



## SENIOR ESSAY AND HONORS THESIS GUIDELINES

RELIGIOUS STUDIES MAJORS ARE REQUIRED TO COMPLETE *EITHER* A SENIOR ESSAY *OR* AN HONORS THESIS.

### *What's the difference?*

#### **SENIOR ESSAY**

A 25- to 30-page essay on a topic chosen by the student and approved by the advisor\* upon receipt of a student's proposal by the end of the *third* quarter prior to expected graduation. The character and content of the essay, which is meant to allow the student to utilize knowledge and skills learned in the course of the major, may take several forms. For example, a student may return to a subject studied earlier but now pursued with more questions or from a new perspective, or research a recent or new topic of interest in the field, or offer a carefully framed critical assessment of what has been learned in the major based on a review of influential sources, theories, and methods of studying religion. The senior essay is read and graded by the student's advisor and one other member of the Religious Studies faculty.

#### **HONORS THESIS**

A 40- to 80-page research paper on a topic chose by the student and approved by the advisor<sup>†</sup> and reviewed by the Director of Undergraduate Studies upon receipt of a proposal in the *fourth* quarter prior to expected graduation. The paper, supported by thorough acquaintance with the primary literature and secondary scholarship, advances a well-reasoned, supportable thesis. Writers of honors theses must have a grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 in Religious Studies courses, and at least 3.2 overall, and are expected to have already demonstrated success in writing research papers. The honors thesis is read and graded by the student's advisor and one other member of the Religious Studies faculty. Theses earning a grade of B+ or above receive honors.

### *Getting Started...*

As you begin to formulate your essay or thesis topic and develop a written proposal, you should be asking yourself three important questions:

1. Does my topic emerge from the coursework I've been doing in the department?
2. Does the topic in some way significantly reflect my focus of study in the major?
3. Have I found someone in the department who is both knowledgeable about and willing to direct my research and writing?

You should also be discussing your plans at length with your advisor. The choices concerning a) whether to write an honors thesis rather than a senior essay, b) what a viable topic might be, given your interests and work in religion to date, and c) which faculty member in the department might be best suited to guide you should be made in close consultation with your main advisor. Note that c) implies that the advisor of your senior project may turn out to be someone other than your regular advisor. That's fine! Just be sure to keep both advisors informed of your progress.

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\* If the thesis advisor differs from the main advisor, approvals from both advisors are required.



Finally, note the deadlines for proposals: Assuming you're on a standard four-year course of study, a copy of the Senior Essay proposal must be submitted and approved by the end of the autumn quarter senior year. Honors Thesis proposals are due (including approvals) by the end of spring quarter junior year.

### ***Getting Started...***

Students opting to write a Senior Essay will do the bulk of their work on this project during their senior year in close consultation with their advisor(s).

1. The Senior Essay must be a genuinely new piece of writing, not a revision of a paper already written for a class.
2. The proposal for the Senior Essay should be 3 pages in length, plus a bibliography of primary and secondary sources to be consulted. It need only receive approval from the advisor(s). This is due before the end of the third quarter prior to graduation. You should leave time for your advisor to review the proposal and for you to obtain the necessary signatures.
3. Students must make RELIGST 297: Senior Essay or Honors Thesis Research a part of their senior year study list (see *The Bulletin*). This is a 3- to 5- unit course consisting of supervised research devoted entirely to your essay. You may count up to 10 units of RELIGST 297 (taken over two quarters, e.g., autumn and winter senior year) toward the major. You must accrue at least 5 units of RELIGST 297. You will receive an N grade for RELIGST 297 until a grade for the essay is assigned, at which point the N will be converted to the essay grade.
4. The advisor of the Senior Essay is expected to supervise the essay at every stage. In addition, the required RELIGST 298: Senior Major's Colloquium course is a 5-unit (S/NC) course devoted to the revision, discussion, and presentation of Senior Essays and Honors Theses, offered ONLY IN THE SPRING QUARTER.
5. The final draft of the Senior Essay must be submitted no later than two weeks before the last day of the quarter in which you plan to graduate. The essay advisor and second reader in Religious Studies will assign a final grade.

### ***Going for Honors***

Assuming you satisfy the prerequisites (adequate GPA and demonstrated prior success in writing research papers) and that you have decided in consultation with your advisor to pursue an Honors Thesis, there are special steps that need to be taken to ensure your project fulfills the expectations commensurate with achieving Honors in Religious Studies.

1. Consult early with relevant faculty members (your advisor, professors who share your interests, the Director of Undergraduate Studies). *If your proposal is to be finished by the end of your junior year, winter quarter is the right time to begin thinking about a topic.*
2. Consider enrolling in RELIGST 199 for two or three units of credit during the spring quarter of your junior year. This will carve out adequate time in your study list to develop a detailed proposal with a preliminary bibliography. These units can be taken graded or CR/NC (consult with your instructor) and counted towards the total required for the major (60), even if permission to pursue Honors is not granted.



3. **By the end of your junior year**, you should have presented a statement of the proposed topic and the method of investigation—approved by both your thesis advisor and your main advisor—to the Director of Undergraduate Studies. This statement should be no less than four double-spaced pages in length and, in addition, contain a substantial bibliography of works to be consulted, together with an appended list of courses taken or to be taken that are germane to the topic. Your approved topic and signature page from your honors advisor should be submitted to the student services officer *before* the end of the quarter. Be sure to budget time for your advisor to review your proposal and for you to obtain the appropriate signatures!
4. Once your proposal has been approved, you are encouraged to take advantage of the summer Honors College, URP grants, and similar university sponsored research opportunities. Indeed, such opportunities are one reason why getting the proposal finished by the end of junior year is to your advantage.
5. Within the department, you should – indeed, *must* – avail yourself of RELIGST 297: Senior Essay or Honors Thesis Research. This is a 3- to 5-unit course consisting of supervised research devoted entirely to your thesis. You may count up to 10 units of RELIGST 297 (taken over two quarters, e.g., autumn and winter senior year) toward the major. You must accrue at least 5 such units. You will receive an N grade for RELIGST 297 until a grade for the thesis is assigned, at which point the N will be converted to the thesis grade.
6. The thesis advisor is expected to supervise the development of the Honors Thesis at every stage, a complete draft being submitted to him or her **no later than the first day of the quarter preceding graduation**. This draft will be revised in light of the advisor’s criticisms. In addition, the required RELIGST 298: Senior Major’s Colloquium is a 5-unit (S/NC) course devoted to the revision, discussion, and presentation of Honors Theses and Senior Essays OFFERED ONLY IN THE SPRING QUARTER.
7. The final draft of the Honors Thesis must be submitted **no later than the end of the second week in May prior to graduation**. The thesis advisor and second reader in Religious Studies will assign a final grade; the essay must receive a grade of “B+” or better in order to be counted as Honors.
8. Late in May the department will sponsor an Honors Thesis presentation event at which you will summarize your research for your peers and the faculty.



# SENIOR ESSAY PROPOSAL

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

LOCAL MAILING ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

SUNET ID: \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR OF EXPECTED GRADUATION: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

DEPARTMENTAL ADVISOR: \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER MAJOR(S): \_\_\_\_\_

**DECLARATION OF INTENT:**

I intend to write a Senior Essay in the Department of Religious Studies on the following topic:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Attached you will find a three-page proposal, together with a bibliography of primary and secondary sources to be consulted.

I plan to submit two copies of the final draft of the Senior Essay no later than two weeks before the last day of the quarter of my expected graduation.

SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED BY: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
(MAIN DEPARTMENTAL ADVISOR)

APPROVED BY: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
(SENIOR ESSAY ADVISOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM ABOVE)

*This form must be completed with appropriate signatures and submitted to the Undergraduate Student Services Officer before the end of the THIRD quarter prior to expected graduation.*



## HONORS THESIS PROPOSAL

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

LOCAL MAILING ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

SUNET ID: \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR OF EXPECTED GRADUATION: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

DEPARTMENTAL ADVISOR: \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER MAJOR(S): \_\_\_\_\_

STANFORD GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

RELIGST MAJOR GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

*(SEE WORKSHEET ATTACHED TO COMPUTE RELIGST GPA)*

(continue on the next page)



DECLARATION OF INTENT:

I intend to write an Honors Thesis in the Department of Religious Studies on the following topic:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Attached you will find:

1. A four-page statement of the proposed topic and the method of investigation, together with substantial bibliography of works to be consulted;
2. My transcript (unofficial is OK);
3. A paper written for a Stanford course (preferably in Religious Studies) demonstrating my ability to successfully undertake research;
4. A worksheet outlining my intended plan of study for the remainder of my junior and senior years, with the courses germane to my Honors Thesis highlighted in yellow.

I plan to submit three copies of the final draft of the Honors Thesis no later than *the end of the second week in May prior to graduation*: one for my advisor, one for a second reader to be assigned by the Director of Undergraduate Studies, and a third for the Department Library.

SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED BY: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
(MAIN DEPARTMENTAL ADVISOR)

APPROVED BY: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
(HONORS THESIS ADVISOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM ABOVE)

*This form must be completed with appropriate signatures and submitted to the Undergraduate Student Services Officer before the end of the FOURTH quarter prior to expected graduation.*



# HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR GPA

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SUNET ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade	Value
A+	4.3
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0

Grade	Value
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3

Grade	Value
D	1.0
D-	0.7
NP	0

For each Religious Studies course, write the value and the number of units in the column below. Multiply the "Grade Value" of each grade by the "Number of Units" and write in the "Grade Points" column.

(Grade Value × Units = Grade Points)

Course	Grade	Grade Value	Number of Units	Grade Points
Sample: RS 101	A-	3.7	4.00	14.8

Total RELIGST GPA = (Grade Points) ÷ (Total # Units)

RELIGST GPA: \_\_\_\_\_