

General Guidelines & Timeline for the Department of Anthropology Honors Thesis

The Honors Thesis is likely to be one of the more challenging, yet rewarding, endeavors that a student will undertake while at Penn State. This guide is intended to help Honors scholars in the Department of Anthropology navigate the thesis process. For general guidelines and information regarding the thesis, students should consult the Schreyer Honors College thesis guide at <https://www.shc.psu.edu/academic/thesis/>. Questions specific to the completion of a thesis in Anthropology should be directed to the department Honors Adviser, Dr. Douglas Bird (dwb5537@psu.edu).

Every thesis will be read by at least two department faculty members. Students will work closely with their thesis supervisor who will oversee all aspects of developing and conducting the research, as well as completing the thesis. In addition, the Department Honors Adviser will serve as the second reader for the thesis. In the event that the honors adviser is serving as the thesis supervisor, another faculty member will be identified to serve as the second reader. Other scenarios involving faculty from departments other than Anthropology are also possible. Consult the Honors College thesis guide for more information.

The topic, scope, and length of the thesis itself vary widely within Anthropology, depending on the subdisciplinary focus (i.e., Archaeology, Biological, Human Ecology/Cultural) of each student. For instance, theses may be composed primarily of independent research conducted in a lab under the direct and close supervision of a faculty member or may result from independent fieldwork or library research. The expectations for the content, length, and scope of the thesis should be discussed in detail with the thesis supervisor and the honors adviser, if necessary, prior to submission of the thesis proposal. Students are encouraged to look at past honors thesis projects (available through the library - <https://honors.libraries.psu.edu/search/>).

The formatting of the thesis is governed by the Honors College. Students should consult the Schreyer's thesis guide for more information. Formatting details specific to Anthropology (e.g., bibliographic reference style, writing style, etc) should be discussed with the thesis supervisor and should generally conform to styles common within the particular subdiscipline. Theses in Anthropology frequently, but not always, are written in the style of a peer-reviewed journal article and the formatting and bibliographic styles follow the common styles used in such publications.

The process for completing an honors thesis can be simplified into the following steps: choose a topic, identify an adviser, submit a thesis proposal, perform the research, write and submit the thesis. More details for each of these steps are provided in the timeline below.

1. Choose a topic and identify a thesis supervisor

Freshman and Sophomore Years (Semesters 1-4). Students should begin thinking about topics and areas of Anthropology that are of particular interest. Ideas may come from topics presented in classes, research experiences, discussions with instructors and other faculty, or independent reading. Students are strongly encouraged to explore opportunities for research experience outside the classroom early in their academic careers. Peruse the department website or meet with the department Honors adviser to learn more about research opportunities in the department.

Fall of Junior year (Semester 5). At this time, students should begin to narrow down ideas and focus on potential topics of interest. Probably the most important factor leading to the successful and rewarding completion of the honors thesis is selecting a topic that is of particular interest to the student. The topic should be intellectually engaging to the student and there should be a real excitement and eagerness to dive into the subject in more detail. Ideally students will have gained some research experience in the department and taken some courses with faculty whose research interests match their own. At this stage, students should begin discussing ideas with potential thesis supervisors.

2. Submit a thesis proposal

Spring of Junior year (Semester 6). The thesis proposal should be developed in consultation with the thesis supervisor in the Spring of the Junior year. The details of the proposal are to be worked out between the student and the thesis supervisor. This process includes initial background literature research to establish the research questions.

3. Perform the research

Summer/Fall Senior year (Semester 7). During this period, the student will conduct the research. This includes performing background research on the topic and collecting all data necessary for the research. Students are encouraged, but not required, to register for up to six credits of ANTH 494H between the Fall and Spring semesters of the senior year.

4. Write and submit the thesis

Fall and Spring Senior year (Semester 7/8). The thesis supervisor will be the primary guide during the research and writing processes. It is important at this stage to stay in frequent contact with your supervisor and to give both the supervisor and honors adviser ample time to read and comment on the thesis prior to the Schreyer Honors College due date. **It is ultimately the student's responsibility to ensure timely submission of drafts to the supervisor and honors adviser.**