

Senior Thesis Expectations and Procedures **in the UW-Madison History Department**

Part A: Expectations for Each Involved Party

1. Thesis Colloquium Instructor:

- The instructor of the thesis colloquium (History 680/690) provides structured support and feedback for enrolled students as they research and write their senior theses. The main aims of the colloquium are to keep students on track, to allow them to work on (and discuss) different parts of the process, to provide opportunities for them to get feedback on their work-in-progress (both from the instructor and from their peers in the class), to build community, and to engage in professional development opportunities, such as the senior thesis presentations.
- In any given semester, there will be a mixture of first- and second-semester students in the colloquium. It is the responsibility of the instructor to ensure that students in both groups benefit from their participation in the colloquium.
- The instructor of the colloquium provides general feedback and guidance for students but, because the thesis is ultimately graded by the student's advisor(s), they should also refer the student to their advisor if they need specific or content-based advice.
- The instructor grades the student's participation in the colloquium, according to grading criteria that are laid out on their syllabus. They do not grade the thesis itself and the completion of the thesis is not necessary for them to achieve a passing grade in the colloquium.
- You can see various examples of syllabi for past versions of the colloquium [here](#).

2. Students:

- The student researches and writes their senior thesis over the course of a year, guided by a faculty advisor. It is the student's job to find a suitable faculty advisor and to work with that person to establish clear expectations about the process.
- Most students write a senior thesis as part of the requirements for [Honors in the History Major](#) (HM), but students who cannot pursue HM are also eligible to write a senior thesis. The expectations for senior theses are the same, regardless of whether they are written as part of the requirements for HM or not.
- Honors students will enroll in the Senior Honors Thesis (History 681-682 or Hist Sci 681-682)) with their faculty advisor (681 in the first semester, and 682 in the

second semester, for three credits each semester). Honors students also enroll in History 680 (Senior Thesis Colloquium) for two credits each semester. .

- Students choosing to pursue Honors in the History Major must be declared as HM students before they can be authorized to enroll in the first semester of the thesis and colloquium.
- Students who are not pursuing Honors in the major enroll in the Senior Thesis (History 691-692 or Hist Sci 691-692) with their faculty advisor (691 in the first semester, and 692 in the second, for three credits each semester). They also enroll in the Senior Thesis Colloquium (History 690) for two credits each semester.
- Students who have course scheduling conflicts with either semester of the History Colloquium (History 680/690) may receive an exception to the colloquium requirement only with the approval of their thesis advisor. Students with scheduling conflicts should discuss their situations with the History academic advising team (undergraduateprogram@history.wisc.edu) as soon as they become aware of a conflict.
- Students can read advice and guidelines from the History Department [here](#).
- Students considering pursuing a dual thesis (an interdisciplinary thesis that counts toward the requirements for two majors) should know that dual theses can be especially difficult and require careful coordination with two faculty advisors. Dual theses must be [approved by the L&S Honors Program](#), but history students are also strongly encouraged to talk with a History academic advisor before pursuing a dual thesis.

3. Faculty Thesis Advisors:

- The thesis advisor commits to guiding the student through the year-long process of researching and writing a senior thesis. Since this can involve considerable work, the advisor should be sure that they can commit to this work for the entire year.
- The advisor provides two grades for their advisee in History/Hist Sci 681/691-682/692. At the end of the first semester, the advisor will enter a “P” for Progress as a temporary grade for History/Hist Sci 681/691; once the thesis is complete, the advisor will enter the final letter grade for the thesis, which will be retroactively applied to the first semester, turning the "P" into the final letter grade.

4. Both Student and Thesis Advisor:

- The thesis advisor and the student should meet at the beginning of the process to discuss their plans and expectations. Topics for the initial meeting might include:

- how the thesis fits into the students' overall academic trajectory, including post-graduation plans.
- what the advisor expects in terms of the thesis, such as word count/page length, use of primary/secondary sources, and originality of contribution (Providing a model of a past senior thesis might be helpful if the student needs some concrete guidance. Note that the department website states that the thesis allows students to “independently research and write an original piece of scholarship around 40 pages about a topic of their choosing.”)
- the frequency and modality of one-on-one meetings and how plans might be adapted if necessary over the course of the process;
- mutual expectations about drafts and deadlines;
- advice on narrowing down a research question and possible sources that are available;
- opportunities for research funding, if necessary. See information on applying for departmental research grants [here](#), on the Hilledale Fellowship [here](#), and L&S Honors research grants [here](#).
- The advisor and the student should stick to the meeting/communications plan (unless they intentionally adapt it along the way).
- Students considering pursuing a dual thesis (an interdisciplinary thesis that counts toward the requirements for two majors) should know that dual theses can be especially difficult and require careful coordination with two faculty advisors. Dual theses must be approved by the L&S Honors Program, but history students are also strongly encouraged to talk with a History academic advisor before pursuing a dual thesis.

Part B: Procedures for Submitting (or Not Submitting) the Thesis

1. How the thesis is deposited:

- The student is responsible for sending the absolute final version of their thesis to both their advisor and the undergraduate program (undergraduateprogram@history.wisc.edu) by no later than midnight on the first Monday after classes end. The final version of the thesis will be kept on record by the department and may (if the student elects) be made available through the library system (Minds@UW). Students should also fill out and sign a [form](#) if they give permission to have their work deposited on the library website (Minds@UW).

- For these reasons, it is important that this version of the thesis a) is polished and professionally laid out and b) has been accepted as a passable thesis by the advisor. The student must CC their advisor(s) on the email to the undergraduate program.
- The final version of the thesis should include a cover sheet with the following information: Name of student, title of thesis, name of advisor(s), institution name (University of Wisconsin-Madison), month and year.
- If the student does not send a finalized, approved thesis by the deadline above, they will receive an Incomplete grade from their advisor in History 682/692 for that semester, which will not be changed until the department receives the thesis. It is important to note that an incomplete received in a student's final semester may delay their official graduation date, which can have a variety of negative consequences.

2. When a thesis cannot (or should not) be completed:

- If the thesis process is not going well, a student should have a conversation with their thesis advisor, or one of the History Department's academic advisors, as soon as possible.
- If a student cannot complete a thesis that will be accepted by their thesis advisor, or decides that it would be best to drop the thesis, it is still possible for them to receive partial credit for History/Hist Sci 681/691 as well as credit for participation in the History Colloquium (History 680/690).
- Depending on the timing of the decision, and the amount of research/writing completed, a student in the first semester of the thesis can choose to convert their thesis class (History/Hist Sci 681/691) into a directed study graded on a Credit/No Credit basis (History/Hist Sci 698) for up to three credits.
- In the second semester of the thesis, a student who will not complete their thesis would drop History/Hist Sci 682/692 and work with the History academic advising team to have their first semester thesis course (History/Hist Sci 681/691) retroactively converted to a directed study graded on a Credit/No Credit basis (History/Hist Sci 698) for up to four credits. Depending on the timing and details of the situation, a student may also need to drop the second semester of the thesis colloquium (History 680/690).