

## **FOR PROSPECTIVE AMERICAN STUDIES THESIS WRITERS**

Junior AMST majors who are interested in doing an honors thesis must submit a research application to the Chair by the last Friday of March, at 5pm ET. Proposals will then be reviewed by all AMST faculty.

The thesis application should set out what you want to do, how you hope to do it, and why it is worth doing. It should also make clear that you have done the necessary preliminary research (literature review, understanding of the topic, and, where relevant, the history of your particular locale/institution/event/ text) to embark on a successful independent research project. Thus, consider how your project builds on and contributes to scholarly knowledge in your chosen area. The proposal should demonstrate that you have thought through the practicality and feasibility of your project plan. Because of the nature of research, it is likely that projects may shift from original plans, so consider the proposal as a statement of not only what research you plan to undertake, but as an opportunity to formulate your understanding of a problem needing scholarly attention (e.g. consider the ways to investigate it and link it to other issues).

Advancing a specific argument or thesis at this stage would be inappropriate and premature. Instead, you should indicate some of the questions you will be asking and how you plan to conduct research to answer them, i.e., what sources and evidence will you consult.

In the case of a project that is more creative than research-oriented, you will need to explain how it relates to your American Studies major.

If you have not identified an advisor, the AMST faculty will make every effort to help you find one. However, we cannot guarantee that faculty will be available to advise every proposal. We encourage you to draft a proposal before you contact the faculty person with whom you would like to work. This kind of preparation shows forethought and organization. And the faculty member can also help you to refine the topic and your proposal for final submission.

While the AMST faculty have established a deadline of the last Friday of March for submission of thesis proposals, please note that if you wish to apply for a grant, such as a Davenport Grant (if your project deals with social/public policy) or an Olin Fellowship (if your project is a literary study), to support summer research, you will need to craft a preliminary proposal and find an advisor in time to meet those grant deadlines – both of which are earlier. Please also note that the Center for the Americas also has its own funding for thesis work in support of majors in AMST. Check the websites for these different opportunities if you wish to apply for funding.

Davenport Study Grant:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/pac/davenport/apply.html>

Olin Fellowship:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/english/prizes/submissions.html>

CAMS Research Grant:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/americas/ApplyingforCAMSRResearchGrants-1.html>

If you plan to conduct research that includes human subjects, please note that you must clear your proposal with the campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting that research. The purpose of an IRB is to provide a comprehensive standard of protection for human subjects in research.

In this context, as stated on the Wesleyan IRB site, “research” is defined as “any systematic investigation designed to contribute to a body of generalized public knowledge,” and the use of “human subjects” refers to “data collection through interaction with individuals or the collection of identifiable private information about individuals.” See the website for more information and deadlines:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/acaf/support/reviewboard.html>.

Send proposals via email, formatted as Word documents, to the Chair of American Studies, by 5 pm (ET) on the last Friday of March.  
Please name the proposal file with your surname.

For example, Vasquez\_AMST Thesis Proposal

Format

Your proposal should include:

0. Title

1. Introduction

In one paragraph, explain what do you want to do, how, and why. Why does this research matter?

2. Background

A. Research Location(s): Identify the research site (a specific locale, institution, etc.) or cultural texts (non-fiction literature, films, television, song lyrics, blog sites, etc.) and describe the historical and contemporary factors relating to this site or material that are relevant to your research. What will your research add to our knowledge of this subject?

B. Literature Review: What have others written about your topic and/or area? Given what has already been written on the topic, why is your research important? What will it contribute to our knowledge, within American Studies and within a related field of scholarly interest? Are there debates in the literature to which your research will contribute? Does your research test out old assumptions and/or take ideas in a new direction? Discuss comparable studies and explain how your research is similar to, or different from them. If there is limited work in your chosen area, consider whether there are similar processes going on in other parts of the world. How will your research scale

up from a local site/problem to broader analytical or theoretical questions or problems? In short, explain how your research will expand on existing ideas and how it promises to advance our understanding of the world or a particular problematic. This is also the place to state the main research questions guiding your work.

### 3. Methods

A. What methods will you use? To get what sort of information? How will your methodology produce information that you can link into an argument or description? Will your methods provide cross-checks on one another, or multiple ways to understand your research site or topic?

B. Analysis: Be sure you indicate not only what you want to find out and how you will go about it, but also how you plan to make sense of what you discover. How are you going to organize the material you learn? What tools will you use to analyze the information gathered in participant observation, or interview (for example)? Also, make sure to explain how you will gather the contextual information (background, regional history, other necessary social or political context) needed to support the more specific argument you hope to make.

### 4. Results

What kind of results do you expect from your research? If all goes well, what do you think your research will contribute? What kind of study do you plan to produce?

### 5. Preliminary Bibliography

Make sure to provide a thorough list of sources you have consulted for your project: this will demonstrate that you have undertaken the necessary preparation for a project of this scale and magnitude.