

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Senior Thesis Application

INSTRUCTIONS:

There are several components needed for a complete thesis application: 1) the application form, signed by your thesis advisor; 2) your 5-10 page thesis overview; 3) a preliminary bibliography of 1-2 pages; 4) an internal transcript. Only completed applications with all four components will be considered.

COMPONENTS OF THE OVERVIEW:

For your thesis overview, you **MUST** address the following components:

1) **Research Question:** The research question is the building block of the thesis. It is the central puzzle you are trying to explore through your original research on a given topic. You should describe why this research question is important to the field of education studies.

2) **Preliminary Literature Review:** To form a good research question, you must know the broader scope of what is already known in the existing scholarship. In this part of your overview, you should go over the major throughlines of scholarly inquiry on your project. The most compelling literature reviews for a thesis will explore how your own work adds to this literature—how it confirms what is known, how it builds new direction of knowledge, or how it diverges from what we currently know. Since you have not conducted your research yet, think of this section of your overview as defining what is known and how you hope to build on existing knowledge.

3) **Methods and timeline:** This component of the overview will carefully explore how you will answer your research question. You should outline the methods you will use (discourse analysis, oral histories, surveys, participant observations, etc) and why these methods are the ones best suited to answer your question. You should identify your primary data sources (newspaper archives, interview transcripts, existing quantitative datasets) and how you intend to analyze them. You must also provide a timeline for your data collection and analysis.

Senior Thesis Application Form

- 1. Name:** **2. Email:**
- 3. Specialization:** **4. Concentration Advisor:**
- 5. Expected date of graduation:**
- 6. Education courses in which you are currently enrolled (if any):**
- 7. Proposed thesis title:**
- 8. Thesis Advisor:**
- 9. Other faculty you plan to consult for advice on this project:**
- 10. For research involving human subjects, please describe where you are in the process of notifying the IRB/submitting a protocol for approval.**
- 11. Please describe, in a few paragraphs, how you have gained the needed experience or training to carry out your proposed research project. This can include work as a research assistant, completion of additional methods courses, or other advanced-level courses that provided you with the skills to complete original research. Please be specific.**

Student's signature

Date

Thesis Advisor's signature

Date

Honors Thesis Process Education Department

Concentrators seeking to graduate with honors must apply to write a Senior Thesis during their sixth semester and be approved, maintain a minimum grade average that includes more A's than B's, and most importantly research and write an original Senior Thesis that meets or exceeds the standards established in the Department Rubric. Honors are awarded on the basis of thesis quality. Writing a thesis does not guarantee that a student will receive honors. At the same time, students may elect to write a Senior Thesis and receive course credit even if they do not qualify for honors so long as they follow the procedures below.

Process for Writing a Senior Thesis

1. Students apply to write a thesis near the end of their sixth semester. They must secure a Thesis Advisor, develop a research question and a plan to investigate it in consultation with this advisor, and submit the application form to the Director of Undergraduate Studies by the deadline of the Friday after spring break. Students will be notified whether their proposal has been approved, denied, or provisionally approved following the April Undergraduate Committee meeting. In the event of a provisional approval, students will have to further develop their research proposal and re-submit an application by September 15 of their senior year.
2. In the fall of senior year, students enroll in EDUC 1900 (Senior Seminar). They also meet regularly with their Thesis Advisor (every week or every other week) as they research and begin writing the thesis. The student and advisor should develop a work plan and timetable from the outset (see recommended timetable below) and file it with the Director of Undergraduate Studies by October 1. Students should also meet with other faculty with expertise in their topic, research methods, and/or scholarly literature for advice and feedback.
3. At the end of fall semester, students must meet with the DUS and submit a progress report to the Director of Undergraduate Studies signed by their Thesis Advisor that details their progress on the thesis, including the research they have undertaken, their preliminary findings, the work they have left to do and plan for completing it, and any challenges they have encountered.
4. In spring semester, students will enroll in EDUC 1991 for credit with their Thesis Advisor and continue to meet regularly. It is recommended that students submit preliminary drafts for feedback to their Thesis Advisor and build in time for significant revision before the final thesis is due.
5. The Senior Thesis is due the second Friday in April. The thesis will be evaluated according to the Department Rubric by the Thesis Advisor and by one other faculty member chosen by the Director of Undergraduate Studies for their expertise. If these faculty members recommend Honors and all other requirements are met (more A's than B's, all concentration requirements satisfied), students will receive Honors in the concentration. They will be notified in the first week of May.

6. Students share their research by presenting their thesis to the Education department faculty, fellow students, friends and families in May.

Suggested Timetable

JUNIOR YEAR

Fall semester

Begin thinking about a research topic. Choose courses and/or design an independent study that helps you to build the knowledge and skills to undertake a senior thesis and introduce you to faculty with whom you might want to work. If you haven't already done so, take a methodology course.

Spring semester

Work to transform a research topic into a research question. Start reading the scholarly literature around your topic/research question. Approach a professor to be your Thesis Advisor and work out a research plan. If your project requires IRB approval, begin the process.

By Friday after spring break

Submit your application to write a senior thesis to the Director of Undergraduate Studies with a strong research plan, a preliminary bibliography, transcript, and the signature of your advisor.

SENIOR YEAR

Over the summer

Conduct your literature review and refine your research plan. If you are able, identify and begin working with your data. Secure IRB approval.

September

Meet with your Thesis Advisor and develop a work plan and timetable for the year, working backward from the due date. Create a tentative outline and plan a schedule for writing that builds in substantial time for multiple revisions. Submit a copy of this work plan to the Director of Undergraduate Studies by the end of the month.

October-November

Conduct research and meet regularly with your Thesis Advisor (every week or every other week) to discuss your progress. Start writing!

December

Continue research and submit a draft to your Thesis Advisor of chapter 1 and/or the literature review. Submit a progress report to the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

January

Research, data analysis, and writing! Submit a draft of chapter 2 to your Thesis Advisor by the end of the month.

February

Finish research and analysis and submit chapter 3 to your Thesis Advisor by the end of the month.

March

Revise chapters according to your Thesis Advisor's feedback and produce a penultimate draft, including introduction and conclusion, by the end of the month for final feedback from the Thesis Advisor.

First two weeks of April

Finish final revisions on the thesis and submit an electronic copy to the Education Department by noon on the second Friday of April and a bound hard copy within the next week.

Last half of April

The thesis is evaluated by two faculty members, your Thesis Advisor and one additional faculty member chosen by the Director of Undergraduate Studies based on expertise. The readers submit a written evaluation and determine whether to award honors.

Early May

Thesis presentations to the Education Department faculty and students. Friends and family are invited to attend.

Sample Thesis Titles:

- Reframing the "Does Money Matter?" Debate: A Look at Spending on Professional Development and Non-Cognitive Outcomes
- Teaching and Learning Social Justice: Potential Pitfalls of "Consciousness Raising"
- "To Fix a Broken City:" Home Rule and the Origins of School Choice in Washington, D.C.
- To Intervene Or Not To Intervene: Supporting Preschoolers' Social Play in a Public Setting
- The Interaction and Integration of Schooling and Psychotherapy Perspectives on Adult-Child Relationships in Children 18-60 Months
- Contemplative Practices in K-12 Education: Theory, Research, Action
- Beyond 1968 and Below the Equator: A Comparison of Student Movements in Argentina and the United States from 1966 to 1976
- Exploring the Educational Pathways of Teen Mothers: Understanding Young Women's Perceptions and Navigations of School and Motherhood In Urban Rhode Island
- 9. Relationships in Transformation: A Study of Teacher Buy-In to Turnaround Efforts at Central Falls High School, Rhode Island
- Refugee Parental Involvement in Providence, Rhode Island: Opportunities and Obstacles
- 11. Balancing School Desegregation and School Improvement: A Study of the Remedies in *Scheff v. O'Neill* in Hartford, Connecticut
- A History of the Free School Movement
- Are Full Service Schools Serving or Motivating?: An Investigation into Teacher Commitment and Participation at Two Full Service Schools
- In Thirty Miles and Thirty Months: A Comparison of the 1968 Black Student Walkout at Brown University and the 1971 Administration Building Takeover at the University of Rhode Island.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
about
HONORS and WRITING A SENIOR THESIS IN EDUCATION STUDIES

1. What do I have to do to write a senior thesis?

In your junior year, you must secure a Thesis Advisor, develop a research question and research plan that you will investigate during your senior year, and apply to write a thesis by the Friday after spring break. You will work on your senior thesis as part of the Senior Seminar (EDUC 1900) in the fall. Then, you will enroll in EDUC 1991 for independent study credit in the spring (this must be above and beyond the 10 course minimum requirement for education studies concentration). You will also meet regularly with your Thesis Advisor who will supervise your research and writing. Senior theses are due on the second Friday in April.

2. Will I get honors if I write a senior thesis?

Most senior theses do receive honors but writing a senior thesis does not guarantee it. The thesis must meet or exceed the standards set forth in the Department Rubric for Honors and you must meet the minimum grade point average (more A's than B's in education studies courses). Your thesis will be evaluated by your Thesis Advisor and an additional faculty reader and who will provide you with written feedback. Even if you do not receive honors, you can still receive course credit for EDUC 1991.

3. Who can be a Thesis Advisor?

Any full-time teaching member of the Education Department faculty can be a Thesis Advisor if they are on campus for the year. Faculty on sabbatical cannot serve as a Thesis Advisor. Part-time or non-teaching faculty may serve as a Co-Thesis Advisor but may not be the sole director for a senior thesis.

4. How often should I meet with my Thesis Advisor?

Regularly—once every other week or even once a week. At the beginning of the year, you should set up a schedule that establishes a regular meeting time. It may not always be necessary to meet in person—emails and telephone are often helpful—but it is always good to have a time set aside when you KNOW you can talk to your Thesis Advisor.

5. Should I consult with faculty who are not my Thesis Advisor?

Absolutely. Faculty inside and outside the Education Department who have expertise on your topic should be sought out and consulted, preferably early in the project, and their advice and help should be acknowledged in the preface of the thesis' final draft.

6. Are there any other steps in the process?

You are required to write a progress report for the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), signed by your Thesis Advisor by the end of fall semester that outlines your progress. You may also be required to meet with the DUS to discuss that progress at this time. Furthermore, in May you will be invited to present your thesis to the Education Department faculty and students.

7. When is the final version due?

An electronic copy of the thesis is due by noon on the second Friday of April. Working backward from this date should help you and your Thesis Advisor to set up a schedule for research and writing across two semesters.

8. *Do I have to write a research paper? Can I do an unorthodox format like a play or website?*

An Honors thesis must ask an original research question, answer it with appropriate evidence, and place that work within relevant scholarly literature. An unorthodox format is unlikely to be able to do these things and satisfy the requirements of the Department Rubric for Honors and will consequently not be approved. A senior thesis cannot be a normative question, creative project, or policy advocacy, and it must do more than summarize what scholars already know; it must conduct original research. If you are interested in doing a different kind of project or an unorthodox format, you should consider doing a capstone project instead.

9. *Whom do I contact if I have questions about honors or about writing a senior thesis?*

You should contact the Director of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Andrea Flores.

10. *Do you have any other advice for writing a thesis?*

- Start thinking about a Senior Thesis early. It takes time to design a good research project. Choose classes your junior year that help you prepare for a senior thesis by introducing you to topics, methodologies, and/or faculty with which you might like to work. Start thinking in terms of research **questions** instead of topics.
- Spend time and energy creating a good research design at the beginning. This means that you should refine your question, identify and begin reading relevant scholarship on the topic, identify your data source and make sure you can access and use it (and look at it—make sure it has the info you think it does), and think carefully about your methodology—how you will answer your question and the strengths and weaknesses of that approach. This should be done **before** the start of senior year—preferably during junior year but at least by the end of the summer right before senior year.
- Establish a clear work plan and timetable that gives adequate time for revisions in partnership with your Thesis Advisor. Make sure that your writing schedule allows the Thesis Advisor enough time to read the penultimate draft and get final suggestions to you. (In other words, get it to your Advisor **AT LEAST** two weeks before the final draft is due and closer to a month if possible).
- Start writing early! Don't wait until spring semester to start writing. Writing can help clarify your thinking and reveal holes in your evidence and arguments. Writing is also hard work and to do it well requires some time and a lot of feedback and revision. Even if you are still collecting data, try to start writing in the fall. Write the literature review or methodology section. If you are writing an education history thesis, aim to write a draft of the first chapter before winter break.
- If there is even a slight possibility that you will need IRB clearance for your research, get started on obtaining it **IMMEDIATELY**. Your Thesis Advisor will help you to determine whether IRB approval is necessary and should guide you through the process if it is.
- Winter break is a crucial time to make progress on your thesis. Don't waste it!