

History 99

Senior Thesis Writers' Seminar, 2021–22

<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/90969>

Course Time: Weds., 6–8pm

Classroom: Robinson Hall Conference Room

Instructor: Dr. Carla Heelan

Contact: cmheelan@fas.harvard.edu

Office Hours: Mon. 3–4:30 (in person);

Fr. 10–11:30 (Zoom)

<https://bit.ly/carlaofficehours>

OH Location: Robinson 102

Instructor: Anna Bisikalo

Contact: abisikalo@g.harvard.edu

Office Hours: Weds. 2–3:30pm (in person or Zoom)

OH Location: Robinson B15



Course Description:

The Senior Thesis Writers' Seminar has a twofold purpose. The first is to provide you with practical guidance and writing advice as you complete a senior thesis in History. We will discuss many of the common hurdles and pitfalls that past students have encountered. Over the course of the year, we will cover a variety of issues from macro-organization to formatting and polishing the final draft. The second purpose of this seminar is to bring you together with other thesis writers to share experiences, interests, successes, and techniques. Writing a senior thesis can be an isolating experience; comparing approaches, exchanging advice, and simply staying current with the work of colleagues helps to dispel the confusion and frustration often encountered by writers at any level. Indeed, collegiality and intellectual exchange are at the heart of any academic seminar, and those can be the most rewarding aspects of History 99.

The 2020–21 thesis program departed from past years in concession to the remote learning environment. We believe that some changes to the format of the course were beneficial—namely, the creation of thesis pods to facilitate greater cohesion among the cohort, and also additional opportunities to meet one-on-one with the History 99 instructors—and so these new components

have been carried into the AY 2021–22.

The senior thesis should be the culmination of your academic experience at Harvard. It will also be the longest and most complex piece of writing that most of you have ever developed, and you will face a number of new challenges along the way. Consequently, we will focus much of our attention on the process of writing an extended, multi-chapter work. Critical thinking and clear writing are inherently linked, and as the seminar progresses we will address matters of style and language.

This seminar will also prepare you for the (either virtual or in-person, TBD) Senior Thesis Writers Conference, which is attended by History Department faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. At the conference, each thesis writer will explain his or her thesis project during a 15-minute presentation. The audience will be given 15 minutes to ask questions of and provide feedback to each presenter. This feedback often proves invaluable in sharpening the argument of the thesis.

Course Requirements and Assessment:

- 1) **Attendance:** Our weekly discussions are integral to the Thesis Tutorial, and attendance is mandatory. You must have a valid excuse for missing a meeting and notification must be given in advance for any absence not due to health problems. In the event of an absence, be prepared to provide documentation from your House Dean or a clinician from Harvard University Health Services. The pandemic continues to disrupt our academic and non-academic lives, so please contact Anna or Carla asap if there is some other obstacle that prevented you from attending or participating in class. History 99 is graded SAT/UNSAT, and unexcused absences may prompt an UNSAT for the fall term and/or jeopardize your ability to complete your thesis.
- 2) **Research Guidance:**
 - a. From 6:45–7:45pm on Sept. 1, Anna Assogba, one of the research librarians for the department, will come to class to introduce you to the organization and citation tool Zotero. Used correctly, Zotero can make you a more efficient researcher and writer; past thesis writers have described Zotero as essential to their success.
 - b. In September, you must schedule a consultation with Fred Burchsted (burchst@fas.harvard.edu) or Anna Assogba (assogba@fas.harvard.edu), our wonderful research librarians, to discuss library resources and research strategies. Harvard Libraries are always acquiring new material, and Fred is an invaluable resource for effective research.
- 3) **Senior Thesis Conference:** The Conference is scheduled for October 28–29. Participation is mandatory for all thesis writers.
- 4) **Prompt Submission of All Assignments:** The assignment schedule for the Thesis Tutorial has been refined over many years based on student feedback about the usefulness of each assignment. The prompt submission of all assignments will ensure that you will have no difficulty completing your thesis by Thursday, March 10. In addition to completing your own written work on schedule, you will also be responsible

for completing a peer review of two of your fellow students' chapters in late January and February.

Collaboration and Academic Integrity Policies:

Historical scholarship may seem at times to have sprung singlehandedly from sole scholars poring over their sources and perhaps breaking occasionally for some dry crackers. Yet every great work of scholarship results from discussion and the exchange of ideas. Our work would not be as rich without sharing and debating it with our peers, advisors, and faculty members. Indeed, the thesis seminar requires you to share your work with your fellow students for peer review. We encourage you to consult your classmates and fellow students for advice on sources and secondary literature as well as for feedback on your chapters. However, your senior thesis must be the result of your own research and writing. You must also follow historians' standard citation practices and properly cite any books, articles, lectures, websites, archival sources, etc. that you have quoted or drawn from. Any suspected plagiarism will be taken extremely seriously and may result in disciplinary action. Please consult Carla, the History 99 TF, or your thesis advisor if you are uncertain. It is far better to check in advance if you have any doubts and we are very happy to answer any questions.

Please note that all work produced for this course is subject to the Harvard College Honor Code, reproduced here in full:

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

Accessible Education Policy:

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with me by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in my inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although note that AEO invites instructors to contact their office to discuss appropriate implementation.

Schedule of Course Meetings:

*NB: **Assignments** (in bold) marked with an asterisk (*) are due to the History 99 instructors, unless in-class submission is noted in parentheses. All other assignments are due to your advisor.*

Fall Semester

Before our first meeting:

- Complete the Zotero survey by the evening of Sunday, August 29.

- Submit your prospectus to the canvas site by September 1 at 6pm.
- Reading in the Thesis Handbook: “Section One” pp. 2–18; “Section Three: Writing a Prospectus” pp. 53–55

Sept. 1 Meeting 1: Embarking on a Thesis (*All students meet together at 6pm*)

- How to begin your project:
 - What is a thesis? How do I write one?
 - What is your topic?
 - Prepare an “elevator pitch”—1-2 sentences about your project
 - How will you manage your research?
 - What are 2 concrete features of Zotero you think will benefit your research/writing?
- *Reading in the Thesis Handbook: “Section Two: Launching the Thesis Project,” “Refining the Thesis Topic”*
- Zotero Session with Anna Assogba at 6:45pm

Sept. 8 NO CLASS: one-on-one meetings with Anna and Carla to discuss your prospectus; meet with your thesis pods either in person or online (per college policy) to discuss the challenges of the semester—which will be different for each of you!

Sep. 15 Meeting 2: Managing Your Research + Keeping Yourself Accountable

- Guest Speaker Sophie DiCara (award winning former thesis writer): Best Tips for Managing Your Research and Writing Process
- Prepare to share your own practices for organizing research, what you are struggling with, and what questions you have about the process.
- *Reading in the Thesis Handbook: “Maintaining Momentum while Researching,” pp. 19–33*

Sep. 22 Meeting 3: Critiquing a Sample Thesis

- Discussion of sample thesis
 - Come to class having read the thesis and handbook excerpts, and prepare to share two strengths and two weaknesses of the thesis, and something that you've taken from reading it that will help you approach your own work
- Reading in the Thesis Handbook: “Section Two: Learning from Sample Theses,” pp. 45–51; “Section Three: Critiquing a Sample Thesis,” pp. 56–57; “Appendix D,” pp. 124ff

Sept. 29 Meeting 4: Staking Out Your Turf: The Importance of Historiography

- How to position your project in the relevant historiography.
 - BEFORE CLASS: read the historiography sections from past theses [in folder on Canvas], and come prepared to explain how the respective authors presented their historiographies, and how their thesis contributed to the overall historiography.
- *Reading in the Thesis Handbook: “Section Three: Preparing an Annotated Bibliography,” pp. 58–64*

*****Annotated Bibliography due to instructors and**

your thesis advisor by Sept. 29 at 6pm***

*****Meetings with Instructors to discuss progress during week of Oct. 4*****

*****Title of conference presentation due by October 4 at 8pm*****

Oct. 6 Meeting 5: Explaining Your Thesis + Envisioning Chapter Outlines

- How to structure your conference presentation.
- Envisioning Chapter Outlines
 - Prepare to briefly explain your chapters in a sentence each, and why that particular chapter outline allows you to make the argument you think you'll be making (note: it's all subject to change and that is totally fine!!)
- *Reading in the Thesis Handbook: "Section Two: Presenting Your Work to an Audience," pp. 34–38*

*****Outline or rough draft of Thesis Conference Presentation due to thesis pod by October 11 at 6pm: meet to discuss during that week*****

Oct. 20 Meeting 6: Preparing for the Thesis Conference

- How to give an effective oral presentation and invite helpful feedback.
- *Reading in the Thesis Handbook: "Section Three: Conducting Peer Reviews," pp. 65–71*

*****Outline of conference presentation due to advisor by October 20 at 6pm*****

Oct. 28 Senior Thesis Writers Conference
& 29 *Presentation of works-in-progress.*

Nov. 3 Meeting 7: Taking the Next Step: Incorporating Feedback and Writing a Chapter Draft

- How to write your first chapter.
- *Reading in the Thesis Handbook: "Section Two: Getting Ready to Write," pp. 39–41 and "Section Two: Maintaining Momentum while Writing," pp. 42–44*

*****First draft chapter due to advisor and History 99 instructors by Nov. 22 at 9pm*****

Nov. 29– One-on-One Meetings with Anna and Carla: *Discussion of progress in fall and agenda*
Dec. 3 *for spring.*

25–35-page paper due Dec. 8 for students leaving History 99

J-Term

Jan. 2-26 Write, Write, Write!

- *Reading in the Thesis Handbook: "Section Two: Maintaining Momentum while Writing"*

*****Second draft chapter due to advisor in the week of Jan. 3, 2022
(submitted by Jan. 8)*****

*****Draft of peer-review chapter due Jan. 24 at 5pm*****

Spring Semester

Jan. 26 Meeting 8: Chapter Draft Peer Review + Revisiting Your Outline

- What does the whole thesis look like?
 - How has your approach to the writing process changed since the first chapter?
 - How has the narrative arc of your thesis taken shape based on your chapter writing?
- ****Peer Review of Chapter****

*****Draft of third chapter due to advisor in the week of Jan. 24: submitted by Jan. 29*****

Feb. 9 Meeting 9: Revisions, Introductions, and Revisiting the Historiography

- How should you think about refining your argument and packaging your thesis as a whole, and making revisions?
- Where does the process of writing a good intro fit into that, and what does a good intro look like?
 - Read Sample Introduction
 - Revisit historiographies
- *Reading in the Thesis Handbook: "Section Three: Introducing Your Thesis," pp. 72–76*

*****Finalized thesis title due by Feb. 9 at 6pm*****

*****Draft of introduction due to peer review group by Monday, Feb. 14, at 6pm*****

Feb. 16 Meeting 10: Finishing Touches + Peer Review of Introduction

- Review, check, and double-check requirements
- Peer Review Introductions
- *Reading in the Thesis Handbook: "Appendix A: Instructions Regarding Theses," pp. 78–79; "Appendix B: Sample Title Page, Table of Contents, and Body Text," pp. 80–87*

Mar. 10 Theses due to the Undergraduate Office (2 copies) and uploaded as a pdf to the History 99 canvas site **BEFORE** 5 PM****