

**Department of Sociology
Senior Thesis Guide
And Contract**

What is the Senior Thesis?

The Senior Thesis is a comprehensive two-quarter project designed to provide exceptionally motivated students with the opportunity to carry out a full-scale sociological research project [or theoretical essay]. Students will design and implement a project based on their own interests and goals. Tasks involved in the Senior Thesis project may include conceptual and theoretical development, data collection, data analysis, and the integration of the component parts into a paper. The Senior Thesis serves as an alternative to the department's capstone courses, and may facilitate greater flexibility of topic development and/or methodological approach.

Who should pursue the Senior Thesis?

The Senior Thesis option [is fulfilled by] 10 credits (see below), but it is expected that most projects will involve a significant commitment of time and resources beyond the normal credit load. For this reason, the Senior Thesis is only recommended for those who have clear motivation to carry out such a comprehensive project. Students pursuing the Senior Thesis option must identify and make arrangements with a Sociology faculty member prior to registration in the appropriate courses. While students need not have formulated research hypotheses prior to undertaking the Senior Thesis, students should have relatively defined ideas about the topic [and scope] of their project. It is strongly recommended that students pursuing the Senior Thesis not enroll in a heavy course load during the two Senior Thesis quarters. Further, all Senior Thesis projects will be evaluated in terms of the viability of completion before the final Senior Thesis quarter. A successfully completed Independent Study preparation quarter (see below) does not guarantee that the student will be able to advance to the final Senior Thesis quarter. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that students enroll in the first of the two Senior Thesis terms *at least* three quarters before anticipated graduation.

How do I enroll in the Senior Thesis?

Students are required to take at least 5 credits of independent study prior to the quarter in which they register for the senior thesis, and this independent study must focus on the thesis topic under the supervision of a sociology faculty member who has agreed to serve as the thesis advisor. Prior to undertaking the Senior Thesis, students must complete an independent study/senior thesis contract in cooperation with their thesis advisor. The remainder of this document serves as an overview of the expected scope of both the Senior Thesis and the associated independent study, along with a suggested timeline for completing the thesis.

Quarter 1: Independent Study as Development of the Senior Thesis

The independent study will be used to explore the viability of potential topics and to write a proposal for the thesis. If the student will be collecting data for a research project for the

thesis, they may also need to gain approval from the university's Human Subjects Review Committee (or apply for a waiver) during this time. Students may begin collecting data during this term as well.

The Research Proposal will typically serve as the "front end" of the completed thesis. For independent research, the thesis proposal will usually include a statement of the problem, a review of the relevant literature including pertinent theoretical considerations, identification of appropriate sources of relevant data, and a discussion of the analytical methodology to be employed. If the Senior Thesis will consist of an intensive theoretical paper, the proposal should include a statement of the issue, review of the relevant literature, and the student's plan for integrating or developing theoretical treatments.

At the conclusion of the independent study, a letter grade will be assigned. At this point, the student and advising faculty member will make an assessment of the feasibility of completing the Senior Thesis during the next quarter. If either the student or advising faculty believes the student will not be able to complete the project, the student will then need to take a scheduled capstone course before graduation.

Quarter 2: Senior Thesis

If the student intends to complete a research paper, the quarter in which the student is enrolled in Senior Thesis credits will be used to complete collection of data and for data analysis. In addition, students will edit and elaborate the aforementioned sections of the proposal in preparation for the final thesis. The student will then draft a discussion of results and conclusion. For those writing a theoretical project, this quarter should be used to develop the thesis as indicated in the proposal. All students should anticipate finishing a complete draft before the end of the term (in consultation with the advisor) so that the student has time to revise the paper as needed.

What will the final draft look like?

There is a range of final products that might be the result of the Senior Thesis. As a general guideline, students should expect to create a finished paper that is approximately 20 pages in length, with additional [including] tables, figures, or references. The paper may be suitable for submission as a conference presentation, or in exceptional cases, for submission to a journal for publication.

Senior Thesis Contract Empirical Track

This document is designed to provide a framework for establishing a timeline for the Senior Thesis. Projects vary in design and scope, however, so elements of the template below may be ignored or supplemented as necessary.

In addition to the timeline, it is recommended that students submit a one-page overview of the project indicating the research question, probable research method, potential data sources, and a description of the project *before the start of the independent study quarter*.

Timeline – Independent Study

Statement of Problem	_____
Literature Collection	_____
Literature Review	_____
Data Acquisition/Instrument Development	_____
Proposal Draft	_____

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Data Collection Complete	_____
Revised Proposal	_____
Data Analysis Complete	_____
Draft of Results	_____
Final Draft of Thesis	_____