Undergraduate Program - Writing a Thesis

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Writing a Thesis

Department Timeline of Thesis Preparation

The thesis writer and adviser should agree on a working schedule which will adequately conform to the calendar of thesis requirements established by the Senior Thesis Adviser. An updated schedule of departmental dates and deadlines relative to the thesis will be available by the beginning of each Fall Term. Primary concentrators undertaking a thesis shall enroll in HAA 99A and B for course (and requirement) credit. Joint concentrators will enroll in the 99 course of their primary concentration.

Overseen by the Senior Thesis Adviser, “HAA 99A - The Senior Thesis Seminar” will meet several times during the semester for two-hour sessions devoted to facilitating the preparation and writing of a thesis. These sessions will cover such topics as compiling a bibliography, using archives, the use of key technology and software, and constructing and presenting an effective argument. Late in the semester, each participant will deliver a twenty-minute presentation on his or her thesis topic, illustrated with digitally projected images. All departmental faculty and students will be invited to these presentations. By the end of the semester, each participant in the seminar will submit a complete first draft of the thesis, complete with illustrations.

Key Dates

Please consult the HAA 99A Canvas site for additional details

- Initial Meeting and Proposals (Rising Seniors): February. Junior concentrators will be contacted by the Undergraduate Program Coordinator in early February to set up an introduction to the senior thesis writing process. By early April, you will be asked to submit a basic proposal outlining your ideas, along with preferences for your thesis adviser. Advisers will be assigned by the faculty at the April Faculty Honors Meeting.
- Application for Pulitzer and Abramson Travel Grants (Rising Seniors): Early April. See Undergraduate Prizes, Grants and Opportunities for details on grant and applications. Information on how to apply will be provided by the Undergraduate Program Coordinator in late February/early March
- Announcement of Pulitzer and Abramson Grant Awards (Rising Seniors): Mid-April. By email letter to the recipients.
- Adviser’s Review: Early March. Ideally, you should present the full, finished and finalized draft of your text to your adviser for a final review before formal submission to the Department.
- Thesis Submission: A week before Spring Break. The day after submission, you are invited to attend the Thesis Reception. In exchange for your finely crafted magnum opus, you will receive a glass of champagne and our heartiest congratulations. Please be sure to submit prior to the deadline because late submissions are typically not accepted.
- Reader’s Response: Mid-late April. Senior Honors Theses are read and critiqued by Members of the Faculty and the Museum at the request of the Senior Thesis Adviser. Readers' identities no longer remain anonymous.
- Faculty Meeting on Honors: Mid April. Department Faculty meet to vote on final honors recommendations, after which thesis writers will receive by email from the Senior Thesis Adviser notification of their thesis grade and recommendation for honors. Writers will also receive at this time the written responses of their readers. Students should speak with their Allston Burr Senior Tutor for anticipated final honors decision of the College.
- Senior Thesis Poster: Mid April. All senior thesis writers are expected to prepare a digital file for a 24x36” poster summarizing the thesis to be exhibited in the HAA department for 2022-23. A suggested template will be provided and a workshop will be held in late March for assistance with poster preparation.

Grading of the Senior Thesis

Theses are read and critiqued by faculty members applying a higher standard than expected for work written in courses or tutorials. Faculty do make use of the full range of grades, and students should consider that any honors grade is a distinction of merit. If you have any questions, please contact the Senior Thesis Adviser, the Director of Undergraduate Studies, or the Undergraduate Program Coordinator at 617 495 2465
SUMMA CUM LAUDE: A summa thesis is a work of "highest honor." It is a contribution to knowledge, though it need not be an important contribution. It reveals a promise of high intellectual attainments both in selection of problems and facts for consideration and in the manner in which conclusions are drawn from these facts. A summa thesis includes, potentially at least, the makings of a publishable article. The writer's use of sources and data is judicious. The thesis is well written and proofread. The arguments are concise and logically organized, and the allocation of space appropriate. A summa is not equivalent to just any A, but the sort given by instructors who reserve them for exceptional merit. A summa minus is a near miss at a summa and is also equivalent to an A of unusual quality.

MAGNA CUM LAUDE: A magna level thesis is a work worthy of "great honor." It clearly demonstrates the capacity for a high level of achievement, is carried through carefully, and represents substantial industry. A magna plus thesis achieves a similar level of quality to a summa in some respects, though it falls short in others; it is equivalent to the usual type of A. A magna thesis is equivalent to an A-. For a magna minus, the results achieved may not be quite a successful due to an unhappy choice of topic or approach; it is also equivalent to an A-.

CUM LAUDE: As is appropriate for a grade "with honors," a cum level thesis shows serious thought and effort in its general approach, if not in every detail. A cum plus is equivalent to a B+, a cum to a B, and a cum minus to a B-. The cum thesis does not merely represent the satisfactory completion of a task. It is, however, to be differentiated from the magna in the difficulty of the subject handled, the substantial nature of the project, and the success with which the subject is digested. Recall that, as students putting extraordinary effort into a thesis most frequently receive a magna, theses of a solid but not exceptional quality deserve a grade in the cum range. When expressed in numerical equivalents, the interval between a magna minus and a cum minus is double that between the other intervals on the grading scale.

NO DISTINCTION: Not all theses automatically deserve honors. Nevertheless, a grade of no distinction (C, D, or E) should be reserved only for those circumstances when the thesis is hastily constructed, a mere summary of existing material, or is poorly thought through. The high standards which are applied in critique of theses must clearly be violated for a thesis to merit a grade of no distinction.

Examples of Past Theses
Senior Honors Theses which are written by students who graduate Summa or Magna are deposited in the University Archives in Pusey Library. Copies of theses which are awarded the Hoopes Prize are held in Lamont Library. Students are urged to consult past theses as much can be gained in exploring precedent or seeking inspiration.

Discontinuance of a Thesis
The process of writing the thesis is a serious commitment of time and energy for both the writer and the adviser. In some cases, however, it might be agreed that the thesis should be discontinued at mid-year. The Senior Tutorial HAA 99 may be divided with credit through a procedure in which the student must submit a written paper presenting the project and research to that point.

Guidelines for Writers and Advisers of Senior Theses
Senior Concentrators wishing to graduate with honors in the Department must write a senior thesis and carry academic standing of Group II or better, with a minimum GPA of 3.00 in concentration grades. In deciding whether one wishes to fulfill the honors requirements the student should consider his/her academic interests, commitment to independent research and other deadlines and obligations during the thesis year. Many students find the task of researching and writing a substantial piece of critical scholarship interesting and rewarding, but others find the senior thesis can become a frustrating and unwieldy burden. Some students prefer the freedom to savor extra-curricular pursuits during their last year at the College unhindered by the encroaching demands of thesis preparation. In general, it may be remarked that students are unlikely to do well in the honors program who are not already committed to this process of scholarship, and proven practiced writers; the senior thesis is not the place to acquire basic skills in writing and research. In considering the Department's honors requirements, it should be remembered that students with honors grades overall may graduate with University Honors (Cum Laude) even if they do not receive Honors in History of Art and Architecture.

Academic Requirements
The writing and evaluation of the thesis is a year-long process, during which the writer meets at scheduled intervals with his/her adviser, to formulate, develop, and ultimately refine their thesis work. The Department has also instituted a "thesis writing seminar" (HAA 99A) which writers will participate in through the fall term. The thesis is due just before spring break and is then sent to its readers for their judgment and critique. The final thesis grade and recommendation for honors is determined at a faculty meeting in mid-April. Students working towards a March degree will follow a schedule to finish the thesis in early December.

The Department encourages seniors to think broadly and explore a problem of interest. The thesis topic does not necessarily have to be within the writer's declared major field, except when required for a joint concentration, in which case, the topic must address an issue shared by both concentrations. The thesis should demonstrate an ability to pose a meaningful question, present a well-reasoned and structured argument, and marshal appropriate evidence. The student should apply a clear methodology and be aware of the assumptions behind the argument, the possible deficiencies of the sources and data used, and the implications of the conclusions. The various parts of the thesis should cohere in an integrated argument; the thesis should not be a series of loosely connected short essays. A primary expectation of the thesis is that it is a work of independent scholarship, directed and crafted by the student, with the thesis adviser serving in a capacity of "indirect overseeing of the project".

There is no set pattern for an acceptable thesis. The writer should demonstrate familiarity with scholarly methods in the use of sources, but this should not be the sole criterion for evaluation. Of equal if not greater importance is the development of the central argument and the significance of the interpretation. A thesis may be research on a little-studied problem or a perceptive reassessment of a familiar question. A well-pondered and well-presented interpretive essay may be as good a thesis as a miniature dissertation.

Skill in exposition is a primary objective, and pristine editing is expected. The department encourages writers to keep to a short page count, so as to craft a clear, concise paper, and further edit it to an exemplary presentation. In general, a History of Art and Architecture thesis will have a text ranging from 20,000 to 25,000 words. Students are encouraged to explore the resources available to thesis writers at the Harvard College Writing Center.

The writer must indicate the source of material drawn from others' work, whether quoted or summarized. Students who, for whatever reason, submit work either not their own or without clear attribution to its sources will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including requirement to withdraw from the College.
Final Submission Requirements

Students are expected to submit their thesis to the Undergraduate Program Coordinator by the specified deadline. Late submissions will not be expected. Students are expected to format their thesis using the guidelines outlined here.

Senior Thesis Adviser

The process of taking honors and writing the thesis in this Department is overseen for all concentrators by the Senior Thesis Adviser. The Senior Thesis Adviser leads the Fall Term thesis-writing seminar (HAA 99A) and directs the meetings for departmental approval once theses have been submitted. The Undergraduate Program Coordinator holds examples of the written requirements (thesis proposal and prospectus) and of the Pulitzer, and Abramson Grant application which students might wish to consult as paradigms.

Thesis Adviser

Students must seek a thesis adviser who is a full faculty member of the History of Art and Architecture Department or museum curator holding a teaching appointment in this department. The adviser ought to serve as a critic of your synthesized ideas and writings, rather than as a director of your work. The adviser should be chosen with consideration more to compatibility in overseeing the process of the work than to being an expert in the field. Prospective advisers should be approached as soon as you have identified a thesis topic. You should be prepared to show examples of your written work to your prospective adviser. Your verbal agreement with your adviser should be communicated promptly to the Senior Thesis Adviser. If you have trouble identifying an appropriate adviser, please consult with the Senior Thesis Adviser before the deadline for the Thesis Proposal.

Graduate students in the Department of History of Art and Architecture do not advise Senior Theses.

Thesis Readers

Each thesis will have two readers chosen by the Department, ideally, but not exclusively, one from within the student’s area of interest, and the thesis adviser. All readers will be asked to submit written comments and grades, which will be factored equally to produce the final grade of the thesis. Individual grades are not released. When grades and comments are distributed, the readers no longer remain anonymous. There exists a procedure by which a writer may request, via the Senior Thesis Adviser, to speak with a reader provided that they are willing to discuss the work in further detail or expound on the written critique.

For joint concentrators, the department will defer the reading process to their primary concentration. Students should reach out to their adviser in their primary concentration for further information.

Grade Report and Honors Recommendation

At the end of each term, Fall and Spring, the student's progress in the Senior Tutorial (HAA 99) will be graded SAT or UNSAT. At the end of the Department's Honors Review process, the Senior Thesis Adviser calculates a recommendation for Honors based on the factored grades of the thesis and the student's grades in concentration coursework. This recommendation is presented to the faculty at their meeting in April for review. A faculty vote is taken and this decision is passed as an honors recommendation to the Registrar of the College. For joint concentrators, the faculty will make recommendations to a student’s primary concentration but will defer the final grading process to them. The decision of Final Honors to be granted on the degree is made by the Registrar based on departmental recommendation and the student’s College-GPA. Students should consult with their Allston Burr Senior Tutor to determine what final honors might be anticipated at Commencement.

The needs of the Department for fair deliberation dictate that there may be no report of decisions regarding the thesis until after the Faculty has considered and voted upon each recommendation for honors. After honors recommendations have been voted by the faculty, students will be notified of the department's recommendation to the College and will receive an ungraded copy of each evaluation of their thesis (the needs of the Department for fair deliberation dictates that there may be no report of decisions regarding the thesis until after the Departmental Honors Meeting). The comments in these evaluations should provide the student with a clear explanation of the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, bearing in mind the difficulties of the field and the type of thesis submitted, and evaluating what was accomplished in terms of what was undertaken, given the student's limitation of time and experience.

Senior Thesis Design Projects, Honors Consideration

Summary

The HAA Architecture Track asks Harvard College students to select an Area of Emphasis for fulfillment of their degree - either Design Studies or History + Theory. The History + Theory Area of Emphasis has traditionally required the completion of a senior thesis paper and presentation as a product of two requirements in order for the student to be eligible for honors consideration: 1) completion of course HAA 99a Senior Thesis Tutorial and 2) discussion of a thesis topic to be studied in said course supported through advisement by History of Art and Architecture faculty over the fall and spring semesters of senior year.

The Design Studies Area of Emphasis orients students toward making-based design courses wherein students develop design experiments engaging disciplinary issues, often incorporating both historical and contemporary architectural precedents. The primary courses currently offered that address thinking through making include: HAA 179x Tectonics Lab (fall), HAA 92r Design Speculations (fall), HAA 96a Transformations (spring), and HAA 96b Connections (spring). An increasing number of Harvard College students who have selected the Design Studies Area of Emphasis are interested in extending their architectural design focus to their conclusive senior year work via ‘creative thesis’ projects. These creative thesis projects would include a hybrid of written text and visual and physical design materials originally produced by the student.

This proposal outlines a draft course requirement guideline and set of final submission requirements for a senior thesis design project that aims to support the design and making-based methodologies as thesis research on a topic of interest while simultaneously paralleling the well-conceived course requirements of the traditional thesis paper and presentation within HAA. This proposal offers that through the requirements outlined here, this senior thesis design project could be eligible for honors consideration for any student pursuing this final thesis option.
**Course Requirements for Honors Consideration**

**Senior Year – Fall Term**

1. **HAA 92r Design Speculations Seminar – required**
   a. Course prerequisite: Completion of either HAA 96A (“Transformations”) or HAA 96B (“Connections”) studios.
   b. This course requires students secure a pair of faculty advisers - one from Harvard History of Art and Architecture (HAA) faculty and one from the Harvard GSD to support their research work within the course; course faculty advisers would serve as advising faculty for senior thesis design project.
   c. Megan Panzano, GSD Arch Studies Director, and Jennifer Roberts, HAA DUS, would both help make faculty adviser connections for students pursuing this path.

2. **HAA 99a Senior Thesis Tutorial (fall) – auditing this seminar is encouraged in parallel with HAA 92r, but not required.**

3. Presentation of design work to History of Art and Architecture and select GSD faculty as part of HAA Thesis Colloquium in December – required

**Senior Year – Spring Term**

1. *Throughout the semester: Advising meetings* with individual faculty advisers to guide production and iterative refinement of design work including digital images and written text as a single PDF file (see "Submission Requirements for Honors Consideration").

2. **March 06, 2023: Submission of final senior thesis design project** including digital images and written text as a single PDF file (see "Submission Requirements for Honors Consideration").

3. **March 31, 2023: Participation in a gallery-style final presentation with faculty and peers after submission of thesis.** The design presentations for the gallery-style event should include an updated digital presentation comprised of the project title, author’s name, the most current versions of all elements listed below in the Final Project Requirements (with the exception of the Written Manifesto which should be consolidated to a single slide containing 3-4 sentences of a thesis statement capturing the topic of study, a position on this topic, your claim about design agency to address this topic, and specifically, what design elements you’ve explored in your thesis in this address). Students may elect to also print or plot selected original design drawings they produced (analytical or projective) from their digital presentation to pin up in the space. Likewise, students are encouraged to bring any sketch and/or final models they have created to display as well.

4. **April 10, 2023: Preparation of a digital file for a 24x36” poster summarizing the thesis to be exhibited in the HAA department for 2022-23.** A suggested template will be provided and a workshop will be held on March 28 (2023) for assistance with poster preparation.

**Submission Requirements for Filing of Design Thesis Project (due March 06, 2023)**

A single multi-page PDF file labeled with student’s full last name and first initial should be submitted. It should contain the following elements and should incorporate thesis research and design work from both fall and spring terms.

1. **Visual Bibliography** (visual project references with annotated description)
   a. Assemble a visual bibliography of references for your research project. The references included should be sorted into categories of your own authoring in relation to the research. Each reference should be appropriately cited using the Chicago Manual of Style, and each reference should also include an affiliated image. The bibliography should include a brief (approx. 200-word) annotation, describing the rationale behind the sorted categories.

2. **Written Manifesto** (text describing specific research focus and the role of design in its address)
   - **Discourse:** the role and significance of architecture relative to the project topic of interest, and
   - **Context:** the relationship of the project topic to broader surroundings which include but are not limited to the discipline of architecture, cultural contexts, technical developments and/or typologies.
   a. A written design manifesto of approximately 2000 words that concisely articulates the issues, problems, and questions embedded in and engaged by your research project. The manifesto should address:
   b. The final 2000-word statement should reflect deeply upon the character of the design process for the project, and discuss how the design process reinforced, inflected, or complicated the initial research questions. For most students, this final 2000-word statement will be an elaboration upon the presentation text prepared for the fall senior thesis colloquium. The final text should capture and discuss the design elements that were further explored in the spring term as means to address initial research questions (i.e. include written descriptions of the drawings and/or physical models produced in relation to the thesis topic).

3. **Visual Method(s) Diagram** (description of design methodology for research)
   a. A visual drawing or info-graphic that describes the process of design research undertaken for your topic. This should include the initial criteria developed for evaluating the project, the steps taken in examining the topic, the points in the process where it became necessary to stop and assess outputs and findings, and final adjustments to the methodology as the project neared completion.

4. **High resolution drawings, animations, and/or diagrams and photographs of physical models** (if applicable) that were produced through research. These should be assembled in single-page layouts of slides to follow preceding elements listed here.