



NELC

Harvard University
Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

*A Guide to the
Senior Honors Thesis
2014-2015*

**THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University**

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	2
II.	2014-2015 Calendar of Deadlines and Events	3
III.	Prospectus Guidelines	4
IV.	Preliminary Outline Guidelines	6
V.	Chapter Guidelines	7
VI.	Contents and Style Guidelines	8
VII.	Format and Submission Guidelines	10
VIII.	Evaluation	12
IX.	Advising Resources	13

**THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University**

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

I. Introduction

The thesis is an essay that affords the student in this concentration an opportunity to deal in a thorough way with a topic in the field of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations that is significant and of particular interest to him or her. In selecting a topic students should keep in mind both of these criteria and also the fact that the paper should be an example of what the word *essay* means: a careful effort to develop and test the writer's analytical and interpretative powers. The honors thesis is not to be a small-scale Ph.D. dissertation. In other words, a thorough command of the topic is not expected, but rather a sustained critical reflection on an issue or text.

The subject matter of the theses will naturally vary widely, by virtue of the nature of the field of specialization. In every case, the subject should be specific enough to allow for depth of treatment. At the same time, however, it should not be so narrowly and technically construed as to allow the writer to lose sight of its relations to broader issues in the study of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. Approval of the topic will be based upon its cogency and its suitability as subject matter for a senior honors thesis in the field of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.

All concentrators are expected to designate the area or the general topic of the thesis in May of their Junior year. A prospectus approved and signed by the senior thesis advisor is due by the middle of October of the Senior year. Primary concentrators will also submit a summary of the thesis, including a detailed chapter outline in mid-November and a draft of one chapter of the thesis in mid-December in order to receive a "Satisfactory" for Near Eastern Civilizations 99. A draft of a second chapter is due during the third week of the second semester. The completed thesis is due the Friday before Spring Recess in the Senior Year. 5 p.m. is the deadline on each of these dates for submission of the appropriate material in the offices of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.

**THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University**

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

II. Calendar of Deadlines and Events for 2014-2015

October 8, by 5 p.m.:

A 1-2 page prospectus of the thesis, approved and signed by the thesis advisor, along with a bibliography and tentative title.

November 11, by 5 p.m.:

A 6-page summary of the thesis, including preliminary, yet detailed overviews or outlines of each chapter; OR a 6-8 page draft of some portion of the thesis.

December 12, by 5 p.m.:

A 12-15 page draft of one chapter of the thesis, along with the latest title.

February 10, by 5 p.m.:

A 12-15 page draft of a second chapter of the thesis, along with the latest title.

March 13, by 5 p.m.:

Three bound copies of the thesis. Thesis length: 50-80 pages (based on double-spaced 12-point type). This is equivalent to approximately 12,500-25,500 words.

March 31 – April 9:

A 1 ½ to 2 hour oral examination of the thesis with members of the department. Part of the examination will focus on a discussion of the student's overall program of study within the department.

Please note: These dates apply for May degree candidates only.

**THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University**

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

III. Prospectus Guidelines

Due 5:00 p.m., October 8, 2014

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines a prospectus as "something (as a statement or situation) that forecasts the course or nature of something not yet existent or developed." As you begin to draft your prospectus, keep in mind that the purpose of this document is to provide yourself and your advisors with a statement of your intentions for your thesis; a kind of road-map or blueprint for your project. A prospectus is, by definition, a forecasting tool for a work in progress – it is neither final nor immutable.

Your senior thesis prospectus should include the following elements:

1. a tentative thesis title
2. a 1-2 page statement of the thesis topic, argument and methodology
3. a preliminary bibliography of 2-3 pages
4. a signature of approval by your thesis advisor

Your prospectus should introduce the topic of your thesis and explain why the subject you have chosen is significant to you. A helpful way to begin thinking about your thesis, as well as to begin your thesis prospectus, is to formulate a question with which you plan to grapple in your thesis.

Formulating your topic as a question, or series of questions also sets you up to discuss how you propose to go about researching and answering these queries. Although it is likely that you do not have a fully formulated thesis statement at this stage of the process, you should indicate how you intend to undertake the research that will help you to make an argument about the issues you have raised. What methodologies, or approaches will you take in your research? Will your project be based upon close, textual analysis? Will you be conducting ethnographic interviews? Will you be observing rituals? Comparing various historical phenomena? These are the kinds of questions you will want to ask yourself as you draft your prospectus.

The prospectus should also indicate how your thesis topic and the questions it generates relate to broader issues in the study of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. What kind of contribution to the field of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations do you hope to make? What conversations within the diverse field of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations will your project participate in? What kind of voice do you want to speak in? What kind of an argument do you hope to make—analytical? theological? ethical? historical? sociological? Please remember that these categories are only suggestions, and certainly not exhaustive or mutually exclusive.

Additional questions that you may find helpful as you formulate your prospectus include:

Are you beginning with a question that is unresolved? What puzzles you? What do you want to find out?

Do you care about the question? Are you clear about what you are asking? What observations have led you to ask this question? What hunches do you have about possible answers?

Is the topic interesting? What interests you about it? Can it be made interesting to others?

Can the topic be researched? How can it be researched? What kinds of information are needed to answer the questions posed?

Does the topic present problems that can be explored or solved with analysis? Does it provide you with an opportunity to do some creative or original thinking?

**THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University**

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

IV. Preliminary Outline Guidelines

Due 5:00 p.m., November 11, 2014

This assignment differs from the thesis prospectus in several ways. First, it is assumed that you have undertaken a significant amount of research since writing the prospectus. Perhaps your research has led you to question the assumptions you stated in your prospectus, or even to modify your argument entirely. This assignment provides you with an opportunity to begin to think through (in written form) how you will use the data you are collecting in your research to support, and perhaps to reformulate, the argument of your thesis. Second, this assignment should include preliminary, yet detailed overviews or outlines of each chapter that you envision. The goal of this requirement is to help you to begin the process of organizing your research in a coherent manner.

You may structure this 6-page assignment in the format that seems most suitable to you. You may wish to submit an alpha-numeric outline; or, you may choose to submit a narrative overview; or, you may submit a graphically-structured flow chart! In any case, your submission must include detailed, thoughtful content that helps you and your advisors to begin to envision the thesis in its final form. Please pay close attention, however, to the word “preliminary.” While the purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to begin thinking systematically about your data and your argument, we do not expect or require that the final draft of your thesis conform to this preliminary outline.

Although you are highly encouraged to try to organize your initial thoughts in outline form, we recognize that some students do not find outlines to be useful writing tools. Therefore you may submit, if you prefer, a 6 to 8 page draft of some portion of your thesis. If you choose this option, the draft you submit must present a coherent, focused, and structured argument that is supported by appropriate citations and evidence. Since the piece you submit will not represent an entire chapter, please indicate how it fits into your overall argument as you currently envision it. Additionally, please be aware that if you choose this option, you may not count this submission towards the page-requirement for later chapter-draft submissions. In other words, if you choose to build upon the 6 to 8 pages you submit in November and include them in a future chapter-draft, you will need to compose an additional 12-15 pages in order to meet the requirement for that submission. (Example: if you turn in 8 pages in November, and include these same 8 pages in your first chapter draft, due December 12, your December submission will need to be at least 20 pages in length).

**THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University**

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

V. Chapter Guidelines

First Chapter Draft due 5:00 p.m., December 12, 2014

Second Chapter Draft due 5:00 p.m., February 10, 2015

Each chapter draft must present a coherent, focused, and structured argument that is supported by appropriate citations and analysis. Your submissions should represent carefully considered and researched drafts of the more polished arguments that you will produce in the final thesis. Free-writing, though very helpful in the process of producing these assignments, is not appropriate in this context.

If you do not envision your submission as a self-contained chapter, please preface your draft with a description of how the piece fits into your overall argument as you currently envision it and what possible structures you are considering for that overall argument.

Please remember, however, that a *draft* is, by definition, preliminary. We do not expect these submissions to be in their final form, and assume that you will revise your work throughout the thesis-writing process. Additionally, these drafts need not follow a rigid chapter-by-chapter progression. For example, you may choose to submit a draft of what will ultimately become your third chapter at the first deadline.

Each chapter draft should be roughly 12-15 pages, although you may submit longer drafts if you desire.

THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

VI. Content and Style Guidelines

Format The thesis has three parts: *preliminaries*, *text*, and *back matter*. The *title page*, a *table of contents*, and a very brief *preface* (or simply *acknowledgments*) are ordinarily the only necessary *preliminaries*. The *text* is the thesis itself. The *back matter* comprises: (1) the *bibliography*, which is always necessary; and (2) *appendices* (including *glossaries*, *charts*, *indices*, *maps*, etc.) when they are needed. The bibliography may take one of several appropriate forms, but it should always include full bibliographic information on every important source used in the preparation of the thesis. Whenever you make use of a book or other source—not simply when quoting directly from a text—you should include it in the bibliography.

Style Good theses not only present illuminating and original arguments, they do so in lucid language and polished prose. Attention to the quality of your prose style should not be reserved for the final stages of editing the thesis; be sure to take into account issues of style as you are drafting and revising your essay, as well. Since you are devoting the better part of a year to examining and writing about a specific area of interest, you owe it to yourself to employ language that reflects your understanding of and enthusiasm for your topic. Please recognize, however, that you are addressing an audience that may not share your degree of expertise on your topic; be careful to avoid jargon and to define clearly any technical terms that you feel are crucial to your argument.

In the final stages of editing, be particularly attuned to misspellings, typographical and grammatical errors, and insufficient or inaccurate documentation. Errors of this kind, while they do not necessarily reflect the amount of work that has gone into the thesis, will distract your reader from the substance of your argument and suggest that the argument is as sloppy as the prose in which it is conveyed.

Style
Manuals: Several publications offer help in matters of form and style. With regard to the details of style and presentation of the thesis, one approved manual should be chosen and used consistently in determining the format of citations, bibliography, and other stylistic elements. *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White (4th edition, 2000) is a useful starting point. *The Chicago Manual of Style* is the most common citation and style guide in publications concerning religion. Unless another style is preferred in your sub-field, it should serve as the basic reference for your citation system and basic questions of form. A shorter work based on the Chicago manual and available in paperback is *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, by Kate L. Turabian. Again, whatever style you choose to employ, use it consistently throughout the thesis.

Notes and Citations

A footnote or endnote supplies the reader with a reference to the source(s) of factual information, specific ideas, or direct quotations used in the text of the thesis. A note may also provide supplemental information that is relevant but tangential to your argument. The tendency of many writers is to use the first kind of note too sparingly, and the latter kind too much. The rule for the former is simple: any passage or idea that is not your own should be credited to its source. To do otherwise is to plagiarize. As to the use of notes for supplemental information, the discretion of the writer must suffice. Note, however, that the value of a piece of scholarship is not judged by the length and abundance of its notes. And recall that discursive endnotes are difficult to follow while reading the main text. If particular information is necessary to the argument, incorporate it into the main text. For guidelines on notation, see the manuals described above.

Direct Quotation

Direct citations from other sources must be treated with the utmost care and precision. To misquote someone else is a serious fault in any kind of writing. Every direct quotation must be reproduced exactly as it stands in the original. Except where integration of a quotation in your own sentence structure requires a change of type-case or end punctuation, the capitalization and punctuation in the quoted passage must be carefully reproduced. Italics in the original must be retained in your quotation. When using ellipsis to eliminate unneeded words or phrases from a quoted passage, be sure not to change or misrepresent the original author's intention and meaning. Any addition to a quoted passage must be enclosed in brackets (not parentheses).

Foreign Words and Phrases

Foreign words and phrases should be underlined or italicized. Passages in foreign languages should be given in English translation when used in the text. If the translation is not your own, the translator must be acknowledged. When it is important to do so, the text in its original language and wording should be given in a note either in transliteration or in the appropriate script.

Illustrations and Photographs

Illustrations in a thesis may include graphs, charts, maps, line drawings, or photographs. These illustrations are normally placed on separate pages, with their legend typed either beneath the figure or on the front or back of the preceding page. Pages of illustrations and figures should be interleaved with the text of the thesis. If illustrations, as in the case of photographs, need to be mounted on the page, a good quality commercial paste or dry-mounting adhesive should be used. Like citations from other sources, illustrations must be credited to the appropriate sources.

THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

VII. Format and Submission Guidelines

- Length The minimum length is 12,500 words (50 pages in double-spaced, 12 point type). The maximum length is 25,500 words (80 pages in double-spaced, 12 point type). Theses should be produced on a laser printer or an inkjet printer with a print quality of at least 600 dpi (i.e., letter-quality). The font used should produce between 9 and 12 characters per inch. These limits refer to the preliminaries and main text of the thesis, excluding endnotes and back matter such as appendices and bibliography. Within these limits, the length of the thesis should be determined by the demands of the particular topic. No thesis may fall outside of these limits without prior permission from the DUS.
- Copies A PDF of the thesis plus two hardcopies on 8 1/2 inch by 11 inch paper, 20 lb. (or higher), acid-neutral, 25% rag (or higher), non-corrasable bond paper (the University Archives recommends Howard Permalife or Crane's Thesis Paper) are required. The hardcopies must be submitted in either a spring binder or a clamp binder (no ring binders are acceptable.) Paper and binders are available at Bob Slate Stationers and Staples. The title of the thesis and name of the author should appear on a label firmly fixed to the front cover and the spine of each binder. The writer should retain a copy of the thesis for him- or herself. All theses that received grades of *magna* or *summa* will be placed in the University Archives. The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations will keep a copy of every thesis, regardless of the grade received. If the thesis is to be entered in competition for a prize, additional copies should be prepared.
- Format The thesis should be typed on one side of the page, double-spaced (except for indented quotation and foot- or endnotes) with margins of 1 inch at the top, bottom, and on the right hand side, and 1 1/2 inch on the left hand side. Notes should be placed either at the bottom of the page (footnotes) or altogether at the end of the essay (endnotes). All pages should be numbered: preliminary matter with Roman numerals, and the remainder of the thesis, beginning with the first page of the Introduction and continuing to the last page of the bibliography, with Arabic numerals. The title page should conform exactly to the following model:

[TITLE]

A Thesis Presented

By

[Full name, including middle name, of author]

To

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

[Harvard University]

[month and year of submission of the completed thesis]

THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

VIII. Evaluation of the Thesis

Thesis
Evaluation
Committee The thesis evaluation committee consists of the thesis readers. There are usually three readers of the thesis: the faculty thesis advisor, a scholar not directly involved in the student's sub-discipline, and a faculty member with a special interest in the subject matter of the thesis. The graduate student thesis advisor may also serve a third reader for the thesis. Seniors are encouraged to suggest possible readers for their theses. The final choice of readers, however, is subject to approval by the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Evaluation Theses will be read and commented on by faculty members, as well as by the graduate student advisor if she or he is serving as a reader. Readers' comments will be made available to the student prior to the oral examination. Theses will be graded on a scale of *cum laude* (minus or plus), *magna cum laude* (minus or plus), and *summa cum laude* (minus). The range from *summa cum laude* to *cum laude* minus corresponds to the letter grade range of A plus to B minus (B minus being the lowest honors grade).

A *summa* essay (*summa*, *summa* minus) is equivalent to an A plus. It should make a significant contribution to knowledge; whether it presents successful research on a new or little studied problem, or provides an original and perceptive reassessment of familiar questions, it should be a contribution that a scholar in the field would feel compelled to cite in his or her own work. While a *summa* thesis does not necessarily have to be in publishable form in its current state, it should show a thorough command of the literature on the subject, rely on appropriate primary sources, be well-written, provide a concise, well-organized argument, and offer first-rate creative thinking with respect to the problem(s) it addresses. A *summa* essay is expected to include work with texts in the original languages.

A *magna*-range essay (*magna* plus, *magna*, *magna* minus) is equivalent to an A or A minus. It is an excellent piece of undergraduate work, showing original research, strong writing skills, a well-crafted argument, incisive and creative thinking, and a good grasp of the issues at stake. A *magna* essay is expected to include work with texts in the original languages.

A *cum*-range essay is equivalent to a B (*cum* plus = B plus, *cum* = B, *cum* minus = B minus). A *cum*-range thesis, considered worthy of "honor," must show serious thought and effort.

THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
Harvard University

THE SENIOR HONORS THESIS

XI. Advising Resources

Senior Thesis Advisors By the end of the junior year, a student should have a general topic for the senior thesis, and some idea of who might best guide him or her in the research and writing of the thesis. We advise students to speak with possible thesis advisors near the end of their junior year and, if possible, to line up a thesis advisor for the senior year. The Director of Undergraduate Studies will be glad to advise students regarding possible thesis advisors. Senior thesis advisors should normally be members of the Harvard faculty or advanced graduate students. We strongly recommend that students find both a graduate student advisor and a faculty advisor.

During the senior year, students are expected to meet at least once every two weeks with their thesis advisor(s) to discuss work-in-progress. In general, students meet with their graduate student advisors weekly, and their faculty advisors approximately monthly. The faculty advisor often assumes the role of “expert in the field,” helping the student to determine how his or her thesis contributes to current scholarship and identifying relevant secondary literature with which the student ought to be familiar. The graduate student advisor often serves as a conversation partner who helps the student to focus and communicate her or his arguments through weekly dialogue and through commenting on written drafts.

Senior Tutorial: Near Eastern Civilizations 99 The Senior Tutorial is a year-long tutorial, graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory, which culminates in the completion and submission of the senior honors thesis. In order to receive a “satisfactory” in Near Eastern Civilizations 99 for the fall term, a student must submit a thesis prospectus, a preliminary outline or a 6-8 page draft of some portion of the thesis, as well as one chapter of the senior thesis to the Director of Undergraduate Studies by the stipulated due dates. Submission and acceptance of the senior thesis in March fulfills the NEC 99 requirement for the spring term.

Other Professors Students may also find it helpful to discuss their thesis topics and progress with other professors in related fields of study. Although Harvard faculty are quite busy, undergraduate education is the core of the activity of the University. Don’t hesitate to make an appointment with a faculty member to discuss your ideas or to ask for reading recommendations.

Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) Khaled El-Rouayheb, 617-495-1681 is willing to discuss any general questions or problems related to the creation of a senior thesis.

- Libraries and Reference Librarians You may need to reacquaint yourself with the many Harvard Libraries, their holdings, their layout, and their personnel. The obvious choices are Widener and Lamont. You would be wise to introduce yourself, and your senior thesis topic, to Cheryl LaGuardia, research librarian for Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. She will be happy to be on the lookout for materials that pertain to your thesis topic and research. She is also familiar with the very numerous and diverse databases and other resources available on-line through Hollis, important research tools that are constantly being augmented.
- The Writing Center The Writing Center offers individual consultations to senior thesis writers on an occasional or regular basis. The Writing Center advisors address the research and (especially) writing needs of thesis writers. Although they are not experts in your specific field, they offer invaluable advice on writing strategies. Check out their website: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/> or contact them directly: (617) 495-1655.
- Bureau of Study Counsel “How do you do some original thinking on a topic like the impact of Newtonian synthesis...” “How can I learn if I'm not motivated?” “I'd like to change my habit of procrastination.” “I need to read more quickly.” “I'm feeling really stressed.” These are only a few of the hundreds of issues that the counselors at the Bureau of Study Counsel deal with. Feel free to approach anyone at the Bureau with any question of concern. You may initially want to speak with Sheila Reindl, who has worked with seniors involved in thesis writing. The Bureau has a large staff of counselors who deal with a broad range of issues. The website for the Bureau is: <http://bsc.harvard.edu> or call: (617) 495-2581.
- Committee on the Use of Human Subjects as Research If your research will involve living human subjects, you may need prior approval by application from the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects as Research (CUHS). To determine whether your research may or may not require review, please consult the guidelines online, http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~research/hum_sub/guidelines.html.