Senior Essay

Choosing between a Senior Essay and Another French and Francophone Studies Elective

French and Francophone Studies majors may choose to complete the nine-course requirement in one of two ways:

- enroll in FREN 97 (Senior Essay) in the fall of the senior year or
- enroll in an additional elective FREN course numbered above 110.

Students who choose to write the Senior Essay will receive full course credit for working individually with an advisor to produce a 20-to-30-page essay closely focused on a topic of their choice. Most of our students choose this option because they value both the individual instruction it offers as well as the opportunity to develop a close relationship with a faculty mentor.

Please note: To receive departmental honors in French and Francophone Studies, students must maintain a 3.5 GPA in French, elect the Senior Essay option, write an excellent essay, apply for and receive permission to expand the essay into an Honors Thesis at the end of the fall semester. Students writing an Honors Thesis in another department may, however, be eligible for departmental honors upon completion of the Senior Essay in French. They should consult the French UAH for further information.

Selecting a Topic

Think about all the texts and ideas you have studied in your French courses, all the presentations, papers, and assignments you’ve done. Try to identify the moment in your French studies when you were the most excited and interested. Once you have found an author, theme, book, cultural
phenomenon, or area of inquiry you would like to pursue in more depth, discuss your ideas with your fellow students and the French faculty.

Do some preliminary research and reading to see what's available for you to use in your research. You should consult the Modern Language Association (MLA) Bibliography at: <http://lts.brandeis.edu/research/articles/index.html>. Enter a title, author, and/or subject to see which articles and books have been written about your area of interest. Often this technique will spark your own thinking. If a lot has been written, you will have an easier time with the research, but will have to work harder to come up with an original idea. If you find not much has been done already on your topic, you’ll have to dig harder for sources, but you’ll be able to break some new ground more easily. You may contact Lisa Zeidenberg, Brandeis’ extremely helpful and knowledgeable Arts and Culture Librarian at <lzeidenb@brandeis.edu> for help in this preliminary research.

Write a precisely worded thesis statement, argument, or question pinpointing a particular aspect of your area of interest that can be treated fully within a tightly written 20-30-page essay. Submit this in the form of a sentence or paragraph to the French UAH by Tuesday, September 7.

You’re welcome to consult the Senior Essays and Senior Honors Theses kept in Shiffman 124 to see what French students have written in the past. Please see Department Administrator, Ellen Rounseville, for a key. Attached to this memo you’ll find a list of some past essay and thesis topics.

**Writing the Essay**

The final Senior Essay should be 20 to 30 pages in length, excluding notes and bibliography. Its format must conform to the Modern Language Association guidelines for style. The title page should observe the format give on page 6 of this memo.

You may write your essay in English or French (and you should make this choice right at the outset), with quotations from other sources in their original language. Most students choose to follow the norm of the academic profession, i.e., writing in English, the language in which most journals in our field are published in the U.S. However, some U.S. journals will publish articles written in French, and some U.S. French professors do publish articles in French journals. At this point in your career, you can choose the method that seems most in line with your personal goals. If you’re a native English speaker, you’ll probably be able to go deeper into a subject and spend more time developing and expressing clearly your ideas if you write in English. If you’re a native French speaker, you might wish to write in French for the same reason. If you write equally well in both languages, you may choose either. You should make this decision with your advisor early in the semester, looking over with him or her some of your past written work in the language you propose to write in. Our experience shows that if a native speaker of English chooses to write in French, the student and professor will spend more time on the mechanics of writing than on the development of ideas and paths of inquiry. It’s up to each student and advisor to choose the method that best suits the student’s goals and skills.
Your advisor will assign a final grade to your Senior Essay. A second reader is not necessary, although you should feel free to consult any faculty members for advice about your research and writing. Your grade will depend on the following criteria, each of which carries approximately equal weight:

- the quality of your thinking in creating and developing your essay topic;
- the scope and quality of your research, including how efficiently and completely you identified and located appropriate sources of information;
- whether your ideas are clearly, intelligently, and convincingly expressed;
- whether all work submitted is on time, polished, proofread, grammatically correct, and has all appropriate accents.

It may help to think of the Senior Essay as an example of the type of finished project you would be proud to submit to a journal for consideration for publication or to your supervisor in the workplace.

Students who begin working on the Senior Essay early in the fall semester (or even before), who meet regularly with their advisors, and who respect all deadlines for turning in work consistently achieve the best results.

### 2011-2012 SENIOR ESSAY DUE DATES

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>First week of classes</td>
<td>See the French UAH to discuss topic and enroll in FREN 97a. If you have a particular faculty advisor in mind, make sure to speak to that person, too, and tell the UAH who it is.*</td>
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<td>(September 1–7):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, September 9:</td>
<td>Submit a one-sentence or one-paragraph proposal to the French UAH. Be specific about the argument, thesis, or question upon which you’ll focus your research and writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, September 12:</td>
<td>You’ll be assigned an advisor with whom you should arrange to meet at least once every other week.</td>
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<td>Tuesday, October 4:</td>
<td>Submit a tentative title and preliminary annotated bibliography of at least five entries beyond the primary texts you will be using.</td>
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<td>Wednesday, October 19:</td>
<td>Submit a one-to-two-page outline of your full essay and/or the first five pages of your essay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, November 15:</td>
<td>Submit the first completed draft of your essay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, December 12:</td>
<td>Submit the final completed version of your essay in a black binder with a title page as outlined on page 6 of this memo.</td>
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<td>(last day of class)</td>
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*You may certainly suggest possible professors, but please know that this advising is split equally among the French and Francophone Studies professors, so you can receive full attention to your work.
Honors Thesis

Students who write an excellent Senior Essay in the fall and who have maintained a GPA of 3.5 in their French courses may apply to the French Area Head in December for permission to expand their work into an Honors Thesis in the spring.

The Honors Thesis is an extremely demanding yearlong project. Students wishing to write an Honors Thesis must have at least a 3.5 GPA in their FREN courses and must apply to the French UAH by December 14 with a copy of their Senior Essay and a prospectus for developing it into a 50-to-70 page thesis. The French faculty will consider the student’s application materials and will decide whether to accept the student into the honors program, with a notification of acceptance by December 19. Accepted students enroll in French 99 (Senior Thesis) and receive credit for another French course upon completion of the thesis.

The work on your thesis must be of exceptionally high quality and must be completed on time. Your advisor must have a reasonable amount of time to read your work and provide feedback. Part of your grade will depend on whether your work shows that you have taken comments and criticism seriously. Late work shortcuts this process, and may prevent you from receiving honors and the grade for which you were hoping.

Plan to meet regularly with your thesis advisor. It is your obligation to make regular appointments with him or her. Between meetings, set aside a couple of hours every day for research or writing.

No matter how much research you do, the basic thought and analysis going into your thesis must be your own. Work must be original to qualify for honors.

2011-2012 HONORS THESIS DUE DATES

Follow all deadlines for the French Senior Essay in the fall, plus:

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, December 14:</td>
<td>Submit your graded Senior Essay and a prospectus for developing it into a 50-70 page thesis to the French UAH.</td>
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<td>Monday, December 19:</td>
<td>You will be notified whether you are accepted into the honors program.</td>
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<td>Spring 2011:</td>
<td>Enroll in French 99. You and your advisor will structure weekly or biweekly meetings during this semester.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, April 6:</td>
<td>Submit the first completed draft of your thesis. Choose a second reader for the final thesis in conjunction with your advisor.</td>
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<td>Tuesday, May 1:</td>
<td>Submit copies of the final version of your thesis to the advisor and second reader.</td>
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**Submitting the Honors Thesis**

Two copies of the thesis should be submitted. One copy should be submitted in a black binder to the ROMS Academic Administrator in Shiffman 108 to be kept in the Romance Studies Department Library, Shiffman 124. The other copy of the thesis should be submitted held together with a binder clip or something similar. This copy will be presented to the Goldfarb Library where it will be bound and placed in their collection. Prior to submission, you must sign the release form on page 10, giving permission to make your thesis available to the public. The release form is also available from the Department Administrator in Shiffman 108 or on the LTS website (http://lts.brandeis.edu/research/archives-speccoll/collections/archives/thesis.html). The title page should observe the same format as that of the Senior Essay (see page 6 of this memo).

**Double Majors**

Students enrolled in double majors may be considered for honors on the basis of work done in the 97-level essay course. This obtains only in the event that the student is enrolled in a 99-level honors project in another major.

**How Honors are Determined**

*Writing a thesis is no guarantee of departmental honors,* which are awarded on the basis of cumulative excellence in all courses taken for the concentration, including the thesis course. The degree of honors—**honors, high honors, or highest honors**—if any, is determined by faculty at a department meeting just prior to graduation upon review of the final records of students who have written theses.

Regardless of whether or not they qualify for departmental honors, all students are eligible to receive university distinctions of **cum laude** or **magna cum laude**, which are awarded automatically according to students' final grade GPAs in all courses. The minimum cumulative GPAs for these honors are:

- **cum laude** – 3.5
- **magna cum laude** – 3.7

**Summa cum laude** honors are awarded only to students whose cumulative GPA is 3.8 or higher *AND who have been awarded departmental honors*. If you complete more than one major, you need only receive honors from one department to be eligible for **summa cum laude**. (Students earning a GPA of 3.8 or higher but not receiving departmental honors will be granted **magna cum laude**.)

Departmental and Latin honors are listed on both the diploma and transcript.
Here is the title page format for both the Essay and the Thesis:

**TITLE**

Department of Romance Studies        Your Name
Name of Advisor                      Course Number
Name of Second Reader (for Thesis only) Date
Here’s a list of titles of some past French Senior Essays and Honors Theses. Feel free to consult them in Shiffman 124. (If you need a key to get in, please see the Ellen Rounseville in Shiffman 108.)

“Honoré Daumier and the Theater”

“The Body in Middle Ages and Renaissance Poetry”

”OuLiPo-Perec-Queneau”

“The Harkis in France Today”

“Descartes and Modern French Philosophy”

“Opium and Hashish in 19th Century Romantic Literature”

“Samuel Beckett, Bilingual Author”

”La Danse en Révolte :L’évolution de la danse contemporaine en France à partir des années 70 jusqu’au présent”

”La Loi Toubon et Les Attitudes des Français à Propos de L’Anglicisation de la Langue Française”

“Aimé Césaire et le Surréalisme”

“Les Lettres Péruviennes by Graffigny and La Religieuse by Diderot”

“Rabelais & Montaigne: Perceptions of Maladies during the Renaissance”

“Camara Laye, Griots and the Oral Tradition in West Africa”

“The Female Role in Marriage in Several 19th Century Novels (Indiana by Sand, La Cousine Bette by Balzac, Madame Bovary by Flaubert, Nana by Zola)”

“Sartre and Marxism”

“George Sand’s Indiana and Gustave Flaubert’s Madame Bovary”

“The Imagination in Creating a Jewish Identity: Modiano, Finklekraut and Perec”

“The Image of Women in the Novels of Marie Thérèse Humbert and Ananda Devi”

“Une invitation à un certain féminisme” (Françoise Sagan and Simone de Beauvoir)
“Zola, Intellectuals and the Dreyfus Affair”

“Femmes perdues, femmes retrouvées” (on the teaching of texts by French women authors)

“Analyse des limites et des possibilités d’une langue” (In three plays by Abla Farhoud, Samuel Beckett, and Simone Schwarz-Bart)

“The Concept of Luxury During the French Enlightenment”

“A Reassessment of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s Paul et Virginie”

“French and South Asian Community Relations: South Asian Population of Paris”

“Le Ménage à Trois de Catherine de Médicis, Diane de Poitiers et Henri II et son influence sur l’époque”

“Vercors, A Second World War Tragedy”

“Merit or Caste: The Class Structure in the “Grandes Ecoles”

"Françaises et Maghrébines: An Examination of the Difficulties Faced By Young North African Women in Contemporary France"

"Institutional Remnants of French Colonialism in Modern India"

"Surrealism and French Fashion"

“Women’s Rights in France and Europe Since 1968: A Struggle to Stay Relevant”

"Arman and Le Nouveau Réalisme"

“Portraits des Favorites: Une etude de la puissance féminine à travers les images”

“Eponine: personnage ou héroïne?”

“Le Corbusier, Ruskin and Sublime Reason”

“Ancien ou Moderne? La Fontaine et la Querelle”

“The Death Penalty Debate in France and the US”

Translations:

Murambi by Boris Diop

L’Amour by Marguerite Duras

Le salut de la vie by Aminata Maiga Ka

A modern English translation of Beaumarchais’ Le mariage de Figaro

Sallinger by Bernard-Marie Koltès

Trois femmes puissantes (part one) by Marie Ndiaye
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