

# **PREPARING FOR THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS IN HISTORY**

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There is no patented formula that prepares students for the experience of writing a senior thesis in history. But you can take several steps, especially in the sophomore and junior years, to lay a strong foundation for the kind of research and writing you will do in the Honors Seminar.

## **1. Get to Know Your Professors**

Writing a senior thesis means working very closely with a faculty advisor, in most cases from the spring semester of the junior year onwards. The more you interact with your teachers, the better sense you will get of whether you and they mesh well—an important consideration, along with a given professor's field of expertise, in making a choice of a supervisor. By the same token, you must persuade a faculty member to sign on as your advisor. Professors will be most willing to advise students whose work and talents they know well. In addition, the best thesis proposals invariably come from students who have received substantial input and guidance from a member (or members) of the faculty.

## **2. Get Experience with Research in Primary Documents**

Senior theses in history require the ability to conceptualize a historical problem, to identify primary sources that can help you answer that problem, to contextualize and assess the evidence contained in those sources, and to construct an effective analytical argument based on that evidence. The more chances that you have to hone these skills before entering the senior year; the more easily you will meet the challenges associated with a much larger research endeavor. Both the "New Majors" seminars and the upper level research seminars furnish great opportunities to pursue this kind of independent research; so too do the Department's "writing in the disciplines" courses. Taking at least a couple of these courses during the sophomore and junior years also constitutes the best way of discovering whether you enjoy the kind of historical inquiry that a thesis will entail.

## **3. Integrate Study Abroad into Your Plans for a History Thesis**

This suggestion is in many ways a new departure for the Department, as only a few History undergraduates have previously taken advantage of study abroad to conceptualize a thesis proposal and begin investigation of primary sources. But with sufficient planning, study abroad offers a fabulous opportunity to pursue research far from the confines of Perkins Library.

## **4. Develop Competency in a Foreign Language**

Many prospective thesis writers in history would like to tackle a historical problem concerning the non-English speaking world. In many cases, students without extensive foreign language skills are able to do just that, either by relying on English-language sources, sources translated into English, or some combination of the two. But your range of options will be far, far greater if you come into the senior year with a solid ability to read a foreign language.