

Senior Thesis Guidelines African American Studies

*Please note that these guidelines are intended to complement “The Jellybean Papers” available at http://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/honors/jelly_bean_papers/ That document represents the University requirements for **all Honors candidates**.*

A thesis at Wesleyan represents a very serious endeavor that will produce an original work of scholarship based on extensive independent research and fashioned through deliberate methodological and theoretical choices. Sources might include media, textual, ethnographic, and other materials. It will be evaluated with the rigor reserved for this level of scholarship.

The advisor works to guide the writer, but not direct them. The writer bears responsibility for determining the pace of the research and writing, although they may ask the advisor for help in establishing milestones throughout the project. The writer and advisor will determine how they will structure their interactions, although the writer bears ultimate responsibility for maintaining the pace of the project’s progress.

A senior thesis differs from a senior essay in the matters of length and honors. Essays have tended to be 30 to 50 pages long. Theses ideally range from 80 to 150 pages in length. Only senior theses, not essays, are eligible for departmental honors.

Preparation

Candidates must declare their interest in writing a thesis and a general idea of their topic in a 2-3 page proposal, to be sent to the program chair and administrative assistant by the Friday after March Break. The proposal should be a description of the intellectual problem of the thesis and the method to be used (whether it will be historical, ethnographic, etc.). The proposal should include a bibliography, a list of courses the candidate has taken that are pertinent to the topic, and a list of three faculty members, in order of preference, who would make good thesis tutors. Students must meet with at least one potential advisor so as to get feedback on the project. The faculty will determine which theses will move forward with which faculty, and may reject some proposals (for reasons such as feasibility). Students will be notified of the department's decision before classes end in May.

Please note that some faculty prefer to work with candidates who have taken at least one course with them. Others may require coursework on the topic to be investigated.

In order to qualify for High Honors the thesis should include significant theoretical and/or methodological reflections and not be limited to description alone.

Writers are recommended to examine previous theses completed in the department to discern some of what the work entails. These can be found on the WesScholar repository online at <http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/>

Summer

Writers are encouraged to pursue research during the summer, although this is not mandatory so long as the writers have significant background in their topic already.

Fall

Upon registration for the senior thesis, the writer will review “The Jellybean Papers” carefully. Writers should read these guidelines thoroughly for important information regarding all steps of their project.

All thesis and essay writers must either schedule a meeting with a research librarian or attend one of the workshops provided by Olin Library in late spring of Junior year or early Senior fall at the latest.

Spring

At least **one completed chapter must be submitted by the first day of classes** in spring semester, or at an earlier date if the supervisor deems it appropriate. This will be evaluated to determine whether the project should continue as a thesis or end as an essay. If it ends as an essay, then the student must add a fourth class to her or his schedule in place of the second thesis tutorial.

The completed thesis is due no later than the date given for thesis submission in “The Jellybean Papers.” Please follow carefully the directions governing submission. The advisor will communicate the result of the evaluation to the writer several weeks after the submission deadline.

High honors is reserved usually for theses that include significant theoretical and/or methodological reflections and are not limited to description alone.

Overall

Writing a thesis can be the culmination of the liberal arts experience. All members of the faculty enjoy working with students in this endeavor because of the intellectual insights and growth the thesis affords. It is an opportunity to draw together strands of earlier work and/or explore entirely new horizons. Please let us know how we can help you to make the most of this experience.