

The Department of Sociology's
SENIOR THESIS HANDBOOK

Academic Year 2014-2015

**Developed by Ann Marie R. Power,
Director of Undergraduate Studies**

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

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Author's note: This is a substantial revision of the 2009 handbook which was developed by the author in consultation with the AY 2009-2010 Undergraduate Studies Committee (Kevin Christiano, Eugene Halton, Sean Kelly, & Andrew Weigert) and Department Chair (Rory McVeigh). Some of the information on pages 5 & 6 of this booklet originally appeared in the Sociology Department's "Requirements For Honors Tutorial."

SENIOR THESIS HANDBOOK

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

ACADEMIC YEAR 2014-2015

THE SENIOR THESIS PROCESS

A senior thesis is the crowning point of students' undergraduate years of study. The process of producing a senior thesis requires two semesters, during which time students carry out an independent research project on a topic of their choice. Thus, every senior thesis is uniquely each student's own.

The benefits of doing a senior thesis are many. The process enables students to pull together, into a unified whole, the sociological knowledge and methodological skills they have acquired over their time in the major. By completing a thesis, students show that they are able to think critically and work independently. It also marks students as creative and persevering.

All Sociology students are encouraged to develop a senior thesis project. While this is voluntary for most students, **those in the department's honors track must do so in order to graduate with the honors distinction.**

The following are some additional benefits to engaging in a senior thesis project:

- Gain more opportunities for exchanging ideas with faculty, graduate students, and peers.
- Strengthen oral and written presentation skills.
- Learn about submitting manuscripts for publication.
- Present research findings to a critical audience.
- Lay the groundwork for graduate studies and other equally rigorous pursuits.

Timing of the Thesis

A senior thesis in the College of Arts and Letters requires two semesters of focused research and writing. Most undergraduate students undertake a senior thesis project during their senior year; but upon recommendation or request, students may initiate the process during their junior year. Students should see the Director of Undergraduate Studies about the timing of their senior thesis.

Courses To Take

Typically, students carry out their senior thesis work through special research-based courses, numbered 48xxx. Students should note that all research-based courses, numbered 48xxx, count in the category of a 40000-level requirement in the Registrar's Graduation Progress System.

Under the advisement of the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), students may begin working on their senior thesis in SOC 48009, Senior Thesis Capstone Project, or they may launch their thesis research within the department's more structured course, SOC 48002, "Doing Sociology: Senior Research Practicum." A third way to get going on the senior thesis is through the course required of students in the Glynn Family Honors Program, ALHN 48980, "Senior Honors Thesis," which Glynn honors students take in the Fall semester. A fourth way in which students can launch their thesis is through a 43xxx senior seminar, under the instructor's and the DUS's advisement.

All students complete their senior thesis in the spring semester by enrolling in SOC 48009. This course is a repeatable course, so those students who began their thesis in SOC 48009 may take it again in the Spring. (All Sociology honors track students are required to take **SOC 48009, Senior Thesis Capstone Project, at least once** in their senior year, for 3 credits in order to complete the honors requirements.) Students who need to build up their methodological skills to carry out their thesis work are advised to launch their senior thesis via SOC 48002 in the fall semester and then complete their work via SOC 48009 in the spring.

During the semesters that students are enrolled in SOC 48009, they are also required to be enrolled in **SOC 41800, Senior Thesis Workshop**. This course provides the students who are working independently on their projects with timely information and consistent support throughout the year. The workshop also offers a forum for sharing works-in-progress.

Deciding on a Methodological Approach

Senior thesis research projects may fall within any of the **genres of sociological research**: analytical, case study, historical, interpretive, phenomenological, quantitative, theoretical, etc., depending on each student's objectives. Students may collect the data for their analyses themselves or extract data from an existing data set.

To get started on their thesis projects, students are encouraged to develop a set of research questions within an area of research that strongly interests them. Students' research questions should be specific and definable, and ones that can be fruitfully studied during the period of time in which the research is to be conducted, i.e., within two academic semesters. Research questions may arise from past sociological interests and concerns, personal experiences, a burning personal issue, current affairs, or future plans.

Students should be aware of the wide array of methodologies and consider which ones are best suited to their questions and data. It is best, therefore, if students work on developing questions and formulating ideas about the relationships among their variables of interest before trying to identify an appropriate methodology. **Students are expected to discuss their research questions and possible methodological approaches with their thesis directors.**

Completing a senior thesis is, by definition, primarily the responsibility of the individual student, and students are expected to put forth full and conscientious efforts throughout this year-long process. At the same time, thesis directors and the DUS can be counted upon to provide an adequate framework of support for reasonably conceived projects.

So that appropriate resources can be mobilized in time for the student, it is important for students to begin thinking about their projects as early as possible.

Choosing a Senior Thesis Director

The Director of Undergraduate Studies assists students in finding faculty mentors for their senior thesis research projects. **The choice of thesis director hinges on two main considerations: students' research interests and a faculty member's availability.**

Students may approach faculty members themselves or discuss their options first with the DUS. If a student does not know the faculty member who is most appropriate to his/her chosen topic, the DUS will contact that faculty member to ascertain his/her availability. If the student already knows the faculty member and has already established a mentor relationship with the faculty member, she may approach the faculty member herself. Students are discouraged from asking for a director outside the Sociology department, unless it is a faculty member in an affiliated department, like, for example, the Institute for Latino Studies.

In the beginning, students may tend toward research projects that extend beyond their present level of expertise in the field. If your director does not know you well, discuss your skills and background with your director prior to beginning your project, so that your director may guide you in limiting your topic to a manageable level. If you feel weak in certain areas (e.g., statistical analysis), feel comfortable about discussing this with your director and/or the DUS. If known ahead of time, the faculty member can then plan to assist you and advise you in those areas.

The senior thesis project entails an application (see Appendix A), and each faculty director must sign the application form along with the student before the DUS grants **department approval** to the student to add the senior thesis course (SOC 48009) to their schedule. Subsequent to the application process, each director receives the senior thesis

guidelines as well as periodic communiqués from the DUS with regards to the senior thesis process.

Relatively few undergraduates are capable of doing a senior thesis without considerable direction from a faculty member, and students' experiences in carrying out their thesis research will be enriched by working with a mature scholar. Directors will have differences in style and strategy in terms of guidance, and the scope of that guidance will depend on a student's individual needs. While direction must be available, the project must not become the director's project, and staying on track must be primarily the student's responsibility.

In sum, students may expect their directors' help in the following areas:

1. Each faculty director will encourage the student to attempt an inquiry of appropriate rigor within the bounds of the student's potential, the time available, and the University's and student's access to resources.
2. Each faculty director will advise the student toward the successful completion of the project, meeting the general specifications as interpreted by the department, which suggests counseling as frequently as appropriate for each student on content, method, and form.
3. Each faculty director will assist with the editing of the report for the typical errors of logic, style, and mechanics that may occur. Evaluation and grading will be based upon the total report.

Evaluating the Senior Thesis

Students will receive a standard letter grade for their thesis work, in each semester. Individual faculty directors assign the grade for their thesis mentee's work. **In order for their senior thesis to receive the honors distinction, students must earn a grade of B or higher on their work.**

Because most students are concerned about the evaluation process, they should discuss with their directors at the outset of each semester what their expectations are for the student's performance in the thesis process. In general, in evaluating the project, each faculty director will consider the following four elements and the manner in which these are combined in the production of the senior thesis:

Form. Form is an essential element of clear expression. **The project should reflect explicit attention to the requirements of form for writing in sociology.** Students should review appropriate sociological journals (e.g., *American Sociological Review*, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *Sociological Theory*, *Sociology of Education*, etc.) for models of how components of the research process tie together into a clear, integrated whole, and for directions on how to present tables, headings, and referencing. In addition, students are expected to follow the manuscript style guidelines as stipulated in the **American Sociological Association's Style Guide, Fourth Edition.**

Content. Each student's set of research questions should reflect a considered and stated judgment as to the significance and manageability of the topic. The completed project should represent a serious and systematic attempt to pursue your questions effectively, making good use of available resources. The theory (or theories) explaining the phenomenon to be studied should be comprehensively and systematically presented along with an assessment of it/them. The literature review should consist of relevant studies on the pertinent issues under investigation. The theory and literature should be clearly linked to the hypotheses or the theses or themes generated.

Method. The choices made in selecting a methodology should be clearly explained. Concepts should be operationalized or otherwise defined, and the technique to be followed outlined in detail. Sampling design should be appropriate and any statistical technique used should be explained and justified. The strengths and weaknesses in methodology should be anticipated and explicated.

Process. The director will take into account the manner in which the project was completed. Did the student work independently, show up for appointments, meet deadlines, etc.? Has the student complied with the expectations related to the senior thesis project (e.g., submitted the thesis to a journal, presented the project to a critical audience, etc.)?

THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL PROCESS

Research involving human subjects requires approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, which is set up to protect the well-being of human subjects as required by Federal law and institutional mandates:

“The Institutional Review Board's (IRB) major role is to safeguard the rights and welfare of all human subjects who participate in research. In compliance with Federal law and institutional policy, all research projects involving human subjects or human material must be reviewed and approved by the IRB.”

Thus, all student researchers who will be collecting their own data must seek approval from the IRB if it involves human subjects.

As part of the first step in seeking IRB approval, students are required to take a tutorial to become familiar with the IRB process. To find out more about this in detail, students should visit the Center for Undergraduate Scholarly Engagement's pages on “Human Subjects Research” at <http://undergradresearch.nd.edu/policies/IRB/>

The following summary is included in this guidebook to help students proceed through the IRB process in a timely way.

IRB Submission Process Requirements

1) IRB Education and Training

- Researcher must complete Human Subjects Protection Certification prior to protocol submission on CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) website. See <http://or.nd.edu/research-compliance/education-and-training/> for more information.

2) IRB Submission Form (Protocol)

- Researcher must submit complete research proposal along with methodologies, survey instrument, consent forms, and recruitment materials.

See <http://or.nd.edu/?s=irb+submission+protocol>

- Researcher must also have approval from their faculty advisor. And the student's Faculty advisor must send a brief note stating his/her approval of the research project.

3) Proposals must be submitted at least 10 working days before the IRB meets. * This usually pertains to researchers who have to undergo a "full IRB review."

<http://or.nd.edu/research-compliance/human-subjects-research/irb-procedures-manual-guidelines/the-substance-of-irb-review/> contains an explanation of the substance of reviews.

Meeting dates: The Institutional Review Board meets once a month. During AY 2014-15, they will meet <http://or.nd.edu/research-compliance/human-subjects-research/institutional-review-board-irb/#irbmeet>

Criteria for IRB Approval

A study should meet the following criteria in order to gain approval from the IRB:

1. The risks to subjects are minimized as much as possible.
2. The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits.
3. The informed consent is adequate.
4. Where appropriate, the research plan makes provisions for the safety of the subjects during the data collection process.
5. Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and maintain confidentiality of data.
6. Appropriate safeguards are included within the study to protect the rights and welfare of the vulnerable subjects.

MANUSCRIPT STYLE GUIDELINES

Students must adhere strictly to the American Sociological Association's (ASA) manuscript style guidelines, as delineated in ASA's *Style Guide, Fourth Edition*. These guidelines should provide a complete reference for all formatting questions. For further examples, students may consult recent journal issues containing articles within the genre of their research.

In addition, students may consult their directors as well as the DUS for guidance in presenting the information as effectively as possible. Tables should be clearly and accurately labeled, and easy to read. The sections of the report should be tightly integrated and should flow from one to the other. Typos should be eliminated and proofreading carefully done. These guidelines apply to both quantitative and qualitative reports.

Because the report will be a senior thesis, here are a few additional rules to be followed when formatting **the official copy to be submitted to the Sociology Department**:

1. Margins: The left (binding edge) margin should be 1.5 inches. The top, bottom and right margins should be 1 inch. This requirement applies to every page in the document. **Keep in mind that the bindery may trim approximately one-quarter of an inch off each edge.** Tables should be accommodated within these limits.
2. Page numbering: Center each page number horizontally; and, without including any punctuation, place the number approximately three-quarters of an inch from the bottom of the page. Paginate, in Arabic numerals, the main body of the text, beginning with the first chapter or its equivalent (e.g., your introduction), from page number 1 through the last page, **avoiding** supplementary page numbering (e.g., 1a).
3. Tabs should be .5 inches.
4. Line spacing: Double-space between lines; 0 pt before and after each paragraph. Do not double space after periods.
5. Title page: See an example of the required format in Appendix B and C, one for honors track students, one for non-honors. (An electronic version is available through the DUS.) The title of your paper should be 24-point type.

PRESENTING YOUR RESEARCH

The Sociology Department holds a presentation event each year, during the third week of April. The format is a poster session. All senior thesis students in the Sociology Department are required to present their research projects at this event. This year's **Senior Thesis Poster Session** will take place on Friday, April 17, 2015, from 2:00-4:00 PM, in the Hospitality Room of South Dining Hall. Students should mark their calendars well in advance so as to ensure they are prepared for the event.

In addition, students are strongly encouraged to submit an abstract of their thesis project to at least one sociological association's annual meeting, held regionally or

nationally. Check below for the list of associations and conferences that are most appropriate to this goal. Included below are the dates and locations of these events for the upcoming year. Deadline dates for submitting abstracts to each can be found online.

National and Regional Conferences

American Sociological Association (visit www.asanet.org)

110th Annual Meeting – August 22-25, 2015

Hilton Chicago and Hilton Palmer House, Chicago, IL

Theme: Sexualities in the Social World

Eastern Sociological Society (visit www.essnet.org)

Annual Conference – February 26-March 1, 2015

Millennium Broadway Hotel in New York City

Theme: Crossing Borders

Midwest Sociological Society (visit www.themss.org)

Annual Conference March 26-29, 2015

Kansas City Marriott Downtown

North Central Sociological Association (visit www.ncsanet.org)

Pacific Sociological Association (visit www.pacificsoc.org)

86th Annual Meeting – April 1-4, 2015

Long Beach, CA

Theme: People, Place and Power

Southern Sociological Society (visit www.southernsociologicalsociety.org)

Annual Conference – March 25-28, 2015

Astor Crowne Plaza at 739 Canal Street, New Orleans, LA

Theme: Stalled Revolutions? Gender Inequality in the 21st Century.

Rural Sociological Society (visit www.ruralsociology.org)

Annual Conference – August 6-9, 2015

Madison, WI

Theme: Knowing Rural

University of Notre Dame Undergraduate Scholars Conference

Another forum in which students may present their research is the University of Notre Dame's annual undergraduate research conference, i.e., ND Undergraduate Scholars Conference, held on the Friday immediately following the last day of classes in the Spring semester.

Visit <http://undergradresearch.nd.edu/USC/> for up-to-date information.

IMPORTANT DUE DATES TO REMEMBER

Full Draft of Senior Thesis: A full, complete draft of your entire thesis should be submitted to your director for review and feedback by March 27, 2015. This gives you time to make changes before the Poster Session and before the final due date.

(For students completing their thesis in the fall, the thesis must be submitted by the third Monday of November.)

Senior Thesis Poster Session in the Department of Sociology: Friday, April 17, 2015, from 2:00-4:00 PM in Hospitality Room of South Dining Hall.

Final Completed Thesis with Director's Signature: Due to the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Sociology Department on **Friday, April 24, 2015, by 5:00 PM.**

Dean's Reception for all A&L Senior Thesis Writers: The dean holds a reception for all thesis students and their advisors each spring, to celebrate your accomplishments. This year's event will be held on **April 24, 2015.**

PUBLISHING YOUR RESEARCH REPORT

ALL Sociology honors track students are strongly encouraged to submit their theses to at least one journal for review. Students should consult their thesis directors for advice on a proper venue.

ORGANIZING YOUR SENIOR THESIS RESEARCH PROJECT

Much of your senior thesis research project is carried out independently. You make your own schedule. It is important to be consistent and organized in carrying out your project. Plan on **an average of at least ten hours per week**, which is usual for a 3 credit course. Establish a regular work pattern. Get into the habit of **writing every day -- and revising** based on feedback from reliable sources.

If you are enrolled in SOC 48009 during the first semester of your project, you should have the following parts of your project completed by the end of that semester:

- Application for the Senior Thesis Capstone Project (SOC 48009) signed by both you and your director and submitted to the Director of Undergraduate Studies (Students may contact the DUS for this form; see Appendix D for sample copy.)
- Summary of your research questions
- Identification of the source of your data
- Summary of your research methodology
- List of the research literature to be reviewed

- Data file (or theoretical, historical, or ethnographic contents) organized and ready for analysis
- Completed version of your Review of the Literature, submitted to your thesis director for feedback.
- Solid draft of the Methodology section submitted to director for feedback
- Draft of Analysis & Results section submitted to director for feedback

Having this work completed by the end of the first semester of the senior thesis project provides thesis directors with a solid basis for determining your grade for the semester. Students in an alternative gateway course (e.g., SOC 48002 or ALHN 48980) are given a list of milestones and deadlines by their course instructors. If they do not receive one, students are advised to follow the above plan.

TO-DO LIST AND DEADLINES FOR ENTIRE TWO-SEMESTER PROJECT

The list below includes the major milestones you will reach as you proceed through your two-semester project. Time lines are included for achieving each milestone, but these are only suggestions. **You and your thesis director should work out each specific due date for your own project.**

1. **Senior Thesis Application:** Students should submit their research question and a general description of the project when they apply to enroll in SOC 48009. This is a first step in your senior thesis research project. (See Appendix A for sample copy of application.)
Date Due: _____
2. **Research Questions:** A two-page summary of your research questions and an explanation of the relationships you intend to explore should be submitted to your thesis director **during the first couple of weeks of the first semester** of your senior thesis research project. The following are a few questions to be thinking about as you prepare this statement: *What are the questions and relationships you want to explore? How is your research sociological? What is the dependent variable, and what are the main independent variables? Who are the affected groups? What are the competing explanations of the issues/problems and their consequences? What are the possible methodological approaches you can employ to answer your questions?*
Date Due: _____
3. **Identification of Source of Data and Methodology:** Students should hand into their thesis directors a summary of their general research design and the source of their data, ideally **by the end of the first month of the first semester** of their senior thesis project.
Date Due: _____
4. **List of the literature to be reviewed and identification of relevant theories:** From the time they first begin to formulate their questions, students

should be looking into the empirical and theoretical work that has already been done on their topic. A compiled list of the literature to be reviewed should be submitted to your thesis director (ideally **by the end of the fifth week of the first semester**).

Date Due: _____

5. **Completed Literature Review:** A complete version of the review of the literature should be submitted to your thesis director by the end of the first semester in SOC 48009.

Date Due: _____

6. **Draft of Methods Section:** A comprehensive draft of the methods section of your report should be submitted to your director by the end of the first semester of your senior thesis capstone project.

Date Due: _____

7. **Draft of Results Section:** A good working draft of the results of your analyses should be submitted to your thesis director by the end of the first semester of your senior thesis project.

Date Due: _____

8. **Final Versions of Methods and Results Section:** These sections should be completed by the beginning of the fifth week of the **second semester** of your research project and should be submitted to your director for feedback.

Date Due: _____

9. **Final Version of Discussion Section:** This section should be completed and submitted to your director for feedback by the beginning of March or the end of October, depending on which term is the second semester of your project.

Date Due: _____

10. **Abstract:** All senior theses must include an abstract, which is a short paragraph of **150-200 words**. It should be concise and well-written. Your abstract should include the following: a statement of the research question, short description of the methodology, summary of the highlights of your results, and the main points of your conclusions and/or recommendations. Do NOT include formulas, diagrams, figures and references. Your abstract should be approved by your thesis director. This should be submitted by the second week of March or the first week of November, depending on which term is the second semester of your project.

Date Due: _____

11. **Complete Full Draft of Thesis:** A complete version of your thesis should be submitted to your director for review and feedback by **March 27, 2015**. Students completing their thesis in the Fall semester should submit a full draft to their advisor by the third Monday of November.) Students may count on

getting feedback from their directors on this version and then have time to make the necessary revisions to their work and resubmit their thesis by the semester.

12. **Format check:** Students should see the DUS for a format check when they hand in their full draft to their directors.

13. **Complete and Final Thesis:** Students must submit their theses to their respective directors by the Friday of the last full week of April (or the Friday in the first week of December) -- along with the official title page, signed by the thesis director. This final, signed version of your thesis should be handed into the DUS. Another copy of your completed thesis should be handed into your director for grading purposes.
Date Due: April 24, 2015

APPENDIX A. FACULTY AGREEMENT TO ADVISE

**FACULTY AGREEMENT TO ADVISE
SENIOR THESIS CAPSTONE PROJECT (SOC 48009)**

The senior thesis capstone project is the crowning point of the sociology major. All Sociology Majors are encouraged to participate in this challenging endeavor, yet it is required of only the students in the honors track. Students may enroll in SOC 48009 twice during their time in the major. (All honors track students must enroll in the course at least once.) A co requisite for SOC 48009 is the “Senior Thesis Workshop,” SOC 41800. Students should consult the DUS when working out the arrangements for their senior thesis capstone research project.

FALL ____ SPRING ____

AGREEMENT:

I agree to advise _____ in the Senior Thesis Capstone Project
Student Name
during _____.
Semester and Year

Research question and basic research design:

(Attach extra pages as needed)

Faculty Name
Date _____

Faculty Signature

Student Name
Date _____

Student Signature

Approved: _____ (Director of Undergraduate Studies)
Date

APPENDIX B. FORMAT FOR SENIOR THESIS TITLE PAGE (Honors Track)

TITLE ALL CAPS

CENTERED

A Senior Thesis

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Honors Track
in the Undergraduate Program
of the Department of Sociology**

by

Student Name

Faculty Name, Director

University of Notre Dame

Notre Dame, Indiana

Month, year

APPENDIX C. FORMAT FOR SENIOR THESIS TITLE PAGE (Non Honors Track)

TITLE ALL CAPS

CENTERED

A Senior Thesis

**Submitted to the
Department of Sociology**

by

Student Name

Faculty Name, Director

University of Notre Dame

Notre Dame, Indiana

Month, year

APPENDIX D. REVIEW OF HONORS TRACK REQUIREMENTS

I. Courses Required for All Sociology Majors (10 credits):

1. Soc 30900 Foundations of Sociological Theory – take as soon as possible
2. Soc 30902 Methods of Sociological Research – take as soon as possible; requires 30900
3. Soc 30903 Statistics for Sociological Research – take as soon as possible
4. Soc 33090 Sociology Proseminar (1 credit) – take as soon as possible

II. Elective Courses (21 credits):

A. Four courses at **any** level, 10000 through 40000 (for 3 credits each):

5. Soc Elective #1 _____
6. Soc Elective #2 _____
7. Soc Elective #3 _____
8. Soc Elective #4 _____

B. Three 40000 level courses (3 credits each) - at least two should be research-based:

9. Soc 40/43/48xxx _____
10. Soc 48xxx (This course should launch you in your senior thesis research project.
_____)
11. Soc 48009 Senior Thesis Capstone Project (required for at least one semester).
(N.B. Students must also enroll in co requisite, Soc 41800, Senior Thesis Workshop)

III. One Graduate Level Course for 3 credits.

12. Soc 53xxx _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF CREDITS FOR HONORS STUDENTS = 34

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