

Brandeis University
Department of Anthropology
Senior Honors Thesis Writing Guidelines:
Steps Along the Way

As you think whether or not to write a senior thesis, keep in mind that most students do not write theses. The senior thesis program is for the student particularly motivated to work in depth for a year or more on a specific topic. The student must be highly disciplined, organized, motivated, and self-directed. The project is the student's own.

For general information about eligibility for participation in the program, please see the document *SENIOR HONORS IN ANTHROPOLOGY: Guidelines & Regulations*. To be eligible, students must have an anthropology GPA of 3.5 or higher by the end of their junior year.

If you decide to do a thesis, here are the procedures you will follow:

1. Decide on a thesis topic or potential topics.
2. Communicate with the Anthropology department faculty for input and advice regarding your topic.
3. Find an advisor (a member of the anthropology department faculty) willing to work with you on the project. You may contact the Undergraduate Advising Head for help in selecting a faculty advisor.
4. Submit a 1-2 page proposal to the Anthropology Department by one week after the first day of classes during the fall term of your senior year (this will be normally the Thursday following Labor Day).
 - The proposal should include:
 - what your thesis topic is
 - why the topic is interesting and important
 - what the central question(s) to be examined are, and
 - your methodology/sources of data (e.g. library research, fieldwork, laboratory analysis)
5. The proposal will be reviewed by the departmental faculty, and students will be notified within one week whether or not they have been admitted to the Anthropology Senior Thesis Program.
6. If you are admitted to the program, you will be given a final thesis advisor assignment (who in most cases will be the advisor you have worked with all along), and you may register with your advisor for Anth 99D (Senior Research), a year-long course. (One semester of this year-long course can count toward the nine courses required for the anthropology major.)
7. If your project will involve research with human subjects (such as interviewing or participant observation), you will need to receive IRB (Institutional Review Board) permission to do so. You should submit your application *as soon as possible*, since it can 1-2 months to complete the process. You can find information and instructions on the Anthropology Department website (click on Graduate Programs and then Human Subjects Information, or go directly to: <http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/anthro/HumanSubjects.html>).

8. By the end of the first semester of Anth 99D, you should have completed:
 - the bulk of your research for your thesis
 - a table of contents
 - a piece of written work (such as a thesis chapter, the thesis introduction, or a detailed thesis prospectus, to be decided in consultation with your advisor)

This work must be completed satisfactorily before the first day of classes of the spring term in order to continue on in the second semester of the honors program.

At the end of the first semester, the student and/or advisor may decide that the student should not continue in the thesis program. In this case, the advisor will attempt to work out with the student a way to receive credit and a grade for the first semester of Anth 99D, perhaps by completing a smaller research paper on the thesis topic.

9. During the second semester of Anth 99D, the student and advisor will establish a clear schedule for submitting thesis chapters.
10. The **due date for the complete thesis** will be arranged in discussion with the advisor and will be *no later than the last day of classes*. Theses are usually between 50 to 100 double-spaced pages and are prepared in the format of professional anthropological writing (as stipulated by your advisor).
11. Toward the end of the spring semester the advisor will schedule an oral defense of the thesis. Defenses are generally held during the last week of classes or during the final examination period. The examining committee of three readers will consist of your advisor and two additional Brandeis faculty members, one from the Anthropology department and one from a different department. **The student must deliver a complete copy of the thesis to each reader at least one week before the scheduled defense.**

The oral defense, usually lasting about one hour, is confined to the honors research and is not a test of anthropological knowledge in general.

12. Following the defense, the examining committee of three makes a recommendation of the level of departmental honors to be awarded based on the quality of both the written thesis and the oral defense. In the anthropology department, the student's GPA in his or her anthropology courses is also considered in determining the level of honors. *Therefore, the final level of honors is not determined until the last anthropology department faculty meeting of the year, just a few days before commencement.* The possible levels of honors are: no honors, honors, high honors, and highest honors.
13. The grade in the Anth 99D *course* is distinct from honors and is determined by the *advisor* only.
14. The student is required to deposit one copy of the thesis at the University library including a signed release form and another copy in the departmental archive, for future students and scholars to read!