

THE SENIOR THESIS PROCESS IN SOCIOLOGY

Choosing Your Project

The senior thesis is your chance to apply the skills and talents you have developed during your almost four years at Colorado College and several years as a Sociology major. Your senior thesis may take various forms:

It may be a position paper that challenges you to answer an important sociological question which can be clarified by examining already existing data, theories, and speculations. See Sean Coffey's 2003 thesis on immigration law in Colorado as an example.

It may be a creative, analytic work dealing with some important theoretical problem in sociology where your contribution lies in the refinement, formalization, reorganization, critique, synthesis, etc. of existing theoretical models, the deducing of new hypotheses from existing models, or in the creation of entirely new models. See Rachel Lindenberg's 2003 thesis which examined how the centralization of power and specialization creates both independence and dependence for individual citizens.

It may be a piece of original empirical research--either qualitative or quantitative--that analyzes some social phenomenon or sociologically relevant historical process. See Kathryn Carr's 2003 thesis based on videotapes of friendship pairs engaged in "troubles talk" or Carl Livers' 2003 analysis of how cross-country fellow team members incorporate running into their identities or Carla Medalia's 2005 comparison of gender displays in Danish and US magazine advertisements. For a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods, see Kathleen Denny's 2007 comparison of the gendered culture of the Girl and Boy Scouts.

It may be a research project which tests a specific hypothesis, either by gathering original data or by manipulating secondary data. Your research may be a replication of previous research or may test a new or reformulated hypothesis. See Elizabeth (Libby) Copeland's 2003 thesis on consistency in the "Pro-Life" ideology which used GSS data to examine several hypotheses.

Regardless of the type of thesis you plan to do, your first task is to pose a sociological question. Think back especially to the courses you've taken—is there a question, a topic, an article, an idea that didn't get enough attention as part of the formal course to satisfy you? Think sociologically about that topic. Is there a race/class/gender analysis to be made? How would various theorists approach it? How do the micro and macro processes interact with one another? What are the processes of social change that shape this issue? Are there movements or organizations that warrant study?

The senior thesis is the culminating experience of your Sociology major. You should select a project to which you bring some expertise; usually, you should have taken at least one course that introduced you to the available literature as well as the relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives that inform your project. While the choice of topic is, in the final analysis, something you decide in consultation with your advisor, we want to caution you that students who undertake a project

for which they have little or no background are often disappointed in their grade and the faculty evaluation of their work. Better papers will exhibit a depth of analysis and a high level of independent thought.

Supervision

The senior thesis is an independent study course. Other than an early orientation meeting, there are no formal course meetings for the senior thesis; some thesis advisors do meet with their thesis students as a group, however. Thesis students may benefit from forming their own support groups of three or four students who can listen to each other think through the thesis argument, pilot test a questionnaire, give encouragement, read drafts, etc.

The thesis coordinator will assign one member of the Department to supervise and evaluate your thesis. If you plan to write your senior thesis during the fall semester, you should indicate your preference for faculty reader to the thesis coordinator as soon as possible. You should speak with several members of the Department about your thesis ideas. On the basis of these conversations, you can choose the faculty advisor you want to request because he or she has expertise in the sociological question you want to pursue, because he or she has methodological or theoretical skills you want to draw upon, or because you have done good work for him or her in the past. Every attempt will be made to honor your first or second choice of faculty advisor. However, we try to distribute the work load equitably among members of the Department. Remember, the assignment of the advisor is not finalized until you have a confirmation from the thesis coordinator.

Once you know with whom you will be working, you should meet with that person to work out the specific sociological question you want to pursue and the approach you will take to it. Although the thesis is an independent project, you should have an in-depth discussion with your advisor about your topic and your approach at least one block before you begin work. Look at copies of previous theses for examples of how earlier students organized their thesis projects. You and your faculty advisor should work out a time-table for when the work should be done.

One department faculty member will be your official advisor, but you may want to consult with several members of the faculty before you begin thesis work or after it is underway. You should also feel free to talk with the Sociology paraprofessional. Members of the faculty who are not your official advisor can help you build a bibliography, brainstorm theoretical or methodological approaches that might be useful for your thesis topic, help you understand a particular theorist's writings or a particular statistical analysis, etc. Your advisor may encourage you to seek out another faculty member. As we have said above, the thesis is an independent project, and part of that independence is knowing when you need outside help and seeking out persons who can provide it.

If you and your thesis advisor are having trouble working together, ask the thesis coordinator or the department chair to help you work more effectively with your advisor.

If your senior thesis is empirical research that entails the observation, interviewing, or surveying of human beings, your research methodology must be approved by the Colorado College

Human Subjects Review Board (IRB). The IRB's web page can be accessed through the departmental webpage. Proposals are usually due by the second Tuesday of a block; you may not begin collecting data until you have IRB approval. If possible, it is best to submit your IRB proposal with a statement of advisor approval the block before you intend to collect data.

Departmental Faculty

In order to help you decide on your preferences for thesis readers we provide the following brief profiles of the sociology faculty who will be supervising senior theses this year. While free to choose your own thesis topics, we encourage students to undertake research on topics that correspond with the expertise and interests of the faculty. This will strengthen the faculty member's role as intellectual mentor and advisor and make the thesis experience more mutually gratifying and rewarding.

Kathy Giuffre: My main areas of interest are the sociology of culture and art, network theory, and sociological theory. I do field work in the South Pacific and therefore, obviously, have a strong interest in Polynesian societies. My current research is focused on the social organization of creativity and innovation. This work grew out of previous work I did on the effect of artists' social networks to their success, studies of popular and high culture, and studies of deviant youth subcultures.

Jeff Livesay: I teach in the areas of social theory, social inequality, social movements, and historical sociology (in particular, about the nature of modernity and postmodernity and the question of the transition between them). My research interests include criticizing and extending the ideas of several contemporary social theorists (Giddens and Habermas, in particular), examining the effects of the current debates about social capital and civil society on both public policy and social theory, the problems of risk and trust, and the effects of an array of ongoing social changes (globalization, the spread of information technology and the simulation of reality, the decline of the nation-state, the rise of identity politics, etc.) on social life and on the discipline of sociology.

While I am especially eager to work with students interested in theoretical and conceptual questions or in issues related to the analysis of social movements, social change, and social inequality, I am open to students working in a wide variety of sub-fields of the discipline.

Gail Murphy-Geiss: My doctoral work in religion and social change culminated in a dissertation on family values. I have taught in the areas of religion, family and gender, and I am particularly interested in those three areas as they intersect with each other and with law. Most recently, I have been working on two projects: (1) Protestant clergy spouses and (2) a comparison of court procedures used with domestic violence defendants. Changing family patterns and inequality is another favorite topic of mine. I am also interested in Supreme Court law, secularization and civil religion, church-sect-cult development and New Religious Movements. Overall, I'd be able to work with students looking at any aspect of religion, family, gender and/or law.

CJ Pascoe: My primary areas of interest are sexuality, gender, youth, new media, deviance/subcultures and microsociology. Recently I examined masculinity and sexuality in high school, specifically homophobic teasing and harassment in a year and a half long ethnographic project.

I'm currently working on two projects, one examining pro-eating disorder (also known as pro-ana) online communities and the other looking at how teenagers use new media (primarily cell phones, Facebook, MySpace, IM) in their intimacy practices (think flirting, talkin' to, going out, making friends, breaking up etc.) I'm especially interested in how GLBTQ teens use new media to create community. I use qualitative methods – ethnography and interviewing - to gather my data. My usual theoretical approach involves symbolic interaction, feminist theory and queer theory.

Wade Roberts: My primary interests are political sociology and social policy, health and medicine, international social development, environmental sociology, and the organizational and spatial dimensions of social inequality. Generally speaking, I bring political economy and institutionalist perspectives to bear on questions relating to inequality and/or social change. I make use of both quantitative (statistical analyses and/or GIS) and qualitative (ethnography and comparative/historical) methods in my research. Recent work has explored the social and institutional determinants of social and economic development in less-developed countries; the socio-spatial patterning of predatory payday lenders in Colorado; and the role of social trust in explaining race/ethnic disparities in health. I am currently working on a project that examines the politics of institutional design surrounding Social Security and our health care system.

Sandi Wong: My primary areas of interest are race and ethnicity, the sociology of education, and self and society. I am currently working on two unrelated projects. One explores the meaning and significance of race in societies that espouse color-blind ideologies and ideals, and the impact of increasingly complex and diverse backgrounds and experiences on racial identities, relations, and institutional practices and policies. The second is a study of how individuals draw from social, cultural, and philosophical resources to interpret and manage emotions. I have used interviewing as a method in my own work and I am developing an interest in narrative analysis. A sample of topics covered in my courses includes: racial stereotyping and discrimination, the consequences of residential and school segregation, race and media, the lives of immigrants, new and old, the relationship between wealth, neighborhoods and unequal education, family-school interactions, students' aspirations and achievement, policies such as NCLB, and the role of teachers as de-skilled laborers or agents of pedagogical and curricular change.

Timetables and Drafts

You must have completed both blocks of Social Theory and two blocks of Methods before beginning senior thesis. Most students write their theses in blocks 5-6. Students may, however, register for thesis any two blocks (consecutive or not) between blocks 1 and 7. Note that students who complete their senior thesis in block 7 may not be far enough along to be considered for the Abbott Prize in Sociology, the winner of which must be chosen mid-block in block 7.

Each thesis student and advisor should establish the sociological question, a framework for the analysis, and a timetable for the completion of the work of the thesis before the beginning of the first thesis block. The timetable will spell out when each portion of the work (e.g., reviewing literature, finalizing methodology, collecting data) should be done as well as when the drafts of the thesis are to be completed. You and your advisor might choose to have a different section due each week or you

might decide to wait and have a complete draft due at the end of the first thesis block. What is a reasonable timetable depends on the project you propose to complete. There are some deadlines which are fixed, however, and you should keep these in mind:

First Monday (first thesis block): Meet with thesis advisor.

Second Tuesday (first thesis block), 2:00pm: Methodology to the Institutional Review Board.

Last Wednesday (second thesis block) 5:00 pm: Final (to be graded) draft due to thesis advisor.

Grading

Your thesis advisor will evaluate your work and assign a grade to your thesis, writing a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of your work. Among the criteria that the departmental faculty members use to evaluate your work are:

- Sociological significance of the project; command of the appropriate sociological literature as well as appropriate sociological theories and methodologies.
- An effective approach to the thesis topic--well conceived and well carried out.
- Ability to work independently of the thesis advisor and ability to utilize advice of the thesis advisor.
- Quality of writing, including the ability to organize the argument.

Students may register for senior thesis for a letter grade or for a pass/fail grade. Most students register for senior thesis on the "G" track (letter grades). To be eligible for the "Distinction in Sociology" designation on the diploma, a student must receive either an A or an A- on his/her Senior Thesis and have a 3.7 or higher Sociology GPA. Those who take the Senior Thesis on the pass/no credit grade track "(P)" are not eligible for distinction.

The draft of the thesis to be graded (one copy on ordinary paper) is due the last day of your second thesis block by 5:00pm. Any theses received after this date will be down-graded one-third of a grade per day (for example, from "A-" to "B+" or from "B" to "B-") until it is handed in or a "No Credit" grade is reached.

If you feel that your thesis grade misrepresents the quality of the work you've done, you are entitled to a second opinion. Ask the thesis coordinator to assign a second reader. The second reader will submit his or her grade to the thesis coordinator who will average it with the original grade. If your advisor is the thesis coordinator, and you want a second reader of your thesis, ask the department chair to appoint one.

Funding For Your Senior Thesis

There are no required textbook expenses for the senior thesis. The final bound draft must be printed on acid-free paper, so there are some expenses for every thesis. Beyond these minimal costs, students doing empirical research may face significant costs: travel to a field study location; reproduction and distribution of a questionnaire; transcribing audio tapes; etc. Up to about \$100, students should be prepared to pay themselves. Above \$100, students may seek funding.

The Sociology Department maintains a modest student research budget to support thesis work. Submit a one-page statement of your thesis topic and your anticipated expenses to the thesis coordinator, who will consult with the Department faculty. Venture Grants have a “student research” category for expenses such as travel, housing, food and materials. Contact the Associate Dean of the College, Victor Nelson-Cisneros, for details.

Technical Details

BACKUP! BACKUP! BACKUP! You get the idea - make sure that you have the most recent draft saved in more than one place.

The model for your senior thesis is a sociological journal article, limited to 35 (double-spaced) pages of text (not including front matter, abstract, tables, graphs, appendices or works cited), using a 10-12 point font. Use the source citation style of the American Sociological Association (see attached “Reference Format” highlights, available in full under “Student Resources” on the Sociology web page) and keep track of page references and citations as you go.

The final draft of your senior thesis must include a title page (see attached sample), and an honor code statement page. You may want to include a table of contents or a list of tables to assist readers in locating information within the thesis. The final draft of the thesis must also include an abstract page; an abstract is a brief summary (150-300 words) of the argument (question asked, methodology, major findings) of the thesis. While the thesis itself is double-spaced, the abstract is a single-spaced paragraph.

The final draft of the thesis must also include a list of references using the proper bibliographic form (as given in the ASA “Reference Format”). Seeing the actual references throughout all drafts will be helpful for your faculty advisor. Page margins must be at least one inch on the top, bottom, and right-hand side of the page. In order to accommodate binding, page margins must be one-and-one-half inches on the left hand side of the page. Each page of text must have a page number. Headings and subheadings should be used to indicate the organization of the material in your paper. Generally, three levels of headings should be sufficient for a thesis; see the “Reference Format” for the correct format. Also, be compulsive about spelling, punctuation, grammar, and diction in order to achieve maximum clarity in your writing. We encourage you to use the Writing Center.

The Department binds all senior theses and keeps these volumes in our seminar room, Palmer 131F. Tutt Library also binds your senior thesis for their permanent collection. The copies to be bound require acid-free paper. The evaluation statement from your advisor will include a list of any changes that should be made, which will provide one more opportunity to edit your thesis for typing, spelling and grammatical errors. Once you have made these changes, give the polished draft to the departmental Staff Assistant, and she will arrange to have it/them bound for inclusion in the departmental and college libraries. Details regarding binding are available on the Department website under Research: Student Resources. In addition to the departmental and library copies, we will arrange the binding of any additional copies you want for yourself. The cost of binding any personal copies is about \$10.

Sample Title Page

AN ANALYSIS OF
DECLINING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the
Department of Sociology
The Colorado College
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

Jane Doe
Spring 2000

Sample Honor Code Statement Page

On my honor
I have neither given nor received
unauthorized aid on this thesis.

Jane Doe
Spring 2000

