application due dates and other important target dates for finding a supervisor, applying for IRB approval, finalizing your research plan, setting up concrete summer research plans, etc. On this calendar, you may also want to break down these larger goals into reasonable tasks to complete toward meeting those goals. For example, you could plan to meet with one or two potential supervisors each week for several weeks.

Another good way to get started on your project is to begin meeting and talking about your ideas with your friends, your current or former tutors, and other faculty or graduate student TFs who may be knowledgeable about subjects you are considering as potential thesis topics.

You'll also want to review notes that you took during the junior thesis workshop and start your thesis journal, which will be due at the beginning of March. You should also plan which thesis methods workshops to take in March and April.

Finally, don't forget that you can also ask your academic advisor and your concentration advisors for advice at any time in this process.

## How do I choose a topic?

The most important consideration in deciding on a topic is to choose a topic that you find academically or personally compelling—so much so, that you are excited about immersing yourself in an investigation of some aspect of this topic for the next 10–12 months. Other considerations, such as academic importance and feasibility of the study are important, too, but these other considerations can often be resolved as you hone your topic into a question (see discussion below).

You may already have some idea of a broad topic that is academically interesting to you and is connected to your Social Studies focus field. As a general rule of thumb, however, your thesis topic will need to be narrower than your focus field. So, for example, a focus field called “Immigration and Citizenship in 20th Century United States” could still lead to a wide range of thesis topics, including (for example): a historical thesis on Chinese immigration to the US during the Chinese exclusion era; a theoretical thesis on the problem of equality in multicultural societies; a sociological thesis on second

# Section two



generation immigrant incorporation in US suburban areas; an anthropological thesis on undocumented immigrant mobilization to change citizenship laws; a political science thesis on immigrant participation in local, state, and national elections; etc. Of course, you don't have to plan a thesis that fits neatly into a particular discipline. About 50% of Social Studies theses are interdisciplinary or employ mixed methodologies.

In order to begin that “narrowing” process from focus field topic to thesis topic, you may want to consider asking yourself the following kinds of questions:

- What topics in your classes have you found the most interesting?
- What kinds of disciplinary approaches have captured your attention in your coursework?
- What kinds of disciplinary approaches do you think you would feel most comfortable using in your thesis?
- Are there scholarly debates you have found yourself drawn to again and again?
- Is there a particular problem that you have read about—like son preference in India, or the “achievement gap” in urban America—that you want to learn more about?
- Do you have personal experience—such as running a homeless shelter at PBHA or promoting effective health advocacy for low-income individuals—that you want to make use of in your thesis and explore in an academic way?

By answering these kinds of questions, you can generate a list of potential topics that you can then discuss with advisors, faculty, and peers. Through these discussions, you can further think about the academic importance of your potential topic, along with the feasibility of completing a project on your potential topic over the next year.

### Can I write a thesis on a subject not covered by my focus field?

No. Your thesis does have to be related to your Social Studies focus field. However, the focus field that you submitted in the fall of your junior year was a preliminary focus field, and you can continue to refine and change your focus field through the fall of your senior year. If you find that you really want to write on a subject that does not at all fit with your focus field, then you'll want to submit a new focus field in the fall of your senior year that does relate to your thesis. If your thesis is somewhat related to your junior focus field—say you decide to focus on economic development and women's rights in Latin America instead of social movements in Latin America—then you can submit a revised focus field with the new area focus senior fall.

### I'm interested in a topic that I could explore either theoretically or empirically. What should I think about in deciding which kind of thesis to write?

You can write either kind of thesis in Social Studies, or even one that is a combination of the two approaches. In recent years, about 80% of theses in Social Studies have been primarily empirical, and the other 20% have been primarily theoretical.

However, it's also important to recognize that theoretical and empirical projects are not mutually exclusive, since a good theoretical project will be tied to empirical concerns, and vice versa.

If you are having trouble making this decision, you may want to think about your sophomore and junior tutorial work—along with your interest in the different theoretical and empirical approaches you were introduced to through those classes—as a general guide to which approach you may want to take. You might also want to think about what kind of question(s) you want to ask and answer in your thesis, since theoretical and empirical projects lead to different possibilities for inquiry. An empirical question might be: What role does emotion play in initiating and sustaining social activism around immigrant rights in Paris? A theoretical thesis, however, might ask what role emotion should play in initiating and sustaining social activism around undocumented immigrant rights in Paris. If you are more interested in how things are, you are probably better suited for empirical work. If you are more concerned about arguing for how things *should be*, you are probably more theoretically inclined. Empiricists explain, while theorists justify and evaluate according to abstract sets of principles.

You may also want to consider what kinds of materials interest you, since theoretical work involves deeply engaged thinking and the exploration of texts, while many empirical topics are investigated through interviews, surveys, observations, or quantitative analyses.

### Does my thesis have to be interdisciplinary?

No. Your thesis can fit firmly within an established discipline, or it can be interdisciplinary. Either way is fine. In all cases, however, keep in mind that your thesis graders will be reading from an interdisciplinary perspective, so—for whatever approach you choose—you’ll need to be particularly careful about providing a methodological justification in the thesis that explains why you’ve chosen the approach that you have, along with discussion of the implications of that approach for your findings and analysis.

### How is a thesis research question different from a thesis topic?

The topic is the subject on which you will focus your inquiry. Topics could include, for example, the role of emotion in social movements, or inequality of educational achievement in the Cambridge public school district. The *question* isolates some aspects of that topic for detailed investigation over the course of 9 months. As such, a question is narrower than the topical subject overall. So, for example, sample questions for the topics above might be: What role does emotion play in initiating and sustaining social activism around undocumented immigrant rights in Paris? How does the “controlled choice” policy of school assignment in Cambridge affect parental involvement and student achievement in that school system? (And a theoretical variation of this latter question might be: In what ways can we account for the “controlled choice” policy as morally praiseworthy?)

### How do I get from topic to question?

Once you’ve decided on a topic, now your real work begins. Not only do you have to come up with a question on which to focus your research, but you also need to come up with an interesting question—one that will engage others in your topic and make them feel invested in the outcome of your research. In other words, it’s not just enough to have a question. You also need to be able to explain why answering this question is important.

For some students, coming up with a question may not be too difficult. For others, it will be. Keep in mind that you can continue to refine your question over time and that your question may also change in response to the data that is available and you are able to collect. It is, in fact, to be expected that your research question will change somewhat over the course of research. For example, as you analyze your data you may discover a more interesting research question than the one you originally formulated. Or you may realize that the data you have collected doesn't allow you to answer your original question and so you must formulate a new one. As you think about defining your question, consider the following:

1. Is there a puzzle or paradox (in actuality or in the scholarly literature) about your topic that you can pinpoint to explore in detail?
2. Can you identify a particular case study to engage with a debate and contribute new evidence related to that debate within the literature on your topic?
3. Can you offer a new interpretation of a theoretical idea, topic, or debate?

One aspect to crafting a question that is somewhat tricky in the Social Studies context is that different disciplines may have different standards for establishing suitable questions around which to frame your study. For example, an anthropological question might be quite open-ended, asking about experiential aspects of individuals' lives, or how meaning gets made in particular contexts. On the other hand, a political science question might require that you craft a question that will allow you to test whether a particular hypothesis that you have developed is valid. Both kinds of questions are suitable for a Social Studies thesis, but each kind of question will orient you toward a different disciplinary focus, along with a different kind of methodology. For these reasons, it is important that you craft your question while working together with your supervisor, who will be able to give you guidance about "fit" between disciplinary concerns, appropriate methodologies, and the topic that interests you.

When crafting a research question, it is also important to think about formulating a question that is actually researchable. As you work toward formulating such a question, it may be worthwhile to think about a big question—a "governing" question—that is too broad to be answered in a thesis but that is significant and really interests you. Then, you can work on narrowing this big question into a research question that you will actually be able to answer in your thesis. Viewed in this way, your research question is relevant to and sheds light on the "governing" question that you've come up with, but it is narrower in scope and can be answered with available data.

## Questions about applying for thesis research funding

### How do I apply for funding for summer research?

There are many opportunities to get funding for your summer thesis research through a number of undergraduate research funds offered through departments, Harvard-affiliated centers, and the Harvard College Research Program (HCRP).

The easiest way to find out which funds your particular research project may be eligible for is to go to the Harvard College Funding Sources website: [funding.fas.harvard.edu](https://funding.fas.harvard.edu). There, you can enter search terms relevant to your summer project to find out all the possible sources of funding for which you are eligible to apply.

The funding application process is centralized around a common application system, called CARAT. Through this system, you can submit one funding proposal to be considered by each eligible funding source that you check off. By centralizing the application process, funders can make sure that they spread funds out over as many projects as possible.

You do, however, need to pay CLOSE ATTENTION to the application deadlines, which are in MID-FEBRUARY for most summer research grants. The HCRP application is usually due a few weeks later, around the end of March. **Late applications are not accepted, and you cannot receive funding without having submitted an application to at least one of these two major funding cycles!**

Although for most funding, students will be competing against juniors from across the College, there are three funds available only for Social Studies students. Applications for these special Social Studies funds must be submitted through the HCRP grant program, so application deadlines will also be in late March. Additional information about the terms of these grants is available on the Social Studies website.

### I'm still trying to decide if I should do my research over the summer or senior fall. Are there funding options for fall research?

There are very few options available for funding fall research. So, if you are investigating a topic that you know will require substantial funding for you to complete, you may want to plan to conduct your research over the summer. There are many options for funding in the summer, including: various Harvard institutes (such as the Weatherhead Center, the Area Studies centers, the Warren Center, etc.) and the Harvard College Research Program (see previous question). Most students who apply get at least partial funding for their thesis research projects. For fall research, on the other hand, there is only one substantial funding source: Harvard College Research Program.

If you receive money for summer research but then you find you have additional expenses in the fall as you transcribe interviews or finish up your research, you can also apply to the Harvard College Research Program for some additional funds. However, you cannot apply in the fall retroactively to cover expenses that you already incurred over the summer. Also, fall funding priorities are likely to go toward students who have not previously received other research funds.

### Can I get funding to stay on campus and do library research or other Boston-based research over the summer?

Yes! While it's true that students doing theoretical theses here at Harvard do not have as many options for funding as students who are working abroad, HCRP provides substantial support every year for students who stay on Harvard campus to conduct library research.

### I've never written a grant proposal before. How do I do that?

Your grant proposal needs to explain your proposed research project in about two single-spaced pages. Most proposals will have the following components:

1. An opening statement that explains why you are applying for funding. This should be short and to the point, including all relevant information, such as the topic of your research, where you'll be conducting that research, how long (that is, what dates) you'll be doing that research, and what the purpose of the research project is (that is, that you'll be writing a senior honors thesis in Social Studies).
2. Some background that helps to set up the research topic you'll be studying.
3. The question related to that topic that you plan to research.
4. A short literature review (or several citations) that situates your question within a body of scholarly literature and helps to explain the academic significance of your question and topic.
5. Details about the methodology you will use to answer your question—that is, how you will conduct your research and come up with sufficient data to answer your question. It's important to recognize that your grant proposal will only be competitive if you've proposed a project that can actually be carried out in the length of time that you have set aside for that research. So, be realistic in this section. Likewise, you should be sure to include concrete information about contacts that you've made or other steps that you've taken to work out the details of any affiliations that you'll need to carry out your research.
6. Details about your preparation for undertaking this study. If you'll be doing research abroad, can you speak the language? Do you have previous experience with the group of people you'll be studying, the organization you'll be using as a "home base," or working with any archival documents related to your study? You'll also want to mention any relevant coursework that you've completed.
7. An itemized research budget, which can include things such as local and international transportation costs, cost of living during the course of research, and any other materials needed for your research, including photocopy fees, a digital recorder, etc.

See Appendix Three for some examples of successful grants written in past years by Social Studies students.

You will learn more about writing grant proposals from the Director of Studies when you take the Thesis Workshop with her in November or February of your junior year. You may also want to attend grant-writing workshops offered at some of the area studies institutes, including the Center for European Studies and the Weatherhead Center.

**I haven't finished honing my question and research plan yet, but I know I'll need funding to complete my project. Should I still submit a grant application?**

Yes! Rest assured that because the summer funding grant applications are due so early in the semester, many students are in a similar position of not having had enough time to work out all the details involved with their thesis projects. Even if you only have a broad idea about your project or think your project could change substantially, you should still submit a grant application. Even so, you will need to present as concrete a proposal as possible, with a question that you can investigate well over the time you plan to allot over the summer for data collection.



Your proposal does need to be as strong as you can make it, since sloppy or ill-conceived proposals are unlikely to be approved for funding. Moreover, you should try to focus your application as closely on what you plan to investigate as possible. You should not apply for something that you know you cannot do or do not actually plan to complete. For that reason, you should spend some significant time in January and early February thinking about your potential thesis topic, so that your grant ends up being for something as close as possible to the final project you undertake.

### What if I get funding for a particular project but decide that I want to work on something else instead?

In most cases, this won't be a significant problem. If you have small changes—such as modifying your question or working with a different population within the same country—then you can assume that you shouldn't have a problem. You should, however, let your granting organization know about the changes and be prepared to explain why they are necessary.

In some cases, you may have a substantial change. Again, you should go to your granting organization and check in with them about your situation. In most cases you should be able to work things out. One year one of my students switched her project from a focus on immigration at the US/Mexico border to an investigation of sustainable development and environmental tourism in Costa Rica. The institution that awarded her the grant allowed her to keep her money.

## Questions about thesis supervisors

### I know I need to find a supervisor, but how can I do that when I am not sure about my topic?

You do need to have some general idea about your topic when you start meeting with potential supervisors, but you do not need to have worked out all the details about your topic to begin those meetings. Students often wait too long to begin meeting with potential supervisors—finding, when they do finally meet, that their “ideal” supervisor has already agreed to supervise other theses and is no longer available. Once you have a tentative—and still very general—topic worked out (for example, contemporary social media and youth culture in China), then you can use your meetings with potential supervisors to help hone that topic into something researchable as a senior thesis project. As you get feedback from potential supervisors about your topic, and as you think about the different possible ways to investigate it, you'll also be able to get a sense of which individuals you speak with might be suitable supervisors for the project that interests you.

### I can't find a specialist on my topic who is willing to be my supervisor. What other options do I have?

It is often the exception, rather than the rule, that a student's supervisor is a specialist on his or her thesis topic. So, if the “specialist” on your topic is not able to supervise you, don't despair. Here are some other options to consider.

1. Ask the “specialist” to refer you to other scholars who are working on your topic or related topics. These other scholars could include graduate students, other faculty at

Harvard, or faculty at other institutions in and around the Boston area. Many graduate students serve as thesis supervisors, and they are often very up-to-date on current research related to their topic of study, since they are in the process of writing their dissertations on the subject. Likewise, you can work with faculty from outside Harvard, provided that you feel comfortable with arrangements to meet regularly and get feedback on your work.

2. Ask the “specialist” if you can still come and consult with her during office hours while you are working on the thesis about questions that you have or the direction that your project is taking. If she agrees, then you can still count her as a member of your thesis “team” and an important resource.
3. Think about other kinds of knowledge and/or experience that you would like to find in a potential supervisor, for example: someone who has significant experience previously advising Social Studies theses, a TF or other faculty member with whom you established a good working relationship in a class on a subject related to your thesis topic, or a scholar working with a similar methodology that you plan to use. Any of these individuals would bring skills and experience that you’ll need as you work on your thesis project and could serve as potential supervisors.

### How do I know if the supervisor I am considering will be a good supervisor?

Keep in mind that being a “good” supervisor is a subjective categorization and that students’ ideas on this subject will vary. However, if at all possible, you should ask around to see if you can find the contact information of other students who have worked with this supervisor in the past. By asking those students about their experiences in working with this individual, you’ll be able to learn more about whether you think the supervisor you are considering will be responsive to your needs and/or concerns.

### Several people have said they are willing to be my thesis supervisor. How do I choose the right one?

In making a decision about which supervisor to choose, you’ll want to think about what strengths potential supervisors will bring to your thesis project, along with what kinds of support they will offer. Supervisors can offer three different kinds of support. First, they can offer knowledge or expertise about your subject area, including knowledge of the texts you are using, regions you’ll be going to, or groups you are examining. Second, they can offer methodological or practical knowledge that may be important for your project, including experience using the methods you’ll be using (for example, survey research, or document analysis) or previous experience supervising a Social Studies thesis. Finally, they can offer emotional support. It is rare for a supervisor to offer all of these kinds of knowledge, experience, and support in equal measure, so you’ll want to base your decision on which strengths you feel are most important for your work-style and successful completion of your project.

## How should I approach a potential supervisor, and what questions should I ask that person?

Most commonly, you will want to e-mail a potential supervisor in advance to set up a meeting. In that e-mail, you will want to let the potential supervisor know that you are interested in talking to her about your thesis project. And, if you don't already know your potential supervisor, you should let her know how you found out about her. Did you get her name off the Social Studies Thesis Supervisor list posted on the website? Did one of your professors recommend that you speak to her? Have you read her work on the subject that interests you? When you meet, you'll want to make sure that you ask about and discuss:

1. What previous thesis advising experience (in Social Studies or in other departments) does this person have?
2. How knowledgeable is this person about your potential topic? Does this person have other kinds of strengths to bring to the thesis process (such as methodological knowledge, good mentoring background, etc.)?
3. What expectations does this person have for YOU in the thesis process—meeting deadlines, providing regular communication, getting drafts turned in, locating other individuals who could provide additional forms of support, participating in the thesis writers' seminar, etc.?
4. Do your expectations about establishing regular communication and meetings match? What time does she have available? How often would you like to be able to meet?
5. Is this person willing to supervise you, and is she available next academic year?

## I'm going to be studying abroad junior spring. How does that make my thesis process different from students who don't study abroad? Do I need to find a thesis supervisor before I go away?

Studying abroad junior spring can be a great addition to your thesis work, particularly if you plan to write your thesis on some question related to the country where you'll be. Spring study abroad gives you the opportunity of getting a jump start on research you normally wouldn't be able to start until the summer, and it also gives you the chance to work with local academics and researchers who may have more specialized knowledge about your topic than faculty at Harvard. However, you'll need to be focused on deadlines relevant to your project from afar—particularly the grant deadlines that can fund your summer research. It's also more challenging to find a supervisor for your topic while you are abroad.

You don't have to find a supervisor before you leave campus, particularly since many faculty may not yet be sure about their availability to supervise you the following academic year. On the other hand, it does make sense to at least try and meet with potential supervisors, so that you can get a sense of what that person is like and whether you might be a good “match.” This kind of information, which you should discuss when you meet someone to ask whether they might consider supervising you, is more easily done in a personal conversation rather than by e-mail. Then, while you're abroad, it will be easier to follow up these initial personal conversations by e-mail. Alternatively, if you don't have a chance to meet with potential supervisors before you go abroad, you could try having Zoom or Skype meetings with them when you do contact them.

If you haven't found a supervisor before you leave, you should try to find a faculty member at your abroad institution to help you focus on your project planning and data collection, so that you don't begin your project without any supervisory input. If you have found one either before you leave, or while you are away, make sure that you work out a system of regular communication so that your supervisor can help you with your project planning. Keep in mind that your supervisor might not be available for last minute advice, and so you need to establish norms acceptable to both of you around communication about your project.

### I've found a supervisor! How can I help to establish a good working relationship with them?

Keep in mind that developing a good relationship with a supervisor is a two-way street. It's not just her responsibility; it's your responsibility, too. One of the first conversations that you should have with your supervisor after she's agreed to work with you is what she expects from you—in terms of communication, setting up meeting times, preparation for meetings, turning in written chapter drafts, etc. Together, you should work out a regular system for communication about your questions and concerns, set up a scheduled meeting time every one to two weeks, and discuss clear guidelines of what work you need to complete prior to scheduled meetings.

Remember that you are not the only busy one. Your supervisor is busy, too. Make sure that you give her ample notice if you will not be able to complete an assignment on time or if you need to reschedule a meeting. In return, give her the same consideration if she needs to change a meeting time or is late offering feedback on your writing.

### Help! It's April, and I still don't have a supervisor. What should I do?

If you have waited until late in the season to get started on your supervisor search, then many of the people you approached as potential supervisors will not be available. Alternatively, you may have thought that you had found your supervisor, who then changed her mind or determined that she won't be available next year after all. Whatever the reason, there are always a handful of students who still don't have supervisors by the end of April.

While this is not an ideal situation to be in, it's not a catastrophe, either. If you haven't done so already, you may want to set up a meeting with the Director of Studies or the Associate Director of Studies to talk about possible supervisors you may not have already asked. In particular, we will know about new Social Studies tutors who may have expertise in your area of study. We may also have additional suggestions that you had not previously considered. At the same time, you should go back to people you spoke with earlier in the semester, let them know you are still looking for a supervisor, and ask if they have any additional recommendations of faculty or graduate students working in your area of research.

If you are planning on doing your research over the summer, you should try your hardest to find a supervisor before you leave to conduct your research. You'll need that advice and input as you plan your methodology and data collection. You also won't be able to get IRB (research on human subjects) approval without a supervisor.

## What should I expect from my supervisor over the summer?

Many faculty and graduate students will be away over the summer months—attending conferences, doing research, or writing articles for publication. Before the semester ends, make sure that you sit down with your supervisor and talk about your individual summer schedules, so that you know when your supervisor will be available and when she won't be. If you will both be away all summer long, it is a good idea to set up a few times during the summer when you will “check in” with her about your project and how it's going. You should also find out what the best form for your communication to take will be: E-mail? Phone? Zoom? Sometimes students and faculty find that their research and travels take them to neighboring areas of the US (or world) and can even meet in person.

It is especially important for you to set up these expectations around communication if you will be doing data collection over the summer. You'll want to make sure that you can get feedback quickly when you need it most if you encounter problems during your research. Your supervisor may also want to receive regular updates and reports on how your research is developing, so that she can provide help and guidance while you are still in the field collecting your data.

## Questions about preparing for the summer

### I'll be doing interview research over the summer. Do I need to apply for human subjects (IRB) approval?

If you are conducting research involving human subjects (that might be by conducting interviews, administering surveys, or doing ethnographic research), then you need to submit a decision form through the **Undergraduate Research Training Portal (URTP)** so that a determination can be made about whether you will also need to submit an IRB application. Most undergraduate research does not need to be reviewed by the IRB (known at Harvard as the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects, or CUHS) as most undergraduate projects, even theses, are done for course credit rather than with the intent of publication.

Submitting the decision form is not difficult, and you get an immediate response which lets you know as soon as the form has been submitted whether your project will require additional review. However, before you fill out the form, you need to have planned much of your thesis research methodology, including developing a well-formed study procedure and identifying who you'll be interviewing, how you'll recruit interview subjects, what questions you'll be asking them, and how you plan to protect their confidentiality. You will also have to complete ethics training before you submit your decision form. You can do this by attending one of the many CUHS-led undergraduate trainings offered throughout the school year or by completing an online human subjects training course (either CITI or NIH; both are available on the CUHS website).

If there's any chance that you think your project could still require additional IRB review, then you should make sure to submit your URTP form at least a full month (and preferably earlier) before you plan to begin your research. That way, you will have time to complete your IRB application and get IRB committee approval before the time period you were planning to begin your research. If your project does require you to



submit an IRB application, you cannot begin any data collection until you have received that approval, which takes a minimum of four weeks.

There are also other reasons why your project could be flagged for additional attention when you fill out the URTP decision form. The most common reason for this is if your project has the potential to put you or your research subjects at risk, since Harvard has an institutional obligation to take reasonable steps to reduce risks for both students and their research subjects. If your project is in this category, you will need to meet with a representative from the Office of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships (URAF) to discuss your research. You should also remember that undergraduates are not allowed to conduct research in regions deemed “high risk” by Harvard’s Global Support Services office. Undergraduates conducting research in locations deemed “elevated risk” by GSS must consult with the GSS Travel Safety and Security team.

### What preparations should I make before leaving for summer research?

In addition to submitting your application for IRB approval (if necessary) and arranging for communication with your supervisor over the summer (see questions and answers on these topics above), there are other kinds of preparation that you will need to do.

If you are going abroad, make sure that you check out the Office of International Education (OIE) website ([oie.fas.harvard.edu](http://oie.fas.harvard.edu)), where a comprehensive pretravel checklist notes all the practical details that you need to consider before going abroad. Make sure you consult this list well in advance of your departure, since some requirements for travel—such as obtaining a passport and other travel documents or visas—may take weeks to months to obtain.

Whether you are going abroad or staying in the US (or wherever your home is located), you’ll want to make sure that you’ve taken care of the following before leaving campus:

1. Make sure that you’ve met in person with your thesis supervisor to talk about your research plans and timetable over the summer and to hone your research question.
2. You’ll want to have initiated contact with any organizations or individuals who will be helping you with your research—for example, an NGO where you will intern or that will provide introduction to your interviewees, or libraries where you will consult archives. These kinds of contacts can also be useful in cases where there is not much known about the area where you will be traveling. (For example, a couple of years ago one of my advisees traveled to Tuvalu, a tiny island nation in the South Pacific, for her thesis research. Initially, she could find almost no information about the specifics of the country. She ended up contacting every English-speaking academic who had published on Tuvalu—and there weren’t many—before she left. Through them, she also gained access to the former Tuvaluan ambassador to the UN, with whom she ended up staying during her visit.)
3. Depending on where you will be going, you may also want to think about connections you can make with any family you have in that area, or other students or Harvard affiliates near where you’ll be staying. These individuals, like the specialists mentioned above, can also provide valuable information about local logistics and on-the-ground happenings that may be helpful or relevant for your research.

## I'm worried that I won't find the data I need to answer my question during my summer research. How will I know if I've done enough?

There is always a healthy dose of uncertainty that goes along with all research projects—particularly those in which you'll be conducting fieldwork in an area in which you may not be very familiar. Things “in the field” may not work in nearly the same ways that you envisioned before you left campus. In some cases, problems may have to do with not being able to gain access to people or places that you had planned to interview (or where you thought you might gain access to key sources of information); in other cases, documents believed to be in an archive might not actually be there, or you might find that the topic you thought would be novel and fresh is not interesting or relevant any longer.

Of course, any time that you encounter a serious setback, you should think about contacting your supervisor and asking for advice about what to do. Here are a few other tips to keep in mind as well.

1. Be Flexible! There is no one set way to do your thesis research or examine a particular research question. If and when you hit roadblocks during the research project, evaluate the kinds of roadblocks you are encountering to decide what, if anything, you should change about your topic, question, or methodology. For example, it is not uncommon for students to find out that the study that seemed fascinating and timely when planned while they were still on campus is not, in fact, the key concern in the area where they've decided to examine this question. If that's the case, then maybe you should think about recasting your topic and question to collect data on what people locally tell you IS actually their key concern.

You may also encounter other problems that may require you to make changes to your research question, hypothesis, or methodology. For example, you may find that you can't get access to the people or group you had planned to interview. Or you might find that you can get access to people, but that you don't seem to be getting the information that you had hoped from them. If you encounter these rather common fieldwork-related problems, you should consult your supervisor and other local “experts” about appropriate steps to take. If you end up changing either the group you plan to interview or the interview guide/survey instrument that you planned to use to collect data, you'll need to submit a “modification request” with the new information to the human subjects committee for further review.

2. Allot sufficient time for your data collection. In most cases, data collection takes significantly longer than you may anticipate. The longer time you devote to the focused collection of your data, the better chance you will have of returning to campus with enough material to complete your thesis.
3. Consult “experts” before you leave or once you are in your research location. These “experts” might be academics at Harvard, local academics or researchers in the area where you're pursuing your project, or other individuals (such as librarians, long-term NGO employees, etc.) who are knowledgeable about the place and people where you are carrying out your research.
4. Develop a “Plan B” before you leave. If you and your supervisor have real doubts that you'll be able to carry out the research that you've planned, then you should talk about contingency plans even before you leave. These plans should include

brainstorming about different questions to explore or ways to take your thesis on the basis of what you find at your research destination.

5. Collect additional kinds of data that can supplement the material that you have been able to collect. For example, can you collect government surveys or national media that provide a different perspective on the problem you've been examining? Can you do some short-term participant observation that will allow you to sketch a fuller portrait of the social organization where you collected interview data? Can you do spatial analyses of a neighborhood to map out additional demographics or networks that may be relevant to your analysis? Sometimes, this additional data can become the bulk of your primary source data if your original plans somehow become unworkable. In other cases, these kinds of supplementary materials can provide valuable data that bolsters your argument or allows you to extend your argument in ways that would not have been possible otherwise.

# Writing the Thesis: From Draft to Final Product

Questions about next steps after data has been collected

I've collected my data, now what do I do?

Whether you conduct your primary data collection over the summer or throughout the fall, you have to figure out what to do with your data as you transform the background reading that you've done and the data that you've collected into a finished product that you can hand in on thesis day. There is no one set way that every student takes to get from those early steps to that end goal. The key is remembering that getting to the end is a process, and, like all processes, takes time as well as different forms. Perhaps the easiest way to think about beginning is to outline the various steps that you will have to go through over the course of the thesis writing process.

These steps include: completing your background (secondary source) research, analyzing your data, making connections between your primary and secondary source data, developing an argument, organizing the presentation of your argument and its supporting evidence in a way that is clear and makes sense, writing chapter drafts, writing an introduction and conclusion, and revising your full draft. These steps don't necessarily take place in a completely linear progression. Instead, you may work on some of them simultaneously. For example, you might complete much of your background secondary source research while you are transcribing your interviews and developing notes related to themes that have emerged from that research. It is also likely that you'll need to revisit your secondary source information after you've begun analyzing your data, since it's only by moving back and forth between secondary sources and data analysis that you'll be able to work out which patterns in your data are important and which secondary sources are relevant to your analysis. However, it does make sense that some steps have to come before others: most importantly, you can't figure out your paper's argument or organization without first analyzing your data.

The key in managing your thesis-writing process is dividing the work that you have to complete into manageable tasks, or "chunks." So, in addition to outlining the stages of your process, you should also break those stages into smaller tasks and map both stages and smaller tasks on to your calendar, so that you have a sense of how long you have to complete each task and stage. I offer some guidelines for organizing the stages of your writing process below, but you will also want to consult with your supervisor as you plan a manageable thesis calendar for senior year.

What should I be doing each month to complete these steps from data collection to finished product?

To answer this question, I've outlined a rough timeline to follow as you plan out your fall and spring stages of writing. You should keep in mind that this is not a set plan, and

## Section three

your own individual needs and work-style will influence the calendar that you make for your project. For example, a theory writer who does not have significant primary source research to collect should begin writing very early in the fall—even by the end of September. Likewise, students who collect data throughout the fall will also have to pace themselves somewhat differently from those who collect data over the summer. Moreover, obligations stemming from extracurricular activities, other academic work, and job searches may also influence the timeline that you and your supervisor map out.

**September:** As soon as possible after you return to campus, you should meet with your supervisor to talk about your summer data collection and what steps you need to take to analyze that data. (Or, if you'll be completing your data collection throughout the fall, you should talk about that planning process with your supervisor and check to make sure that you've got your background reading completed.) If you completed interviews over the summer, you'll need to work out a timeline for transcribing your interviews. You'll also want to map out a "thesis calendar," through which you divide the work you need to do in the coming months into manageable chunks and schedule work time to complete these tasks, keeping in mind any other major commitments you've made for the fall and winter.

**October:** Your thesis prospectus will be due at the beginning of October (see below for more information on the prospectus). Theory writers should already have begun writing. Students who collected data over the summer will continue to analyze that data, while students who still need to collect data should have already begun that process. All students should complete secondary source reading. You may also want to read a sample Hoopes winning thesis from those that we have posted on the Social Studies 99 course website. By the end of the month, you should be ready to begin writing.

**November:** This is your first major writing month. By the end of the month, you should be able to map out a preliminary argument and organization for the thesis. But even before you are able to articulate an initial argument, you can begin writing, so that you have a draft of your first chapter ready by the end of the month.

**December:** Your first chapter is due at the beginning of reading period. By the time you've finished writing your first chapter, you should definitely have a well-articulated argument and proposed organization for your thesis, even if they are still provisional and subject to change.

**January:** January should be spent writing additional body chapters. By the time spring term begins, you should have completed at least one more chapter (in addition to the chapter you turned in to your supervisor in December), and, if your thesis will have 4 or more body chapters, then you should have completed two more chapters. Some students will have had to do additional secondary source reading, as they develop new themes, ideas, and possible points of analysis for their projects. If you have any last data to collect, then J-term is your last chance to collect it. However, do not plan on using this period to collect the majority of your primary source data. You simply will not have enough time following J-term to analyze your data and write it up in a coherent way if you leave your primary data collection until this late date.

**February:** By mid-February, you should have completed a full first draft. This means that in addition to drafting all of your body chapters, you'll also need to write an introduction and a conclusion. The earlier you get the draft finished, the longer you'll have for revision. Leaving time for revision is key! By mid-month, you should be revising your thesis.



**March:** The first week in March you will continue to revise your thesis and complete the bibliography, appendices, and formatting. The thesis is due early in the month, on the Wednesday before spring vacation.

**April:** You'll get your thesis grades back this month and take your oral exam. Then you'll be ready to graduate!

### What is a thesis prospectus and what information should I include in it?

The prospectus is a 3–4 page proposal that you write at the beginning of senior year in which you answer 4 key questions about your thesis project. These questions are: What is your research question? Why is it significant? What is your methodology for investigating this question? What do you plan to argue?

Writing the prospectus at the beginning of your senior fall is a useful exercise—it allows you to take stock of where you are in your research process and identify what areas you've accomplished already as well as what things you still have left to do. It also allows faculty in the department to review your project to make sure that you are on track and respond when they identify potential areas of concern. You should keep in mind that we know (and expect!) that your project will continue to evolve over the course of the year after you've submitted your prospectus. It is the first in a series of goals that you'll need to set for yourself as you work through the different forms that your project will take as you continue to collect and analyze your data and do more reading, thinking, and writing over the months ahead.

### What's an annotated bibliography? Why should I compile one?

Creating a bibliography can be a very useful exercise for keeping track of the readings (background, theoretical, etc.) that you need to do before you begin writing. There are different ways that you can tailor this exercise to your research and writing needs. Often, I begin by working together with students to identify the different kinds of literatures (or reading topics) that they'll need to focus on and include in the thesis—thinking that some sources will provide background information for the topic being studied, some will contribute toward explaining the significance of the project, and other might help with analysis. For example, a student writing on Iranian youths' experiences with cultural globalization in Iran would want to think about developing a bibliography that includes at least three reading topics, including: theoretical literature on cultural globalization, background literature on the history and politics of contemporary Iran, and anthropological or sociological works on youth cultures in the Middle East (and Iran in particular) to help support analytical discussions of the study's research findings.

Once you've identified the different literatures (or subject areas) that you need to read up on for the thesis, then you can either develop one bibliography that includes all these different works or specific bibliographies for each literature. You can also create what's called an *annotated bibliography*, in which you write a short summary of each work that you include in your bibliography, explaining both the main argument of the work you list along with a short paragraph about how that work is relevant to your project. The more detailed you make the annotated bibliography, the closer you will be to writing a draft of your literature review for the thesis. And, of course, you can add and subtract relevant works from your bibliographies throughout the thesis process—as you discover new topics you'll need to read about and also make choices about what information is relevant (and what information is not relevant) for the final product. Endnote, Zotero,

and RefWorks ([guides.library.harvard.edu/cite/refworks](https://guides.library.harvard.edu/cite/refworks)) are useful tools to help you make, keep track of, and format your bibliographic references.

## What should I know about transcription?

For anyone who conducts interviews, you'll need to spend a significant amount of time in the fall transcribing the interviews you've collected. If you collect interviews over the summer, then you should plan on finishing your transcription by mid-October. If you collect your interviews throughout the fall, then you should plan on finishing your transcription as soon as possible, no later than mid-December, since you'll need to leave time to analyze your data before you can begin writing full chapters that incorporate that data.

If you've ever transcribed interviews before, you know that it takes a tremendous amount of time—up to four hours of work for each hour of recorded data. Many students use voice recognition software programs to help aid their transcription. Commonly used programs include otter.ai and descript. You'll also want to talk with your supervisor about any transcription “shortcuts” that he or she might advocate, such as partially transcribing interviews or transcribing directly into English if you've conducted your interviews in a different language.

## Questions about writing

### What should I write first?

The most important lesson you should take away from this section about writing is that writing is a process that takes place in stages and drafts over time. Any writing that you do is good writing; the important thing is to begin writing and keep writing. Likewise, there's no one “right” place to begin writing your thesis. There is, however, a **WRONG** place to begin—and that's with the introduction—or what you imagine to be the first sentence of the first paragraph of the introduction. Instead, one way to begin writing is to pinpoint themes or information that you know will have to be in your thesis and begin working on producing “chunks” of writing grouped around those themes (see below). This focus on writing as a process—in which there are many potential points to begin getting your ideas down on paper—is often a new one to students who have been able to write most of their college papers in one draft, from beginning to end. The reason why you'll need to adapt the approach of “writing as a process” for the senior thesis is because this project is fundamentally different from all other writing projects you have completed until now. The size of the project, and the sheer number of sources of information that go into it, require a different technique from past assignments.

There are a number of excellent books about the process of writing, and you should consider reading at least one of these in the fall as you are planning out your thesis timeline and so forth. Two books that I recommend highly to students are Joan Bolker's *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis* (Henry Holt and Co. 1998) and Eviatar Zerubavel's *Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books* (Harvard University Press, 1999). Both of these books provide in-depth advice and strategies about how to get started writing and how to continue to move forward with your writing project in a timely and productive way.

## How can I begin writing?

One way that you can begin writing is through focusing on producing drafts, or “chunks” of writing, around particular themes that you have identified in the secondary source literature and primary source data as key information that will have to be included somewhere in your thesis. If you are having trouble identifying those themes yourself, then ask your supervisor for help or take a step back and begin with taking notes on readings and data collection that you have completed to see what kinds of information comes up again and again.

Note-taking is also a precursor to writing in that it allows you to get your thoughts down on paper in an organized way that you can often edit to include in chapter drafts. It is also ultimately a time-saving mechanism to help you keep track of valuable information and ideas over time as you conduct primary and secondary source research. There are a number of exercises that involve note-taking that you should consider incorporating into your thesis project, the most obvious of which is to take notes on secondary source readings that you do, such as for an annotated bibliography (see above). Likewise, you can use note-taking to identify and keep track of themes that you have discovered in your primary data collection, including: 1) key research findings and themes that have emerged from your data collection; 2) your interpretation (and analysis) of those themes; and 3) connections between those findings and your analysis of them and the secondary source readings that you have done. As with your secondary source note-taking that you can develop from annotated bibliography to literature review to background chapter, these notes on your primary source data collection can serve as the baseline for drafting readable text that you will eventually revise into coherent chapters focusing on the analysis of your primary source data and support of your thesis argument.

## When should I write my thesis outline?

You should treat any outline that you write for your thesis as a “draft” in the same way that you will write your chapters through a series of drafts, the content and organization of which are likely to change substantially over the course of the academic year. That is, while you may at any early stage—even before you begin writing—want to draft an outline as a way to help you think through the organization of all the different materials that you’ll be including in your thesis, you should not plan to stick to that outline over time and may even find that it helps for you to revise your outline once, twice, or frequently over the course of your writing project.

## How do I figure out what my thesis argument is?

Developing a thesis argument is not always straightforward. In fact, many of my students over the years have struggled with the problem of developing a clear argument that is interesting, significant, and well-supported by their research. Keep in mind that your thesis argument will develop and change over time. Here are a few points to consider:

1. The single most important aspect of your argument is that you should be able to support the argument that you make with the data that you have collected. Year after year, I see students aim too high with their arguments; that is, in wanting to make sure their argument is significant, they argue a point that their data does not support. It is better to scale down your argument so that you can provide definitive evidence in support of that argument than for you to reach for a seemingly more significant argument that you cannot support with the data you’ve collected.

2. Arguments can be multifaceted. That is, your argument may be sufficiently complex that you cannot describe it in a single sentence. In many cases, students' arguments unfold over several chapters, with each chapter providing support for one aspect of the overall thesis argument. Reviewing how students have articulated their arguments in past theses may be helpful as you work to craft a meaningful argument for your own thesis. By reading the introductions and conclusions of model theses posted on the SS99 website, you'll also be able to get a better sense of the kinds of arguments that have been successful for past thesis writers.
3. Try out your argument on others—as often as possible. Ask your friends, your roommates, your supervisor: does this make sense? Does it seem interesting? As you respond to others' questions about your argument, then you can also talk through any concerns you have about why this argument is important (the “so what” question) and how well your evidence supports it.
4. Some supervisors have their students write out their argument for each meeting. In this way, students have the opportunity to practice articulating what they see as their argument at each stage of the thesis writing process while also keeping track of how their argument changes and develops over time as students analyze new data, incorporate new ideas into writing, and work out what kinds of statements they can and cannot support with the data they've collected. Sheila Reindl of the Bureau of Study Counsel also advises students to print out a copy of their thesis question and thesis argument-in-the-making and keep these next to their computer while they work. Constant engagement with your argument also allows you to “test” it through your written work, so that you can adapt it as necessary as your thoughts develop over time.

### I know my first chapter is due at the beginning of December. Does it matter which chapter I write first?

It doesn't matter which chapter you write first, but the chapter you turn in to your supervisor in early December should be one of your body chapters (not your introduction). Many students write their background chapter first. That is, they write the chapter that provides important background information in theory or history that your readers will need to know before they read the chapters focused on your original research and findings from that research. Some students, who have already collected and analyzed their data over the fall term, may also choose to write one of their own original findings chapters first instead. You should discuss with your supervisor which kind of chapter makes sense for you.

### When should I complete my full thesis draft, and what should be in it?

You'll want to have your full draft completed by mid-February, to give your supervisor time to read through the draft and get you comments, so that you can work on revising the draft before you turn it in on thesis day. You'll work on drafting your thesis in stages, over the course of your senior fall and spring. Ideally, you will have at least one chapter drafted in early December, another two chapters drafted by the end of January, and the introduction and conclusion drafted in early February. Your full draft will include all of these sections, but in revised form. That is, your full draft should include revisions of all the previous body chapters that you have already submitted to your thesis supervisor, along with the introduction and conclusion, too.

## What should I be working on while I am waiting for my supervisor to finish reading my draft?

There are a number of ways that you can use your time productively while you are waiting for your supervisor to return your draft. Suggestions that I usually make for students include using this time to: 1) make sure that your bibliographic references and footnotes are all in order; 2) prepare any supplementary material that you may want to include in your thesis, such as appendices or photos; 3) solicit additional readers' opinions about your work (if you have friends who are reading your thesis, or other specialists who have agreed to read a chapter or two, now is the time to have them read these sections of your thesis and provide you feedback); 4) double-check your thesis formatting; and 5) catch up on your other coursework.

## I usually write my papers in one draft. Why should I leave time for revising my thesis after I finish a full first draft?

Revision is crucial to the successful outcome of your thesis project. It is almost always very clear to thesis graders which students have had time to revise their theses, and which students have not. In some cases, if you have already substantially revised individual chapter drafts before handing in the full draft to your supervisor, the revision that you do toward the end of your writing process may not seem too onerous—allowing you to finely tune your argument or your other points of analysis. In other cases, revision may be substantial and may result in full-scale reorganization of chapters, scaling back your argument, or adding in additional information your supervisor (or another reader) deems necessary information for fully making your case. It is to your advantage to turn in the best written thesis that you can, since clear argumentation and organization will impress your readers, just as a poorly argued or organized thesis, or one with a host of grammar mistakes, will be penalized.

## Even though I am writing, my working relationship with my supervisor is not going as smoothly as I would like. What should I do?

There are a variety of reasons why students encounter difficulties with their supervisors during the writing process. Sometimes these reasons have to do with the supervisor (who is too busy to meet, who is not handing back drafts in a timely manner, etc.), but sometimes these reasons may also begin with the student (who has not completed work required by her supervisor in a timely manner, who got busy or nervous and stopped replying to her supervisor's email messages, etc.). In most cases, temporary difficulties can be remedied by good communication about specific expectations and goals related to work assignments, frequency of meetings, setting writing deadlines, and so on.

If you think you have made every effort to communicate well with your supervisor and you are still experiencing problems, you should set up a meeting with the Director of Studies or the Assistant Director of Studies—both of whom are experienced at providing advice to help you work through any issues you are facing. If you are having problems, please ask for help earlier rather than later in the process. The closer you are to the thesis due date, the fewer options may be left to help resolve concerns or difficulties you are facing.

If at any point in the thesis writing process you find that you are having substantial difficulties—with your supervisor, with obstacles to data collection, with writing progress,

or with personal health or family problems, you should always seek help. Besides the resources listed above, there are a number of places at Harvard where you can seek additional support, including the Academic Resource Center, the Writing Center, UHS, etc. (see full list in Appendix Two).

### Help! The thesis is due in a few weeks (or less), and I haven't gotten nearly as much written as my peers. What should I do?

If at any time that your worry about your thesis feels overwhelming, make sure that you seek help (see above question). That said, you should also remember that any thesis is a good thesis. That is, as long as you can turn in a thesis you will graduate, even if the quality of your final thesis product is not as strong as you had hoped or planned at the beginning of that project.

Many students do hole up the last few weeks before their theses are due and spend intense periods of time writing. If you have had trouble writing and have not already done so, it's time for you to go through a checklist of reasons why you may not be writing effectively. Do you have writer's block? Have you been procrastinating? Are you too busy with other commitments? Whatever the reason you are not writing, you need to try to find the cause and address the problem without delay. Sometimes students are able to help motivate themselves to write by getting a writing "buddy"—a friend, who may also be writing a thesis, who will sit with them in the library and make sure that they are working at a predetermined amount. In other cases, students have identified work locations that are less distracting or times of the day when they prefer writing, and have had success writing after making adjustments to work at these locations or times. If you need help figuring out why you are not writing, or need to talk about how to get started writing, then you may want to consider setting up a meeting with one of the professional writing coaches and counselors at the Academic Resource Center. You may also want to consider requesting a senior thesis writing tutor from the Writing Center (check out their website for more information). If you are far behind you should also contact the Social Studies Director of Studies or Associate Director of Studies for advice.

If you are writing, but just writing slowly, then there are some strategies that you might try to ensure that you get the thesis finished in time. For example, you should focus on writing the parts of the thesis that are the most crucial to your argument, skipping any parts that contain subsidiary or less crucial information—and only returning to those sections once you have finished the most important sections. Likewise, if you had planned on writing a thesis with four body chapters, now might be the time to re-evaluate (in conjunction with your supervisor) to see if you can get away with one fewer chapter than you had planned, or if you can incorporate outstanding data into the chapters you have already finished. If you are really running down to the wire, then you should also consider enlisting friends and/or family to help you proofread sections already written or finish any bibliographic references, formatting, or reference checking—tasks that do not require your particular expertise. Finally, you may also want to consider approaching your professors and/or TFs for your other courses to ask whether they would be willing to grant you extensions on any assignments due in those classes, so that you can concentrate full time on your thesis writing.

## Last-minute questions

### I'm doing a joint concentration. What do I need to know about turning in my thesis?

The copies of your thesis that you turn in to Social Studies and to your joint concentration need to be completely identical, even on the title page. Both copies need to be handed in by the Social Studies thesis due date, even if your joint concentration has a later due date.

### What if I go over the word count limit?

Many students find—particularly right at the end of the thesis writing process—that their thesis exceeds 30,000 words. Unless you are hugely over this word count limit, you probably shouldn't worry. You should be aware that your readers do have the option of penalizing you by one honors-level grade (for example, reducing your grade from a magna to a magna minus). However, your reader may choose not to penalize you. As a general rule of thumb, if your reader feels that you could have made your point within the word limit, then you are more likely to be penalized. If your reader agrees that the additional words were necessary (or are not substantially over the limit), then you may not be penalized. You should, however, keep in mind that graders are reading multiple theses, and so they may be annoyed at having to read an unnecessarily long thesis—and you don't want to annoy your graders!

If you do want to cut down your text, you can try strategies such as the following: re-read your thesis and look for easy ways to cut out words—such as eliminating repetition or any content that is not directly related to support or analysis of your argument. Also, by using footnoted references (rather than the parenthetical citations embedded in the text), you may be able to cut down on your word count, since footnotes don't count toward your word count.

### What kind of citation format should I use?

Any approved citation format is fine, as long as you remain consistent in your formatting throughout your thesis. Generally, students choose to follow the citation format that most closely fits with the conventions for the discipline in which the student's thesis falls. If you need help with these conventions, or have other questions about proper citation formats, check out the *Chicago Manual of Style* online: [chicagomanualofstyle.org](http://chicagomanualofstyle.org).

### I used footnoted references throughout the thesis. Do I still need to include a bibliography?

Yes! Whether you have used footnoted citations or in-text parenthetical citations, you will need to include a bibliography or works cited or references section at the end of the thesis that includes the full and proper citation for any books, articles, chapters, newspaper content, or online sources that you have cited in the thesis text.



## Should I include appendices?

You can certainly include appendices if you want to, but this is not necessary. I often find that students start thinking much earlier than they should about planning appendices, so don't focus on these supplemental materials at the expense of the actual thesis content that will form the basis for your readers' decisions on grading. Some common forms of appendices that I have seen include: a chart of interviewees contacted, along with their significant demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, etc.; a sample interview schedule; a glossary of foreign terminology or words used throughout the thesis; data tables; maps; and so on.

## Do I have to include footnotes and appendices in my word count?

Footnotes do not count toward your word count. Appendices do not count, unless they are textual appendices. For example, if you include a detailed account of your methodology as an appendix (rather than in the body of the text), then you will need to count that text as part of your word count.

## Can I have pictures in my thesis?

Yes, some (but not many) students choose to have pictures in their theses. Some theses investigate a visual topic or rely on analysis of images to support the argument. Obviously, it makes sense to include pictures in these theses. In other cases, students want to include some visual orientation for the reader and may feel that pictures can help supplement the written text. Pictures can either be included in the appendix or in the text.

## What are the formatting requirements for the thesis?

Theses need to be double spaced with 12-point font. All margins should be standard one-inch margins.

Theses should include a cover sheet (see sample in Appendix Four) and a table of contents before the Introduction and body chapters. Any appendices and a full references section should be clearly marked following the Conclusion. The final page of the thesis should list the word count (as in: Word Count: 26,578).

## What happens if I don't turn my thesis in on time?

You must turn your thesis in on time! Theses that are turned in later than 2 p.m. on thesis day are subject to a substantial penalty. Up to 5 p.m. on thesis day, theses are docked 1 point out of 100 for each hour they are late. After 5 p.m. on thesis day, theses are docked an additional three points out of 100 for every 24 hours the thesis is late. These point reductions add up quickly and can result in downgrading by partial honors levels within a short period of time.

# Calendar of Due Dates for March Degrees

## March Degrees

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First Week of Spring Semester	Meet with DUS and ADUS for Juniors and Seniors
March 1st	Thesis Prospectus Due
Last Day of Spring Classes	First Chapter Due to Supervisor
First Tuesday of October	Thesis Title and Descriptive Paragraph Due
First Wednesday of November	Senior Thesis Due
End of November to mid-December	Oral Exams

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Specific dates for this academic year can be found on the Social Studies website.

appendix one

# Contacts and Resources

## **Library Resources:**

Sue Gilroy, reference librarian at Lamont Library: [sgilroy@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:sgilroy@fas.harvard.edu)

Harvard Library Citation Tools: <https://ask.library.harvard.edu/faq/380446>

## **Emotional Resources:**

Academic Resource Center: [academicresourcecenter.harvard.edu](http://academicresourcecenter.harvard.edu)

HUHS Counseling and Mental Health Services:

[https://camhs.huhs.harvard.edu/Research-related Resources:](https://camhs.huhs.harvard.edu/Research-related%20Resources)

## **Research-Related Resources:**

Harvard College Funding Sources: [funding.fas.harvard.edu](http://funding.fas.harvard.edu)

Office of International Education: [oie.fas.harvard.edu](http://oie.fas.harvard.edu)

General information on human subjects research at Harvard College: [cuhs.harvard.edu](http://cuhs.harvard.edu)

Human Subjects Committee e-mail address for questions related to human subjects research at Harvard College: [cuhs@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:cuhs@fas.harvard.edu)

## **Writing-Related Resources:**

Harvard College Writing Center: [writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu](http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu)

Joan Bolker's *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis* (Henry Holt and Co., 1998)

Eviatar Zerubavel's *Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books* (Harvard University Press, 1999)

*Chicago Manual of Style* online guide to citation formatting: [chicagomanualofstyle.org](http://chicagomanualofstyle.org)

# Sample Grant Proposals

## appendix three

### ***Proposal One: Submitted to HCRP***

I am applying to the Harvard College Research Program in order to help support summer research I will conduct in advance of my senior thesis in Social Studies. My project examines restorative justice theory—a view of crime and punishment that takes crime “as a source of harm that must be repaired” by the “restoration of trust” between the victim, the offender, and society at large, often accomplished through face-to-face encounters between victims and offenders<sup>1</sup>—and its prospective role in American criminal justice reform, including theoretical and historical research in the Harvard libraries as well as some sociological research in Vermont. Specifically, I will aim to address three distinct yet interlocking questions: 1) What social, political, and intellectual forces led to the development and contribute to the perpetuation of our current system of retributive punishment? 2) What distinguishes restorative justice from this status quo and what is the moral significance of that distinction? 3) What place should restorative justice take in the American criminal justice system moving forward?

This project is of both abstract and practical interest. It locates itself within both timeless questions about the nature of justice and the ethics of interpersonal life and in timely debates regarding the crisis of American criminal justice and the need for solutions. Restorative justice carries profound implications for the character and role of the state, relationships between individuals and wider society, and the source and content of categories of right and wrong—as Daniel Van Ness remarks, it is “a way of seeing life.”<sup>2</sup> My thesis will consider the profound ethical stakes of restorative justice and explore their implications. In doing so, it will consider theoretical and normative perspectives from outside the standard canon of political philosophy as it is commonly practiced in the American setting, drawing on selected works from critical theory, existentialism and phenomenology, post-structuralism, and others. The introduction of these intellectual trends to restorative justice theory will contribute to the widening and deepening of its conceptual vocabulary.

My research also occurs at a critical point in the history of American criminal justice, with academics and policymakers finally beginning to concern themselves in earnest with our epidemic of massive racialized incarceration. While the will for reform is widespread, its proposed content has been limited and without imagination,<sup>3</sup> focusing on reducing prison populations, or, more rarely, humanizing conditions. There is very little if any conversation about the propriety of a justice system anchored in retributive incarceration in general. I am hopeful that extended consideration of restorative justice as a true, practical alternative, not merely an adjustment, to current paradigms of crime and punishment can add some new thinking to a vexed policy issue.

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1. London, Ross. 2011. *Crime, Punishment, and Restorative Justice*. Boulder: First Forum Press. Print. 1x, 16.

2. Van Ness, Daniel W., “Restorative Justice as World View.” Prison Fellowship International. 3.

3. Marguiles, Joseph. “The Limits of Criminal Justice Reform.” *The Limits of Criminal Justice Reform*. Boston Review, 17 Nov. 2015. Web. 28 Mar. 2016.

I plan to spend eight weeks of my summer in Cambridge using the resources available through the Harvard library system to answer the above questions. The bulk of my research expenses will be incurred here, including housing (\$2000), food (\$2000), and miscellaneous living expenses (\$150). This portion of my research can be broken up into three major parts: close study of the theory and history of the restorative justice movement and its analogues; a genealogy of American criminal justice practices; and an inquiry into selected works of political theory and philosophy, particularly those from within the continental tradition, in order to buttress the first two endeavors. Throughout the process, I will be in regular consultation with Professor Terry Aladjem, my supervisor on the project, in order to refine and direct my research and, eventually, my writing.

The first section, on restorative justice and its analogues, will involve extended study of works by the leading theorists of the modern restorative justice movement, including Howard Zehr, John Braithwaite, Gerry Johnstone, and the aforementioned Van Ness. This portion of my research will also consider more recent scholarship produced on the issue, including quantitative and qualitative research on restorative justice in practice. I will also examine the literature surrounding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and others like it, whose methods are often compared with those of restorative justice, including works by Desmond Tutu and others. The purpose of this segment of my research is to produce a more rigorous understanding of the character of restorative justice, and articulate a sturdy conception thereof for further consideration.

The next section of my research will use primary and secondary sources available in the Harvard library system to construct a genealogy of current practices of criminal justice and punishment in American society. This genealogy will be a tripartite one. First, I will examine the evolution of philosophical ideas surrounding the practice of punishment within the liberal tradition that has so influenced the American experience, engaging with thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Mill, Rawls, and others. Next, I will trace changes in the institutions and practices of punishment throughout historical time. Finally, I will investigate trends in the history of repressed minority groups—particularly African Americans—with respect to their connection with the criminal justice system, to see how criminal justice has intersected with the perpetuation of difference. Together, these three lines of research will produce a thorough genealogy of the current state of our criminal justice system. This portion of my research will provide an in depth account of the status quo with regard to criminal justice, such that its component parts can be evaluated and its future considered.

Finally, I will devote substantial time to the study of various thinkers from the continental tradition in order to illuminate the two courses described above. For example, to complement my genealogy of punishment, I will examine the work of scholars like Giorgio Agamben and Carl Schmitt on the link between western sovereignty and the persecution of undesirables, Michel Foucault on the power/knowledge economies at play during juridical processes, and several theorists of the Frankfurt School as well as Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in order to better understand the relationship between reason, modernity, and state violence. Likewise, to diversify and deepen my treatment of restorative justice theory, I will also engage with the work of Hannah Arendt on narrativity and politics, Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber on the ethical and spiritual phenomenology of face-to-face encounter, and ethicists from the existential tradition, particularly Simone Beauvoir and Albert Camus, on the situational character of right and wrong. This will allow for me to contribute to the expansion and

diversification of the scholarly debate surrounding punishment and restorative justice by incorporating intellectual perspectives that are less often referenced.

Though the immediate focus of my research requires time in the library, I plan to incorporate an empirical component as the summer advances. Since 1998, the state of Vermont has employed restorative justice practices as part of its formal criminal justice system.<sup>4</sup> As my library research begins to yield analytical and theoretical frameworks through which to consider restorative justice, I will begin to make short trips to Vermont to engage in interviews with both facilitators of restorative conferences and participants, as well as observe conferences if possible. A portion of the funding I receive would go to bus transportation (\$250) to and from Vermont, lodging in state (\$500), as well as a recording device for interviews (\$100). Interview questioning will address personal experiences with restorative justice, as well as broader questions about conceptions of the just and community ethics. This ethnographic portion of my research, which may continue into the fall, will serve to anchor my theoretical claims in social reality, and provide an instructive test case through which to press the practical side of my research questions.

This research is a natural extension of my academic pursuits. Four themes that have arisen consistently in my coursework here have been state violence, social constructions of the enemy, intersubjective encounters with the unfamiliar, and the reconsideration of practices of punishment, all of which have inspired a portion of my interest in this topic. I have written a theoretical paper on restorative justice in the past, for a political theory course on authority and disobedience, and plan to do so again in my junior tutorial this semester on Law and American Society, taught by Aladjem, my thesis supervisor. I have been introduced seriously to many of the intellectual currents I hope to engage with through Social Studies 10, coursework in existentialism and phenomenology, and through my own independent reading. Additionally, I have had experience conducting interviews on intense personal encounters and incorporating them into a cohesive project, having done so for my fall junior tutorial, in which I studied the transformative impact of volunteer tourism in Guatemala City on returning volunteers.

As I hope I have demonstrated, this thesis project is at once of wider social concern, and of personal interest—both a contribution to scholarly conversation as well as a fitting capstone to my undergraduate studies. I am excited to begin this work, and hope the Harvard College Research Program will support me as I carry it out.

### ***Proposal Two: Submitted to the Center for European Studies (CES)***

#### *Spaces of Conflict: Roma Migration and the French Urban Experience*

I am seeking a thesis research grant to carry out eight weeks of research this upcoming summer. The goal of this research project is to better understand the relationship between migrant communities, ethnic identities, and spatial boundaries in the context of the Roma population in France. I will analyze France as a space of conflict in which this particular ethnic minority population attempts to understand the boundaries of the country while undergoing a negotiation process that defines their ethnic identity. Through interviews with Roma youth, I will address the following related questions: How do the boundaries of France (both physical and imaginary) and the urban experience influence the process of ethnic identity negotiation? What role do these boundaries play in the lives of Roma youth as they formulate and perceive the distinction between “us” (Roma youth) and “them” (French youth)?

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4. “About CJNVT.” Community Justice Network of Vermont, 13 May 2015. Web. 28 Mar. 2016.

The space of today's citizen, according to French philosopher Michel Foucault, is heterogeneous for it establishes a set of unique relations that demarcate sites as being irreducible to one another (Foucault 2011, 1). An inherent aspect of this space is the recognition that conceptual distinctions and cultural traditions create, maintain and dissolve social differences (Lamont 2002, 168). The central French ideological model of "Republicanism," however, strongly resists any notion of differentiation by the state concerning ethnic differences between citizens. As a result, much of the current literature on migration produced under this model has presented ethnic minorities as either perpetual outsiders or as subordinate insiders (Schiff et al. 2008, 30). A notable exception is the work of Abdelmalek Sayad, which explores Algerian immigrants as displaced persons who have no appropriate place in the social space and no set place in social classifications (Sayad 2004, xiii). His work restores the immigrant's origin and all the particularities that are associated with it. Following Sayad's approach, I hope to better understand how the Roma's urban experience interacts with the process of racial subordination to generate a unique form of ethnicity, which may or may not be specific to the French context.

The question of the Roma has become an increasingly important one in Europe although the Roma have not been studied as extensively as other immigrant populations. While they are currently subject to social tension, political discussion and media attention (especially given their recent expulsion by the French government), they remain a people whose culture and customs are beset with misunderstanding. As they attempt to retain their distinct identity in the face of persistent rejection, I hope this research project will bring certain aspects of this group into the wider discussions about representation and ethnic identity formation.

To answer my research questions, I will primarily conduct ethnographic research. For ethnographic observations, I will make repeated visits to some of the Roma camps located on the outskirts of Paris in addition to several social service organisations that provide resources to Roma youth. I am hoping to interview between thirty and forty Roma youth from these camps. The questions will relate to their migratory past, the nature of their membership in a unique minority population and their perception of the French urban experience. I am currently in the process of reaching out to these social service organisations and exploring the feasibility of visiting the camps. I am also in touch with researchers at l'Observatoire Sociologique du Changement (OSC), a research centre affiliated with Sciences Po and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. OSC studies the relationship between spatial configurations, group social relations and collective practices of representation. In addition to these ethnographic interviews, I will contextualize my research questions with archival research at French libraries and France's immigration museums, including the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration (Paris).

This research proposal represents a natural continuation of my academic interests and experiences. My junior research paper for Professor Nicole Newendorp's tutorial Migration in Theory and Practice, provided me with a unique opportunity to conduct interview-based primary research on ethnic identity formation of Chinese American youth in Boston's Chinatown. Coursework in Harvard's French Department has exposed me to societal transformations in the French context while enhancing my facility in all of the French language skills. I am currently studying abroad at L'Institut d'études politique (IEP) de Paris (Sciences Po). My coursework is done entirely in French and focuses on contemporary European politics and notions of multiculturalism and diversity in the



French context. Familiar with Paris and the surrounding area, I also possess the necessary French language skills to be able to conduct interviews and read historical documents.

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### Proposal Three: Submitted to the Asia Center Grants and also HCRP

#### *Moving Beyond Cantonese: Language Use, Identity, and the State in Guangzhou, China*

I am applying to the Harvard College Research Fund to support research for my Social Studies senior honors thesis. I plan to conduct research in Guangzhou, China for 12 weeks during the summer to investigate forms of resistance to the Chinese government's push for increasing use of Mandarin Chinese in Guangzhou, where Cantonese has historically been the dominant language. Guangzhou is also a recent site of open resistance against national language policies.

Last summer, peaceful protests erupted in the city in response to a proposal made by a top advisory board in Beijing for prime time programming in Mandarin, the national language, instead of Cantonese in anticipation of the Asian Games. This comes at the heel of a number of Mandarin promotion policies and directives—starting with an explicit clause in the 1982 constitution encouraging the popular use of Mandarin, the prohibition of other languages in the nation's schools, and more recently, campaigns for more Mandarin use beyond the school. Using the protests and China's national language policy as a staging ground, I hope to parse out the nuances of the relationship between the Cantonese people and the state—a site of tension that has not, until the 2010 protests, been brought to the forefront of Cantonese or national consciousness.

Discussion of language in China in existing literature has highlighted the ways that language, group identity, and the state are and have always been intertwined—but only as it relates to the 55 officially recognized "nationalities" (i.e., minority groups) in China. Like some ethnic minority groups, the Cantonese are distinguished by more than just their language. They are united also by a shared culture and a sense of pride in their distinctiveness. The Chinese definition of a minority, however, includes the idea of nationalism, weighing self-identity more heavily than any ethnic or cultural difference. The Cantonese, though distinct, still identify as members of the majority nationality, the Han. The Cantonese self-identification with the Han nationality protected them from the persecution and suppression of minority cultures and languages during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Reforms in policies toward minority nationalities starting in 1979 have been far more accommodating—allowing for bilingual schools, local

language use in government, among other things. In an interesting reversal, the Han identity now precludes the Cantonese from the ethnic language policies that would help to preserve their language and instead subjects them to the inflexible Han policies that promote only the national language.

The 2010 protests involved thousands of people in Guangzhou who gathered to show their support of the Cantonese language, their displeasure at the further push for Mandarin use, and their concern about the future of Cantonese language and culture. The protestors attracted attention from foreign correspondents and news of the protests reached Hong Kong quickly through social media, inciting a solidarity demonstration there. Later statements from authorities affirmed that the state is in fact not interested in suppressing Cantonese culture. It is unclear what effects these statements had on allaying fears of cultural suppression or whether the state and the people have come to some common understanding. The protests are significant because they speak to a complex relationship between the Cantonese people and the state—in protesting, the Cantonese may be expressing disappointment with a government that they align with but feel has failed to meet their expectations to the people or may be more of a celebration of difference, signaling a move away from their ties to the state.

This ethnographic study will attempt to piece together the sentiments of individuals, families, and communities in Guangzhou toward language policies that ultimately resulted in open protest. I will start by positioning myself at a primary or secondary school near the original site of protest for four weeks and build a network of sources to interview for the remaining eight weeks. I will conduct both formal and informal interviews, starting with students and teachers at the school and then moving outward to their families and the community. With thousands involved in the protest, I am certain that I will be able to reach individuals who participated in or witnessed the protests. My interviews will pull together how language use has changed over time, the efficacy of state policies in shaping public and private language use decisions, the prospects of the Cantonese language survival in the future, and reactions to the protests themselves. I hope to be able to construct a sense of how a balance is struck between Cantonese and national pride and determine whether the protests reflect an existing conflict with the state, or mark a distinct shift in the focus of identity from Han to Cantonese.

The Harvard College Research Program funds will be used toward research essentials—specifically, a recorder for interviews, gifts for informants, transcription services, and supplies (including photocopying or mailings) for which I do not currently have funding. I will be working under the guidance of my thesis advisor, Dr. Nicole Newendorp, a China specialist who conducts fieldwork in Cantonese, who has worked with me over the course of the semester to develop my topic, refine my methodology, and identify resources in existing literature as well as potential connections in Guangzhou. This advising relationship will continue through the summer through weekly email updates and extend to the academic year as I write my senior honors thesis for Social Studies.

This topic is of interest and deeply personal to me as somebody who has witnessed the social and linguistic changes that have swept across Southeast China. My interests, combined with my past experiences, make me equipped to successfully carry out this research project. I have a solid working knowledge of both Mandarin and Cantonese and have made many extended visits to the region. This study will also be a natural extension of the research papers that I am working on this semester for a seminar on family change in East Asia and for my junior tutorial on social change in East Asia (led

by Dr. Newendorp). The thesis I will write upon my return will be the capstone to my academic career at Harvard, a meaningful contribution to the field of Chinese studies, and will be one more way of involving myself with a country that I am inextricably tied to by my ancestry and which I will certainly continue to engage with in the future.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mackerras, Colin, *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994) 65.

<sup>2</sup> Dwyer, Arianne M., "The Texture of Tongues: Languages and Power in China" in Saffran, William. Ed., *Nationalism and Ethnoregional Identities in China* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1998) 68–69.

<sup>3</sup> Jamestown Foundation, "Will Linguistic Centralization Work? Protestors Demonstrate Against Restrictions on Cantonese" *China Brief*. 10 (2010).

## Proposal Four: Submitted to HCRP

If awarded an HCRP grant, I will pursue a project related to social capital and social mobility in low-income neighborhoods in Detroit. Specifically, I hope to examine the way in which social capital manifests itself in low-income settings through informal mechanisms such as community crime watch systems, neighbor-to-neighbor contact and other such means. This research will form the basis for my senior thesis in Social Studies.

For the purpose of this research, I will define social capital as the Civic Practices Network does, specifically as "stocks of social trust, norms and networks that people draw upon to solve common problems."<sup>1</sup> In addition to exploring the "stock" of social capital present in low-income Detroit neighborhoods, I also hope to understand its various manifestations—namely, I hope to research whether social capital is concentrated in the "bonding" or "bridging" realm. I use the terms "bonding" and "bridging" social capital (sometimes referred to as "strong ties" and "weak ties" respectively) in a similar fashion to most social capital literature,<sup>2</sup> as references to social capital within certain groups (bonding) and cross-group social capital (bridging).

There are numerous reasons for my interest in the study of social capital in low-income neighborhoods. To begin, much of my coursework at Harvard has focused on social mobility in America and the ways in which it can be improved. During the fall semester of my junior year, I focused intensively on this question of social capital through a Government seminar with Professor Robert Putnam, whose new book *Our Kids* focuses specifically on questions of the correlation between social capital and social mobility. Through this seminar, which aligned well with my previous coursework on social mobility, I gained an understanding of the way in which social capital could provide a potential mechanism for increasing social mobility in low-income American neighborhoods. Specifically, the formation of social capital and the way in which it allows for advocacy efforts at a local, state and national level provides a strong basis for believing that it might be a powerful lever for increasing social mobility.

I am particularly interested in looking at social capital in low-income neighborhoods, as they are major locations of stagnant social mobility in America. Moreover, while

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1. See Carmen Sirianni and Lewis Friedland, [cpn.org/toolsdictionary/capital.html](http://cpn.org/toolsdictionary/capital.html).

2. Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" in *Culture and Politics*, ed. Lane Crothers and Charles Lockhart, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 223–234.

most of the literature focuses primarily on institutional mechanisms for development of social capital (i.e., through church or neighborhood groups, local chapters of national organizations, etc.), very little of the literature focuses on non-institutional forms of social capital, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. In my research, I hope to study informal social capital mechanisms on Detroit's East Side and in Southwest Detroit (Mexicantown). These two areas comprise some of the lowest-income parts of the city (both have median incomes in the \$20,000–\$30,000 range<sup>3</sup>) and both contain considerable neighborhood diversity within them, making them interesting and unique. I have already conducted research on Detroit's East Side and expect to continue conducting a survey as well as follow-up interviews there, which will make it easier to study informal forms of social capital in a way that existing quantitative research might not capture. I am interested in studying Southwest Detroit as well because of its racial characteristics, which diverge greatly from the rest of the city. While Detroit's East Side is approximately 90% African-American,<sup>4</sup> Southwest Detroit has experienced an influx of Latino immigrants, and is now about 57% Hispanic.<sup>5</sup> In addition to looking at social capital in low-income neighborhoods, I am interested to know if and how informal social capital systems differ by race/culture. I think that looking at two racially different but socioeconomically similar neighborhoods would be an ideal way to study this.

While some previous research has been done on the topic of informal capital institutions in low-income neighborhoods by authors such as Robert Sampson and Subhir Alladi Venkatesh, much of it has focused on the idea of “negative” social capital forms such as gang involvement. While one might conjecture that the reason for this is the non-existence of these non-institutional forms of social capital, my research in Detroit during my class with Professor Putnam showed me that there are indeed informal mechanisms of community organizing that often result in fairly high levels of social capital. Though traditional social capital theory would posit a connection between social capital levels and levels of civic participation, mitigating factors such as free time and institutional trust could potentially explain the disconnect between high social capital and low civic participation in low-income communities.

Through a mix of survey data collection and interviews, I hope to have the opportunity to dig deeper into this realm and truly understand what mechanisms for social capital exist that have previously been missed by both qualitative and quantitative assessments of low-income communities. Through my prior qualitative research in Detroit with Professor Putnam and my quantitative education research with Dr. Anya Bassett, I believe I have gained research skills to conduct this unique analysis.

One of the reasons for which I plan to examine Detroit is that I have a great deal of connections there through my previous work in the city, which is located approximately 30 minutes from my home. I am hoping these contacts will allow me to gain access to individuals and communities with whom I might not otherwise be able to speak. The volunteer work I have done and research that I have conducted in the city of Detroit have both been instrumental in creating these connections. In addition, examining poverty and its effects in the city of Detroit is academically interesting as a result of the financial, economic and political situation the city finds itself in today. Finally, I am personally interested in the case of Detroit and deeply invested in the success of the city, in large part because of the work I have done there.

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3. See [city-data.com/neighborhood/Mexicantown-Detroit-MI.html](http://city-data.com/neighborhood/Mexicantown-Detroit-MI.html) and [city-dtat.com/zops/48207.html](http://city-dtat.com/zops/48207.html).

4. See [factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF).

5. See [datadrivedetroit.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/SW-Detroit-Neighborhoods.pdf](http://datadrivedetroit.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/SW-Detroit-Neighborhoods.pdf).

For my research, I plan to spend the months of May through July hiring surveyors and putting my survey into the field. I hope this will allow more than enough time to gain an “n” of 100 in each community (200 survey participants overall). I then plan to spend the month of August commuting from my home into Detroit to conduct formal follow-up interviews (hopefully upwards of 50–60) with survey participants, and to engage daily in ethnographic and observational research. I believe that this amount of time will be sufficient to gain an understanding of the informal mechanisms that drive social capital in these areas. Through this research, I hope to begin to understand the steps that organizers and policy makers might take to both utilize existing social capital and encourage its formation through formal and informal mechanisms. I believe this survey is critical to the success of my thesis, as it will allow me to quantify the way in which social capital is conducted in these neighborhoods. To date, no survey that I have found has documented social capital, much less informal social capital, in low-income Detroit neighborhoods. Even Professor Putnam’s Community Benchmark Survey in 2000 surveyed only the “metro Detroit” area and did not look at specific neighborhoods within the city.<sup>6</sup>

This HCRP grant would help to cover my survey data collection costs. I have already applied for a CAPS grant for my travel expenses and for participant payment related to follow-up interviews. However, I am still in need of funds to conduct the survey, which will require a substantial number of person-hours (approximately 100, including travel, at a wage of \$15/hour). While I have itemized my budget more specifically on the CARAT application, I expect that most of this money will go into wages for people conducting the survey and into participant payment (\$5/person) for responding to the survey (something I believe to be necessary in order to gain a sufficient number of responses).

### ***Proposal Five: Submitted to HCRP for Fall Funding***

In my senior thesis I am studying the gender division of labor among dual-earner upper middle class couples. The question that I am exploring is the following: how have the ways that working spouses divide their time changed over the past several decades since the late 1970s and early 1980s, and how do current highly educated, dual-earner couples’ decisions regarding work and care fit with their conceptualization of gender and marriage?

This topic is derived from the research that was originally conducted following the third wave of feminism. As professional women began to enter the workforce in significant numbers, academics began to study how this shift was affecting family dynamics. One major work, Arlie Hochschild’s *The Second Shift*, is based on a series of interviews that she led with fifty couples during the late 70s and early 80s. Hochschild uncovers some interesting findings and revealing insights regarding overall trends in how dual-earner couples handle this area of marriage.

My project uses Hochschild’s study as a launching point. I am interested in learning about how the coping strategies and dynamics detailed in *The Second Shift* and the works produced following the women’s revolution may have evolved since Hochschild and others conducted their studies. Research (Jacobs 2004; Lareau 2003; Bianchi 2006) suggests that three significant cultural and structural changes have taken place over the

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6. The executive summary of this survey can be found here: [www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/communitysurvey/docs/exec\\_summ.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/communitysurvey/docs/exec_summ.pdf).

past thirty years; these changes may have altered the ways that contemporary high-earning couples form strategies for dividing household and childcare duties. For example, new technologies have emerged. These technologies can take the form of both “time-saving” household appliances and devices like smart phones, portable tablets, and laptops that allow for 24/7 communication between work and home-life (Jacobs 2005). For highly educated, upper-middle class working adults, hours worked per week has significantly increased over the past several decades. In *The Time Divide* (2005), Jacobs explains how technology has allowed for this spillover from work to family life to occur. Even as individuals in the upper income bracket work ever-longer hours, technology allows for an increasing encroachment in one’s personal life.

Furthermore, parenting styles have also dramatically changed (Lareau 2003). As the age and education level of childbearing couples increases and fertility rates decrease, couples invest more time and energy in developing each child. In *Unequal Childhoods* (2003) Annette Lareau notes the rise of a parenting style she calls “concerned cultivation” among middle class parents. She explains that parents, most notably mothers, devote significantly more time, money, and effort in order to develop every aspect of their child than they did previously. More recently, this phenomenon has been termed “intensive parenting” and has become a parenting style that is increasingly popular among couples (Lyn, Powell, and Smyth 2015).

One apparent impact of the cultural shift toward intensive parenting is that despite the fact that more women have increasingly busy schedules as working mothers, parent-child interaction time has not decreased. In *Changing Rhythms of American Family Life* (2006), Suzanne Bianchi et al. argue that parents, especially mothers, are now more than ever likely to multitask as a way to cope with time constraints. As these changing norms take hold, what is happening to household maintenance? Are more families outsourcing labor to help with these chores? I’m interested in answering these questions and others as I try to uncover how gender strategies have evolved over the past thirty to forty years.

Finally, cultural transformations have also taken place; men are more involved and invested in household duties than they were previously. Suzanne Bianchi (Bianchi et al. 2006) investigates this trend. She notes how men now work more hours in the house than they did before, whereas women’s hourly contribution has decreased. However, a gender divide in household labor still persists—men predominantly contribute to childcare in more masculine ways (i.e., time spent doing interactive rather than routine activities with children, etc.) (Bianchi et al. 2006). This is true for household responsibilities as well. I am interested in learning more about why this change has taken place. For instance, research suggests that in previous decades, men predominantly viewed their parenting role from a financial perspective; being a good father meant providing for their child (Bianchi et al. 2006). Has this male perspective shifted—how does the upper-class father define “good fatherhood” and how, if at all, has this affected his contribution to the domestic sphere? Furthermore, if the overall perspective has shifted, which some research indicates (Pederson 2015), what prompted this shift in gender ideology?

In order to answer these questions, I will be interviewing fifteen couples (thirty individuals) who have a fourth or fifth grade child in one of several local Boston private elementary schools (Cambridge Friends, Shady Hill School, Cambridge Montessori, Buckingham Browne and Nichols School, Fayerweather Street School, etc.). I will first reach out to the principals of these various elementary schools through email to ask their permission to recruit at their schools. I will also ask that these principals forward



an email on my behalf to parents of the 4th and 5th graders at their schools—this email will include my contact information so that interested couples may reach out to me.

Once I get in contact with fifteen couples, I will conduct interviews with each spouse, for a total of thirty interviews. Interviews with each of the thirty candidates will last an hour to an hour and a half and will be held in private. I will use a Zipcar to travel to each participant's preferred destination, whether that is his or her home, office, or a local coffee shop. I estimate that each interview will be roughly a thirty-minute drive away from Harvard's campus. As a result, I expect that the total zipcar rental time per interview will be roughly three hours, for a total of \$27/interview.

I will record the interviews on an application on my iPhone. I will be asking subjects a number of questions that fall under five categories: their background, their expectations prior to marriage and prior to raising a family with their spouse, the reality of the individual's current situation, their family history, and their gender ideology. The questions are structured this way to get a sense of what the participant envisioned prior to his or her marriage and then to compare this with what happened in actuality. The final two sections of the interview, family history and gender ideology, are included to better understand each individual and to provide a personalized contextualization. This grant will provide me with the funds I need to make my research possible.

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### **Proposal Six: Submitted to the Committee on Ethnicity, Migration, and Rights**

*The Black Aquatic: Water as Refuge and Alienation in Histories of Blackness*

I am applying to the Ethnicity, Migration, Rights Thesis Research Grant to support research for my Social Studies senior thesis. I plan to conduct research in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for 8 weeks during the summer to uncover historical relationships between Blackness and water with regard to the Civil Rights Movement. I would like to investigate how water was used as both a site of anti-Black violence and pro-Black empowerment, using this lens to theorize what this dual nature means for Black American identity, and my research would focus specifically on the states of Alabama, Florida, and Georgia in the United States.

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) coined the theoretical concept of the Black Atlantic. Gilroy describes the Black Atlantic as a way in which Black diasporic cultures and peoples are connected through the Atlantic Ocean



despite the physical separation between landmasses. He proposed that the modern Black experience cannot be defined as African, American, or Caribbean; instead, this modern Black experience must be understood as a collective culture of the “Black Atlantic” that transcends ethnicity or nationality. Using Gilroy’s concept of water as a conduit of Blackness and Black identity, I hope to theorize how various forms of water have been used as methods of resistance and violence by and against Black people in the US. Water has long been a site of refuge for black people; during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, enslaved Africans were known to jump from their ships into the water as a method of freeing their bodies and souls from the grasp of slavery, and during the Civil Rights Movement, bodies of water were physical sites of protest during wade-in demonstrations which challenged segregationist practices. I seek to understand these acts as displays of strength and defiance that were made possible because of water. I also hope to use expansive understandings of water to understand water’s role as an agent of violence against Black people—rather than limiting the analysis to natural bodies of water such as the Atlantic, I also seek to highlight the role of human manipulation of natural resources through the analysis of pools, water hoses, and polluted bodies of water as sites of anti-Black violence.

In 2021, Rinaldo Walcott argued that “bodies of water are foundationally formative of [B]lackness” (Walcott 65). He coined the term “Black Aquatic” in order to describe the intimate relationship between Blackness and water, and he applied this term art by arguing that contemporary art has a responsibility to represent these forms of aquatic Blackness through artistic practices. I hope to expand Walcott’s idea of the “Black Aquatic” by arguing water’s role in resistance and the destruction of Black identity and self-understanding.

This archival and theoretical study will utilize historical documents and testimonies to paint a picture of water’s role in shaping Black American identity and approaches to movement building during the Civil Rights Era in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. I hope to conduct most of my research at Harvard’s available archives, and I will also incorporate available theory regarding water that is available in Harvard-area libraries and online. My research will focus on specific moments in which water is used by Black Americans to strengthen their movement and against Black Americans as a tool to enact violence, both in terms of physical harm and the invalidation of Black personhood. These historical moments will be rooted in the American South, especially in the states of Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. Some of these instances may include civil rights protests or the creation of new ordinances banning Black people from access to public water resources.

The EMR Thesis Research Grant funds will be used toward transportation to Boston, housing in the Boston or Cambridge area, and food during the duration of my time in Boston. I have not yet secured a thesis advisor for this project, but I am currently in the process of reaching out to graduate students and faculty with experience in research areas similar to those I will be studying. I hope to work with Professor Gabriela Soto Laveaga, a historian of science with specific expertise in histories and theories of water. Once I determine my advisor, I hope to participate in weekly check-ins throughout the summer in order to gauge my progress and obtain the support I need to complete this research. I will continue to check in biweekly with my advisor during the academic year for methodological and topic-related support. This relationship will strengthen my project by providing me with expertise in both methods and subject matter.

# Sample Thesis Title Page

(Title of essay—should be located toward the middle of the page)

An Essay Presented

by

(first name, middle name, and last name of author)

to

The Committee on Degrees in Social Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for a degree with honors

of Bachelor of Arts

Harvard College

(month and year)

appendix four

# AI Usage Policy

We forbid the use of ChatGPT or any other generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools at all stages of the writing process, including preliminary ones. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct. In some circumstances, however, students may be permitted to employ AI to aid with data collection or quantitative data analysis. Students who wish to use AI in this way should secure initial approval from their adviser and then petition the Social Studies Board of Instruction for final approval.



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