

Brandeis University
Senior Honors in Anthropology:
Guidelines and Regulations

As you think about whether to apply for the honors program and 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.

1. *What is the honors program?*

The honors program is a two-semester sequence (ANTH 99a, "Senior Research" in fall, followed by ANTH 99b, "Senior Thesis" in spring) during which select senior anthropology majors carry out independent research and writing of a senior thesis. Only majors in the honors program can graduate with Honors, High Honors, or Highest Honors in anthropology. To earn honors, candidates must complete ten (not nine) semester courses toward their anthropology major, including ANTH 99a and ANTH 99b. Completing an honors thesis can be one of the most rewarding undergraduate experiences at Brandeis.

2. *What happens during the program, and what does a thesis consist of?*

Honors students, under the supervision of the faculty advisor, carry out independent research and writing of the thesis. Students in the program enroll in ANTH 99a in fall and ANTH 99b in spring. ANTH 99a can be used for course credit toward their major requirement of nine courses; ANTH 99b after that fulfills the honors program requirements of ten courses. Students and advisors will establish a clear understanding about the number of meetings and the schedule for completing various stages of the project. The honors thesis itself is a polished piece of writing that describes the project undertaken, details the research carried out, addresses well-conceived questions with well-substantiated and analytically sophisticated answers, and articulates with relevant anthropological literature. Suitable projects can involve ethnographic or archaeological fieldwork, library research, laboratory analysis, or a combination of these three. Some exciting honors theses have applied new theoretical perspectives to existing bodies of data. Theses are usually between 60 and 100 double-spaced printed pages and are prepared in the format of professional anthropological writing (as stipulated by the advisor). Toward the end of the spring semester the advisor will schedule an oral defense of the thesis before a three-member defense committee (see #6b, below). The student's level of honors in anthropology will be based on the committee's evaluation of the student's written thesis and oral defense, in conjunction with the student's GPA in anthropology (see #8, below).

3. *Who is eligible?*

At the end of their junior year, students must have a grade point average of 3.5 or better in anthropology courses to be considered for admission to the program. Students must complete the two introductory-level required anthropology courses, ANTH 1a and ANTH 5a, before beginning the honors program. Eligible students then must apply to the honors program in the fall of their senior year (see #5, below). A student may undertake only one honors thesis, although honors students may have more than one major.

4. ***What do I need to know in my junior year that might help me to write a thesis in my senior year?***
 - a. **Get started early in formulating your project and seeking a potential advisor.** It is in your interest to conceive of a research project and seek out a potential advisor by the end of your junior year so that you can conduct preliminary work before the beginning of your senior year. Please note, however, that the entire anthropology faculty will decide collectively whether or not to accept you to the honors program at the beginning of your senior year (see #5, below). If your proposal is not accepted you have the option of writing up your research and ideas in a one-semester independent study (ANTH 98a/98b) under the guidance of a faculty advisor. Some students decide that an independent study is a preferable option for them.
 - b. **Be sure to apply for IRB permission (where required) well in advance so that you can use your data toward a thesis.** A thesis is a “public document” so the research described in it must comply with IRB (Institutional Review Board) guidelines. If you plan to use data collected during study abroad in your junior year or during the summer between your junior and senior year, and if that data involves research with human subjects (such as interviewing or participant observation), you need to apply for and receive IRB permission in advance of conducting the research to use it toward a senior thesis. You should submit your application *as soon as possible*, since it can take 1-2 months to complete the process and the board not infrequently asks students for revisions. Some students apply for IRB permission in or at the end of their junior year; others apply first thing in their senior year. Please consult carefully with your advisor on this matter. 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>).
5. ***How do I apply to the honors program?***
 - a. **Eligible students must, on their own initiative, conceive of a research project and seek out an anthropology faculty supervisor who agrees to advise the project.**

In approaching a faculty member to be the advisor, students should already have formulated a topic, research questions, and a methodology. A student may contact the Undergraduate Advising Head for help in selecting and approaching a possible faculty advisor.
 - b. **Students must submit a 2-3 page thesis proposal to the anthropology department by one week after the first day of classes during the fall term of your senior year (this will normally be 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
 - how your topic speaks to anthropological literature
 - your methodology/sources of data (e.g. library research, fieldwork, laboratory analysis)
 - a preliminary bibliography
 - c. **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 Senior Honors Program in Anthropology.
 - d. **If you are admitted to the program, you will register with your advisor’s signature for ANTH 99a (Senior Research) in fall.** In spring, provided you are progressing according to plan, you will register for ANTH 99b (Senior Thesis).

6. *What is a typical timeline for senior thesis progress over the year?*

a. **First Semester**

- i. In September the Undergraduate Advising Head will hold an **informational meeting** for all seniors who have been accepted to the honors program to introduce you to one another and discuss some logistics.
- ii. **By the end of the first semester, you should have completed:**
 - the bulk of your research for your thesis (note: this means IRB approval will need to have been obtained early in the fall semester, at the latest)
 - 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) at least 20 pages long. This and the table of contents will be submitted to the student's advisor and to the Undergraduate Advising Head (UAH) for evaluation; on the basis of this submitted work the advisor will assign a grade for 99a and the advisor and UAH will determine whether the student is eligible to continue in the thesis program. The signatures of both the advisor and UAH are required to move forward in the program.

b. **Second Semester.**

- i. During the second semester, the student and advisor will establish a **clear schedule for submitting thesis chapters.**
- ii. By the middle of the second semester you should have a discussion with your advisor about the **other members of your defense committee**; the defense 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. While you and your advisor will collaborate on choosing possible readers, your advisor will approach these faculty members to extend a formal invitation to serve on your committee. It is generally advisable that you be in touch with your other committee members about the intellectual content of the thesis prior to the oral defense.
- iii. The **due date for the complete thesis** will be arranged in discussion with the advisor and will be *at least one week before the scheduled oral defense*. You must provide copies of the complete thesis to each of your readers.
- iv. 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.
- v. Finally, before you depart campus: 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! The library requires your copy be clean, unstapled, and unbound so that they can bind it themselves. The library staff or our departmental administrator can give you a copy of the release form.

7. *What do I need to know about the oral 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. It is typical for students to open the oral defense with a brief summary of the central argument(s) of the thesis, along with a discussion of anything they wish the committee to know. Students may comment, for instance, on the discovery process that led them to write the thesis to begin with; on certain field-related or theoretical difficulties they encountered along the way; or on unresolved issues or questions

that they did not discuss in the written document. The discussion that follows will allow your defense committee members a chance to ask you questions about your research and to converse with you about the contents of the thesis. The defense can be a wonderful opportunity to showcase the depth of thinking that went into your project. Oral defenses are not open to other members of the Brandeis community or to the public.

8. *How will the work be evaluated and by whom?*

There are several points in the honors thesis process when evaluations are made:

a. Grades for ANTH 99a and ANTH 99b. The student's advisor (not the entire committee or the UAH) will assign grades for 99a and 99b. These grades reflect evaluations of the process of researching and writing the senior honors thesis, and the 99a grade will also be based on the approximately 20 pages worth of writing produced by the end of the fall semester. If, at the end of the fall semester, the advisor and UAH decide that the project is not being successfully carried out, a grade will be assigned for ANTH 99a, and the student will not continue in the honors program. In such cases the student is not precluded from graduating with Latin honors, which is based on the university-wide grade point average. The award of *summa cum laude*, however, requires not only a cumulative grade point average of 3.70, but also the achievement of "honors" or above on the thesis.

b. Honors thesis/oral defense. The defense committee, made up of the advisor, a second reader from the anthropology department, and a third reader from another department, determines a recommendation for honors at the time of the defense. The committee will base this recommendation upon both the written thesis and the oral defense.

c. Departmental honors are based on the level of honors recommended by the committee *and* the departmental grade point average. For this reason, the final decision regarding departmental honors cannot be made until the grades for the final semester have been turned in and the anthropology department holds its last faculty meeting of the year, just a few days before commencement. Students should therefore be aware that the level of departmental honors recommended by the committee might not be the same as the final level awarded at graduation (the level could go up OR down, depending on the student's departmental GPA). The possible levels of honors are: no honors, honors, high honors, and highest honors.

9. *Can I receive honors in more than one department, and can I use my thesis to fulfill requirements in other departments or programs?*

The anthropology department does not allow seniors to work on two different honors theses or to enroll in two 99-level courses at the same time. Furthermore, the anthropology department will not award anthropology honors for a thesis written in another department. If another department decides to award a student honors in that department on the basis of a thesis written for the anthropology honors program, the decision is up to that other department. Students are free to submit anthropology theses for requirements in various interdepartmental programs (such as Women's and Gender Studies, Religious Studies, or Health: Science, Society and Policy [HSSP]).